



Received: 12-05-2026
Accepted: 22-06-2026

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Perceived Efficacy of Counselling Interventions Among Divorced Adults in Ndola District, Zambia

¹ Muyunda Mutalu, ² Vincent Mutale

¹ Licensed Counsellor, Clinical Psychology Trainee and Research Scholar, Mkange Counselling Institute, Zambia

² Research Supervisor, Mkange Counselling Institute, Zambia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62225/2583049X.2026.6.4.6554>

Corresponding Author: **Muyunda Mutalu**

Abstract

Family breakdown through divorce is a major psychosocial concern with emotional, social, and economic consequences. This study examined the efficacy of counselling interventions among divorced adults in Ndola District, Zambia. Specifically, it assessed the perceived effectiveness of counselling, explored clients' experiences, examined psychosocial challenges following divorce, and identified gaps in counselling support services.

A mixed-methods design with a dominant qualitative approach was employed. Data were collected from purposively selected divorced adults who had accessed counselling services using semi-structured interviews and a demographic questionnaire. Snowball sampling was used to identify additional participants. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, while quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics.

Findings showed that counselling interventions were generally perceived as effective in promoting emotional healing, improving self-esteem, and strengthening coping

abilities. Participants reported receiving emotional support and improved adjustment following divorce. However, help-seeking was largely reactive, with most individuals seeking counselling only after severe emotional distress. Divorce was associated with emotional distress, loneliness, depression, stigma, substance use, and reduced self-esteem. Both adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies were identified, with family, friends, and religious institutions serving as important support systems. Barriers to counselling utilisation included cost, distance, concerns about privacy and confidentiality, cultural beliefs, and perceptions of counsellor competence.

The study concludes that counselling interventions play an important role in supporting divorced adults. However, gaps remain in accessibility, awareness, confidentiality, and long-term psychosocial support. The study recommends strengthening referral systems, increasing awareness of counselling services, and enhancing professional development among counsellors.

Keywords: Counselling, Divorce, Family Breakdown, Counselling Effectiveness, Psychosocial Challenges, Zambia

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Marriage is widely recognised as a fundamental social institution that promotes emotional wellbeing, social cohesion, and family stability. Through companionship, emotional support, and shared responsibilities, marriage contributes significantly to individual and family wellbeing. However, increasing rates of family breakdown through divorce have resulted in significant psychosocial challenges among affected individuals. Widely regarded as a major life stressor, divorce is associated with emotional distress, disrupted family roles, financial strain, and difficulties in social functioning.

Globally, divorce has been linked to a range of adverse psychosocial outcomes, including anxiety, depression, reduced self-esteem, loneliness, and social isolation. Marital dissolution often disrupts family systems and may result in financial instability, parenting challenges, and identity-related difficulties among affected individuals (Amato, 2010; Bonanno *et al.*, 2011) [3, 4]. Although many individuals eventually adjust to life after divorce, the transition period is frequently characterised by considerable emotional and social strain.

Within Africa, the psychosocial consequences of divorce are often compounded by cultural expectations, social stigma, economic vulnerability, and limited access to professional mental health services. In many African societies, marriage remains a highly valued institution, and its dissolution may attract social judgement and emotional distress, particularly among women.

While extended family networks and religious institutions often provide emotional and practical support, these informal systems may not always be sufficient to address the deeper psychological challenges associated with marital breakdown (Mokomane 2012; Adebawale *et al.*, 2016) ^[16, 1]. In Zambia, changing social dynamics, urbanisation, technological influences, economic pressures, and evolving gender roles have contributed to increasing marital instability. National statistics indicate that divorce cases increased from approximately 20,818 in 2019 to about 25,851 in 2020 (Times of Zambia, 2021) ^[29]. Recent national reports indicate that divorce cases in Zambia have continued to increase, rising from approximately 31,000 cases in 2022 to about 36,000 cases in 2023 (News Diggers, 2023; Mwebantu, 2024) ^[22, 21], highlighting family breakdown as an important and growing social concern with important implications for individual, family, and community wellbeing.

At district level, Ndola continues to experience notable levels of marital dissolution. Public reports indicate that approximately 1,291 divorce cases were recorded within a single year, while records obtained from the Ndola High Court showed 155 divorce petitions in 2024 and 147 petitions in 2025. Although a slight decline was observed between the two years, these figures suggest that divorce remains a persistent social reality within the district. It is important to note that the divorce statistics presented in this study are based primarily on records from the Ndola High Court, as records from other courts and customary divorce systems were not readily accessible.

Local records also provide insight into marriage formation within the district. According to Ndola City Council records, marriage registrations increased from 584 in 2023 to 586 in 2024 and further to 659 in 2025. When considered alongside the divorce petitions recorded by the Ndola High Court, these figures suggest that while marriage continues to be widely practised within the district, marital dissolution remains a notable social phenomenon.

The continued occurrence of divorce cases highlights the need for effective psychosocial interventions to assist affected individuals in coping with the emotional, social, and economic consequences of family breakdown. Among these interventions, counselling services have emerged as an important mechanism for promoting emotional healing, psychological adjustment, and overall wellbeing following divorce.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Family breakdown through divorce continues to affect many households in Ndola District, resulting in emotional distress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, strained social relationships, and reduced psychological wellbeing among affected individuals. Beyond its emotional consequences, divorce may also contribute to financial difficulties, social stigma, parenting challenges, and disruptions in family functioning. These challenges can significantly affect individuals' ability to adjust to post-divorce life and maintain overall wellbeing. Although counselling services are available through health facilities, faith-based organisations, non-governmental

organisations, and private practitioners, there is limited documented evidence regarding the effectiveness of these interventions among divorced adults in Ndola District. Existing research in Zambia has primarily focused on the causes of marital breakdown, relationship instability, and general mental health concerns, with comparatively little attention devoted to evaluating counselling outcomes from the perspectives of clients who have experienced divorce.

This lack of localised evidence creates an important knowledge gap regarding the extent to which counselling interventions address the psychosocial challenges experienced by divorced individuals and the barriers that may limit their effectiveness. Without such evidence, counsellors, service providers, and policymakers may face difficulties in designing, implementing, and improving psychosocial support services that adequately respond to the needs of individuals affected by family breakdown.

