

Has the Covid-19 Pandemic Enhanced the Professionalisation of
Funeral Directing in Zimbabwe?

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Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to my husband, Philip, my children and grandchildren for being my pillar of support throughout this incredible journey.

Dedication

I dedicate this research to my late mother, Rudo Martha Muchineuta, my most cherished cheerleader. She is the wind under my wings.

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Acronyms

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease of 2019
DBA	Doctor of Business Administration
FUSA	Funeral Services Association
IFBM	Institute of Funeral Business Management
IFBCS	International Federation of Burial and Cremation Services
IPC	Infection prevention and control
IPEC	Insurance and Pensions Commission of Zimbabwe
MoH	Ministry of Health and Child Care
NAFD	National Association of Funeral Directors
NFDA	National Funeral Directors Association
NTU	Nottingham Trent University
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
SARS	Severe acute respiratory syndrome
SIP	Sahwira International Plan
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
WHO	World Health Organization
WUA	Women's University in Africa
ZAFA	Zimbabwe Association of Funeral Assurers

Abstract

The funeral industry is vital in providing dignified and respectful services to the deceased and their families. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges and opportunities for the funeral industry and its professionalisation. This study aimed to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe. Using a qualitative research approach, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with 18 key informants, including funeral directors, public health professionals, and government officials. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study found that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe in various ways. The main themes that emerged from the data were the new rules and regulations introduced by the government and health authorities to prevent the spread of the disease and protect the citizens, the perceptions and experiences of the funeral directors and stakeholders regarding their professional identity, roles, and responsibilities; the interaction and collaboration of the funeral directors with the health care and public health systems in Zimbabwe; and the effects of the pandemic on the professionalisation traits, such as education, training, certification, accreditation, and code of ethics. The study also identified the key drivers and barriers for the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe, such as the demand for funeral services, public recognition and appreciation, government intervention and support, and the lack of standardisation and regulation. The study concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need and potential for the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe but also revealed the gaps and challenges that need to be addressed. The study contributed to the literature on professionalisation and funeral services by providing empirical evidence from the context of Zimbabwe. It also has practical implications for funeral directors, industry associations, training institutions, and policymakers interested in enhancing the quality and recognition of funeral services.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

The funeral industry is crucial in providing dignified and respectful services to the deceased and their families. In Zimbabwe, the funeral industry is relatively young, having emerged in the 1990s. In 2020, a new coronavirus (COVID-19) sparked a pandemic that resulted in higher death rates and impacted normal social and economic activities. The pandemic is one of the most significant challenges the funeral industry has faced. Other important effects of the pandemic on the funeral industry include the disruption of the rituals and practices of mourning, as social distancing and travel restrictions limited the attendance and participation of family and friends in funerals. (Wilkes et al., 2021). Like other parts of the world affected by the pandemic, the Zimbabwe funeral services industry was at the centre of the efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and limit its impact. Like the health industry at the frontline of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the funeral industry was stretched beyond capacity. This was a new experience for the young industry.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the peak number of COVID-19 deaths in Zimbabwe was in July 2022, when the country recorded 2,142 deaths (World Health Organisation, 2023). On average, 69 deaths were reported per day in July 2022. The highest number of COVID-19 deaths per day was 107 on 27 July 2022. The second-highest monthly average was in January 2021, when the country recorded 1,342 deaths and an average of 43 deaths per day (World Health Organisation, 2023). The average number of deaths per day during the peak pandemic was challenging for the funeral industry. The number of deaths attended by Nyaradzo Funeral Services, one of the largest funeral companies in the country, almost doubled in quarter 3 of 2020 to 503 funerals from 263 funerals in quarter 2 of 2020. The number of funerals attended by Nyaradzo per quarter peaked at 764 in quarter 3 of 2021. Based on Nyaradzo quarterly board reports, these numbers are coordinated with Zimbabwe's daily COVID-19 deaths, which had a massive increase in July 2020 and peaked in July 2021. Figures 1 and 2 show the number of funerals attended by Nyaradzo and daily COVID-19 deaths, respectively. The graph in Figure 1 shows the almost doubling number of funerals in Q3 of 2020 when the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic peaked in Zimbabwe.

Information for the graph is compiled from Nyaradzo quarterly board reports. Nyaradzo belongs to two funeral service associations: the Zimbabwe Association of Funeral Assurers (ZAFA) and the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA). ZAFA represents fully registered funeral assurance companies in Zimbabwe (Mataranyika 2020). NFDA is the

world's leading funeral service association, with over 19,000 individual members from more than 10,200 funeral homes in the United States and internationally (NFDA, 2023).

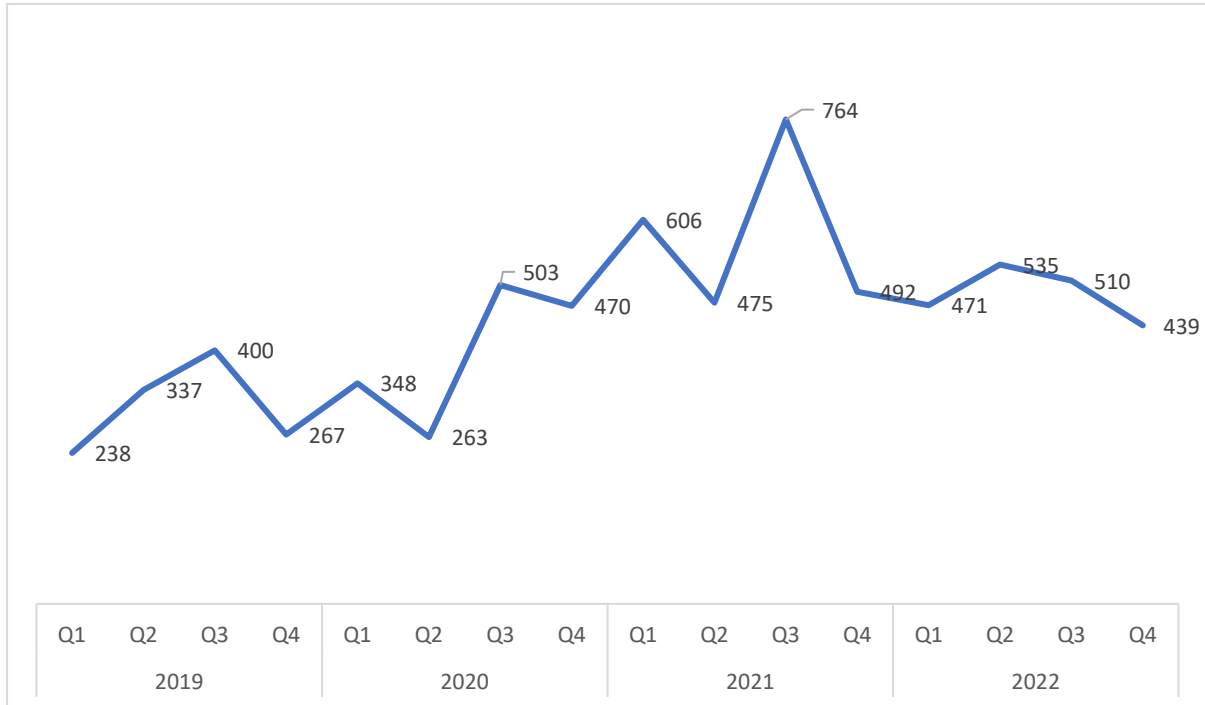


Figure 1: Number of funerals per quarter attended by Nyaradzo.

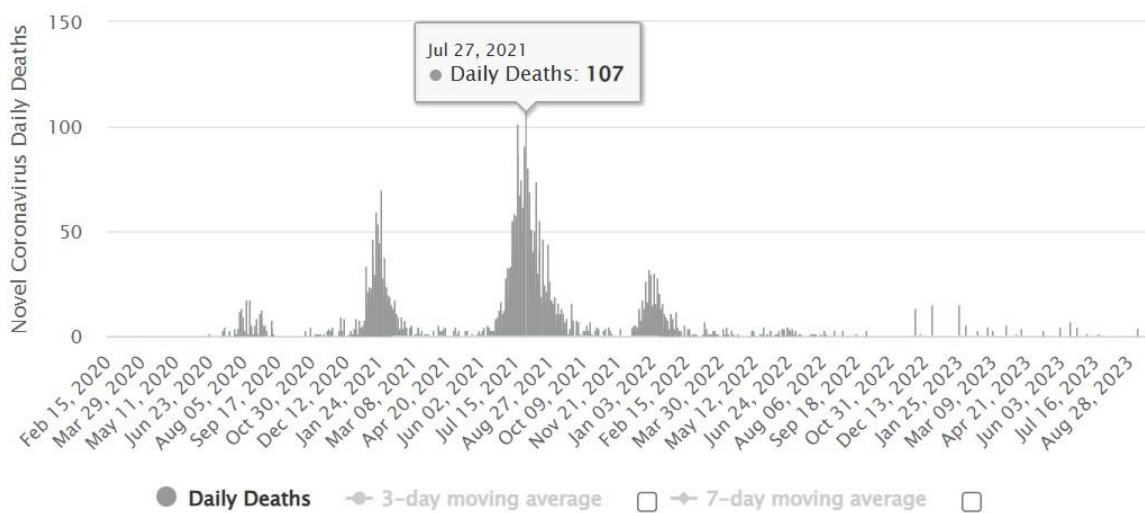


Figure 2: COVID-19 daily deaths in Zimbabwe peaked in July 2021.

Funeral directors are at the forefront of delivering funeral services. A funeral director plans the details of a funeral. Their role includes communicating with the bereaved to plan the funeral service according to their wishes and preferences, transporting the body from the place of death to the funeral home or crematory, following the health and safety protocols, preparing the body for the funeral service, which may include embalming, dressing, casketing, or cremating, and supervising the funeral service and burial or cremation, ensuring that they are conducted with respect and dignity (Parsons, 1997; Valentine et al., 2013; Jordan et al., 2019). As COVID-19 is a highly contagious disease, funeral directors could not continue performing their role as usual. The pandemic thrust funeral directors to the frontline of the public health emergency, and their competencies were challenged and questioned for the first time in Zimbabwe.

The COVID-19 pandemic raised essential questions about public health safety for funeral directors and their families, funeral industry clients, those bereaved, and the public interacting with funeral directors. These questions exposed the need to standardise the funeral industry's response to the pandemic and the importance of funeral directors acquiring competencies through adequate training, regulation, and recognition of their vital role in society. Responding to the pandemic, the Ministry of Health in Zimbabwe issued guidelines, convened meetings, and organised workshops to standardise the practices of funeral directors and the funeral industry, aiming to enhance public health security. However, how the pandemic changed the operations of funeral companies, the status of the professionalisation of funeral directors, stakeholders' perceptions of the importance of funeral directors, and the impact of these changes post-pandemic is unknown.

This research investigates how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the funeral industry in Zimbabwe and how it influenced the perceptions and practices of funeral directors regarding their professional identity, roles and responsibilities. This study provides insights into the experiences and challenges of funeral directors during the COVID-19 pandemic. It contributes to the literature on the professionalisation of funeral services in Zimbabwe and beyond.

1.2 The research problem and issue description

The Zimbabwe funeral industry has tremendously transformed since the early 1990s, from being dominated by a small number of family-owned businesses into a multi-million-dollar industry dominated by big companies operating nationally and beyond. Take Nyaradzo

Funeral Services, a company established in 2001, as an example. In the past 22 years, it has become a national company, having started its operations in Harare and now has a network of over 42 branches across Zimbabwe. Furthermore, Nyaradzo has grown to have offices and representation in different countries by responding to the needs of Zimbabweans in the diaspora. Through its Sahwira International Plan (SIP), it provides funeral cover and repatriation services to Zimbabweans based abroad. In the Zimbabwean Chishona language, Sahwira refers to a close friend and can be used the same way as a mate or close friend. Nyaradzo has set up offices in South Africa and the United Kingdom. Although the funeral industry has undergone this massive growth, its professionalisation is lagging. Funeral companies in Zimbabwe have remained mainly unregulated, and there are few restrictions for Zimbabwe to enter the industry (Mataranyika, 2020; Mataranyika, 2021).

The funeral industry in Zimbabwe comprises two main types of businesses: the funeral assurance business, regulated by the Insurance and Pensions Commission of Zimbabwe (IPEC) and funeral services, which is generally unregulated. Since it started reporting on the status of the insurance and pensions in Zimbabwe, the IPEC, established in 2006, has consistently reported growth of funeral assurance companies. In its last quarterly report before the COVID-19 pandemic, IPEC said that funeral assurers' total inflation-adjusted assets had increased by 54 % in the first three months of 2020 (Insurance and Pensions Commission, 2021). As the funeral industry has grown, so has been the push for its recognition and formalisation by funeral directors, as shown by the establishment of the Zimbabwe Association of Funeral Assurers (ZAFA), Funeral Services Association (FuSA) and the Institute of Funeral Business Management (IFBM) (Mataranyika, 2020; Mataranyika, 2021). These institutions provide a pathway to professionalisation through professional associations to lead the self-regulation and the development of sector code of conduct as well as education and training.

This study is not concerned with the funeral assurance side of the funeral industry. This side of the funeral industry is undergoing professionalisation in the insurance industry with precise government regulation by the IPEC and self-regulation association in place. The study is concerned with the funeral service side of the funeral industry. However, the funeral services side of the industry lags with little to no regulation. Funeral services companies mainly deal with the burial or cremation of the dead and the funeral ceremony. It is a service industry as funeral directors handle the dead, from collecting the body from a place of death

or hospital until burial or cremation. As the demand for funeral services in Zimbabwe has grown, so has the industry's push to professionalise.

Zimbabwe's funeral industry has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Nyarota, 2020). Like public health professionals, funeral directors were on the frontline in the fight against COVID-19 as they continued with their duties of disposing of the deceased. Expectedly, the funeral services industry met unbudgeted costs, especially in the first few months of the pandemic, as it had to implement strict PPE and bio-security measures (Nyarota, 2020). Funeral directors were at considerable risk. They met with families to make funeral arrangements, collected bodies from hospitals and homes and interacted with healthcare professionals at the frontline of fighting COVID-19 as part of their work. As a result, the funeral service industry is under the focus of many stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Local Government Municipalities, and the Ministry of Home Affairs through the Zimbabwe Republic Police. The study attempts to show how the pandemic has disrupted the industry and allows government and funeral industry players to develop appropriate practices, laws, and regulations for safe funerals.

The history of pandemics worldwide has set up conflicts between dealing with the dead and protecting the living from the spread of disease (Campbell, 2006). As experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to restrict public gatherings contradicts the Zimbabwean desire to pay final respects to loved ones. The funeral rites are subservient to the need to contain or reduce the spread of a disease in a health emergency. Past pandemics have shown that this can be done well when health services and public health systems plan and communicate effectively with funeral directors (Campbell, 2006). Examples include the Great Plague of London, a major epidemic of bubonic plague that occurred in 1665-1666 and was estimated to have killed a quarter of London's population at the time; the Spanish influenza of 1918 to 1919 that killed tens of millions of people worldwide, and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) (Campbell, 2006).

Therefore, the professionalisation of funeral directors is crucial because it can contribute to the quality and safety of funeral services, especially during emergencies and pandemics. Professionalisation involves developing and recognising a body of knowledge, a code of ethics, formal training, culture and community sanction, and mandatory registration for funeral directors (Greenwood, 1957; Lumsden, 2017). These aspects can help funeral directors meet the standards and regulations set by the healthcare and public health systems to prevent or reduce the spread of disease from the dead to the living (Campbell, 2006).

Furthermore, professionalisation can enhance the ability of funeral directors to adapt to the changing needs and preferences of bereaved families and collaborate with other professionals, such as health workers and police officers, to facilitate safe funeral processes that follow the guidelines. The study sought to show how the interaction of funeral directors in Zimbabwe with health care and public health systems changed during the COVID-19 pandemic and how it impacted the professionalisation of funeral directors. The professionalisation of funeral directors matters because it can improve their performance and reputation and contribute to public health safety and social well-being. With pandemics predicted to increase and become more frequent, the services provided by funeral directors are a public health matter.

The professionalisation of funeral directors is expected to contribute to the improved protection of the public under pandemics or public health emergencies. The code of ethics empowers funeral directors to conduct themselves appropriately and gives them the confidence to address unprofessional conduct among their colleagues, irrespective of rank, role, or position. (College of Policing Limited, 2014). It contributes to enhanced public trust and confidence. As they are rules of conduct and procedure and guide the behaviour of professions, codes of ethics institutionalise moral authority and, therefore, counterbalance professional power by building accountability and addressing issues of public trust (Martin, 2018). Becoming more professional will bring several advantages for funeral directors in Zimbabwe. It will establish standards and rules for the workers, protecting the interests, health, and satisfaction of clients. It will also improve public confidence, ensure compliance with legal or administrative obligations, and regulate the behaviour of experts in the field. This is especially relevant for issues that involve ethical or moral dilemmas.

The government of Zimbabwe responded to COVID-19 using guidelines and regulations published by the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoH). These included the guidelines for managing COVID-19 cases, including case definitions, testing criteria, isolation procedures, infection prevention and activities such as clinical management and discharge, guidelines on the burial of COVID-19 deaths, including notification of death, transportation of the body, handling of the body, burial site, and post-burial activities criteria (Ministry of Health and Child Care, 2020). This study was interested in establishing whether these regulations and guidelines would bring lasting changes that affect the professionalisation of funeral directors. More specifically, this study examines the changes in the funeral industry and how they impact the development and recognition of a body of knowledge, a code of ethics, formal

training, culture and community sanction, and mandatory registration for funeral directors in Zimbabwe when these changes in the funeral industry affect these critical traits of a profession that professionalisation of funeral directors can be achieved.

1.3 Research Objectives

The COVID-19 pandemic has put the funeral industry under focus, with various Government departments instituting guidelines and regulations to reduce the spread of the disease and protect citizens. This research aimed to show whether the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the professionalisation of funeral directors and the funeral industry.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- Examine the perceptions of the management of funeral companies, critical stakeholders in the public health domain, and the Ministry of Health and Municipalities on how COVID-19 has affected practices regarding their professional identity, roles, and responsibilities.
- Examine how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the interaction of funeral directors with health care and public health systems in Zimbabwe.
- Examine whether the impact of COVID-19-inspired changes in funeral guidelines and regulations will have a lasting effect on the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe.

