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## Exploring the Role of Performing Death Rituals in the Grief Journey of Primary Mourners

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**Abstract**

Death rituals are culturally structured practices that structure grief, regulate emotions and restore social order. In the Indian context, especially in Tamil Nadu, these rituals are highly organized, time-bound and morally prescribed, placing primary mourners at the center of ritual performance while they simultaneously navigate personal loss. Despite the prominence of ritual practices and cultural diversity, only limited research examined how actively performing death rituals influences the grief journey within the first 18 months following bereavement. This exploratory qualitative study adopts a phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of primary mourners who performed death rituals for their first degree relative. Using purposive sampling, 12-15 adults will participate in in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted in Tamil or English. Interviews will be audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using inductive thematic analysis to generate themes grounded in participants' narratives. The study explores their experience, emotional responses before and after ritual performance, personal meanings attached to rituals, gendered roles, social obligations, support system, and the negotiation between choices and expectations within ritual contexts. By centering the subjective experiences of primary mourners, this research seeks to advance culturally responsive grief counselling practices, contribute to the development of mental health policy frameworks that acknowledge the role of ritual, personal and sociocultural context in bereavement processes.

**Index Terms**

Death Rituals, Primary Mourners, Grief, Bereavement, Phenomenology, Indian Cultural Context