Therefore, this study sought to explore the efficacy of counselling interventions among divorced adults in Ndola District, Zambia, with particular focus on counselling effectiveness, clients' experiences of counselling services, psychosocial challenges following divorce, and unmet counselling needs.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To assess the perceived effectiveness of counselling interventions among divorced adults in Ndola District.
2. To explore clients' experiences of counselling services following divorce.
3. To identify the psychosocial challenges experienced by divorced adults in Ndola District.
4. To identify gaps or unmet counselling needs within existing counselling services for divorced adults.

1.4 Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How effective are counselling interventions from the perspectives of divorced adults in Ndola District?
2. What are clients' experiences of counselling services following divorce?
3. What psychosocial challenges are experienced by divorced adults in Ndola District?
4. What gaps or unmet counselling needs are reported by divorced adults following divorce?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory

This study was guided in part by Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory (1968). Erikson proposed that human development occurs through eight psychosocial stages, each characterised by a developmental conflict that influences personality and psychological wellbeing. Of particular relevance to this study are the stages of *Intimacy versus Isolation* and *Generativity versus Stagnation*, which correspond to the adult life stages during which marriage, family relationships, and social responsibilities are most significant.

Stage	Age Range	Psychosocial Crisis	Positive Outcome if conflict resolved	Negative Outcome if conflict not resolved
Infancy	0–1 year	Trust vs. Mistrust	Trust, hope, sense of safety	Fear, mistrust, insecurity
Early Childhood	1–3 years	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Independence, confidence, self-control	Shame, self-doubt, lack of confidence
Play Age	3–6 years	Initiative vs. Guilt	Initiative, leadership, purpose	Guilt, fear of trying new things
School Age	6–12 years	Industry vs. Inferiority	Competence, productivity, belief in abilities	Inferiority, low self-esteem
Adolescence	12–19 years	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Strong identity, sense of self, fidelity	Identity confusion, role uncertainty
Early Adulthood	20–40 years	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love, close relationships, emotional connection	Loneliness, isolation
Middle Adulthood	40–65 years	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Care, productivity, contribution to society	Stagnation, self-absorption
Old Age	65+ years	Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom, life satisfaction, acceptance	Regret, despair, dissatisfaction with life

During the stage of *Intimacy versus Isolation*, individuals seek to establish meaningful and committed relationships. Successful resolution of this stage results in emotional intimacy, trust, and strong interpersonal bonds. However, divorce may disrupt these relationships and lead to loneliness, emotional distress, social withdrawal, and feelings of rejection. Such experiences may negatively affect psychological wellbeing and hinder successful adjustment following marital dissolution.

The stage of *Generativity versus Stagnation* is characterised by a desire to contribute to family, community, and future generations. Divorce may interfere with these developmental goals by disrupting family roles, parenting responsibilities, and social relationships. Consequently, individuals may experience frustration, loss of purpose, reduced self-worth, and emotional instability.

From Erikson's perspective, divorce represents a significant psychosocial disruption that may challenge an individual's identity, emotional wellbeing, and social functioning. Counselling interventions therefore play an important role in helping divorced individuals process emotional distress, rebuild self-confidence, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and develop healthier coping mechanisms. Through counselling, individuals may be assisted in navigating psychosocial crises and achieving positive psychological adjustment following family breakdown.

2.2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

The study was further guided by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1943) ^[14], which proposes that human behaviour is motivated by the pursuit of needs arranged in a hierarchical order. These needs include physiological needs, safety needs, love and belongingness needs, esteem needs, and self-actualisation needs. According to Maslow, individuals strive to satisfy lower-level needs before

progressing towards higher-order psychological and personal growth needs.

Level	Category of Need	Description	Relevance to divorce
1	Physiological Needs	Basic survival needs such as food, water, shelter and rest	May disrupt financial stability and housing arrangements
2	Safety Needs	The need for security, stability and protection from harm	May create emotional and economic insecurity
3	Love and Belonging Needs	The need for intimacy, affection, family bonds and social connection	Disrupts attachment, intimacy and a sense of belonging
4	Esteem Needs	The need for self-worth, respect, confidence and recognition	May reduce self-esteem and increase feelings of shame or rejection
5	Self-Actualization	The need for personal growth, fulfilment and achievement of one's potential	Counselling may help individuals rebuild purpose, personal growth and life direction

Divorce has the potential to disrupt multiple levels of human needs simultaneously. At the physiological and safety levels, marital dissolution may result in financial instability, housing challenges, and uncertainty regarding future wellbeing. At the love and belongingness level, divorce often disrupts intimate relationships, family connections, and social support networks. The loss of these relationships may contribute to loneliness, social isolation, and emotional distress.

Divorce may also negatively affect esteem needs through experiences of rejection, stigma, reduced self-confidence, and diminished self-worth. Furthermore, unresolved emotional difficulties may hinder individuals from pursuing personal growth and self-actualisation. In this context, counselling interventions can assist individuals in restoring emotional stability, rebuilding self-esteem, strengthening social relationships, and promoting psychological wellbeing. By addressing these needs, counselling facilitates healthier adjustment following divorce.

2.3 Justification for the Choice of Theories

Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory were selected because they provide complementary perspectives for understanding the experiences of divorced adults and the role of counselling interventions in promoting adjustment following family breakdown.

Erikson's theory was considered appropriate because it explains how divorce may disrupt important developmental tasks related to intimacy, identity, social relationships, and family roles. The theory provides a useful framework for understanding the psychosocial challenges experienced by divorced individuals, including loneliness, emotional distress, and social isolation. It also highlights the role of counselling in facilitating psychological adjustment and personal growth following marital dissolution.

Maslow's theory was selected because it explains how divorce affects multiple dimensions of human needs, including belongingness, safety, esteem, and self-actualisation. The theory helps explain why individuals

experiencing divorce may require emotional support, reassurance, social connection, and opportunities to rebuild self-confidence. It further demonstrates how counselling interventions may contribute to the restoration of psychological wellbeing by addressing unmet emotional and social needs.