1.4 Previous documents

This thesis culminates six documents required for the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA). It is Document Five, and although the study stands alone, it builds from the four earlier documents. Firstly, Document One introduced the research area, the funeral industry and the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe. Secondly, Document Two is a detailed initial literature review to critically summarise the current knowledge in the professionalisation of the funeral industry. Thirdly, a realist and interpretive qualitative research on whether funeral directing has professionalised in Zimbabwe is presented in Document Three. Fourthly, to test the results of the qualitative research in Document Three, survey-based quantitative research was done in Document Four with the title “Is Funeral Directing in Zimbabwe a Profession?”. The final document of the DBA is Document Six, a reflection of the researcher’s DBA journey.

1.5 Structure of Research Thesis

This thesis is split into six chapters. Chapter One provides a brief background that introduces the key issues the research seeks to establish. Chapter Two of the thesis, the literature review, presents literature on professions, professionalisation, funeral directing and the effects of the pandemic. It broadly gives, among other things, the theories of professionalisation, the evolution of funeral directors and the status of the funeral industry in Zimbabwe. The third chapter, the methodology, details the research study design, data collection methods and analysis. The research findings in Chapter Four are split into two main sections: findings from the literature and document review and findings from qualitative interviews with funeral industry players and stakeholders. A discussion of the findings is presented in Chapter Five. The thesis ends with Chapter Six, which contains the conclusions of the thesis.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The funeral industry is a vital sector of society that supplies essential services to the bereaved and the deceased. As the main actors in this industry, funeral directors perform various tasks such as arranging, conducting and supervising funerals, cremations and burials and providing emotional support and guidance to the families and friends of the deceased. However, despite their essential role, the public and the authorities often overlook or undervalue funeral directors. One of the most significant events recently affecting the funeral industry is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused unprecedented mortality worldwide and disrupted the standard practices and rituals of funerals.

In Zimbabwe, the evolution of the funeral industry has been tremendous since the early 1990s, from small family-run backyard businesses to well-established multimillion-dollar enterprises. Funeral directors have been at the forefront of this evolution. They have gradually moved away from their full-time occupation, generally known as undertakers, and broadened their operations beyond burial and cremation ceremonies. The growth of the funeral industry is mainly attributed to the attractive benefits perceived by both clients and funeral companies (Mataranyika, 2020; Mataranyika, 2021). The Zimbabwe funeral industry includes companies offering funeral assurance and funeral services. These companies provide either funeral assurance or funeral services only, and others offer both (Mataranyika, 2020). However, the Zimbabwe funeral industry is not widely recognised as professionalised (Mataranyika, 2020; Mataranyika, 2021).

Professionalisation is a complex and contested phenomenon that involves the transformation of a full-time occupation into a profession through the acquisition of specialised knowledge, skills, values and norms, as well as the establishment of formal institutions, regulations and recognition (Greenwood, 1957; Saks, 2012; Lester, 2015). Professionalisation can be seen as a strategy to enhance an occupation's quality, legitimacy and autonomy and protect its interests and identity from external threats or challenges (Tobias, 2003; Thomas and Thomas, 2014). However, professionalisation is not a linear or uniform process but rather a dynamic and contextual one that varies across time, space and domains.

The professionalisation of funeral directors, which refers to acquiring the attributes and status of a profession, is influenced by various social, economic, cultural, and technological factors over time (Callaghan, 2014; Dent, 2024). The pandemic has highlighted the importance and

vulnerability of funeral directors as frontline workers who play a critical role in controlling diseases by contributing to containing infections and facilitating safe and dignified burials and cremation.

Guided by the three research objectives presented earlier, the literature review examines the following aspects: professions and professionalisation, the evolution of funeral directors, professionalisation of the funeral industry in the world and Zimbabwe, the COVID-19 pandemic and funeral industry, and research conceptual framework. The literature review covers relevant sources from academic databases, journals, books, reports, and websites, as well as research reports written by the researcher as part of her Doctor of Business Administration. The research was to find the status of the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe. The literature review also covers Document Three and Four.

The first section is an overview of the three concepts of professions, professionalisation and professional, and their application in general. This provides the researcher's understanding of the concepts and how they relate to the funeral industry. In this section, the key definitions and approaches of professionalisation are presented. This helps to show the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study, as well as to find the key issues. The section also lists some of the common professionalisation approaches.

The second section traces the historical development of professions from full-time occupational groups to recognised professions. The section outlines how occupations have evolved over the years to become recognised professions. This can help provide a historical and comparative perspective on the professionalisation of funeral directors and highlight the challenges Zimbabwe funeral directors are likely to meet in attempts to professionalise.

The third section briefly looks at the modern and emerging professions using the historical and social origins of professions. The section analyses three modern professions that have been identified: project management, management consultancy, and executive search. The section also outlines the main differences between the professionalisation of modern fields such as project management, management consultancy, executive search and traditional professions.

The fourth section examines the impact of COVID-19 on the funeral industry in general and on the professionalisation of funeral directors in particular. What traits of a profession are affected by the pandemic, and how do these changes affect the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe?

The fifth and last section of the literature review chapter presents the research conceptual framework that guides this study. This helps to explain how the literature review informed the research design, methods, and analysis and shows how the study contributes to the existing knowledge and literature.

2.2 Professions, Professionalisation and Professionalism

This section provides an overview of the main concepts and issues related to professions, professionalisation and professionalism and how they are relevant to this study. The three concepts of professions, professionalisation and professionalism, are critical topics of sociology, education, and development, as they relate to the roles, functions, and identities of different occupations in society (Callaghan, 2014; Dent, 2024). As society evolves, these concepts have also evolved from when the classic professions relied on their specialised knowledge to perform exclusive services (Saks, 2012; Lester, 2015) in return for occupational autonomy, income, status, and self-regulating power (Smith, 2020). This is known as the taxonomic approach, which emphasises the distinctive aspects of professions, such as their service orientation, public interest, and social contribution (Saks, 2012). This approach allows examining professions' historical development, evolution and responses to changing social, economic, political, and technological conditions. Professions, as we understand them today, have undergone a significant transformation.

Classically, professions are occupations that have achieved a high degree of autonomy and control over their work, have gained recognition and legitimacy from their peers and society, and adhere to ethical principles and standards that regulate their practices and conduct. However, the concept of professions is often challenged by the reluctance to define its central concept, profession (Nolin, 2008). This can result in many claiming to be professionals or adhering to professionalism without the authority of classic professions.

Professionalisation is the process by which an occupation becomes a profession or improves its level of professionalism by acquiring or enhancing its characteristics of professional authority, community sanction, and regulative code (Reed et al., 2019). Professionalism and professionalisation are frequently examined in relation to emerging professions and are integral to discussing how professions evolve (Dent, 2016). Professionalism is the quality or competence expected or demonstrated by a professional in their work or the values and norms that guide their conduct and ethics (Reed et al., 2019). By this definition, members of an occupation that has not achieved professional status cannot claim professionalism. The

concepts of professionalism and professionalisation are linked to how a profession is practised and conducted (Dent, 2016; B. Reed et al., 2019). Some use these terms interchangeably, although they are distinct elements of a profession. Defining these concepts has proven to be complex, and they have been the subject of academic discussion for many years. Defining these concepts has proven to be complex. They have been the subject of academic debate for many years. (Reed et al., 2019).

As we understand them today, professions have significantly transformed throughout history. Initially, they were characterised by their association with elite status and reliance on state or royal sponsorship, as exemplified by the church, law, and medicine (Dent, 2024). The concept of professions, professionalisation and professionalism has also evolved. The term professions can be traced back to the 1930s when sociologists started work to classify professions based on a list of common attributes (Greenwood, 1957; Burns, 2014; Lester, 2015). There is no single or universally accepted definition of a profession, as different scholars and disciplines may have different perspectives and criteria for what constitutes a profession.

The following section aims to explore the current state of knowledge and research on professions, professionalisation, and professionalism and analyse the approaches historically used to conceptualise and measure professions, professionalisation and professionalism. Sections on professions, professionalisation and professionalism focus on defining the terms used in this study.

2.2.1 Theoretical frameworks for studying professions.

The Interactionist approach

The interactionist approach focuses on how professionals interact with their clients and the public and construct their professional identity and legitimacy through symbolic means (Saks, 2012). Based on this, the interactionist approach argues that professions are not different from other occupations as the taxonomic approach may assume. The approach argues that professions are socially negotiated labels based on occupational ideologies. The interactionist approach also highlights the parallels between professions and more stigmatised occupations (Saks, 2012).

Saks (2016) defines the interactionist approach as a theoretical perspective highlighting the importance of social interactions and the interpretations individuals gain from their experiences in professional settings. According to this approach, professionals continuously

negotiate their roles and identities through daily interactions, shaping their practices and structures. Consequently, professionals are viewed as active participants who interpret and respond to their social environments, impacting their professional practices (Saks, 2016; Saks & Adams, 2019). The interactionist perspective emphasises individual experiences and the meanings associated with them.

Using the interactionist approach in this study risked missing important structural and institutional factors affecting professional practices. When examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on funeral directing, the interactionist approach could have neglected systemic issues like regulatory changes, economic pressures, and public health guidelines that were crucial during the pandemic. Additionally, focusing on individual interactions and subjective meanings limits the generalisability of the results.

The interactionist approach provides valuable insights into professions; however, it was not adopted as it does not equip one with objective or universal criteria for defining and classifying professions. Additionally, the approach fails to sufficiently address structural factors and the complexity of professionalisation. Consequently, achieving consistent and generalisable conclusions would have been challenging, as various funeral directors, clients, and other stakeholders might have interpreted the impact of COVID-19 differently during the pandemic. Lastly, the interactionist approach was not adopted because it does not critically examine or question the claims and interests of those seeking to be recognised as professionals and their associations. It presumes that they act out of service orientation and public interest, overlooking the possibility that they could be driven by self-interest and market competition.

The Marxist approach

The Marxist approach views professions as a privileged group that exploits its monopoly over knowledge and skills to serve its interests and support its dominance in the social structure (Saks, 2012; Dent, 2024). The Marxist approach is a branch of sociology that takes a macro-structural approach to professions based on the assumption that the state serves capitalist interests and that professions are agents of surveillance and control for a dominant class (Saks, 2016). It challenges the taxonomic approach, which sees professions as having a functional relationship with society and supplying positive services to the public.

One significant criticism of the Marxist approach is its overemphasis on class as the sole determinant of social dynamics (Saks, 2012). This limitation may hinder a comprehensive

understanding of the professionalisation of funeral directing during the COVID-19 pandemic, where multiple intersecting factors are at play. Other limitations of Marxism include being deterministic and focusing on social outcomes. This is related to yet another limitation of focusing on class struggle and neglecting other significant social issues, such as the emotional and cultural aspects of death and mourning relevant to funeral directors and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Marxist perspective provides an essential understanding of class struggle and economic power. Still, its shortcomings in considering the complex nature of social issues, such as the professionalisation of funeral directing during the COVID-19 pandemic, indicate that using this framework alone may not fully explain the topic. The Marxist approach contributes to the professional discourse; however, the thrust of the current study does not align with the perspectives of the Marxist approach. The limitations of the Marxist approach are that it is deterministic and reductionist, as it assumes that professions are decided by the economic base and the interests of the dominant class and have no autonomy or agency in their development and transformation (Saks, 2012). It disregards the diversity and complexity of professions and the possibility that they may challenge or resist the existing social order. This would have made it difficult to account for how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected funeral directors' roles, responsibilities, and identities.

The Foucauldian approach

According to the Foucauldian approach, professions are discursive formations that produce and regulate knowledge and power through specific practices, techniques, and institutions (Saks, 2012; Dent, 2024). This approach is based on a branch of sociology that challenges the rationality and scientific progress associated with professions in prisons, schools and other institutional areas (Saks, 2012). It argues that professions are agents of surveillance and control for the state and that their knowledge and expertise are not neutral or beneficial but serve to discipline and regulate the population. The Foucauldian approach criticises the taxonomic approach for ignoring the power and interests of professional groups with the state and the market (Saks, 2012).

The Foucauldian approach was not adopted in the current study because it is not concerned with the impact of external events or factors and, therefore, does not provide empirical criteria for defining and analysing how the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected the professionalisation of funeral directors (Dent, 2024). It relies on abstract and ambiguous

concepts, such as discourse, power, and knowledge, that take more work to conceptualise and measure (Saks, 2012). It would be difficult to account for how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the professionalisation of funeral directors using this approach. Foucault's concept of power minimises the role of funeral directors in adapting to their surroundings and external shifts. Despite state authority, funeral directors, impacted by the pandemic on various fronts, are anticipated to react and adapt.

The neo-Weberian approach

The neo-Weberian approach defines professions as occupational groups that use exclusionary closure strategies to control the access to and the quality of their services and to secure their status and rewards in the market (Saks, 2016; Adams and Saks, 2018; Saks and Adams, 2019). The neo-Weberian perspective is a framework used by sociology to characterise a profession based on exclusionary practices in the marketplace that is endorsed by the state (Saks, 2012). This means that professions are occupational groups that gain and support professional status by creating legal boundaries that exclude others without the recognised requirements from competing with them. According to this approach, professionals are not necessarily defined by their knowledge and expertise but by their power and interests in relation to the state and the market (Saks, 2012; Saks, 2016). The neo-Weberian approach avoids the assumptions and limitations of the taxonomic approach, which sees professions as having unique and positive characteristics, including distinctive knowledge and expertise. The neo-Weberian approach further considers the historical and socio-political context of professional groups.

Although there are indications that funeral directors in Zimbabwe are trying to use exclusionary closure strategies associated with the neo-Weberian approach, it was not considered a guiding framework for this study. This is because it overlooks the other aspects of professionalisation, such as developing and recognising a body of knowledge and skills, a code of ethics and standards of practice, a professional association or organisation, and a professional identity and culture (Saks, 2016). The COVID-19 pandemic can be used to justify exclusionary strategies; it must be based on a body of knowledge and attaining a defined qualification.

The neo-Weberian approach tends to emphasise structural factors, such as institutional norms and regulatory frameworks, at the expense of individual agencies (Saks, 2016). This can lead to an incomplete understanding of how funeral directors have navigated the challenges posed

by the pandemic. Using neo-Weberian approaches could have resulted in the experiences of funeral directors being overlooked due to a focus on structural changes. Death and funerals are also emotional and cultural events (Mitima-Verloop et al., 2022). A neo-Weberian approach misses the impact of COVID-19 on these dimensions. The pandemic has greatly changed how grief is expressed and managed (Mitima-Verloop et al., 2022). A structural view of the neo-Weberian approach may not fully capture these effects on the professionalisation of funeral directors.

Taxonomic approach

The taxonomic approach is a method of classifying professions or non-professions based on a list of attributes or characteristics that they have (Reed et al., 2019). This approach is also known as the structuralist or the trait theory of professions. According to this approach, a profession must have the following traits: a systematic body of theory or knowledge, a formal and specialised education, a high degree of autonomy and self-regulation, a code of ethics and a sense of service, a distinct professional culture and identity (Greenwood, 1957; Saks, 2012; Lester, 2015). This approach has been a central and influential perspective in understanding the nature of a profession, although it has also faced criticism by scholars who argue it oversimplifies professionalisation, which is complex to a handful of rigid categories, and it fails to capture the evolving nature of professional work (Otterlei, 2018; Saks, 2012).

The history of the taxonomic approach dates to the 1950s and 1960s, when it emerged as the first attempt to define what the professions were in the social sciences (Saks, 2012; Dent, 2024). The taxonomic approach was influenced by the cultural reverence given to groups like doctors and lawyers in the first part of the twentieth century, and it reflected a positive and idealised view of the professions (Dent, 2024).

One of the strengths of the taxonomic approach is its attempt to show clear criteria for what constitutes a profession. The taxonomic approach defines a profession as an occupation that is distinctly identified and follows a specific set of justifiable criteria (Lester, 2015).

Possessing a diverse range of characteristics enables professionals to differentiate themselves from other occupations (Saks, 2012). Recognised professions typically possess a higher level of formal knowledge and a more advanced educational background than other occupations. Being classified as a profession is often associated with a sense of dignity for that particular type of work (Smith, 2020).

The taxonomic approach has its drawbacks. The characteristics that define professions, such as a well-structured theoretical framework recognised professional authority, community endorsement, established ethical regulations, and distinct professional culture, are not unique to professions alone. This observation underscores the complexities involved in establishing definitive criteria for professional classification, as highlighted in discussions about the challenges of defining professionalism (Brown & Ferrill, 2009; Saks, 2016). Non-professional occupations may also have them, although to a lesser degree. The sufficiency of attributes to qualify as a profession and the exact number of traits required are not standardised. Furthermore, the taxonomic approach has been criticised for failing to consider the power dynamics and interests of professional groups within the state and the market (Reed et al., 2019; Dent, 2024). Another limitation of the taxonomic approach is its static nature, which may cause the framework to overlook professional practices' dynamic and evolving characteristics.

According to King et al. (2018) two ways to approach the taxonomy professions are from the trait and the functionalist perspectives. The trait approach relies on core traits or elements that separate professions and occupations (King et al., 2018). Using the trait approach, the professionalisation of an occupation is gradual and depends on attaining specific traits and qualities typical of professions. On the other hand, the functionalist perspective emphasises the social importance and role of professions, concentrating on the services provided by the profession and public acceptance, as well as the practical use of the knowledge and skills professionals possess (King et al., 2018).

While the professions' concept based on the taxonomic approach continues to hold appeal in everyday discourse, it has evolved over the decades. As an example, the issue of trust, which was once taken for granted, is now central to the belief of professions (Dent, 2024). As seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, the public and governments no longer assumed that professions were responsible enough to self-regulate, and some levels of external regulation were legislated. Moreover, the institutional arrangements that define professions are not fixed or rigid, contrary to widely held beliefs (Dent, 2024).

The taxonomic approach was used for this study rather than the alternative approaches discussed in this section. The taxonomic approach provides a clear and simple framework for defining and classifying professions based on an easily understood set of criteria or attributes, such as knowledge, ethics, culture, and community sanction (Muzio and Kirkpatrick, 2011; King et al., 2018). This helps to name and compare the characteristics and functions of

funeral directors as a professional group and to assess their degree of professionalisation as it is more descriptive. Secondly, the taxonomic approach allows the examination of the distinctive aspects of professions, such as their service orientation, public interest, and social contribution. This can help highlight the value and importance of professionals and explore their motivations and satisfaction with their work. Lastly, the taxonomic approach was used for this study to trace the historical development and evolution of funeral directors over time and to analyse how they respond to changing social, economic, political, and technological conditions (Muzio and Kirkpatrick, 2011). This is particularly useful in understanding how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the status and development of funeral directors as professionals and how they have adapted to the new challenges and opportunities.