Together, the two theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding both the psychosocial consequences of divorce and the mechanisms through which counselling interventions may support emotional healing, coping, adjustment, and overall wellbeing among divorced adults in Ndola District

3. Literature Review

3.1 Psychosocial Challenges Following Divorce

Divorce is widely recognised as one of the most stressful life events experienced by adults. The dissolution of marriage often results in significant psychological, social, and economic disruptions that affect individual wellbeing and adjustment. Research consistently demonstrates that divorced individuals are more likely to experience emotional distress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, reduced self-esteem, and social isolation than their married counterparts (Amato, 2010; Bonanno *et al.*, 2011) ^[3,4].

Globally, studies have shown that divorce can negatively affect mental health and quality of life. Amato (2010) ^[3] found that divorced individuals frequently experience emotional instability due to the loss of companionship, disruption of family roles, and uncertainty regarding future relationships. Similarly, Bonanno *et al.* (2011) ^[4] reported that although some individuals demonstrate resilience following divorce, many experience prolonged periods of emotional distress during the adjustment process. These challenges may be further compounded by parenting responsibilities, financial pressures, and reduced social support.

Beyond psychological effects, divorce may also generate significant social and economic difficulties. Research indicates that divorced individuals often face financial hardship, changes in living arrangements, and increased responsibilities related to childcare and household management. Such challenges may contribute to chronic stress and reduced overall wellbeing, particularly where social support systems are limited.

Within African societies, the psychosocial consequences of divorce are frequently intensified by cultural expectations and social norms surrounding marriage. Mokomane (2012) ^[16] observed that divorced individuals often experience social stigma and reduced community acceptance because marriage remains a highly valued institution in many African cultures. Women may be particularly vulnerable to negative social perceptions, economic insecurity, and emotional distress following marital dissolution. Similarly, Adebawale *et al.* (2016) ^[1] found that divorced women reported significantly higher levels of depression, loneliness, and social isolation compared to married women.

In Zambia, studies have also highlighted the emotional and social challenges associated with family breakdown. Siziya *et al.* (2015) ^[28] reported that psychological distress is associated with social and emotional vulnerabilities among affected individuals. Muula (2018) ^[17] similarly noted that family breakdown may increase the risk of anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal, particularly where adequate psychosocial support is unavailable. Furthermore,

Ngambi *et al.* (2023) ^[23] reported that divorced individuals in Zambia frequently experience emotional distress, family conflict, financial strain, and challenges adjusting to post-divorce life.

The literature demonstrates that divorce is associated with a range of psychosocial challenges that affect emotional wellbeing, social functioning, and overall quality of life. However, limited research has specifically examined how these challenges are experienced by divorced adults in Ndola District and how counselling interventions assist individuals in managing their psychosocial consequences. This gap provided justification for the current study.

3.2 Coping Strategies Following Divorce

Coping refers to the cognitive and behavioural efforts individuals employ to manage stressful situations and the emotional demands associated with them. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) ^[12] conceptualised coping as a dynamic process involving both problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies. Problem-focused coping seeks to address the source of stress through practical action and decision-making, whereas emotion-focused coping aims to regulate emotional responses to stressful experiences. The effectiveness of coping strategies often influences an individual's ability to adapt to challenging life events such as divorce.

Following divorce, individuals adopt a variety of coping mechanisms to manage the emotional, social, and economic consequences of marital dissolution. Research suggests that adaptive coping strategies such as seeking social support, engaging in counselling, participating in religious activities, and developing problem-solving skills are associated with better psychological adjustment and emotional wellbeing. These strategies enable individuals to process emotional experiences, build resilience, and maintain social connectedness during periods of transition.

Conversely, maladaptive coping strategies may hinder adjustment and contribute to poorer mental health outcomes. Studies have found that some divorced individuals respond to emotional distress through substance use, denial, avoidance, social withdrawal, or self-isolation. Although these strategies may provide temporary relief, they often fail to address underlying emotional difficulties and may exacerbate psychological distress over time (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) ^[12].

Within African societies, coping following divorce is often influenced by family structures, community relationships, and religious beliefs. Mokomane (2012) ^[16] observed that extended family networks frequently provide emotional support, practical assistance, and childcare support to individuals experiencing marital breakdown. Religious institutions also play an important role in helping individuals cope with divorce by providing spiritual guidance, counselling, and social support. Young Lives (2020) ^[32] observed that family support, community networks, and social relationships play an important role in helping individuals navigate marital disruption and family transitions.

In Zambia, family members, friends, religious leaders, and community networks continue to serve as important sources of support for individuals affected by divorce. Ngambi (2024) ^[24] reported that many individuals initially rely on family members, friends, and community support systems before seeking professional counselling services. He further

observed that while these support networks may provide emotional reassurance and practical assistance, their effectiveness varies depending on the availability and quality of support provided. Professional counselling therefore remains an important complementary intervention in facilitating adjustment and recovery.

The literature demonstrates that divorced individuals utilise both adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies in response to the challenges associated with marital dissolution. However, limited research has examined the specific coping mechanisms employed by divorced adults in Ndola District and the extent to which counselling interventions complement existing family, social, and religious support systems. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into coping processes among divorced individuals within the local context.

3.3 Counselling Interventions and Efficacy

Counselling interventions are widely recognised as an important component of psychosocial support for individuals experiencing emotional distress following divorce. Counselling provides a structured and supportive environment in which individuals can explore their feelings, develop coping strategies, improve self-awareness, and adjust to significant life changes. Through professional guidance, counselling aims to reduce psychological distress, strengthen resilience, and promote emotional wellbeing.

Globally, counselling has been shown to contribute positively to post-divorce adjustment and psychological recovery. Lebow *et al.* (2012) ^[13] found that counselling interventions assist individuals in managing emotional distress, improving coping abilities, and enhancing interpersonal functioning following relationship breakdown. Similarly, Ahrons (2007) ^[2] reported that counselling facilitates emotional healing by helping individuals process feelings of loss, anger, guilt, and rejection associated with divorce. Counselling also provides opportunities for individuals to rebuild confidence, develop healthier relationships, and establish new life goals.