While acknowledging its shortcomings and limitations, as briefly highlighted by other approaches, the taxonomic approach definition of a profession was adopted for this study. A profession is an occupation that requires advanced education or training in a specialised body of knowledge gained through advanced research, education, and training (Greenwood, 1957; Saks, 2012). Furthermore, a profession is regulated by formal institutions, such as licensing bodies, professional associations or codes of conduct, which aim to ensure the profession's quality, legitimacy and autonomy (Saks, 2014). The taxonomic method is a practical framework for organising and classifying the changes experienced within the funeral industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. This replicable approach delivers empirical evidence, maintains objectivity, and forms a foundation for generalisations.

2.2.2 The Nature of a Profession

The profession concept has been a subject of much debate and discussion, with scholars offering various definitions and perspectives. The paper by Abadi et al. (2020) illustrates this. The paper has a list of definitions of a profession from various standpoints. From a legal perspective, a profession is defined as "*a self-selected, self-disciplined group of individuals who hold themselves out to the public as possessing a special skill derived from education and training and who are prepared to exercise that skill primarily in the interests of others*" (Abadi et al., 2020). This definition highlights the specialised knowledge and skills professionals get through education, training, and experience. In addition to the legal perspective, other definitions emphasise specific principles and responsibilities that are associated with the concept of a profession given in the paper. These include:

- "*A profession's knowledge, skill, and judgement are accepted by the public on trust*" (Abadi et al., 2020). This highlights the importance of public trust in the expertise and competence of professionals.
- "*A profession has an obligation to the public to render services in the public interest*" (Abadi et al., 2020). This underscores the societal role of professions, which is to serve the needs and interests of the public.
- "*A profession is bound by a code of ethics that governs its relationships with the public, its clients, and its colleagues*" (Abadi et al., 2020). This emphasises the ethical standards and guidelines professionals must adhere to when interacting with various stakeholders.
- "*A profession is entrusted with the responsibility to regulate its members and the services they provide*" (Abadi et al., 2020). This highlights the role of professional bodies in setting and enforcing standards of practice within their respective fields.
- "*Professionals are accountable for their actions, the actions of those they supervise, and the practice of the profession in general*" (Abadi et al., 2020). This underscores professionals' individual and collective responsibility in upholding the standards and values of their respective professions.

These definitions illustrate that there is no universally agreed-upon definition of a profession. However, there is a consensus that professions are characterised by a combination of specialised knowledge, skills, and experience acquired through formal education and training. Furthermore, professions are not just about the individual expertise of professionals but also about the structural, occupational, and institutional arrangements that govern their work (Abadi et al., 2020; Smith, 2020; Dent, 2024). As a result of the evolution of professions and the modern world, professional groups can be elites with connections to political power. Professional practitioners can, in such cases, be licensed as a mechanism of market closure (Evetts, 2013). This highlights the broader social and economic dimensions of professions, which can involve issues of power, market dynamics, and occupational control.

The taxonomic approach uses the attributes and characteristics that differentiate professions from other occupations to classify professions (Cavar, 2021). According to the taxonomic approach, a profession has several essential attributes, including a systematic body of theory, recognised authority, community endorsement, established ethical codes, and a distinct culture (Cavar, 2021; Lester, 2015). Classical professions, including medicine and law, can be called elite and are considered full professions, while social work and nursing are regarded as

semi-professions. (Lumsden, 2017). Following their recognition, professionals merge their status and improve their services.

While the concept of a profession may be challenging to define in a definitive and all-encompassing manner, certain specific attributes and principles are commonly associated with professions. These include specialised knowledge and skills, public trust, a commitment to the public interest, adherence to a code of ethics, self-regulation, and accountability (Evetts, 2003; Dent, 2024). A combination of formal education, vocational training, and experience also characterise professions. However, it is essential to recognise that the nature and understanding of professions can vary across different contexts, disciplines, and societies and may continue to evolve.

2.2.3 Professionalisation

Professionalisation refers to the process by which an occupation or field of work attains a higher status and distinct identity as a profession (Callaghan, 2014; Thomas and Thomas, 2014; Dent, 2024). This process involves establishing specialised knowledge and skills, regulating entry into the profession, and controlling the market for the profession's services. One key aspect of professionalisation is the establishment of rigorous entry standards, which often include extensive education and multiple levels of examination (Callaghan, 2014). This is seen as a primary means through which a profession asserts control over its members and distinguishes itself from other occupations.

According to Thomas & Thomas (2014), the professionalisation of occupations can be divided into three primary categories. The first category emphasises the fundamental characteristics of professions and evaluates the prevalence of these characteristics within specific occupations (Wilensky, 1964; Thomas and Thomas, 2014). The traits or characteristics perspective primarily assesses whether an occupation has the required traits from lists like those produced (McCann et al., 2013). The second looks at strategies used by occupations to close off outsiders and regulations used by professional associations to secure the professional status of those occupations. Occupations push to drive their professionalisation to improve their status and gain market benefits from the control of the occupation (Tobias, 2003; McCann et al., 2013). As a result, occupation closure and control are why some occupations professionalise, and the traits and characteristics are an outcome of the process. The third and last strand relates to the shift of attention towards the role of corporate entities in professionalisation (Tobias, 2003; Thomas and Thomas, 2014). This

process involves strict standards or codes, coupling extensive education with several levels of examination or apprenticeship as clerks or formal entry into the profession. This emphasis on education and examination standardises professions or occupation groups to a specific body of knowledge (Freidson, 1999).

Another crucial element of professionalisation is the commodification of the profession's specialised knowledge and expertise, which allows the profession to attain considerable market power. As Saks (2016) explains that professionals create a particular service, regulate entry into the profession, and control the market regarding their service. From this perspective, there is always an element of occupational closure whichever way professionalisation goes. Professionalisation involves strategies and practices by which occupation groups claim authority, expertise and status (Griffin et al., 2005; Lumsden, 2017). The outcome of professionalisation will often include attaining generally agreed characteristics expected of professionals in the occupation group. Whilst the outcome of professionalisation is the same across all occupations, professionalisation varies for each occupation and is affected by local context.

The definition of professionalisation includes three essential components for the professionalisation of an occupation (Griffin et al., 2005). Firstly, an occupation's members acculturate formally and informally into an academic discipline (Griffin et al., 2005). Secondly, the members become recognised and legitimated as professionals in each discipline (Griffin et al., 2005). Lastly, the professionals accommodate themselves to the working context in which they operate. Training, recognition and culture are essential to professionalisation (Griffin et al., 2005). These do not end when occupations professionalise but continue beyond acceptance or recognition.

Drivers of professionalisation are not only occupation-specific but also country-specific (Egetenmeyer et al., 2019; Neal & Morgan, 2000). Looking at the historical professionalisation of nineteen occupations in the two countries, Neal & Morgan (2000) concluded that the government's role in setting up and managing professional bodies in the UK and Germany are different, with the UK having a 'bottom-up' process whilst Germany has a 'top-down' process. Two main stakeholder groups determine the process of professionalisation. The first is the occupation groups through the formation of associations that push for its members to attain the traits of a profession. This is what is referred to as the bottom-up. The second is the state, through laws and regulations that push occupation groups

to professionalise. When states push for the professionalisation of occupations, it is known as the top-down process.

The formal professionalisation of vocations typically occurred under parliamentary acts, which marked a clear separation from their past associations with other trades. However, the 19th century saw the emergence of new professions, such as accountancy and engineering, which were closely tied to the rise of industrial capitalism (Egetenmeyer et al., 2019). The 20th century, on the other hand, saw the growth of public sector services professions, like social work and nursing, because of the expansion of the welfare state. The process of professionalisation is not without its challenges and criticisms. One point of contention is the ambiguity surrounding the phases through which an occupation must transition to secure professional status. Just like with the concept of a profession, there is a lack of clarity on the nature and sequence of the professionalisation phases. This ambiguity extends to the concept of professionalism itself, which is often seen as a vague and elusive outcome of the professionalisation process (Abadi et al., 2020; McCann et al., 2013).

In conclusion, professionalisation is a complex and multifaceted process that involves establishing specialised knowledge and skills, regulating entry into the profession, and commodifying the profession's expertise. It is a means through which an occupation or field of work attains a higher status and distinct identity. However, the process has challenges and ambiguities, and professionalism is still a subject of debate and interpretation.

2.2.4 Professionalism

Related to the concept of professions and professionalisation, professionalism is a concept that refers to the standards, practices, or motivations associated with a profession (King et al., 2018). When one belongs to a profession, professionalism is how one displays their behaviour, attitude, and skills within and outside the workspace based on the expectations and values of the profession. Although occupation members, according to the taxonomic approach selected as the framework for this study, can casually claim professionalism (Dent, 2024) members of a profession should be the only ones claiming professionalism.

Members of a profession are referred to as professionals. Professionals are individuals at an advanced performance level of work following vigorous training. They are part of a group of colleagues who adhere to standards and share common values they can (Houle, 1981). As a result, professionals have autonomy and, therefore, have the approval of clients to make decisions on their behalf. To get continuous acceptance, professionals need advanced

performance and vigorous training. These are considered necessary for the survival of a profession, as being a professional is not an end state, and community sanction can be withdrawn. Not performing at the expected level or expanding the body of knowledge for a profession necessitates continued development (Houle, 1981). As a result, further training and performance reviews by peers and professional associations are typically used for professional development. Professionals' critical characteristics and criteria include expertise, ethics, service and identity.

Expertise is acquired through education, training and experience. Professionals show advanced knowledge and skills in a specific domain acquired through formal education, training, and experience (Frimpong, 2013; Houle, 1981). They also engage in continuous learning and improvement to keep up with the latest developments and standards (Freidson, 1999).

Ethics refers to the code of conduct that professionals adhere to. A code of conduct defines the values, principles, and norms that guide professional behaviour and operations (Freidson, 1999; Houle, 1981). This also includes demonstrating integrity, honesty, respect, accountability, and responsibility in their work.

Service relates to how professionals use their expertise to serve the needs and interests of their clients, employers, colleagues, and society. Professionals are expected to balance their interests with those of others and act reasonably, impartially, and respectfully.

Lastly, identity refers to a professional's sense of belonging and commitment to their profession (Holm et al., 2020). They also develop a professional identity that reflects their values, beliefs, attitudes, and goals as members of their profession. Holm et al. (2020) argues that involvement with professional organisations contributes to the appreciation of the professions by promoting professionalism and fostering the professional values essential for practitioners. Shared values and beliefs characterise professional associations among their members, who benefit from opportunities to enhance their professional knowledge, advance their careers, contribute to public service, and maintain high standards of professional practice (Holm et al., 2020).

2.2.5 Occupation to Profession

This section concludes the discussion on professions, professionalisation, and professionalism by examining how full-time occupations have evolved into professions. This evolution is not straightforward, as the stages of professions presented here are not

necessarily sequential. However, this discussion illustrates the different levels of a profession or stages of professionalisation. Some scholars in the professionalisation discourse argue that there are stages to professionalisation. Theodore Caplow, a renowned sociologist, proposed four stages from a simple occupation to a professional association: organising membership, changing the occupation's name, developing an ethical code, and engaging in political agitation to enforce occupational barriers (Smith, 2020).

The first step from an occupation to a profession is to set up a professional association (Caplow, 1954). The role of the professional association is to set the membership policy, which limits access to the emerging profession to those who meet the qualifications. The second step involves changing the occupation's name to differentiate the emerging profession (Caplow, 1954). This step can also include distinguishing the emerging profession from dishonest or incompetent members of the occupation who may damage its reputation. According to Caplow (1954), the third step is to develop a code of ethics that asserts the social value of the occupation. The emerging profession further reinforces the exclusion of unqualified and uses the code of ethics as a tool. The fourth step suggested by Caplow (1954) is prolonged political agitation. The step aims to obtain the support of the public and for the maintenance of the new profession.

Other theorists criticising the trait models of professionalisation also propose models involving successive steps. For example, the interactionist approach uses linear models whereby occupations become professions by taking steps such as organising prescribed working hours, acquiring knowledge and skills in higher education institutions, establishing professional associations, adopting professional standards, and obtaining licensure (Cavar, 2021). The proponents of this approach claim that occupations develop according to a specific structural and cultural pattern of professional control.

2.3 Modern Professions

This section briefly looks at the modern and emerging professions using the historical and social origins of professions. Modern professions refer to new or emerging professions that traditionally were not considered professions. If put on a continuum, these would be at the other end of the scale as those that developed in the medieval and early modern periods, including medicine and law (Egetenmeyer et al., 2019). Traditional professions were characterised by high education, training, and expertise, a code of ethics, a public service orientation, and a degree of autonomy and authority. They were also called the learned

professions, as they required a mastery of a body of knowledge and skills (Egetenmeyer et al., 2019).

Traditional professions are based on classic professionalisation theories, which focus on the attributes and functions of professions in society, such as the control of knowledge, ethical values, academic education, and the common welfare. In contrast, the modern professions developed in the industrial and post-industrial eras, such as engineering, management, education, and journalism (Egetenmeyer et al., 2019). These professions are characterised by having a more diverse and specialised range of knowledge and skills and a more flexible and dynamic approach to work. They are also affected by the changes in technology, economy, society, and culture that shape the modern world. New, modern, or emerging professions include those that have been academised and require specialised knowledge, such as User-Managed Personal Assistants (UMPA) in the welfare field (Otterlei, 2018). These professions may not have the same level of formal education as traditional professions but still require specific qualifications and skills. Otterlei (2018) also argues that not all occupations can become professions because of differences in formal education, the exclusivity of knowledge, ethical guidelines, autonomy, and the monopoly over specific tasks and titles.

Modern professions are influenced by changes in the working world, such as the rise of knowledge societies, market and customer orientation, organisational and managerial cultures, and heterogeneous and independent learners (Reed, 2018). Emerging professions still need to be fully established or recognised as professions but are developing their identity, knowledge and practice. Examples of emerging professions include public relations, management consulting, and wealth management (Reed, 2018). Funeral directing belongs to the modern profession in a few jurisdictions. It has undergone professionalisation and is an emerging profession in most jurisdictions, including Zimbabwe. The role of the professional body in current and emerging professions needs to be addressed, as it may not resonate with the practitioners' professional identity construction (Reed, 2018; Muzio et al. 2011a). Muzio et al. (2011) offer a discussion on the emerging role of the professional body in current and emerging professions. The authors identify and provide an analysis of project management, management consultancy and executive search as modern professions. The study offered by Muzio et al. (2011) provides key components of their model of corporation professionalisation. The three modern professions are discussed in the following sections.

2.3.1 Project Management

Muzio et al. (2011a) identifies project management as one of the relatively new and important fields of management that has been undergoing a process of professionalisation. The article discusses how several national and international professional associations represent project management globally. These associations differ in size, influence, and reputation. For instance, the Project Management Association (PMA) in the USA has a membership of 290,000. In contrast, the Association for Project Management (APM) in the UK consists of 17,500 individual members and 500 corporate members, making it the largest independent association within the Project Management Institute (PMI). According to Muzio et al. (2011a) Project Management is departing from traditional paths and pursuing what they refer to as corporate professionalisation. The new professionalisation strategies in project management, highlighted in Muzio et al. (2011a) are organisational membership, client management, competence-based closure and internationalisation.

2.3.2 Management Consultancy

Another flagship modern profession discussed in Muzio et al. (2011) is management consultancy. Management consultancy is an emerging knowledge-based occupation pursuing the establishment of itself as a profession. The authors identify UK management consultancy associations such as the Institute of Management Consultants (IMC) and the Management Consultancies Association (MCA). The IMC is affiliated with the International Council of Management Consultancy Institutes (ICMCI), a global umbrella organisation that brings together national associations and has established standardised competence-based qualifications. One of the qualifications is the Certified Management Consultant (CMC) designation. The IMC has historically maintained a membership of 3,000 to 3,500, while its successor, the Institute of Business Consulting (IBC), has approximately 7000 members. These associations initially targeted to professionalise management consultancy and pursue a Royal Charter. The projection of the associations shifted towards a corporate professionalisation model. As discussed in project management, these associations also incorporated organisational membership and voluntary adjustments to regulatory standards, moving from traditional approaches focused on public service and competence.

2.3.3 Executive Search

Executive search firms specialise in filling corporate roles by recruiting candidates from competing organisations. They have shifted away from the service-oriented model

traditionally associated with management consultancy firms. Muzio et al. (2011) identify two types of executive search firms.

- a. “Retained executive search firms - specialising in elite, ‘top- and middle-tier’ labour recruitment with guaranteed payment by clients for successful placements (usually defined in the UK as positions with starting salaries of above £100,000.
- b. ‘Contingent’ executive search firms – offering full service across all parts of the organisational hierarchy, including traditional recruitment services, with more precarious client-fee structures.”

According to Muzio et al. (2011a) the retained executive search organisations are represented by the Association of Executive Search and Leadership Consultants (AESC), which was established in 1959. Membership to AESC is at “the firm-level (not individual practitioner level) with around 257 firms, employing 6000 practitioners, being members of the AESC worldwide.” Muzio et al. (2011a). The firms are critical in shaping corporate leadership through their expertise in talent acquisition and assessment. Generally, retained firms largely dominate the global search industry, and efforts towards professionalisation have been made within this segment of the executive search field.

2.3.4 Traditional versus modern professionalisation

The main differences between the professionalisation of modern fields such as project management, management consultancy, and executive search and traditional professions like medicine or law include:

- i. Pathways to professionalisation – Traditional professions often follow well-established pathways involving rigorous educational requirements, licensing, and adherence to ethical standards, whilst the professionalisation of newer occupations is characterised by more flexible and varied pathways that may not require formal qualifications or certifications to the same extent (Muzio et al., 2011a; Reed, 2018).
- ii. Role of Associations – Traditional professions typically have strong, long-standing professional associations that enforce standards and provide a unified identity for practitioners, whilst, in newer fields, associations are still developing and may focus more on networking and market engagement than on enforcing strict professional standards (Muzio et al., 2011a).
- iii. Traditional professions often employ a model of closure, where entry is restricted based on specific competencies, while newer professions are moving towards a model

that emphasises client engagement and organisational membership rather than strict barriers to entry based on qualifications (Muzio et al., 2011a; Reed, 2018).

- iv. Knowledge-based occupations are increasingly shaped by market demands and client relationships, leading to a more transactional view of professionalism (Reed, 2018). This contrasts with traditional professions that emphasise service to the public and adherence to ethical norms as central tenets of their identity (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2012).
- v. In traditional professions, identity is often tied to a specific body of knowledge and a commitment to public service. Conversely, in corporate professionalisation, identity is more fluid and can be influenced by organisational culture and client expectations (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2012).

Clarifying the traditional versus modern professions is complex and dynamic. It depends on how one defines and measures professionalism, views professions' historical and social context, and anticipates future needs and demands (Egetenmeyer et al., 2019). It also depends on balancing the continuity and change of professional qualities, such as expertise, ethics, service, and identity. Professionalisation for a classic and typical profession compared to a modern or emerging profession followed different paths. The middle ground or hybrid could be a more viable pathway to the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe. Having reviewed the professionalisation of modern and traditional professions, the following section reviews the evolution of funeral directing as it embarks on the professionalisation pathway.

2.4 Evolution of Funeral Directors

This section zeros in on funeral directors and how the occupation has evolved to position itself. It details the status of the funeral director in different jurisdictions in the world. Some of the context factors driving the evolution of the professionalisation of funeral directors in various jurisdictions include urbanisation, greater public demand or varied expectations, increased regulations and growth of the funeral industry from small family-run businesses to big companies operating internationally. Before presenting the various cases from different countries, the following section provides definitions of a funeral director.

2.4.1 The Funeral Director

A funeral director is responsible for arranging the disposal of a body (Parsons, 1997). The role of a funeral director has evolved due to some changes, including urbanisation and the change of place of death from home to hospital (Valentine et al., 2013). Formerly known as

the undertaker, mainly responsible for supplying the coffin and the means of transporting the body to the cemetery, the funeral director now has the role of the custodian of the dead and has responsibility and control of a funeral (Parsons, 1997). In modern times, a funeral director's role is not restricted to arranging the disposal of a body after death. It also includes providing guidance and support to the bereaved to help them plan and conduct the funeral according to their wishes and beliefs. Funeral directing now encompasses a wide range of activities that can be categorised as follows: care of the body, planning the funeral, furnishing the funeral, necessary legal administration on the day of funeral services, after the funeral services, and financial services (Rugg & Parsons, 2018). According to Rugg & Parsons (2018, pp 65 -67), the components of each category are;

“Care of the body

- *arrange for the removal of the body at any time of the day or night.*
- *preparing the body, which might include embalming, dressing in clothes provided by the client or a shroud (back-less gown to cover the deceased), and*
- *giving access to the chapel of rest.*

Planning the funeral

- *receive instructions for a burial or cremation from a client, either at the funeral director's office (funeral home) or the client's home.*
- *organise the date and time for the funeral, including liaising with cemeteries, crematoria, places of worship, officiants, and*
- *provide a written estimate of funeral costs.*

Furnishing the funeral

- *offer a range of coffins and possibly caskets;*
- *offer a range of caskets and urns for cremated remains;*
- *offer a range of vehicles to convey the coffin and mourners;*
- *prepare and insert announcements about the dead and the funeral in the local newspaper and on any memorial page associated with their business;*
- *discuss and arrange for the purchase and delivery of floral tributes;*

- *discuss the funeral itself, including arranging music for the funeral and any specific requests from the client, and participation from family or friends; and*
- *prepare and arrange for the printing of the order of service.*

Necessary legal administration

- *advise the client about the registration of the death and/or the coroner's and*
- *arrange for the completion of statutory certificates for cremation or complete and forward all documentation required by the cemetery.*

On the day of the funeral

- *supervise the funeral; and*
- *provide bearers to carry the coffin.*

After the funeral

- *post-funeral contact concerning donations, cremated remains, enquiries;*
- *provide an invoice for the service;*
- *receive and administer charitable donations;*
- *arrange for the collection of cremated remains and also hold them pending collection;*
- *arrange for the burial or scattering of cremated remains; and*
- *arrange for the removal and replacement of a memorial covering the grave.*

Financial services

- *arrange for the redemption of any pre-payment funeral plan;*
- *advice on state benefits, including the Funeral Expenses Payment; and pay all third-party individuals, including the cemetery or crematorium, the officiant and the florist; distribute any gratuities”.*

The broadening of the funeral director role appears to be positively associated with driving professionalise in the funeral industry in different jurisdictions. Acquiring professional recognition is essential for funeral directors (Parsons, 1997). Like most occupations gaining significance in the world undergoing globalisation and urbanisation, funeral directors have been seeking recognition as a profession (Cahill, 1999; Parsons, 1997; Valentine et al., 2013). Funeral directing is in the service industry; thus, its demand is not predictable and intangible,

and the services cannot be stored. It is an occupation closely linked to public health concerns, as funeral directors are responsible for handling, transporting, storing and disposing of the deceased safely and respectfully. Funeral directors also provide guidance and support to the bereaved and help them arrange and conduct funeral services according to their wishes and beliefs (Rugg & Parsons, 2018). Funeral directing involves various tasks and activities that may pose risks or challenges to public health.

2.4.2 Professionalisation of the Funeral Industry in the World

Like other professions, the professionalisation of funeral directors varies by country or jurisdiction, depending on the historical, cultural, religious, and legal frameworks (Cahill, 1999). This section illustrates briefly how the funeral industry has progressed with professionalisation in a few select countries. The section shows the differences and similarities in the professionalisation of funeral directors in five jurisdictions: the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, South Africa, and Sweden. It examines the historical, cultural, legal, and social factors that shape the practices and expectations of funeral directors in each context. This analysis is done following the taxonomic approach of professions.

The features of the taxonomic approach that allow this comparison of funeral directors to evolve under different contexts include the flexibility of applying the approach. The taxonomic approach generates a list of the traits, attributes and characteristics that set professions apart from other occupations (King et al., 2018). This feature allows easy comparisons based on a checklist of traits. Furthermore, the descriptive nature of the taxonomic approach, especially the trait approach as opposed to the functionalist approach, allows for empirical comparison of funeral directors in different jurisdictions. This can be important in understanding the mechanism of professionalisation and what drives or hinders professionalisation. This is particularly relevant in a study to establish the effects of COVID-19 on the professionalisation of funeral directors.

2.4.3 Professionalisation of Funeral Directors in the UK

The British funeral industry has been attempting to professionalise funeral directors over the last century (Valentine et al., 2013). The drive to professionalise, which gained traction in the 1950s, has not been achieved, and funeral directors in the UK have limited grounds to claim to be a profession. Although the British funeral industry has grown significantly over the past century since the National Association (NAFD) formation in 1905, no formal training or

education is required. Furthermore, compulsory registration, which has been a goal of the NAFD since its inception, remains to be achieved (Valentine et al., 2013).

The NAFD's dedication to improving standards includes offering a Code of Practice and a Diploma in Funeral Directing, requiring that at least one member of a firm's team obtains this qualification (Valentine et al., 2013). However, because there is no mandatory requirement for a funeral director to be affiliated with the NAFD, individuals can still establish and operate without any experience or qualifications (Valentine et al., 2013; Walter, 2017). While more prominent, established firms may be more willing to follow a Code of Practice, smaller, less established ones resist as they fear it may drive them out of the business (Walter, 2017).

Around 60% of funeral homes in the UK are privately owned small or medium-sized businesses (Walter, 2017). Funeral directors are not regulated by law and can easily be practitioners without specific registration or accreditation (Valentine et al., 2013). However, the Burial and Cremation Scotland Act 2016 now provides some provisions. It states that the Scottish Ministers may make a scheme for licensing funeral directors' businesses, Burial and Cremation Act, 2016. Furthermore, the act restricts people from carrying out businesses as funeral directors unless the person holds a license issued under the scheme. Outside Scotland, the only form of regulation available for funeral directors' businesses is through the various consumer-orientated codes of practice operated by different occupational associations, which only apply to member firms (Valentine et al., 2013).

2.4.4 Professionalisation of Funeral Directors in the USA

In the USA, the professionalisation of funeral directors has been successfully achieved (Cahill, 1999). For example, an individual wishing to become a funeral director or mortician can enrol for a Bachelor of Science degree with a major in Mortuary Science, studying deceased bodies through mortuary work (Cahill, 1999). In the USA, the status of funeral directors as professionals peaked during the 1950s when the industry was subjected to bad publicity and investigations by federal agencies during the 1960s and early 1970s (Torres, 1988). After establishing the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) in 1882, funeral directors began transforming a relatively open occupation into a more exclusive one. To rid the occupation of overly competitive and often unscrupulous undertakers, including curb stoners who plied their trade in the streets, prominent undertakers saw education and professionalisation as a means for upgrading the occupation.

The expertise allowing funeral directors to seek professional status was embalming, which tied them to surgeons, physicians, and physiologists, who often served as instructors of embalming (Habenstein & Lamers, 1955). However, by the 1940s, embalming knowledge was not progressing, except for "improved" products put out by embalming fluid manufacturers. Efforts by some embalmers to unionise prompted leaders within the industry to redefine expertise as knowledge in counselling, grief, legal requirements, and customs. Despite the change in professed expertise, funeral directors could upgrade educational requirements to professional standards. In 1972, the US Office of Education granted accrediting powers to an industry-sponsored organisation, the American Board of Funeral Service Education. This gave the funeral industry formal power to regulate education in the field. However, the American Board and its forerunners had been accrediting schools on an informal basis since the 1920s. Funeral directors in America generally present themselves as a professional. However, there are occasional difficulties in legitimising this occupational stature; they use their tasks in the care of the bereaved to support their claim to professional status, and they position their services and products in terms of therapeutic value for the bereaved. This is useful to avoid the stigma of working with the dead, just as pathologists or coroners may enjoy professional status even though they work with the dead.

The force behind professionalising funeral directors in the USA was the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) and its state affiliates (Gilligan, 1928). The NFDA dispensed information, assistance, and funds to establish professional authority from state to state (Gilligan, 1928). During the 1940s, the NFDA also accepted the responsibility of reviewing proposed state legislation (Gilligan, 1928).

2.4.5 Professionalisation of Funeral Directors in Canada

In Canada, the funeral director is a highly skilled profession, and funeral service degree programs are offered at ten campuses across Canada (Cahill, 1999). To be a funeral director, individuals must complete courses in public health, embalming, restorative arts, business management, social sciences, and the legal, regulatory and ethical issues governing the profession (Cahill, 1999). Analogous to the USA, there are clear indications of systematic theory using Greenwood's (1957) traits or the initial professional education based on McConnell's (2004) elements. The professionalisation of funeral directors in Canada is even devolved to provinces and localities. For example, in the province of Alberta in Western Canada, the Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board (AFSRB) is responsible for licensing funeral businesses, crematories, funeral directors, embalmers, and pre-need sales

representatives (Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board, 2016). To protect clients and the best interest of the funeral industry in Alberta, the AFSRB also establishes educational criteria, oversees performance standards, and examines consumer complaints. To promote the highest level of professional excellence, the AFSRB has developed a competency profile for funeral directors, including embalmers and pre-need salespeople (Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board, 2016).

2.4.6 Professionalisation of Funeral Directors in South Africa

The situation in South Africa resembles that of many developing countries. There are signs of movement towards professionalisation, but the funeral industry is not regulated by any qualifications, registration, licensing, or other conditions that define a profession. Established in 2017, the Federation of Funeral Professionals in South Africa (FFPSA) brings together funeral industry players and advocates for regulation and professionalisation. The FFPSA was established by the coming together of the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA), the Independent Funeral Directors Association (IFDA), and the South African Funeral Practitioners Association (SAFPA). One of the founding members of the FFPSA, the NFDA, shows the aspirational nature of funeral associations in South Africa. The NFDA requires its full members to have a permanent mortuary with refrigeration, all licenses or permits required by law to operate a funeral service from the premises, and registration with the Department of Home Affairs. Membership is voluntary, and the requirements are comparable to those for any business operating in the country. The benefits of joining the NFDA include building expertise, with the funeral expo and annual conference as critical ways to achieve this. This indicates the beginning of professionalisation, as traits such as initial professional education, accreditation certification, and licensing are not mandatory for funeral directors to operate in South Africa.

2.4.7 Professionalisation of Funeral Directors in Sweden

In Sweden, the funeral services market comprises three leading players. There are privately owned funeral businesses affiliated with the *Sveriges Begravningsbyråers Förbund*¹ (SBF) account for nearly 60% of the market, the *Fonus* rooted in the cooperative labour movement with a 30% share, and the rest of the funeral businesses are non-affiliated and privately owned (Bremborg, 2006). Known literally as funeral entrepreneurs in Sweden, funeral directors in Sweden have evolved like their counterparts in other parts of the world. The SBF

¹ The Swedish Funeral Directors' Association

has aimed for a higher level of recognition. However, funeral directors in the country do not qualify as professionals based on the characteristics of the taxonomical approach of professionalisation. A significant factor contributing to this is the weakness of the SBF and its failure to place obligations on its members (Bremborg, 2006). The SBF attempted several changes that were more aligned with the classical professionalisation process, which was vigorously resisted by members and eventually toned down. For example, the SBF enforced compulsory academic courses for funeral businesses wanting to remain authorised. The half-year-long course proposed by the SBF was dismissed as too long and, therefore, initially halved before the requirement of passing the course was reduced to just participation. Further relaxation of obligations included the decision that only one staff member was required to participate, with the rest of the team expected to complete a 3-day course provided by the association. To end, the brief discussion on the professionalisation status of funeral directors in Sweden is the story of the effects of the general negative attitude towards embalming. This is called professionalisation without the body (Bremborg, 2006). Unlike in other jurisdictions, funeral directors have been professionalising without specialisation in making the dead body a science. Funeral directors in Sweden seem reluctant to establish job duties associated with the deceased, preferring to expand their responsibilities to include other areas of logistics, bereavement, and rituals.

2.4.8 Insights from the Country Case Studies.

The professionalisation of funeral directors in different jurisdictions has been a multifaceted process, marked by expanding their roles and establishing educational and regulatory frameworks. Traditionally, funeral directors were primarily responsible for the practical aspects of handling the deceased, such as supplying coffins and transporting the body. However, their role has evolved significantly over time. According to Parsons (1997), funeral directors are now seen as the "custodians of the dead" and are entrusted with a broader range of responsibilities. This includes not only arranging the disposal of the body but also providing guidance and support to the bereaved in planning and conducting the funeral service according to their wishes and beliefs.

The professionalisation of funeral directors has been a gradual process, driven by factors such as the need to eliminate unscrupulous undertakers, changing societal expectations, and the desire to align with other established professions. Another key driver behind the professionalisation of funeral directors has been the desire for professional recognition. As Parsons (1997) notes, "the acquisition of profession recognition is an important objective for

funeral directors". This aligns with the broader trend of occupations seeking professional status in a world undergoing globalisation and urbanisation.

The United States and Canada provide exciting case studies in the professionalisation of funeral directors. In the US, the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) played a pivotal role in this process. As Gilligan (1928) highlights, the NFDA established professional authority across different states, providing information, assistance, and financial support. Funeral directing is considered a highly skilled profession in Canada, with funeral service degree programs offered at various campuses nationwide. To become a funeral director in Canada, individuals must complete courses in multiple subjects, including public health, embalming, restorative arts, business management, and legal and ethical issues.

In Sweden, funeral directors have aspired to professionalise and attain a higher standing, but they do not qualify as a profession based on the taxonomical approach of professionalisation. This is mainly due to the weakness of the Swedish Funeral Directors' Association (SBF) and its failure to place obligations on its members. The SBF attempted to enforce compulsory academic courses for funeral businesses, but these were met with resistance and eventually toned down. This is similar to what has happened in South Africa with the emergence of the NFDA, which set voluntary membership requirements for funeral directors and in Zimbabwe with the setting up of ZAFSA and FuSA.

The case studies show that the barriers and drivers of the professionalisation of the funeral director are complex. On the one hand, there is a growing recognition of the importance of funeral directors in handling, transporting, and disposing of the deceased safely and respectfully. This recognition is closely tied to the evolving role of funeral directors, which has expanded to include tasks such as post-funeral contact, financial services, and the broadening of funeral services. On the other hand, there are challenges in defining and enforcing professional standards, as witnessed in Sweden and the UK. The resistance to compulsory academic qualifications has hindered the professionalisation process.

The evolution of funeral directors as an occupation and their attempts to professionalise in different jurisdictions, such as the UK, the USA, Canada, South Africa, and Sweden, shows that the professionalisation of funeral directors varies by country or jurisdiction, depending on the historical, cultural, religious, and legal frameworks. Factors and processes that shape the professionalisation of funeral directors include urbanisation, public demand, regulation, industry growth, education, and culture. Some countries have achieved a higher level of

professionalisation than others, based on criteria such as formal education, training, certification, licensing, accreditation, association, code of conduct, and public recognition. These are critical traits of the taxonomy approach of professionalisation (Greenwood, 1957). The main benefits of the professionalisation of funeral directors include improving quality, recognition, and satisfaction of work and service delivery. Improving the quality of work is an essential benefit regarding public health safety. However, the case examples also highlight the downside of the professionalisation of funeral directors, which includes high costs of services and the exclusion of small, family-owned funeral companies.

Table 1 presents an analysis of the professionalisation status of funeral directors across various jurisdictions. This analysis is conducted through three primary strands. The first examines the essential characteristics of professions and assesses their prevalence, drawing on the works of Wilensky (1964) and Thomas & Thomas (2014). The second reflects on the strategies employed by funeral directors in the selected jurisdictions to exclude non-professionals and the regulatory measures implemented to secure professional status within the occupation (Tobias, 2003; McCann et al., 2013). The third strand shifts focus on the influence and role of corporate entities in the field (Thomas & Thomas, 2014).

Table 1: The professionalisation of funeral directors in each country, focusing on essential characteristics, regulatory measures, and the role of corporate entities

Country	Essential characteristics	Regulatory measures	Role of corporate entities
UK	Limited formal education and training; voluntary adherence to a Code of Practice provided by NAFD.	No compulsory formal education or mandatory registration; voluntary membership in NAFD; Burial and Cremation Scotland Act 2016 provides some provisions.	Around 60% of funeral homes are privately owned small or medium-sized businesses, affecting the adoption of professional standards.
USA	Formal education and training (e.g., Bachelor of Science in Mortuary Science); strong professional associations (NFDA).	Licensing and accreditation by the American Board of Funeral Service Education; state-level regulations and standards.	Corporate entities and large funeral service providers play a significant role in setting and maintaining professional standards.
CANADA	Formal education and training; provincial regulatory bodies; comprehensive degree programs.	Licensing and regulation by bodies like the Alberta Funeral Services Regulatory Board; mandatory courses in various relevant subjects.	Corporate entities influence the industry through regulatory boards and educational institutions, ensuring high standards.

SOUTH AFRICA	Emerging professionalisation; voluntary membership in FFPSA ² associations; limited formal requirements.	No mandatory qualifications or licensing; voluntary membership in associations like NFDA, IFDA, and SAFPA.	The industry is largely unregulated, with efforts towards professionalisation led by associations rather than corporate entities.
SWEDEN	Voluntary adherence to standards set by SBF; limited formal education requirements.	No compulsory academic qualifications; SBF's attempts to enforce standards met with resistance.	A few large players dominate the market, but resistance to regulation and professionalisation is prevalent among smaller firms.