Research indicates that counselling interventions can enhance self-esteem and reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress among individuals experiencing marital dissolution (McLeod, 2019; Norcross and Lambert, 2019) ^[15, 25]. Through emotional support, self-reflection, and problem-solving techniques, counselling assists individuals in developing adaptive coping strategies and healthier responses to stressful life events. Consequently, counselling contributes to improved psychological adjustment, resilience, and overall well-being following divorce (Corey, 2021; Lebow *et al.*, 2012) ^[7, 13].

Within African contexts, counselling services are increasingly recognised as important mechanisms for addressing the psychosocial effects of family breakdown and promoting mental well-being (Patel *et al.*, 2018; World Health Organization, 2022) ^[26, 30]. Despite these benefits, access to professional counselling services remains limited in many settings due to financial barriers, cultural beliefs, inadequate awareness of mental health services, and shortages of trained counsellors (Muula, 2018; Mweemba *et al.*, 2015) ^[17, 19]. Consequently, many divorced individuals continue to depend on informal support networks such as family members, friends, religious leaders, and community structures for emotional and practical assistance. While these support systems play a significant role in coping and

recovery, they may not always provide the specialised psychosocial interventions necessary to address complex emotional and psychological challenges associated with divorce.

In Zambia, counselling services are provided through health facilities, educational institutions, faith-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, and private practitioners. Despite the increasing availability of counselling services, relatively few studies have evaluated their effectiveness from the perspectives of clients who have experienced divorce. Ngambi (2024) ^[24] observed that while counselling services are increasingly utilised to address relationship and family-related challenges, limited evidence exists regarding client perceptions of counselling outcomes. Similarly, Mutasha and Bwalya (2026) ^[18] noted that counselling research in Zambia has often focused on service provision rather than the evaluation of counselling effectiveness from the clients' perspective.

Previous studies therefore suggest that counselling interventions may promote emotional healing, improve self-esteem, strengthen coping abilities, and facilitate psychological adjustment following divorce. Nevertheless, there remains limited empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of these interventions among divorced adults in Ndola District. Furthermore, little is known about clients' experiences of counselling services, the barriers affecting service utilisation, and the unmet counselling needs that persist following divorce. Addressing these gaps was a primary objective of the current study.

3.4 Clients' Experiences of Counselling Services

Clients' experiences of counselling services constitute an important indicator of service quality and effectiveness. Counselling outcomes are influenced not only by the techniques employed by counsellors but also by how clients perceive and experience the counselling process. Research suggests that positive counselling experiences are associated with trust, empathy, active listening, confidentiality, and a strong therapeutic relationship between counsellor and client (McLeod, 2019) ^[15].

Globally, studies have shown that clients are more likely to report positive counselling outcomes when they perceive counsellors as supportive, respectful, and non-judgemental. The therapeutic alliance has consistently been identified as one of the strongest predictors of successful counselling outcomes (Norcross & Lambert, 2019) ^[25]. When clients feel understood and emotionally supported, they are more likely to engage openly in the counselling process and apply coping strategies discussed during sessions.

Within African contexts, experiences of counselling services are often influenced by cultural beliefs, perceptions of mental health, and levels of awareness regarding professional counselling services. Some individuals initially prefer seeking support from family members, friends, or religious leaders before engaging formal counselling services (Mokomane, 2012) ^[16]. Nevertheless, studies indicate that clients who access professional counselling frequently report emotional relief, improved coping skills, enhanced self-awareness, and greater psychological wellbeing following marital challenges and divorce (Adebowale *et al.*, 2016; Ngambi, 2024) ^[1, 24].

In Zambia, limited research has specifically examined clients' experiences of counselling services following divorce. Existing studies have largely focused on

counselling provision rather than client perceptions of service quality and effectiveness (Ngambi, 2024; Mutasha & Bwalya, 2026) ^[24, 18]. Consequently, there is limited understanding of how divorced individuals experience counselling services, the factors influencing satisfaction, and the aspects of counselling perceived as most beneficial. This gap informed the inclusion of clients' experiences as a key objective of the present study.

3.5 Gaps and Unmet Counselling Needs

Despite the recognised benefits of counselling services, several barriers continue to limit access to and utilisation of psychosocial support. Research indicates that affordability, accessibility, stigma, and limited awareness remain among the most common obstacles preventing individuals from seeking professional counselling (World Health Organization, 2022) ^[30].

Globally, studies have identified financial constraints, shortages of trained mental health professionals, and limited-service availability as significant barriers to accessing counselling services (Patel *et al.*, 2018; World Health Organization, 2022) ^[26, 30]. Individuals experiencing emotional distress may therefore delay seeking help or fail to access support altogether, contributing to prolonged psychological difficulties.

Within African settings, barriers to counselling utilisation may be further compounded by cultural beliefs and social attitudes regarding mental health and help-seeking behaviour. In some communities, emotional difficulties are addressed primarily through family networks, religious institutions, or traditional support systems, reducing utilisation of formal counselling services (Mokomane, 2012) ^[16]. Concerns regarding privacy, confidentiality, and social judgement may also discourage individuals from seeking professional support (Adebowale *et al.*, 2016) ^[1].

In Zambia, counselling services continue to expand through health facilities, educational institutions, faith-based organisations, and non-governmental organisations. However, challenges relating to accessibility, affordability, counsellor availability, and public awareness remain (Ngambi, 2024) ^[24]. Furthermore, limited research has examined the specific unmet counselling needs of divorced individuals and the barriers affecting service utilisation following family breakdown (Mutasha & Bwalya, 2026) ^[18]. The literature therefore suggests that while counselling services provide important psychosocial support, significant gaps remain in service accessibility, awareness, confidentiality, and continuity of care. Understanding these unmet needs is essential for improving counselling service delivery and ensuring that interventions effectively respond to the challenges experienced by divorced adults. This gap provided further justification for the current study.