² Established when three associations, National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA), the Independent Funeral Directors Association (IFDA), and the South African Funeral Practitioners Association (SAFPA), merged.

The following section offers a brief description of the status of the funeral industry in Zimbabwe based on work the researcher did as part of the DBA.

2.4.9 Status of the Funeral Industry in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, as funeral directing is relatively young, many of the services that the modern funeral director in other jurisdictions provides are unavailable. Common categories in Zimbabwe are care of the body, furnishing the funeral and on the day of funeral. These are primarily to do with handling, transporting, storing, and disposing of the deceased safely and respectfully.

The regulation of the funeral services industry in Zimbabwe is currently governed by legislation related to public health, occupational health and safety, as well as births, deaths, and marriages (Mataranyika, 2020, 2021). The industry is additionally influenced by council planning, health regulations from the state government, infection control measures for mortuaries, and a business operating licence (Mataranyika, 2020). Those funeral service providers who offer funeral service business are regulated by the Companies Act (Chapter 24:03) and fully comply with all municipal by-laws. They can be affiliated members of ZAFA by applying for membership. Since health regulations are generally not enforced and there is a requirement to register funeral parlours, it is challenging to determine how many are currently operating in Zimbabwe.

The growth of the funeral services industry is a crucial driver to the push by funeral directors in Zimbabwe to professionalise. The number of people gainfully employed in the funeral industry is growing with innovation and specialisation of services (Mataranyika, 2020). Furthermore, funeral directors are keen to separate themselves from new entrants by identifying themselves as belonging to a profession and presenting new entrants as ‘unprofessional’ and, therefore, belonging to an occupation. One of the reasons many occupations have historically professionalised was primarily to exclude competing interest groups (Neal & Morgan, 2000).

Generally, most of those serving as funeral directors in Zimbabwe have not been formally educated by a tertiary education institute in the critical subject areas. No colleges or universities offer study programmes to prepare students for careers as funeral directors. Funeral directors in Zimbabwe are from various educational and professional backgrounds, and no training or academic qualifications are required to enter the funeral industry (Mataranyika, 2021). The following subsections will briefly look at the status of funeral

directors in other countries using a taxonomic approach bias. The attainment of the critical traits of a profession and the circumstances driving or hindering the professionalisation process were reviewed.

2.5 COVID-19 Pandemic and Funeral Industry

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the role of funeral directing globally. The outbreak, which was first detected in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, was declared a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization (WHO) on January 30, 2020, and was classified as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Hua & Shaw, 2020). In many countries, the central or national government enacted laws and policies regarding aspects of mortuary and funeral practices in COVID-19 (Balci & Kaya, 2021). Many countries implemented procedures to manage the deceased quickly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an estimated 18.2 million excess deaths globally between January 2020 and December 2021 (Koh et al., 2021), causing disruptions to the funeral industry. In response to the pandemic, all countries were urged to implement measures to slow its spread. Guidelines have been introduced and are still evolving, and funerary practices are being modified concerning policy measures implemented in response to COVID-19 (World Health Organisation, 2020). The Zimbabwean government designated COVID-19 as a national disaster on March 17, 2020, enabled it to allocate resources for preparedness and potential containment measures (Makurumidze, 2020). This included areas such as handling of bodies, infection control procedures, personal protective equipment, transportation, embalming of bodies, advice for religious or ceremonial preparation and funeral practices, cremation of bodies, body viewing, and ways to curb the spread of COVID-19 at funerals. All these processes could be linked to some of the traits of the taxonomy approach of professionalisation as they relate to the body of knowledge, code of ethics, culture, and training in one way or another.

Promotion and compliance with government COVID-19 guidelines can potentially impact the professionalisation of funeral directing in Zimbabwe. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, government regulations have significantly impacted the work of funeral directors. Reacting to the pandemic, governments worldwide have implemented various policies to limit the spread of the virus, such as social distancing guidelines and capacity limits. These policies have directly impacted how funeral directors conduct their services and forced them

to adapt quickly to meet the demands of the new environment. Funeral directors have also had to adapt to new technology and procedures to keep guests and staff safe.

Despite best efforts to control the pandemic, a gradual increase in cases caused healthcare systems to be overwhelmed; in turn, downstream impacts on the deathcare sector due to high fatality rates were experienced. Concerns arose about the risks and protocols required for managing the deceased, as well as the additional safety measures needed to safeguard those who come into contact with the bodies. This includes death care professionals, family members, loved ones, and clergy attending funerals. A rapid increase in fatalities can also lead to shortages of supplies, personnel, and traditional facilities for storing the deceased, which can create further public health challenges (O’Keeffe, 2020). The pandemic necessitated adaptations that fostered values and psychological states such as self-preservation, resilience, optimism, courage, compassion, self-esteem, burnout, civic responsibility, and self-efficacy (Shanafelt et al., 2020).

Funeral directors risk becoming infected when embalming a corpse (Kelly & Reid, 2011). Funeral directors face infectious risks from inhaling body fluids in the air, direct physical exposure, and mucocutaneous contamination (Ringane et al., 2019). Viruses and bacteria are known to spread post-mortem. Often, funeral directors do not know the specific cause of someone's death. This can be due to professional secrecy (Ringane et al., 2019). These dangers are significant regarding COVID-19, as the virus seems very contagious and can survive in dead bodies. There is, therefore, typically a greater likelihood of infection due to improper handling soon after death when pathogens are more likely to remain viable (Cardoso & Vieira, 2016).

The pandemic has underscored the vital role of funeral directors. In natural disasters or mass tragedies leading to high fatalities, funeral directors are at the forefront, helping families and providing essential services, which is no different with COVID-19. During the COVID-19 pandemic, funeral directors were a critical part of the community, offering support and adaptability as key services to families navigating the challenges and overwhelming situations (Selman et al., 2020).

COVID-19 could have had a significant impact on the professionalisation of funeral directors. As highlighted, the pandemic has led to a surge in death rates and increased demand for funeral directors. This focus on funeral directors can lead to a need for funeral directors to be more professional and knowledgeable about the services they provide.

Suppose they already needed to appreciate the importance of public health safety. In that case, funeral directors are likely to have become more aware of the importance of health and safety precautions when providing their services. These changes impact the professionalisation of funeral directing in Zimbabwe.

In the previous studies as part of this DBA, clients who participated in a survey believed that funeral directors in Zimbabwe do not adhere to the same principles except in reason and theory (Mataranyika, 2020, 2021). They do not have to follow common standards or codes of conduct as they are not regulated. The funeral companies under ZAFSA refer to some smaller companies not registered with ZAFSA as rogue or fly-by-night funeral service providers (Mataranyika, 2021). Rogue or fly-by-night funeral service providers are those who operate without proper licenses or ethical standards and often exploit the vulnerability and ignorance of grieving families. They may offer low-quality, fraudulent, or illegal services, such as unhygienic or improper embalming, misrepresentation of caskets or urns, overcharging or hidden fees, or violation of burial or cremation regulations. ZAFSA-registered companies are concerned with the bad reputation that can come from non-registered companies if they exploit vulnerable customers or provide substandard services. In public health security, rogue funeral services companies may not follow the infection prevention and control (IPC) guidelines to manage a dead body to maximise profits safely. This poses a risk of transmission to themselves, their staff, their customers and the public (WHO, 2020; Wilkes et al., 2021). Without appropriate regulation or enforcement, rogue funeral companies may undermine the reputation and standards of legitimate funeral directors who provide quality services to their customers. Therefore, local authorities, health care facilities, mortuaries, religious and public health authorities, and families must be aware of the possible risks and harms of rogue and fly-by-night funeral service providers and take appropriate measures to prevent, detect and report them.

Regarding the professionalisation of funeral directors, rogue service providers have increased the demand and need for regulation and standardisation of the funeral industry. This has two main effects observed in countries like the USA and Canada that have professionalised funeral directors. Firstly, this has stimulated and mobilised the formation of professional associations to develop and impress a code of practice. Secondly, this has challenged and motivated funeral directors to improve the quality and diversity of their services to differentiate themselves from the rogue providers. They have also encouraged the funeral

directors to enhance their skills, knowledge, and competencies through education, training, and certification.

2.6 Research Conceptual Framework

The research is framed on the taxonomic approach of professions. Following this approach, full professions possess a systematic theory, authority, community sanction, ethical codes, and a culture (Greenwood, 1957). The evolution of full-time occupations to become professional follows three main pathways: Spontaneous or bottom-up, driven by those who are part of the full-time occupation; and state-sanctioned or top-down, driven by the government and instituted through legal frameworks; and hybrid route, which is a combination of the spontaneous and state-sanctioned routes (Neal & Morgan, 2000). Funeral directors in the USA and Canada acquired the characteristics to claim full professional status (Cahill, 1999). The process in both countries was largely state-sanctioned and driven by the need to protect citizens. At both national and local levels, the government expedited the professionalisation of funeral directors in both jurisdictions. The professionalisation of funeral directors seems expedited when driven by the state and delayed when left to those in the occupation. The slow professionalisation of funeral directors in countries where it remains a full-time occupation supports this belief.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a disruptor that presents different possible scenarios of how the professionalisation of funeral directors can be expedited. Considering the slow progress of professionalisation when a process is internally driven, the public emergency that followed the pandemic brought much attention to the funeral industry and funeral directors. The effects of the pandemic may be the catalyst needed by the occupation to stimulate state-sanctioning of the professionalisation of funeral directors. This research seeks to understand whether the COVID-19 pandemic disruption stimulated the government's push for the professionalisation of funeral directors. The critical question to be answered is: How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the professionalisation of Funeral Directors in Zimbabwe?

More specifically, concerning the taxonomic approach of professionalisation, to what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted elements of professionalisation, stimulated the government to push for the professionalising of the funeral industry, and enhanced the acceptance of professionalisation by the funeral industry? Figure 3 illustrates the research conceptual framework highlighting possible ways the COVID-19 pandemic could impact the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe driven by the state. The traits of a

profession, as defined by the taxonomic approach, are used as the analytical framework for the study and are listed below.

i. Systematic Body of Theory – Professions possess distinctive knowledge and expertise (Saks, 2014). The difference between an unprofessional and a professional occupation is that the skills that distinguish a professional flow from and are supported by a source of knowledge arranged into an internally coherent system called a body of theory (Greenwood, 1957). These are intellectual concepts guiding how things are done professionally. The reputation of a profession is mainly based on a claim to specialised knowledge acquired through advanced training and education.

ii. Professional Authority – Professional expertise is acquired through a theoretical body of knowledge, and professionals control the services they offer; their customers cannot rate the services they provide (Greenwood, 1957). While this is true for most professions at the well-recognised and undisputed professions end of the continuum, it may be disputed at the other end or for newer professions providing services to clients. Professional authority denotes a specific type of social dominance occupational associations exercise over providing and delivering services to consumers within a jurisdiction. This authority encompasses the power to determine who is registered, the conditions under which they operate, and the principles that govern the practical application of these powers, among other factors. Professions such as nursing, journalism, and marketing have established their legitimacy, and recent research suggests that professional associations play a crucial role in professionalisation (Thomas & Thomas, 2014). Professional associations typically seek to further a particular profession or occupation, the interests of their members, and the public interest. Associations contribute to professionalisation by establishing acceptable qualifications, skills, competencies, and standards for their members.

iii. Community Sanction – Each profession seeks to gain the community's recognition of its authority in specific areas by obtaining a set of powers and privileges, whether formally or informally, as noted by Greenwood (1957). As a result of the power given to the profession, it acquires control over admission into the profession. When an occupation aspires to achieve professional status, a key objective is to obtain a monopoly over its practice that comes with the powers and privileges conferred by the community (Greenwood, 1957). The professional determines what is good or bad for the client.

iv. Regulative Code of Ethics – To protect the community from abuse because of the monopoly of a profession, members of a profession sign up for a regulative code which compels ethical behaviour (Greenwood, 1957). The profession's ethical code is part of a formal written code that professionals typically pledge to uphold upon admission, alongside an informal, unwritten code that holds the significance of legal regulations.

v. Profession Norms and Culture – The funeral parlour provides the primary formal setting where the Funeral Director networks to develop the expected norms and culture. Greenwood (1957) highlighted that “every profession operates through a network of formal and informal settings”. Through these interactions, the norms and culture of a profession are expressed and reviewed by both clients and peers. The other critical formal settings include the organisations that supply talent to expand the profession's fund of knowledge and the organisations emerging to express the profession's interests. A professional involves possessing scientific knowledge, conforming to standards and etiquette, and professionally presenting oneself. In other words, members of a profession behave and conduct themselves in a comparable way within and outside a formal setting.

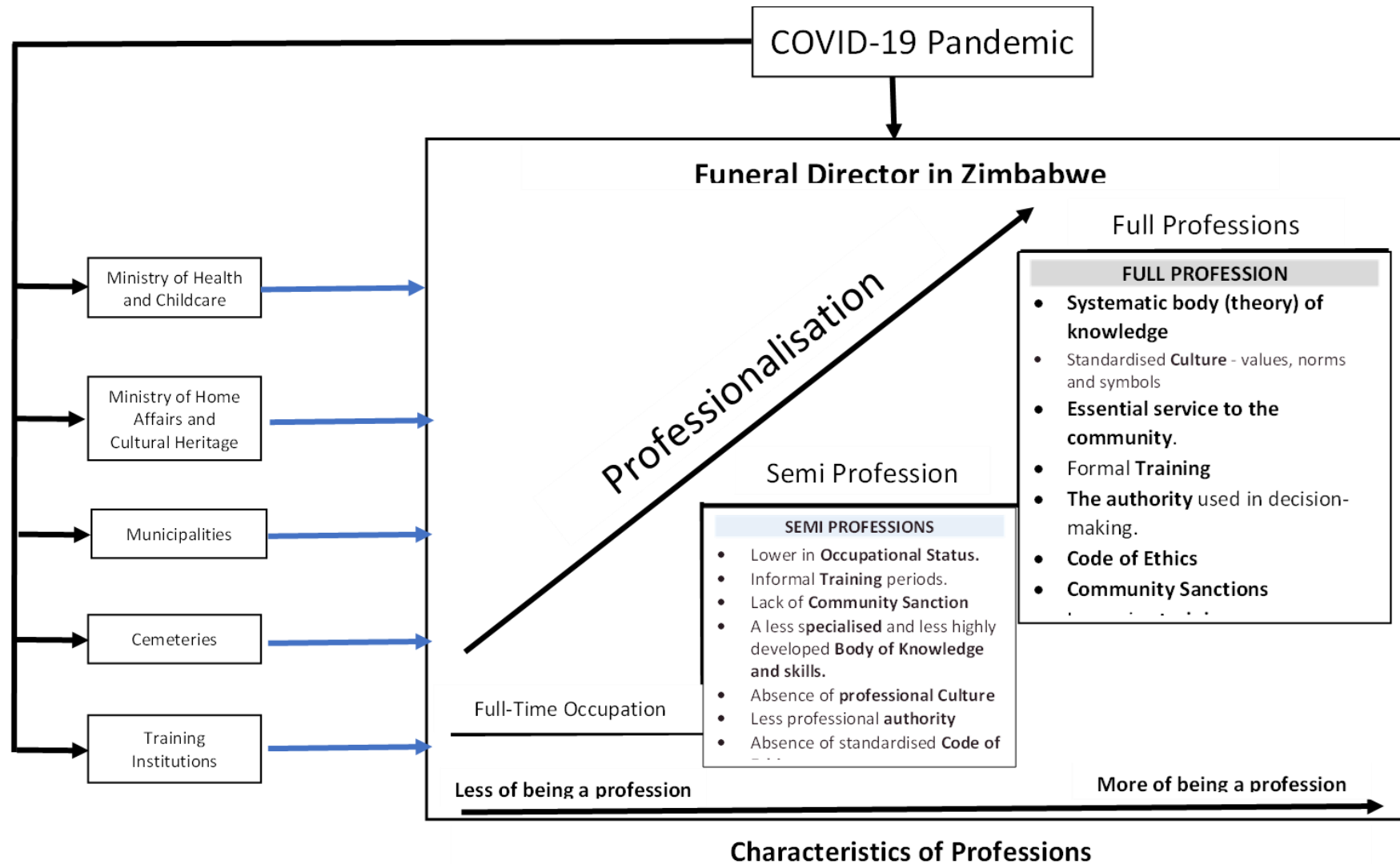


Figure 3: Research Conceptual Framework

2.7 Conclusion

The funeral industry has developed significantly in the past 100 years and closely followed growing urban populations. The outcomes of the birth of the funeral industry include the diverse funeral services, more than the disposal of the dead, and the emergence of the funeral director specialising in providing solutions to their clients, including the bereaved and those planning their funerals. The growth of the funeral industry has contributed to the need for recognition and push for professionalisation by funeral directors. This call for recognition is not universal; funeral directors in different jurisdictions are at various stages of professionalisation. The drivers and barriers to professionalise are context-specific, and countries move at varying speeds following different routes. Those in the occupation can drive professionalisation, and this is generally known as the bottom-up process, state or government through legal instruments in a top-down process, or by a combination of both in a hybrid process with both those in the occupation and government steering professionalisation. Wars, emergencies and disasters with high fatalities and the need to protect clients have a history of placing the funeral industry under sharp focus. This often leads to some regulation and pushes funeral directors and lawmakers toward professionalisation. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a notable impact on the funeral industry. Its impact on the professionalisation of the funeral industry is perhaps unclear, and this study seeks to understand how the pandemic has impacted the professionalisation of Funeral Directors in Zimbabwe.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The study is a case study that sought to establish the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe. It investigated how the guidelines introduced by the government have changed the funeral industry. Key to this study was understanding how the management of funeral directors in Zimbabwe responded to COVID-19-inspired changes and new regulations. Qualitative research was considered appropriate to facilitate a deep dive and open discussions with those knowledgeable on how COVID-19 regulations for the funeral industry were instituted. Eisenhardt (1989) states that case research is inherently qualitative, focusing on in-depth understanding rather than quantitative measurement. The methodology included guided interviews with key funeral industry stakeholders in Zimbabwe to establish the impact of COVID-19 on the professionalisation of funeral directors. The qualitative research approach allowed the respondents to openly express their experiences and perceptions towards the professionalisation of funeral directing. The qualitative approach paved the way for investigating the professionalisation of funeral directing in a real-life context. Yin (2018) explains this approach as “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident.”

3.2 Research Philosophy

An interpretive approach was followed as the study was concerned with investigating and "deep diving" the experiences and perceptions of funeral directors and public health stakeholders on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the professionalisation of funeral directors. The selected approach allowed the researcher to discuss, reflect on and interpret how the pandemic has affected the professionalisation of funeral directors. This was appropriate as the study is exploratory and an inductive enquiry seeking new insights and understanding (Syrigou, 2018).