4. Materials and Methods

4.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design with a dominant qualitative approach. The qualitative component facilitated an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences of divorce, perceptions of counselling interventions, coping strategies, and unmet counselling needs. A quantitative component was incorporated to collect demographic information and provide descriptive contextual data. The mixed-methods approach enabled the integration of narrative accounts with descriptive statistical findings,

thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of counselling experiences among divorced adults in Ndola District as explained by Creswell and Creswell (2018) ^[8].

4.2 Study Setting and Target Population

The study was conducted in Ndola District, located in Copperbelt Province, Zambia. Ndola was selected due to the continued occurrence of statutory divorce cases recorded by the Ndola High Court and the availability of counselling services through health facilities, faith-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, and private practitioners. These characteristics made the district suitable for examining counselling interventions among divorced individuals.

The target population comprised legally divorced adults residing in Ndola District who had accessed at least one formal counselling session following divorce and were therefore able to provide insights into counselling experiences, psychosocial challenges, coping strategies, and unmet counselling needs.

4.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The study included adults aged 25 years and above who had legally divorced through statutory court procedures, attended at least one post-divorce counselling session, resided in Ndola District, and voluntarily consented to participate in the study.

Individuals who were separated but not legally divorced, had never accessed counselling services, were below 25 years of age, or declined to provide informed consent were excluded from the study.

4.4 Sampling Design and Sample Size

Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants who met the inclusion criteria. Due to the sensitive nature of divorce and counselling experiences, snowball sampling was further utilised to recruit additional eligible participants through referrals from initial respondents.

To provide statistical context, Taro Yamane's (1967) ^[31] formula was initially to be applied to an estimated accessible population of 40 individuals who met the study criteria during the data collection period. The formula suggested a sample size of approximately 36 participants. However, since qualitative research prioritises data saturation rather than statistical representativeness (Guest *et al.*, 2006) ^[10]. The sample size for this study was thus justified through the combined consideration of purposive sampling, the principle of data saturation, and guidance from qualitative research literature, while also acknowledging the indicative calculation derived from Yamane's sample size formula. Saturation was achieved with a final sample of twenty-two (n = 22) participants for general analysis and twenty-one (n = 21) participants for counselling-specific analysis.

4.5 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and a demographic questionnaire. Information was obtained through face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and online questionnaires distributed via Google Forms. The interview guide explored participants' experiences of divorce, psychosocial challenges, coping strategies, counselling experiences, perceptions of counselling effectiveness, and unmet counselling needs.

Qualitative data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's

(2006) [5] six-phase thematic analysis framework. The process involved familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, review of themes, definition of themes, and report writing. Braun and Clarke (2013) [6] further emphasise that thematic analysis provides a flexible and rigorous approach for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings facilitated a comprehensive understanding of counselling experiences among divorced adults in Ndola District.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were observed throughout the study. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Identifying information was removed from transcripts and reports to protect participant privacy. Ethical approval was obtained through the relevant institutional procedures before commencement of data collection.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Background Characteristics of Respondents

Gender Distribution

A total of twenty-two ($n = 22$) participants took part in the study. The majority of respondents were female (77.3%, $n = 17$), while males accounted for 22.7% ($n = 5$).

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Female	17	77.3
Male	5	22.7
Total	22	100.0

The predominance of female participants suggests that women were more willing to discuss their divorce experiences and participate in psychosocial research. This finding is consistent with Mokomane (2012) [16], who observed that men are generally less likely to seek emotional support or participate in counselling-related activities due to cultural expectations that emphasise emotional restraint, self-reliance, and traditional masculine norms. The finding may also partly explain why women are more visible within counselling and support services despite divorce affecting both genders.

Age Distribution

The majority of participants were between 26 and 45 years of age. Specifically, 40.9% ($n = 9$) were aged 26–35 years, 31.8% ($n = 7$) were aged 36–45 years, while 27.3% ($n = 6$) were aged 46 years and above. No participants were below 25 years of age, reflecting the study's inclusion criteria.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
18–25	0	0.0
26–35	9	40.9
36–45	7	31.8
46+	6	27.3
Total	22	100.0

The findings indicate that 72.7% of participants were between the ages of 26 and 45 years. This age range corresponds closely with Erikson's stages of Intimacy versus Isolation and Generativity versus Stagnation, where individuals typically focus on establishing intimate relationships, family life, and social responsibility. Consequently, divorce occurring during these developmental stages may result in significant psychosocial challenges, including emotional distress, identity disruption, loneliness, parenting difficulties, and financial instability. The finding supports the relevance of Erikson's theory in understanding the experiences of divorced adults in Ndola District.

5.2 Perceived Effectiveness of Counselling Interventions

The study assessed participants' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of counselling interventions following divorce. Findings revealed that counselling services were generally perceived as beneficial in helping individuals cope with the emotional and psychosocial consequences of marital dissolution. Among the twenty-one respondents who had received counselling services, 23.8% reported that counselling helped them significantly, while 66.7% indicated that it helped somewhat. Only 9.5% reported that counselling did not help at all.

Table 3: Participants' Perceptions of Counselling Effectiveness

Perceived Effectiveness	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Helped significantly	5	23.8
Helped somewhat	14	66.7
Did not help at all	2	9.5
Total	21	100.0

The findings suggest that counselling contributed positively to post-divorce adjustment for the majority of participants. Respondents reported that counselling provided a safe and supportive environment in which they could openly discuss their experiences and emotions. Many participants indicated that counselling helped them understand their circumstances, accept the reality of divorce, and develop healthier coping mechanisms.

Further analysis revealed that emotional healing was the most frequently reported benefit of counselling, identified by 81.0% of respondents. Other reported benefits included improvements in self-esteem (47.6%), stress management (38.1%), depression management (38.1%), parenting skills (23.8%), and communication skills (19.0%).