3.3 Qualitative inquiry

A qualitative approach was selected for this study because it can provide rich and detailed insights into the impact of COVID-19 on the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe that quantitative or statistical methods may not capture. A qualitative approach can also generate new knowledge and understanding that can inform policy and practice development for the future. This research aimed to establish whether the COVID-19

pandemic has impacted the professionalisation of funeral directors and the funeral industry by examining perceptions of how practices affect professional identity, roles, and responsibilities.

Qualitative research involves interpretive, material practices that make the world visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The data collection method used for the study was one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders close to the funeral industry's COVID-19 response. A total of eighteen (18) interviews were undertaken: eleven (11) funeral directors, two (2) government ministry of health officials, a hospital administrator, a cemetery manager, two (2) local government officials from the cities of Harare and Bulawayo and one official from the IFBM. To triangulate findings from interviews, a review of minutes and records of meetings convened by the Ministry of Health and Child Care, funeral directors, police and other stakeholders was conducted. Other documents reviewed include the guidelines circulated by the Ministry of Health and Child Care and the World Health Organisation (WHO). This is in congruence with Eisenhardt (1989) explanation of the nature of case research involves collecting rich, detailed data through various methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis. The data triangulation in this study provides a comprehensive view of the case of professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe.

Qualitative research employs an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. Qualitative research was used to gain an understanding of how COVID-19 has impacted the professionalisation of funeral directors. The qualitative inquiry was set up to generate knowledge and contribute to understanding the perspective of funeral directors and stakeholders who worked closely with the funeral industry during the pandemic.

Furthermore, the qualitative inquiry was used to identify and elucidate the consequences of the pandemic on the professionalisation of funeral directors. Qualitative research helped tell stories that matter to funeral directors' experiences and illuminate meaning.

3.4 Research strategy and design

The descriptive, exploratory and qualitative approaches selected for the study informed the research strategy and design. As the lived experiences of funeral directors and funeral industry stakeholders are of great importance to this study, it was situated using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology focuses on exploring experiences from the viewpoint of the individual. Phenomenological methods are characterised by Lester (1999) as

“based on a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity” and highlight the significance of individual perspective and interpretation.

Therefore, phenomenological approaches are crucial for comprehending subjective experiences and uncovering insights into individuals' motivations and behaviours. As noted by Syrigou (2018), a phenomenological research strategy consists of three key steps. The first step requires researchers to set aside their pre-existing beliefs, biases, expectations, and assumptions as much as possible. The second step involves describing the experiences and insights reported by individuals. The third step, horizontalisation, mandates that all initially recorded experiences be treated equally. Therefore, conducting in-depth interviews using a guided approach with funeral directors and public health officials who have experienced the changes brought about by the pandemic is deemed suitable for achieving the study's objectives. Eisenhardt (1989) identifies contextual understanding as a key aspect of the nature of case research. The phenomenological approach helps understand the context in which a phenomenon occurs, as it is crucial for interpreting the findings and building theories grounded in reality.

3.5 Descriptive Research

Descriptive research explores things in the dark, revealing a fuller picture of what is being studied (Creswell, 2009). It is a type of research that aims to describe a population, situation or phenomenon accurately and systematically and can answer what, where, when and how questions (Creswell, 2009; Neuman & Robson, 2015). Descriptive research can use various research methods, such as surveys, observations, interviews and case studies. Once all the preliminary work has been done, more information is needed for the field to be researched. This is where research describes what happened in more detail, filling in the gap and increasing understanding (Creswell, 2009). Descriptive research enables the researcher to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. Descriptive research was appropriate for this study to characterise what has changed and its impact on the professionalisation of funeral directors.

3.6 Data collection method

Data collection is systematically gathering and analysis of information on relevant variables to answer specific research questions (Kabir, 2016). Interviews, observations and document reviews are qualitative data collection methods. As indicated, interviews were selected as this study's most appropriate data collection method. Interviewing is a question-and-answer

exchange between an interviewer and an interviewee, emphasising the interviewer asking questions, actively listening, and the interviewee answering (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The assumption that the participants' perspectives are meaningful and valuable is guided by interviews as a data collection method. Document review was used initially to show the data collection and later triangulate findings from interviews during analysis. Data triangulation combines data collected through multiple sources to minimise error or bias and optimise data collection and analysis accuracy (Johnson et al., 2020).

3.6.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with funeral directors, public health officials and other stakeholders who had experiences with how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the funeral industry. As already highlighted above, interviews provide a unique opportunity to uncover rich and complex information from an individual. Semi-structured interviews use open-ended questions that explore ideas and allow follow-up probes (Gill et al., 2008). This interview format provides participants with some guidance on what to talk about. This approach is more flexible than structured interviews, allowing participants to share information the researcher may have overlooked (Creswell, 2009). The environment and situation in which the research is conducted play a crucial role in how the interviews are conducted, the selection of interviewees, the questioning material, the interview structure and how one understands and interprets the data.

The researcher employed semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights into the participants' ideas and beliefs and to gather data other methods, such as observation or survey, may miss (Gill et al., 2008; Neuman & Robson, 2015). To direct the interview, a guide was created as a data collection tool (see Appendix 7.2). The following areas were part of the interview guide: funeral directing in Zimbabwe, the COVID-19 pandemic and the funeral industry, beyond the pandemic and funeral industry stakeholders. The questions were designed to gather information systematically across participants, with opportunities to probe and follow up on responses depending on the direction of the conversation.

3.6.2 Document review

Document review or analysis is a systematic way of reviewing or analysing documents, printed or otherwise. Data must be analysed and interpreted to extract meaning, enhance understanding, and build empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). Minutes of meetings between public health officials and the funeral industry during the pandemic were reviewed and

analysed, along with Ministry of Health and Child Care guidelines. Document review was helpful during the development of the interview guide and understanding of context.

3.7 Respondents

The researcher did recruitment for interviews through the Zimbabwe Association of Funeral Assurers (ZAFA). ZAFA is a corporate body representing all fully registered Funeral Assurance Companies in Zimbabwe. These are Funeral Assurers in funeral assurance and funeral services. These companies will be licensed, registered and regulated by the Insurance Act (Chapter 24:07) and the constitution of ZAFA. All ZAFA members are required to follow the Association's Code of Ethics in their business practices. Self-regulation through membership in industry associations does not encompass the entire sector. Funeral directors not affiliated with ZAFA are not obligated to follow its policy guidelines. Therefore, ZAFA members were ideal candidates to interview as they provided valuable insights and perspectives on the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe and how they cope with the challenges and opportunities of their work in a changing social and economic context. Qualitative research aims to understand and interpret the experiences and natural phenomena of a specific context and carefully chosen individuals. Instead of seeking to draw general conclusions from a sample to a population, qualitative research employs a purposive sampling design. This means that participants are selected based on their suitability for answering the research questions. Qualitative researchers acknowledge that some participants may provide more relevant and insightful data than others, helping to achieve the research purpose and answer the question (Johnson et al., 2020). Funeral directors and the stakeholders they interact with "professionally," especially those they worked with during the COVID-19-inspired emergency, are rich with data and insights on how the pandemic has impacted the professionalisation of the funeral director.

Purposive sampling methods are suitable where information-rich cases can provide a deep dive into the study, and units are selected based on one or more predetermined characteristics (Patton, 2015). Purposive sampling involves deliberately choosing research participants to enhance data quality for addressing the research question (Johnson et al., 2020). For example, the research question may be best answered by persons with experience in critical case sampling or specific expertise in essential informant sampling, such as stakeholders. Similarly, additional participants were referred for participation by active participants following the snowball sampling approach. The snowball technique was used to minimise the bias of purposive sampling and transparency until the saturation point was reached. Snowball

sampling is a method used to select key informants. A well-developed conceptual framework can guide and justify methodological choices, including defining and establishing the study sample, which is critical to ensure rigour and quality. Purposive sampling is more suitable for this research.

The respondents were drawn from key stakeholders: the Ministry of Health and Child Care, Municipalities and the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Ministry of Health and Child Care stakeholders know the guidelines and regulations, while Municipalities and the Ministry of Home Affairs are responsible for death registration and policy adherence to regulations. The Ministry of Health and Child Care plays a crucial role in the funeral industry by issuing guidelines and regulations to ensure safety and quality services to the public. Recently, the Ministry has issued COVID-19 burial protocols and health and safety measures for funeral workers. Funeral directors must comply with these regulations to ensure the quality and safety of their services. The Ministry of Health and Child Care also monitors the performance of the funeral industry to provide feedback and ensure public health safety.

The Ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for issuing burial permits for the deceased. The funeral directors must work with the municipalities by obtaining the necessary documents and permission to conduct funerals. The municipalities give minimum standards for funeral parlours and manage the public cemeteries and crematoria where some funerals occur. The funeral directors must follow the rules set by the municipalities for using these facilities. Municipalities fall under local government.

There were no exclusion criteria based on gender, age, ethnicity, or theoretical orientation; however, all participants needed to communicate in English. In addition to funeral industry stakeholders, the management of funeral companies belonging to ZAFSA was interviewed. The research received mandatory approval in compliance with ethical requirements for conducting research (see Annex 7.2). Consent forms for participation were given to the informants (refer to Annex 7.1) and signed before their interview.

Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously, with ongoing analysis guiding further data collection. To ensure the accuracy and completeness of qualitative data, it is crucial to gather enough information until no new data or themes emerge. This is known as data saturation, which indicates that all pertinent data has been collected and no further coding is feasible. Achieving data saturation is a widely accepted standard for ensuring the reliability of data collection in qualitative research. (Johnson et al., 2020).

Data saturation means having a sufficient sample size, which may only apply in some cases. For instance, in certain qualitative research methods, data collection might continue indefinitely if the event persists. On the other hand, the pool of potential participants may be limited, making it likely that achieving data saturation could be challenging. It may be unrealistic to achieve data saturation for specific populations or research questions fully. The researcher strongly believes that the saturation point was reached for this study. After ten interviews, no new themes emerged based on analysis during interviews.

A total of 18 key informants were enlisted to participate in the interviews, lasting under 60 minutes. Most interview participants (n=15) identified as male, with only a representation of female key informants taking part (n=3). Eleven funeral directors were interviewed and assigned random fake names to anonymise them. Pseudonyms of Zimbabwean names that are not real and do not belong to existing persons known by the researcher were used.

Furthermore, seven funeral industry stakeholders comprised two Ministry of Health and Child Care officials, two local government officials, one cemetery manager, one hospital administrator, and one representative from the training institute. The following pseudonyms have been used for the 18 interviewees:

- Funeral director 1: Tendai Chikwanda
- Funeral director 2: Rudo Moyo
- Funeral director 3: Simbarashe Nyoni
- Funeral director 4: Netsai Gumbo
- Funeral director 5: Kudakwashe Makoni
- Funeral director 6: Patience Mutasa
- Funeral director 7: Munyaradzi Dube
- Funeral director 8: Sekai Ncube
- Funeral director 9: Tichaona Zhou
- Funeral director 10: Tambudzai Chirwa
- Funeral director 11: Tapiwa Sibanda.
- Government 1: Ruvimbo Chibanda
- Government 2: Takunda Mhlanga

- Local Government 1: Shingirai Nyoni
- Local Government 2: Tanaka Chikomo
- Cemetery Manager: Tariro Gwaze
- Hospital Administrator: Simba Ndlovu
- Training Institute Administrator: Ruvarashe Mapfumo

Interviewing the 18 key informants provided rich data, which enabled inference of findings from a small number of interviews. Eisenhardt (1989) justifies making inferences from a few interviews by emphasising the depth of understanding gained through qualitative case studies. Eisenhardt (1989) highlights the balance between flexibility and rigour in case study research. The method allows for adjustments as new insights emerge while maintaining systematic procedures to ensure validity and reliability. The selection of the 18 key informants was carefully done and aligned with the research design; the focus was on the quality of data rather than quantity (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018).

3.8 Ethical Issues

The researcher faced two main ethical issues in this study:

1. The researcher's position is senior executive at Nyaradzo, one of Zimbabwe's leading funeral service providers. This could influence the researcher's perceptions and experiences of professionalisation status and the impact of the pandemic on the funeral industry. It could also affect the openness and honesty of the interview participants, who were the researcher's peers and competitors. As already mentioned, the respondents were recruited through ZAFSA. The researcher is a founding member of ZAFSA. The researcher's position as a senior executive at Nyaradzo, one of the leading funeral service providers in Zimbabwe, and as a founding member of ZAFSA, the Zimbabwe Association of Funeral Assurers, the researcher's perceptions and experiences of professionalisation status and the pandemic could influence the responses. On the other hand, the researcher's involvement provided the study with insider knowledge and access that would have been difficult for external researchers. As professionalisation is not necessarily a neutral or objective phenomenon but a contested and complex one that involves different stakeholders, perspectives, and interests, having a researcher be a funeral director will not necessarily lead to biased research.
2. The difficulty of ensuring anonymity for the interview participants is due to their specific roles and descriptions. To address ethical concerns, the researcher introduced herself

and explained the study's purpose. She emphasised that the research was solely for academic purposes and could benefit all funeral companies in Zimbabwe by contributing to the growth and professionalisation of the industry. Before the interview, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study and encouraged to ask questions or seek clarity. The researcher disclosed this information in the research proposal, the consent form completed by respondents, and the thesis. Furthermore, the researcher obtained written consent from the participants after providing them with information about the study and their rights.

The researcher ensured the interviewees' participation was voluntary, informed, and confidential. Respondents were informed of their right to refuse to participate and to withdraw from the study at any stage during the interview or post-interview before the finalisation of the thesis. The respondents were assured that their withdrawal from the study would be without any negative consequences.

To address the potential ethical issues of the researcher's position and involvement in the study, the researcher took several steps to ensure reflexivity, transparency, and trustworthiness in the data collection and analysis processes. Firstly, the researcher kept a reflective notebook throughout the research process, where the researcher's thoughts, feelings, assumptions, and biases were routinely noted. Secondly, using multiple data sources, such as interviews and documents that included meeting records, flyers, reports and guidelines, gave the researcher confidence in their analysis. Thirdly, feedback was sought from some of the interview participants and peers from ZAFSA on their interview responses. These were incorporated into the preliminary findings and interpretations and the final analysis. By doing so, the researcher aimed to enhance the credibility and reliability of the research.

The researcher anonymised all the data collected from the interviews by removing identifying information such as names, organisations, locations, ages, and years of employment. The confidentiality and privacy of the data were achieved by storing it in a locked cabinet or a password-protected computer and using pseudonyms or initials for the participants. The researcher followed the ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice, as suggested by Payne and Payne (2004). Ethical practice involves conducting research with high standards of technical procedures and moral respect for the people who consent to be studied (Payne & Payne, 2004). The researcher actively protected the welfare of the participants by limiting any adverse consequences of their participation.

The research received ethical approval from Nottingham Trent University (NTU).

3.9 Data Analysis

This section explains how the qualitative data was collected, managed, and analysed for this study.

3.9.1 Data collection

Eighteen (18) interviews with funeral directors and key funeral industry stakeholders were conducted by the researcher. The interviews were conducted in person at the interviewee's offices. The interviews had an average duration of just an hour, with a mathematical mean of 1 hour, 0 minutes and 16 seconds. The most extended interview was 1 hour, 37 minutes and 35 seconds. Whilst the shortest interview was 26 minutes and 48 seconds. The interviews with funeral directors were generally longer than those with non-funeral director stakeholders because the interview guide had 17 questions compared to 13 for non-funeral directors, as shown in Appendix 7.2 Interview Schedule.

The questions interviewees were asked were designed to address two specific objectives: to examine the perceptions of the management of funeral companies and key stakeholders in the public health domain on how COVID-19 has impacted the professionalisation of funeral directors and to postulate whether the impact of COVID-19 inspired changes in funeral guidelines and regulations, will have a lasting effect on the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe.

The questions for the management of funeral companies focused on:

- Their background and experience in the funeral industry.
- Their opinion on whether funeral directing is a profession in Zimbabwe.
- The impact of COVID-19 on the funeral industry, including regulations, standards, challenges, and opportunities.
- The competencies and skills that funeral directors lacked or needed to respond to COVID-19 and its impact on various aspects of professionalisation, such as education, training, self-regulation, code of ethics, body of theory, research, knowledge management, and adaptive management.
- The likelihood that the changes in the funeral industry due to COVID-19 will remain beyond the pandemic.
- The preparedness of the funeral industry for similar pandemics in the future.

- The role of different actors in driving the professionalisation of funeral directors.

The questions for the public health stakeholders focused on:

- Their role in public health and interactions with the funeral industry/funeral directors.
- Their opinion on whether funeral directing is a profession in Zimbabwe.
- The responses to the pandemic regarding guidelines and regulations for funerals and the funeral industry.
- The compliance and enforcement of funeral directors' and associations' guidelines and regulations.
- The impact of COVID-19 on various aspects of professionalisation, such as education, training, self-regulation, code of ethics, body of theory, research, knowledge management, and adaptive management.
- The likelihood that the guidelines and regulations introduced due to COVID-19 will institute a standard way of doing things by all funeral directors.
- The challenges and opportunities for protecting the industry and clients from unqualified or unethical practitioners.
- The budgetary impact of COVID-19 on the funeral industry.

Relevant documents that included minutes of meetings between public health officials and the funeral industry during the pandemic, guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health and Child Care, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) released by governments were collected. The collection of data from multiple sources of evidence allowed the triangulation of findings and strengthened the validity and reliability of interpretations (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) Advocates for the role of multiple sources of evidence in ensuring the validity and reliability of interpretations.

3.9.2 Data Management

To support manual coding and identification of themes, ATLAS.ti 23 was used. This software helped to code, sort, organise, and weigh the data elements. It also helped with the identification of deviant cases and the detection of coding errors. However, the researcher was still responsible for analysing and interpreting the data.

3.9.3 Data Analysis

Two significant steps were followed to analyse. The first step was identifying key themes emerging from each interview transcript, interviewer's notes, and documents. The second step

was to conduct a thorough deep dive into the data, merging, renaming, deleting, and defining codes to document a straightforward narrative of the experiences and perceptions. They included in vivo quotations to support the codes following the deep dive.