Table 4: Reported Benefits of Counselling Interventions

Reported Benefit of Counselling	Percentage (%)
Emotional healing	81.0
Improved self-esteem	47.6
Stress management	38.1
Depression management	38.1
Parenting skills	23.8
Communication skills	19.0

The prominence of emotional healing as the most frequently reported benefit suggests that counselling played an important role in helping participants process grief, rejection, loss, and other emotional consequences associated with divorce. These findings are consistent with Lebow *et al.* (2012) [13], who reported that counselling interventions

contribute to emotional regulation, resilience, and psychological adjustment following relationship breakdown. Similarly, Ahrons (2007) ^[2] found that counselling assists divorced individuals in adapting to post-divorce realities by facilitating emotional healing and strengthening coping capacities.

The findings also support previous observations by Ngambi (2024) ^[24], who noted that counselling services provide important psychosocial support for individuals experiencing family and relationship challenges. The positive outcomes reported by participants in the present study suggest that counselling interventions contribute significantly to emotional recovery and improved wellbeing among divorced adults.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. Divorce often disrupts individuals' needs for belongingness, emotional security, and self-esteem. The improvements reported in emotional healing and self-esteem suggest that counselling helped participants restore these important psychological needs. The findings also support Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, particularly the proposition that disruptions in intimate relationships may result in emotional distress and social isolation. Through counselling, participants appeared better able to adjust to these disruptions and rebuild confidence in their personal and social lives.

Despite the generally positive perceptions, a small proportion of participants reported limited benefits from counselling. Some respondents continued to experience loneliness, trust issues, and emotional distress even after receiving counselling services. This finding suggests that counselling effectiveness may be influenced by factors such as service quality, counsellor competence, duration of intervention, client readiness, and the availability of follow-up support.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that counselling interventions played a significant role in promoting emotional healing, strengthening self-esteem, improving coping abilities, and facilitating adjustment following divorce. The high proportion of respondents reporting positive outcomes indicates that counselling constitutes an important psychosocial intervention for individuals affected by family breakdown in Ndola District.

5.3 Clients' Experiences of Counselling Services

The study explored participants' experiences of counselling services following divorce. Findings revealed that respondents accessed counselling services through various providers, including private practitioners, non-governmental organisations, hospitals, clinics, and faith-based institutions.

Table 5: Sources of Counselling Services

Counselling Service Provider	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Private Practitioners/NGOs	9	42.9
Hospitals/Clinics	7	33.3
Churches/Faith-Based Organisations	5	23.8
Total	21	100.0

The findings indicate that private practitioners and non-governmental organisations constituted the most common source of counselling services, followed by hospitals and faith-based institutions. This demonstrates that counselling

support in Ndola District is delivered through a combination of healthcare, community-based, and religious service providers.

Participants also reported different pathways through which they became aware of counselling services.

Table 6: Sources of Information About Counselling Services

Source of Referral	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Friends and Family	12	57.1
Church	5	23.8
Hospital	2	9.5
Social media	2	9.5
Total	21	100.0

The majority of participants (57.1%) learned about counselling services through friends and family members. Churches accounted for 23.8% of referrals, while hospitals and social media each accounted for 9.5%. These findings suggest that informal social networks play an important role in facilitating access to counselling services. Family members, friends, and religious communities often serve as the first point of contact for individuals experiencing emotional distress following divorce.

The study further found that individual counselling was the predominant mode of service delivery.

Table 7: Type of Counselling Received

Type of Counselling	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Individual Counselling	18	85.7
Group Counselling	3	14.3
Total	21	100.0

The predominance of individual counselling suggests that participants preferred private and confidential environments in which to discuss sensitive personal experiences. Many respondents indicated that confidentiality, trust, empathy, and active listening were among the most valued characteristics of effective counselling services.

Participants generally described their counselling experiences positively. Counsellors were frequently perceived as supportive, understanding, respectful, and non-judgemental. These findings are consistent with Corey (2021) ^[7], who emphasised the importance of empathy, trust, and the therapeutic relationship in facilitating positive counselling outcomes. Similarly, McLeod (2019) ^[15] observed that clients are more likely to benefit from counselling when they experience a strong therapeutic alliance with the counsellor.

The findings further support Norcross and Lambert (2019) ^[25], who identified the therapeutic relationship as one of the strongest predictors of successful counselling outcomes. Participants in the present study frequently highlighted the importance of feeling listened to, respected, and emotionally supported throughout the counselling process. These experiences contributed to increased confidence in counselling services and enhanced engagement in the therapeutic process.

A notable finding was that help-seeking behaviour was largely reactive rather than preventive. Many participants reported seeking counselling only after experiencing severe emotional distress, depression, substance use, or significant adjustment difficulties. This finding supports observations by Mokomane (2012) ^[16], who noted that individuals experiencing family breakdown often rely on informal

support systems before seeking professional assistance. The tendency toward delayed help-seeking may also reflect limited awareness of counselling services, cultural beliefs regarding emotional difficulties, and concerns about stigma. From a theoretical perspective, the findings support Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory. Participants frequently described counselling as helping them rebuild confidence, restore interpersonal relationships, and adjust to disruptions in intimate relationships following divorce. These outcomes align with Erikson's emphasis on successful adaptation to psychosocial challenges and the importance of supportive relationships in promoting psychological wellbeing.

Overall, the findings indicate that participants generally experienced counselling services positively and viewed counsellors as important sources of emotional support following divorce. However, the tendency toward delayed help-seeking highlights the need for increased public awareness and earlier utilisation of counselling services among individuals experiencing family breakdown.

5.4 Psychosocial Challenges and Coping Strategies

The study explored the psychosocial challenges experienced by divorced adults and the coping strategies they adopted following marital dissolution. Findings revealed that divorce was associated with substantial emotional, psychological, social, and economic difficulties that affected participants' wellbeing and adjustment.

Participants reported a range of psychosocial challenges, including emotional distress, loneliness, depression, social isolation, reduced self-esteem, financial difficulties, stigma, and substance use. Emotional distress emerged as the most frequently reported challenge, with respondents describing feelings of sadness, anger, disappointment, rejection, and emotional pain following divorce.

Several participants used powerful expressions to describe the impact of divorce on their lives:

"My world collapsed."

"I felt completely alone."

"I became suicidal."

"Depression and loneliness became part of my life."