3.9.4 Thematic Analysis

Developing the theory of the professionalisation of the funeral director's profession in Zimbabwe was meticulous and systematic, employing the grounded theory analysis. This approach involved several steps, each contributing to the overall understanding of the subject matter. Firstly, the researcher employed constructivist grounded theory, which emphasizes how participants create meaning related to the topic of investigation. This genre of grounded theory analysis emphasises the meaning of data collected through coding and the inquiry aspect of the research process.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that involves identifying emerging patterns or common themes within the data (Bowen, 2009), was used for analysis. This involved reading selected data closely, coding, and constructing categories based on the characteristics of the data to identify relevant themes for the study (Bowen, 2009). Generally, the initial step in thematic analysis involves identifying patterns of meaning within, between, and across the data, starting with familiarisation through transcription and careful reading (and rereading) for initial insights (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Predefined codes based on the study objectives and questions, document analysis, and emerging data were initially used and applied to interview transcripts during analysis. Predefined codes were primarily based on research questions or objectives and were applied to the data before or during the data collection. They helped to focus the analysis on the main topics of interest and guide the data collection process. However, the researcher was flexible in changing as new themes or patterns emerged from the data. Some predefined codes based on research questions are presented in the code book in Table 2 below. As mentioned earlier, predefined themes were derived from the research objectives, questions, and literature on the topic to identify the main concepts and categories that are relevant and important for the study. The study conceptual framework was also used to come up with codes for thematic analysis.

These codes were used to label and categorise the interview transcripts according to the main themes or topics related to the research objectives. New codes were created by splitting and refining existing codes or introducing new codes as the analysis progressed. This is crucial

when using a qualitative approach, as it allows flexibility and creativity in exploring the data. As an example, the code ProfessionASPECT was split into the various taxonomic profession aspects, namely ProfessionTHEORY, ProfessionCODE, ProfessionAUTHORITY and ProfessionASSOCIATION for a body of theory, code of ethics, community sanction, and profession association, respectively.

Themes and data patterns emerged during interview analysis and rereading of key information sources. Most themes only became known or emerged upon further reflection and rereading of notes and transcripts. The thematic analysis approach was used to organize the data, identify reportable themes, and advance toward interpretations that address how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the professionalisation of funeral directors. Through this systematic process, themes derived from qualitative data provided insights into the interviews.

Table 2: Theme analysis code book

Code/Theme	Definition	Identification	Qualification
<i>ProfessionYES</i>	Professional status of funeral directors	Texts that indicate the positive perception, appreciation, or support of the funeral directors' role, function, or contribution by the public, the media, the government, or other stakeholders	Only code for texts explicitly or implicitly referring to funeral directors' professional status, not their personal or business attributes.
<i>ProfessionNAY</i>	Professional status of funeral directors	Texts that indicate the negative perception, criticism, or opposition of the funeral directors' role, function, or contribution by the public, the media, the government, or other stakeholders	Only code for texts explicitly or implicitly referring to funeral directors' professional status, not their personal or business attributes.
<i>ProfessionalisationDRIVER</i>	Positive effect on the professionalisation of funeral directors as a result of COVID-19	Texts that indicate how COVID-19 has increased the demand, recognition, or quality of the funeral directors' services, skills, or standards	Only code for texts explicitly or implicitly linking COVID-19 to funeral director professionalisation.
<i>ProfessionalisationBARRIER</i>	Adverse effect on the professionalisation of funeral directors as a result of COVID-19	Texts that indicate how COVID-19 has decreased the demand, recognition, or quality of the funeral directors' services, skills, or standards	Only code for texts explicitly or implicitly linking COVID-19 to funeral director professionalisation.

<i>RegulationsSELF</i>	Funeral industry regulations, guidelines and standards that are self-imposed or voluntary by the funeral directors or their associations	Texts that mention or describe any rules or norms that govern the funeral directors' practices, conduct, or ethics that are not mandated by the government or other external authorities	Only code for texts that refer to self-regulation or voluntary compliance by the funeral industry.
<i>RegulationsGOVERNMENT</i>	Government regulations, guidelines and standards for the funeral industry that are imposed or enforced by the state or its agencies	Texts that mention or describe any rules or norms that govern the funeral directors' practices, conduct, or ethics that are mandated by the government or other external authorities	Only code for texts that refer to government regulation or mandatory compliance by the funeral industry.
<i>RegulationCOMPLIANCE</i>	Compliance with regulations, guidelines and standards by the funeral directors or their associations	Texts that indicate or evaluate how well the funeral directors or their associations adhere to or follow the rules or norms that govern their practices, conduct, or ethics	Only code for texts that refer to compliance as an outcome or a performance indicator.
<i>RegulationENFORCEMENT</i>	Enforcement of regulations, guidelines and standards by the state or its agencies	Texts that indicate or evaluate how well the state or its agencies monitor, inspect, sanction, or reward the funeral directors or their associations for their adherence to or violation of the rules or norms that govern their practices and conduct	Only code for texts that refer to enforcement as an action or a process.

<i>CompetencesGAP</i>	They observed some competencies and skills of funeral directors in Zimbabwe that are inadequate or insufficient for their professionalisation.	Texts that identify or describe any areas of knowledge, ability, or expertise that are lacking or missing among the funeral directors in Zimbabwe that prevent them from achieving a higher level of professionalism	Only code for texts that refer to competencies and skills as observable and measurable attributes.
<i>CompetencesSKILLS</i>	They lack the competencies and skills of funeral directors in Zimbabwe, which are needed for their professionalisation.	Texts that specify or recommend any areas of knowledge, ability, or expertise that are needed or desired among the funeral directors in Zimbabwe to achieve a higher level of professionalism	Only code for texts that refer to competencies and skills as observable and measurable attributes.
<i>ProfessionASPECT</i>	Traits of a professional according to the taxonomic approach or conceptual framework used for the study.	Texts related to professional authority (the degree of autonomy and control over one's work), community sanction (the degree of recognition and legitimacy from one's peers and society), and regulative code (the degree of adherence to ethical principles and standards)	Only code for texts that explicitly relate to taxonomic traits of professionals.

<i>Professionalisation</i> CHALLENGES	Difficulties or obstacles faced by funeral directors in Zimbabwe in their pursuit of professionalisation.	Texts that mention or describe any factors or issues that hinder or impede the progress or improvement of professionalism among funeral directors in Zimbabwe	Only code for texts that refer to challenges as negative influences on professionalisation
<i>Professionalisation</i> OPPORTUNITIES	Opportunities or possibilities for funeral directors in Zimbabwe to enhance their professionalisation.	Texts that mention or describe any factors or issues that facilitate or promote the progress or improvement of professionalism among funeral directors in Zimbabwe	Only code for texts that refer to opportunities as positive influences on professionalisation
ProfessionalisationSTAKEHOLDER	The stakeholders involved in or affected by the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe.	Texts that mention or describe any individuals, groups, or organisations that have an interest or influence in the process or outcome of the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe	Only code for texts that refer to stakeholders as actors or beneficiaries of professionalisation, not as sources of information or data

All key informants' interviews were recorded using an audio device, converted to MP4, transcribed verbatim and then transcribed using Microsoft Word 365 web version to ensure accurate transcription. Corrections were made, and all name information that could be used to identify the interviewee was anonymised. Using software to code data can contribute to the identification of anomalies and the detection of coding errors. However, the researcher still does the actual analyses and interpretations. Researchers are accountable for the accuracy and validity of their findings. ATLAS.ti 23 software was selected to support coding and thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis was guided by the research conceptual framework and the traits of a profession following the taxonomic approach. The following steps were followed:

- 1 Familiarise with the data by reading and revisiting the 18 interview transcripts, noting down any initial impressions or observations.
- 2 Coding the data was done by assigning labels to segments of text that relate to the research question and the taxonomic approach of professionalisation. Codes were posted to the text mentioning predefined codes drawn up as part of thematic analysis. Further codes were also applied, including the elements of a profession of the taxonomic approach: a coherent theoretical framework, professional legitimacy, community endorsement, a regulatory code of ethics, or the norms and culture of the profession. Coding was also done for text that indicated how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted these taxonomic traits of a profession. Such changes as demand, regulations, practices, or perceptions were coded.
- 3 Themes were generated by grouping the codes into broader categories to capture the essence of the data. Some of the broad themes that emerged are presented in Figure 4 below. For example, texts related to professional authority, community sanction, the regulative code of ethics, and professional norms and culture were coded under ProfessionASPECT. Themes that reflect how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced these aspects of professionalisation included "challenges and opportunities", "adaptation and innovation", or "sustainability".

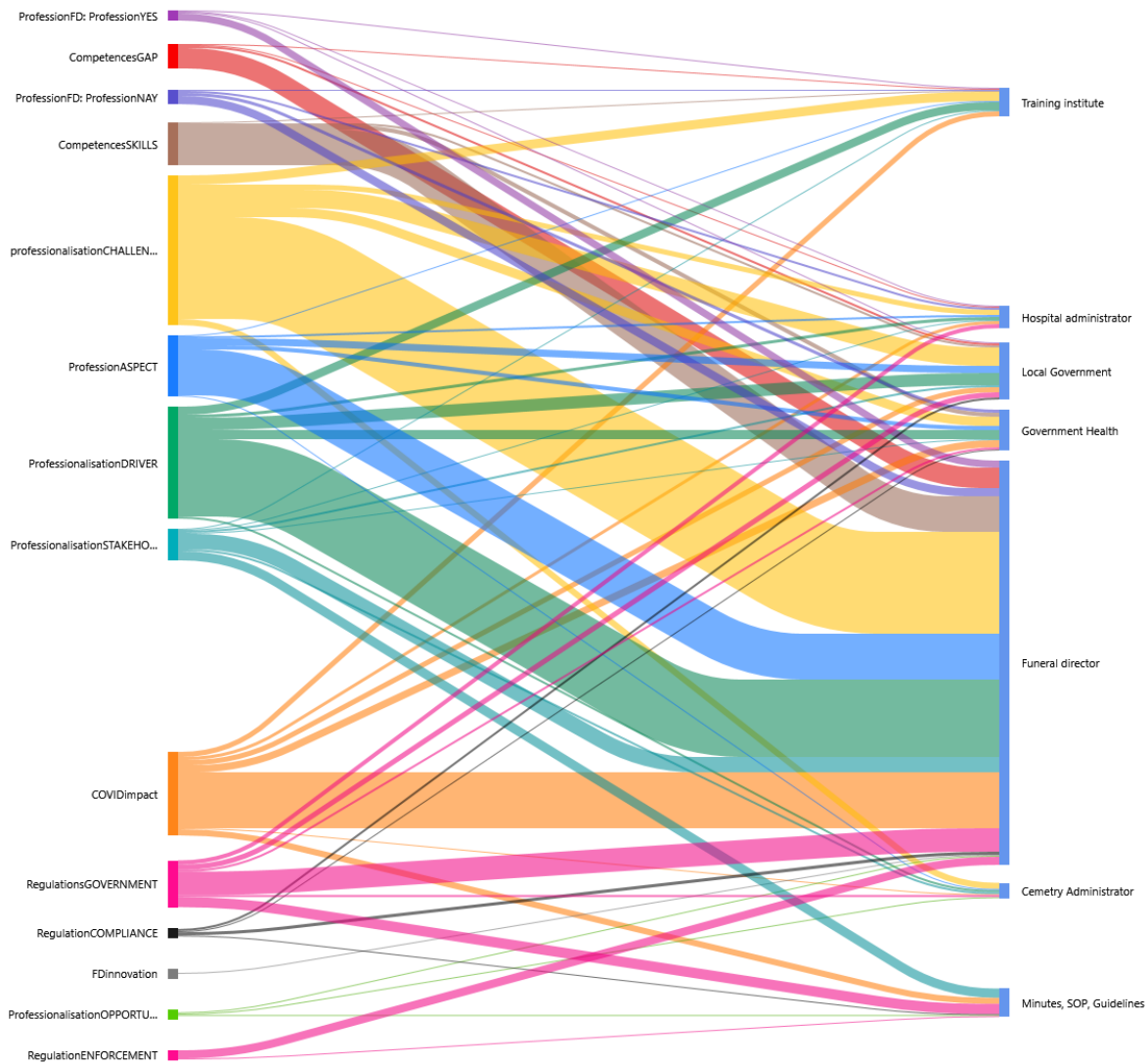


Figure 4: Emerging codes and themes from interviews and document review

4 Review themes by checking if they are coherent, consistent, and distinctive and if they accurately represent the data. Reviewing themes is an essential step in thematic analysis, as it helps to ensure that the themes are meaningful, relevant, and valid. First, the coherence of each theme was checked by reading all the extracts that were coded under that theme and ensuring that they had a shared meaning or concept and did not contradict or diverge from each other. Extracts that did not fit the theme were moved to an appropriate theme or discarded if they were irrelevant or redundant. Second, the consistency of each theme was checked by reading all the data again and ensuring that the same theme was applied to similar or related extracts across the data set. Inconsistencies or ambiguities in coding were addressed as needed. Third, the distinctiveness of each theme was checked by comparing and contrasting it with other themes and ensuring that they were not overlapping or redundant.

Remedies included merging into one theme and differentiating by creating subthemes. Lastly, the validity of each theme was checked by comparing it with the entire data set and ensuring that it accurately represented the data and answered the research question. If any of the themes were too narrow or too broad, it was either expanded, its scope was reduced, or its focus was redefined. For example, CompetencyGAP was used for competencies identified or indicated as lacking, while CompetencySKILL was used where specific funeral directing skills had been demonstrated.

5 The findings are presented, and each theme clearly describes the traits of the taxonomic approach profession.

6 The findings are discussed in relation to the research questions, conceptual framework, and the existing literature on professionalisation and the funeral industry.

3.10 Drawing Valid Conclusions

This study aimed to use qualitative research to deepen the understanding of the professionalisation status of funeral directors and how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the professionalisation of the occupation. Valid conclusions about the pandemic's impact on funeral directors' professionalisation were drawn using specific perspectives, observations, and experiences of funeral directors and public health professionals, as evidenced by the behaviours or products of individuals and groups as they were situated in specific contexts or circumstances. The conceptual framework of how the taxonomic approach of professions was used to examine whether pandemics impact the professionalisation of funeral directors. The conclusions derived from the study findings contribute to a new theory of professionalisation.

3.11 Reporting Research Results

To ensure high-quality results in qualitative research, it is essential to communicate the findings with clarity, organisation, completeness, accuracy, and conciseness. The study's credibility is established by transparent reporting of how biases and other possible distortions were recognised and managed throughout the research process. Eisenhardt (1989) reiterates the importance of rigorous reporting of the research process as this improves credibility by allowing readers to assess the fit between the evidence and the emergent theory. The study's themes are based on the research questions and existing literature. The first broad theme from the data was the new rules for the funeral industry introduced by the government and health authorities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These were mainly around the

requirement for funeral directors to wear personal protective equipment (PPE), follow infection prevention and control measures, and limit the number of mourners and the duration of funeral ceremonies. Evidence for this was mainly sourced from reports, meeting minutes, and guidelines and standards published by authorities. These were triangulated with findings from interviews with funeral directors and key stakeholders.

The second broad theme was on the findings from funeral directors and stakeholders. Subthemes included the status of funeral directing in Zimbabwe, COVID-19 pandemic demands on the funeral industry, compliance and enforcement of emerging regulations, effects of the pandemic on professionalisation traits, and professionalisation stakeholders.

In qualitative studies, the researcher is often the primary instrument for data collection. The study focused on the experiences, events and occurrences with minimum regard for the external or physical reality. This research is known as phenomenology or non-positivism. Ideas were generated from cases or stakeholders with a rich amount of data, including the researcher, an executive with one of the big funeral companies in Zimbabwe.

4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the professionalisation of funeral directors are presented in two sections; the first is based on a review of guidelines published by the Ministry of Health and Childcare (MoH) and records of meetings convened by the MoH in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It presents the guidelines or standard operating procedures for funeral services introduced by authorities to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the interest of public health security. Critical is how these guidelines are likely to have explicitly affected the professionalisation of funeral directors based on the taxonomic approach of professionalisation and, more generally, the professionalisation of the funeral industry in Zimbabwe. The second section of the findings presents the views and perceptions of various stakeholders on how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted them. These views were gathered through interviews and sought to establish whether stakeholders perceived any changes in the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe driven by the COVID-19-inspired changes. A fundamental interest in this section is the views of funeral directors on the changes in the disposal of bodies and how these have impacted the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe. The section relates to the study question on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the interaction of funeral directors within the health care and public health systems in Zimbabwe.

As the taxonomic trait approach was used for study, the effect of the pandemic on high-level knowledge and expertise alongside other characteristics such as codes of ethics, altruism, rationality and educational credentials. The argument is that if the COVID-19 pandemic has affected these traits irreversibly, then the pandemic has impacted the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe.

4.2 New rules for the funeral industry: COVID-19 Guidelines.

This section presents findings from grey literature or unpublished documents that include guidelines, records of meetings, flyers and adverts, presentations, and other publicly available material showing evidence of the “new normal” for the funeral industry following the pandemic. These are presented with the potential impact they may have on the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe. Since the initial report of COVID-19 to the WHO in 2019, significant changes have occurred. In the funeral industry, social customs surrounding death and the handling of remains have been influenced by legal, behavioural,

and social measures implemented to control the outbreak. Throughout the pandemic, policies aimed at infectious disease control have impacted the storage, management, and disposal of remains globally (Talic et al., 2021; World Health Organisation, 2020). Likewise, in Zimbabwe, the COVID-19 pandemic has focused much on the funeral industry and the professionalisation of funeral directors. Introducing new guidelines and protocols by the government can impact key characteristics of professions, including training and certification, accreditation, development of professional associations, and establishing a code of ethics. The management and disposal of bodies are of public health interests and importance. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of standards and guidelines to protect the public. This section presents findings from the analysis of guidelines produced by the national government and the WHO for those in the funeral industry to curb the transmission of COVID-19 and protect the public. Furthermore, it presents findings from the analysis of meeting records convened by the MoH with funeral industry players and stakeholders in response to the COVID-19 outbreak in Zimbabwe. Lastly, it reflects on flyers for courses offered by the IFBM and the needs assessment conducted by a university for a diploma and a bachelor's degree in mortuary science.

4.2.1 The funeral industry is under-prepared for a pandemic.

The preparedness of funeral directors for pandemics can indicate their professional status, especially following the taxonomic approach. The readiness of funeral directors for pandemics can reflect how they possess or demonstrate these attributes of the taxonomic approach in their work. For example, being able to handle deceased bodies, prevent transmission of diseases, and provide a safe and dignified funeral can only be done consistently when funeral directors possess and apply specialised and systematic knowledge and expertise. Preparedness enhanced by professionalism is also reflected in how funeral directors follow a solid ethical and moral code of conduct that guides their behaviour and protects the interests of their clients, the public, and themselves, especially when they face emergencies such as pandemics.