These narratives demonstrate the profound psychological consequences of family breakdown and illustrate the extent to which divorce affected participants' emotional wellbeing. The findings are consistent with Amato (2010) [3], who found that divorce is frequently associated with emotional instability, loneliness, and psychological distress. Similarly, Bonanno *et al.* (2011) [4] reported that although some individuals demonstrate resilience following divorce, many experience prolonged emotional difficulties during the adjustment process.

Financial difficulties were also commonly reported. Participants indicated that divorce resulted in increased financial responsibilities, reduced household income, and difficulties meeting personal and family needs. For some respondents, economic strain intensified emotional stress and uncertainty regarding the future. These findings support previous studies which have identified financial instability as a common consequence of marital dissolution (Amato, 2010) [3].

The study further revealed that social stigma and cultural expectations contributed to participants' psychosocial

challenges. Some respondents reported feeling judged, rejected, or negatively perceived by members of their communities because of their divorced status. Male participants in particular described difficulties expressing emotional vulnerability due to societal expectations regarding masculinity. One participant explained:

"Men are told to be strong."

This finding is consistent with Mokomane (2012) [16], who observed that divorce in many African societies is often accompanied by social stigma and cultural pressures that influence emotional adjustment and help-seeking behaviour. Participants adopted both adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies to manage the challenges associated with divorce.

Table 8: Coping Strategies Adopted by Participants

Coping Strategy	Percentage (%)
Family support	23.9
Friends' support	17.9
Religious support	16.4
Substance use	16.4
Counselling services	13.5
Social isolation	11.9

The most frequently reported coping strategy was support from family members (23.9%), followed by support from friends (17.9%) and religious institutions (16.4%). These findings suggest that informal support systems play an important role in facilitating adjustment following divorce. Family members, friends, and faith communities often provided emotional encouragement, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging during periods of emotional distress.

The findings support Mokomane (2012) [16], who reported that extended family networks frequently serve as important sources of emotional and practical support following family breakdown. Similarly, Young Lives (2020) [32] observed that family, community, and social support systems play an important role in helping individuals adjust to family transitions and emotional challenges. However, maladaptive coping strategies were also evident. Substance use (16.4%) and social isolation (11.9%) emerged as common responses to emotional pain and stress. Some participants reported increasing alcohol consumption following divorce, while others withdrew from social interactions and avoided contact with family and friends. One respondent stated:

"I started drinking to forget everything."

Although these coping mechanisms provided temporary relief, participants generally acknowledged that they failed to address underlying emotional difficulties and often worsened psychological wellbeing over time.

Counselling services also emerged as an important coping resource. Participants reported that counselling helped them process emotional experiences, regulate emotions, strengthen coping abilities, and regain confidence following divorce. The integration of professional counselling with family, social, and religious support appeared to enhance resilience and facilitate psychological adjustment.

These findings support Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) [12] coping theory, which suggests that individuals employ both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies when responding to stressful life events. Adaptive coping

strategies such as family support, counselling, and religious engagement appeared to facilitate healthier adjustment, whereas maladaptive strategies such as substance use and social withdrawal were associated with continued emotional difficulties.

The findings also support Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, which proposes that disruptions in intimate relationships may result in loneliness, emotional distress, and challenges in social functioning. Furthermore, the findings align with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, particularly the importance of belongingness, social support, and esteem in promoting psychological wellbeing following major life transitions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that divorce affects multiple dimensions of wellbeing and that individuals employ diverse coping mechanisms to navigate its consequences. While supportive relationships and counselling services contribute positively to adjustment, maladaptive coping strategies such as substance use and social withdrawal remain important concerns requiring targeted psychosocial intervention.

5.5 Gaps and Unmet Counselling Needs

Despite the generally positive perceptions regarding counselling effectiveness, participants identified several barriers and unmet needs that limited access to and utilisation of counselling services. These findings suggest that while counselling interventions provide valuable psychosocial support, important challenges remain in service accessibility, delivery, and continuity of care.

Participants frequently reported financial constraints as a significant barrier to accessing counselling services. Some respondents indicated that private counselling services were expensive and difficult to sustain, particularly following divorce when financial responsibilities had increased and household resources had diminished. Consequently, some individuals were unable to attend counselling sessions consistently or access services when required.

Accessibility challenges were also commonly reported. Participants described difficulties related to distance, transportation costs, and the limited availability of counselling services within their communities. These barriers often delayed access to support and reduced opportunities for sustained engagement with counselling interventions. Similar findings have been reported by Patel *et al.* (2018) [26], who identified financial constraints and limited-service availability as major obstacles to accessing mental health and psychosocial support services in low- and middle-income countries.

The study further revealed concerns regarding privacy and confidentiality. Several participants expressed fears that sensitive personal information might be disclosed to others within their communities. Such concerns discouraged some individuals from seeking counselling services or discussing personal experiences openly during counselling sessions. These findings support observations by Adebawale *et al.* (2016) [1], who found that concerns regarding privacy and social judgement often influence help-seeking behaviour among individuals experiencing emotional distress.

Participants also reported that cultural beliefs and social stigma affected the utilisation of counselling services. Some respondents indicated that counselling was sometimes perceived as unnecessary or appropriate only for individuals experiencing severe psychological problems. Others

reported that discussing marital problems with professionals was discouraged within certain social and cultural contexts. In Zambia, stigma surrounding mental health and help-seeking behaviours continues to influence service utilisation, with individuals often fearing discrimination and social judgement (Kapungwe *et al.*, 2010) [11]. These findings are also consistent with Mokomane (2012) [16], who observed that cultural expectations and community attitudes frequently influence help-seeking behaviour following family breakdown.

Another important concern related to counsellor competence and service quality. While many participants reported positive counselling experiences, some felt that counsellors lacked specialised knowledge and skills relating to divorce, grief, and family breakdown. Participants suggested that additional training and professional development would enhance the quality of counselling services and improve client outcomes. This finding supports Ngambi (2024) [24], who emphasised the importance of strengthening counselling capacity and professional standards within counselling practice. Challenges relating to workforce shortages, service accessibility, and integration of mental health services continue to affect the delivery of psychosocial support in Zambia (Mweemba *et al.*, 2015) [19]. Previous studies have highlighted the need to strengthen community-based mental health services and improve access to psychosocial support programmes across Zambia (Sikwese *et al.*, 2014) [27].

A further unmet need identified by participants was the lack of structured follow-up support. Several respondents indicated that counselling services often ended after a limited number of sessions despite continuing emotional and adjustment difficulties. Participants expressed a desire for ongoing support through follow-up counselling, peer-support groups, and community-based psychosocial programmes.

Table 9: Reported Gaps and Unmet Counselling Needs

Identified Barrier/Unmet Need	Description
Financial constraints	Cost of accessing counselling services
Accessibility challenges	Distance, transport costs, limited-service availability
Privacy and confidentiality concerns	Fear of disclosure of personal information
Cultural beliefs and stigma	Negative perceptions of counselling and divorce
Counsellor competence concerns	Need for specialised counselling skills
Lack of follow-up support	Limited long-term psychosocial assistance

The findings are also consistent with Lebow *et al.* (2012) [13], who noted that adjustment following divorce is often a long-term process requiring sustained psychosocial support. The absence of follow-up services may therefore limit the long-term effectiveness of counselling interventions and reduce opportunities for continued emotional recovery.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings may be understood through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. Barriers such as financial constraints, social stigma, and limited access to counselling may prevent individuals from adequately meeting their needs for safety, belongingness, esteem, and psychological wellbeing. Similarly, Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory suggests that inadequate

support during periods of relational disruption may hinder successful psychosocial adjustment.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that although counselling interventions are generally perceived as effective, important gaps remain in accessibility, affordability, confidentiality, service quality, and continuity of care. Addressing these unmet needs is essential for strengthening counselling services and improving psychosocial outcomes among divorced adults in Ndola District.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the efficacy of counselling interventions among divorced adults in Ndola District, Zambia. The findings revealed that counselling interventions were generally perceived as effective in supporting individuals following divorce. Most participants reported that counselling contributed to emotional healing, improved self-esteem, strengthened coping abilities, and facilitated psychological adjustment. These findings demonstrate the important role of counselling in helping divorced individuals manage the emotional and psychosocial consequences of family breakdown.

The study further found that participants generally reported positive experiences of counselling services. Counsellors were perceived as supportive, empathetic, and respectful, while individual counselling was preferred because of the privacy and confidentiality it offered. However, help-seeking behaviour was largely reactive, with most participants accessing counselling services only after experiencing severe emotional distress or significant adjustment difficulties.

The findings also revealed that divorce was associated with substantial psychosocial challenges, including emotional distress, loneliness, depression, social isolation, stigma, reduced self-esteem, financial difficulties, and substance use. Participants adopted both adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. Family support, friendships, religious involvement, and counselling services emerged as important sources of support, while substance use and social withdrawal were identified as less effective coping mechanisms.

Despite the positive contributions of counselling interventions, several gaps and unmet needs were identified. Participants reported challenges relating to affordability, accessibility, privacy, cultural beliefs, counsellor competence, and the lack of structured follow-up support. These barriers limited access to counselling services and influenced the overall counselling experience.

Overall, the study concludes that counselling interventions constitute an important psychosocial resource for divorced adults in Ndola District. While counselling contributes significantly to emotional recovery and adjustment following divorce, strengthening service accessibility, quality, confidentiality, and continuity of care is essential for improving counselling outcomes and promoting long-term psychological wellbeing among individuals affected by family breakdown.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Increase public awareness of counselling services. Community sensitisation programmes, media campaigns, and educational initiatives should be

implemented to improve awareness of counselling services and encourage early help-seeking behaviour among individuals experiencing marital difficulties and divorce.

2. Strengthen referral systems for counselling services. Collaboration between health facilities, faith-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, community leaders, and counselling practitioners should be enhanced to facilitate timely referrals and improve access to psychosocial support.
3. Improve accessibility and affordability of counselling services. Government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and counselling providers should explore mechanisms for expanding affordable counselling services through community-based programmes, outreach services, and subsidised counselling initiatives.
4. Enhance confidentiality and privacy measures. Counselling service providers should strengthen confidentiality procedures and create safe counselling environments that encourage individuals to discuss sensitive personal issues without fear of disclosure or stigma.
5. Promote continuous professional development for counsellors. Counsellors should receive ongoing training in divorce counselling, grief counselling, trauma-informed care, and evidence-based intervention approaches to improve service quality and client outcomes.
6. Establish structured follow-up and support programmes. Counselling providers should develop follow-up mechanisms, peer-support groups, and community-based support programmes to ensure continued psychosocial assistance for divorced individuals beyond initial counselling sessions.
7. Promote family and community support systems. Families, religious institutions, and community organisations should be encouraged to provide supportive environments that facilitate healthy coping and psychological adjustment following divorce.
8. Encourage further research on counselling outcomes. Future studies should examine counselling effectiveness among diverse populations and geographical settings in Zambia to strengthen the evidence base for counselling practice, policy development, and psychosocial intervention programmes.

8. Dedication and Acknowledgements

This work is lovingly dedicated to my son, Gabriel, whose presence in my life has been a constant source of inspiration, strength, and purpose. Your love, resilience, and encouragement have motivated me to persevere through challenges and pursue my academic and professional goals. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine.

I sincerely express my profound gratitude to Mkange Counselling Institute for providing the academic environment and support that made this study possible. Special appreciation is extended to all lecturers and members of staff whose dedication, encouragement, and commitment contributed significantly to my academic and professional development.

I am particularly grateful to Mr. Vincent Mutale, Research Lecturer, for his invaluable guidance, constructive feedback, and continuous support throughout the research process.

Special thanks are also extended to Mr. Peter Mutasha, Course Coordinator, for his supervision, mentorship, and encouragement during the conduct of this study.

I further wish to thank all participants who willingly shared their experiences and insights, thereby making this research possible. Finally, heartfelt appreciation is extended to family, friends, and all those who provided moral support, encouragement, and inspiration throughout this journey.

Any errors or omissions in this work remain my sole responsibility.

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