Since independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has not experienced a disease outbreak of the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic (Talic et al., 2021; World Health Organisation, 2020). While case mortality is relatively low, the high number of cases, hospitalisation, and exclusion from work and other socioeconomic interactions during the pandemic made COVID-19 a disease of significant economic importance (World Health Organisation, 2020). COVID-19 is a

highly contagious disease that can spread rapidly from one individual to another (Talic et al., 2021; World Health Organisation, 2020). Like everyone else, funeral directors had a new normal to contend with. The term “new normal” was frequently used during the COVID-19 pandemic to describe the required adjustments and changes. It includes changing the ways of living, working, and socialising influenced by the health and safety measures, restrictions, and challenges posed by the pandemic.

One of the immediate challenges funeral directors faced was the removal of bodies from both inside and outside hospitals. Due to new regulations introduced by the Ministry of Health and Child Care, funeral directors could not remove bodies unless the cause of death was clearly stated.

“ZAFSA [Zimbabwe Association of Funeral Assurers] expressed their concern that they were having challenges with removing bodies from both hospitals and outside hospitals where the cause of death was not clearly stated as this presented a potential risk to their undertakers during this period of COVID-19” (World Health Organisation, 2020).

As all people could not be tested for COVID-19 before death due to the prohibitive cost of tests, all deaths were treated as COVID-19 for removal and disposal during the pandemic. This complicated the removal and disposal of bodies. As a result, the specific handling procedures relating to COVID-19 cases are applied in all cases of death for public health purposes. Funeral directors could not remove bodies unless provided with a record establishing the cause of death on BD11 or BD12 forms duly signed by a medical officer or any acceptable confirmation relating to the same, depending on the place of death (World Health Organisation, 2020). This change alone increased the awareness of funeral directors of the public health risk they confronted with each collection, management, and disposal of the dead. The effects on the professionalisation of funeral directors could be on the body of knowledge, training, code of conduct, and authority.

Where documentation was available, and funeral directors could remove bodies for disposal, access to PPE was the major constraint the funeral industry had to contend with. This was recorded as a challenge in a meeting convened by the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoH) on 29 May 2020. The records of the meetings state that *“There is inadequate PPE for the environmental health practitioners, police officers, funeral parlours and other health workers during the funeral management process”* (World Health Organisation, 2020).

Besides the obvious scramble for limited PPE, the cost of procuring PPE was not envisaged

and, therefore, unbudgeted. The funeral industry and the funeral directors were not prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic, and they were caught unaware. This may have brought the need for PPE to protect funeral directors to the fore for most funeral directors, especially for those in funeral companies that did not consider public health safety. These rogue and *"fly by night funeral services companies are only interested in maximising profits"*. The growth of the funeral industry in Zimbabwe has resulted in many aspiring to get a share of the business due to increased demand for funeral services. Establishing and building a body of knowledge to be used and referred to by funeral directors contributes to the professionalisation of the funeral industry, especially for funeral companies interested in the growth and credibility of the funeral industry. When funeral directors routinely use evidence and science in their work and everyday decision-making, a body of knowledge supporting the professionalisation of their occupation is promoted.

Funeral directors from established, more prominent, bigger companies and those from smaller backyard firms had to follow new guidelines introduced to reduce the spread and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Compliance with the body of knowledge, guidelines, and protocols is essential in professionalising occupations. Introducing guidelines for removing and disposing of the dead obligated the municipality or local government to public health, and the police would monitor funerals. In big cities like Harare and Bulawayo, it was overwhelming as there were inadequate resources to meet the cost of the pandemic, and they were neither conceived nor budgeted. The services they offered required more workforce for improved public health safety, more transport to ensure social distancing, and PPE to protect funeral directors, among other things, which increased the expenses for the funeral companies. In remote or rural areas, the increased costs were exacerbated by heavy police presence and dawn-to-dusk curfews that restricted travel during the lockdown period and resulted in delays.

Funeral companies attending the second meeting convened by the MoH reported that the police and local government officials were unavailable during the burial period to enforce regulations, compromising the social distancing requirement. Key stakeholders responsible for monitoring compliance were not capacitated on the COVID-19 funeral management. This transferred compliance monitoring to funeral directors. Funeral directors had to ensure mourners complied with COVID-19 regulations that included a maximum of 30 people at a funeral, maintaining social distancing and wearing face masks. As a result, it may be in MoH's best interest to push for the professionalisation of funeral directors to ensure they

comply with and enforce regulations for public health and safety at funerals. The professionalisation of funeral directors will ensure they can self-regulate and remove the need for police and local government officials to monitor funerals and comply with guidelines.

4.2.2 Effect of new rules on the professionalisation of funeral directors

When enforced, the guidelines were introduced to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate public health security. These new guidelines can potentially impact the professionalisation of funeral directors. Two sets of guidelines were introduced. The MoH produced national guidelines that are based on the WHO international guidelines. Both guidelines affected the operations of funeral directors and introduced a new normal for the removal, management and burial of the dead.

On 3 August 2020, the Ministry of Health and Childcare approved and circulated the guidelines for handling collapsed patients and dead bodies of suspected or probable confirmed COVID-19 in Zimbabwe. The guidelines aimed to prevent infection of healthcare workers, police, family, the community and the environment (Ministry of Health and Childcare, 2020). The scope of the guidelines includes advice to law enforcement agents, health workers, environmental health workers, mortuary staff and funeral homes on the rational approach to possible COVID-19 cases. A total of six guidelines, numbered A to F, are given in the final published guidance documents. Guidelines B, C, D, E, and F directly affected how funeral directors offered or delivered services to their clients (Ministry of Health and Child Care, 2020).

Before the publication of the guidelines by the MoH, the World Health Organisation (WHO) also published an interim technical guidance on 24 March 2020. It had six guidelines numbered 1 to 6. The WHO guidelines were titled "*Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) for the safe management of a dead body in COVID-19*". It targeted funeral directors, healthcare managers of facilities and mortuaries, religious and public health officials, and families tasked with managing the remains of individuals who died from suspected or confirmed COVID-19 (World Health Organisation, 2020). As stated by the World Health Organisation (2020), infection prevention and control (IPC) is a practical, evidence-driven strategy aimed at protecting patients and healthcare workers from preventable infections (World Health Organisation, 2020). According to the WHO, IPC is essential for the safety and quality of healthcare delivery and for preventing the spread of diseases such as COVID-19. Some of the core IPC practices for safe health relevant to funeral directors include

performing hand hygiene at the correct times and with the proper technique, using personal protective equipment (PPE) appropriately according to the risk of exposure, cleaning and disinfecting the environment and equipment regularly and effectively, managing waste safely and adequately, educating and training funeral directors on IPC principles and practices, and monitoring and evaluating IPC activities and outcomes (World Health Organisation, 2020). IPC is important for funeral directors because it helps them to protect themselves, their staff, and the public from the risk of infection when managing the deceased.

Both guidance documents by the MoH and WHO can potentially impact the body of knowledge, code of ethics, formal training, culture and community sanction for funeral directors and movement towards mandatory registration with ZAFSA or other associations. Rules and regulations from government and public health regulators in the face of COVID-19 were introduced to reduce the spread of the disease. They presented the funeral industry with an opportunity to standardise services. The interactions with health professionals, police, and other professionals that had been low before the pandemic were suddenly routine in peak pandemic times. Occupations are believed to be more successful in defending their claim to professional status when members of the group can assert their claim to esoteric knowledge under challenge from clients, competitors, regulatory agencies and other professionals (Lumsden, 2017).

The meeting convened by the MoH with funeral directors and other players in response to the pandemic provided funeral directors with a platform to demonstrate their competencies and how essential their services are to the country. To members of ZAFSA, these meetings were viewed as an opportunity to defend funeral directors by showing what they can contribute, as much as an opportunity to speak with one voice. According to Tapiwa Sibanda, one of the funeral directors interviewed, the funeral industry recognised its limitations and sought to address them by lobbying for meetings with the MoH. Tapiwa stated, "*The industry lobbied for a meeting with the Ministry of Health and Child Care to conduct meetings...*" This indicates that the meetings allowed the industry to enhance its standing with the government.

Similarly, another funeral director, Munyaradzi Dude, expressed the need to defend themselves against perceived misconceptions about their practices, stating, "*We found ourselves having to defend ourselves against the perceived [mal]practises that people thought we did...*". This indicates that these meetings were an opportunity to address misunderstandings and present a more accurate industry picture. Furthermore, Tapiwa highlighted the role of the government in acknowledging the industry's need for training and

collaboration. They mentioned, *"If it is a COVID case, definitely the government played their role in that they accepted to train the industry and also to have meetings with the industry."*

This suggests that the government recognised the importance of the funeral industry's services during the pandemic and actively engaged with them to ensure their preparedness.

The increased interaction with public health officials and government, coupled with the impact of COVID-19 on the country's economy, are disruptions that are likely to impact the professionalisation of the funeral director in Zimbabwe. Funeral directors and ZAFAs, with the support of the MoH, can use the pandemic to push for a legal framework that makes ZAFAs membership mandatory rather than voluntary as it was before the pandemic and remains post-pandemic. Some funeral directors under ZAFAs reported the reputational damage caused by *"fly-by-night"* funeral companies. Fly-by-night or rogue funeral companies, according to ZAFAs, are typically backyard businesses with little interest in joining ZAFAs. Mandatory affiliation with ZAFAs is likely to drive the professionalisation of funeral directors by instituting minimum qualifications and training for them. One of the key benefits that could motivate the MoH to support this is the self-regulation that ensues in professionalisation. The MoH needs to have adequate capacity to monitor compliance with the guidelines it publishes for public health and safety. Having MoH officials inspect all funerals is unnecessary when funeral directors are professionalised and generally self-regulate.

The interviews with funeral directors mention the importance of tightening regulations and the efforts to professionalise the industry. This suggests their openness to a legal framework that ensures funeral directors' proper training, qualifications, and conduct. Extract from an interview with Tapiwa Sibanda, a funeral director of more than ten years and an active member of ZAFAs, mentions that the funeral industry was not prepared for the pandemic and that there is a need for organisations to have a plan in place for future pandemics. Tapiwa Sibanda said, *"Every organisation is saying that anything is possible and that there should be procedures and systems in place to deal with future pandemics."* This suggests that Tapiwa Sibanda perceives the need for a legal framework to guide the industry in handling pandemics. Likewise, another funeral director, Tichaona Zhou, discusses the need for regulations and training in the funeral industry. They mention that there is currently no curriculum or training for funeral directors in Zimbabwe and that there is a need for education, research, and a body of knowledge about the industry. Tichaona Zhou also mentions the importance of self-regulation and the need for the industry to develop

procedures and standards. This indicates that Tichaona Zhou recognises the need for a legal framework to professionalise the industry and ensure proper standards and training.

Furthermore, another funeral director interviewed, Tambudzai Chirwa, discusses the importance of guidelines on the industry and the need for collaboration and lobbying for regulation changes. Tambudzai mentions that regulations bring efficiency and define roles within the industry. Patience Mutasa goes on further to mention the importance of enforcing regulations to protect both clients and employees. Patience perceives that the funeral industry in Zimbabwe has a pivotal role in advocating for regulations and standards that contribute to public health security. In general, none of the funeral directors interviewed explicitly stated their intention to use the pandemic to push for a legal framework for funeral directors.

However, by suggesting a need for regulation and adherence to standards to provide safe and professional funeral services, it can be inferred that they recognise the importance of a legal framework. All the funeral directors interviewed are from the bigger, more formalised and, to a large extent, established funeral service businesses. They are all ZAFAs members, with some being board members of ZAFAs.

Those in the government and public health sector called for COVID-19 to be an opportunity to establish the funeral industry. Some quotes from the interviews that support this inference include:

"I think the funeral industry should professionalise itself... the government should describe the general regulations, but the funeral industry should determine how to professionalise itself." - Takunda Mhlanga.

"We need to formulate a regulatory framework for funeral homes...we need that kind of regulatory framework," -said Shingirai Nyoni.

"We have seen fewer cases of COVID-19 among professional funeral directors compared to those who are doing it on their own without being regulated." - Takunda Mhlanga

"We need to create that relationship where we will say if there is a funeral, let us carry out everything in hygienic conditions...we should engage funeral associations and have specific training." - Takunda Mhlanga.

These quotes indicate that the interviewees recognise the need for regulations and professionalisation within the funeral industry. They intend to work with funeral associations and government bodies to establish legal frameworks, training programs, and hygienic

standards for the industry. The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the significance of these measures and provided an opportunity to address them.

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as evidenced in the guidelines introduced by both the MoH and the WHO and records of meetings convened by the MoH for stakeholders in the funeral industry, shows how the pandemic can impact the professionalisation of funeral directors. However, this would require the funeral directors to respond or comply with guidelines and decisions taken. In addition, the actions of other key stakeholders in response to the guidelines and decisions taken in response to the pandemic will be drivers or barriers to professionalisation.

4.2.3 Emergence of formal training and courses for funeral directors

The Institute of Funeral Business Management (IFBM) was established pre-COVID-19 pandemic (Mataranyika, 2020, 2021). It is one of the main achievements of the ZIFA. It offers training and skills development for the funeral industry and related sectors. The launch documents of the IFBM indicate the aspiration to conduct research, workshops and seminars and investigate funeral-associated practices and issues to provide valuable information to businesses, governments, civic organisations and the general public. The image of a launch advert is shown in Figure 5 below to illustrate the aspirations of the IFBM, which was published in the local newspapers Daily News and the Daily News on Sunday in 2019.

When the COVID-19 pandemic started, the IFBM advertised for paid training and awareness sessions. The training sessions on COVID-19 targeted funeral directors, morticians, underwriters, claims personnel and customer services personnel. As this was still early in the pandemic, the training covered topics such as the signs and symptoms of coronavirus, handling of coronavirus-infected bodies and safety procedures when conducting funerals in the face of COVID-19. Realising the need for standard training in the funeral industry, the IFBM also offers flexible in-house training tailor-made to the needs of organisations.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the IFBM started offering training workshops for funeral directors, morticians, underwriters, claims personnel and customer services personnel. The training, which was advertised before deaths from COVID-19 were reported in Zimbabwe, targeted funeral companies in Zimbabwe. Figure 6 is a flyer showing the training designed to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Since the pandemic, the IFBM has conducted more training targeting the funeral industry. Figures 5 and 6 below illustrate some of the training they offer.



INSTITUTE OF FUNERAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
Face setting perfection

INSTITUTE OF FUNERAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

OFFICIAL LAUNCH SUPPLEMENT

The Institute Of Funeral Business Management was recently unveiled in Harare to offer training and skills development for the Funeral Industry and related sectors. The Institute also carries out Research, conduct Workshops and Seminars, investigate Funeral Practices and Related issues in order to provide valuable information to Businesses, Government, Civic Organizations and the General Public...

The launch of IFBM is without doubt a momentous milestone which should be celebrated and expect support from stakeholders. With this in mind, the Daily News will publish on the 16th of June a Congratulatory special feature on which will profile IFBM as well as unpack its role and functions.

TO PLACE YOUR CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE FOR IFBM KINDLY CONTACT THE UNDERSIGNED:

15 x 3 (A6) = \$ 468.00

20 x 4 (A5) = \$ 834.00

27 x 5 (A4) = \$ 1 410.00

20 x 7 (half Page) = \$ 1 460.00

40 x 7 (Full page) = \$ 2 920.00

To participate, contact

E-mail

dailynews
on sunday

dailynews

Figure 5: IFBM official launch poster supplement in one of the local newspapers



INSTITUTE OF FUNERAL
BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
Pacesetting perfection

CORONAVIRUS

- * What is coronavirus
- * How it is spread
- * Signs and symptoms of coronavirus
- * Handling coronavirus infected bodies
- * Prevention of coronavirus in parlours
- * Procedures and safety when conducting funerals

VENUE:

Telone Training Centre

DATE:

14 March 2020

TARGET AUDIENCE

- * Funeral Directors,
- * Morticians,
- * Underwriters,
- * Claims personnels,
- * Customer servives personnel

CORONAVIRUS: THE FACTS

- 1 Virus enters through the nose and mouth
- 2 It then finds a 'host cell' in the respiratory system
- 3 The host cell then bursts and infects other cells nearby

SYMPTOMS

- Runny nose
- Cough
- Sore throat
- High temperature

HOW IT SPREADS

Novel coronavirus first spread to humans from an animal – thought to be a snake – at the South China Seafood Wholesale Market, Wuhan. The virus is transmitted between humans in droplets from coughing and sneezing and touching or shaking hands.

HOW IT CAN KILL

Most victims of the virus die from complications including pneumonia and swelling in the lungs. The virus also causes swelling in the respiratory system, which can make it hard for the lungs to pass oxygen into the bloodstream – leading to organ failure and death. Severe pneumonia can kill people by causing them to 'drown' in the fluid flooding their lungs.

Contact: +263 787 725 315

Email: info@ifbm.co.zw, ifbmoffice@gmail.com, Website: www.ifbm.co.zw

Figure 6: An advertisement of IFBM Training on Corona Virus for Funeral Directors

Post-pandemic, the training targeting funeral directors and the funeral industry in general seem to have increased. Figure 7 is a flyer advertising a short course titled "Infectious Disease Management". Like others shown in Figure 6 to Figure 8, the flyer is placed in local newspapers, posted on social media and emailed to ZAFAs members. As detailed in the flyer,

the infectious disease short course covers some diseases of concern to the MoH and a threat to public health. As per the flyer, the trainers of the short course are from the MoH, and the facilitator is from the University of Zimbabwe's Faculty of Medicine.

Figure 8 is another flyer advertising a post-pandemic short course targeting funeral directors titled "Mental Health among Funeral Industry Professionals". Interestingly, the title refers to funeral industry workers as professionals. Whether this is a loose use of the term professional or otherwise, this identification and grouping of funeral directors feeds the desire to professionalise. The course covers such topics as stress, mental health in the workplace, stigma and mental health, grief and dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and dealing with funeral work's occupational burnout. It is challenging for occupations to be



Figure 7: An advertisement of IFBM Training on Infectious Disease Management

referred to as professions when using the taxonomic approach because it is based on the

traits, attributes and characteristics that set professions apart from other occupations. However, there is no consensus or agreement on the essential or definitive features of a profession and how many or how many of them are required to qualify as a profession. This is perhaps why some in the sector already identify as professionals.

In addition to the increase in the number of training and short courses targeting funeral directors, the IFBM is collaborating with a local university, the Women's University in Africa (WUA), in partnership with the International School of Funeral Business Management (ISFBM) to develop a Diploma and a BSc Degree Programme in Mortuary Science and Funeral Services Management. The WUA is conducting a needs assessment, and the introduction statement of the questionnaire being used to gather stakeholders' views states that *"The [proposed degree] programme aims to equip individuals with the requisite ethical and scientific knowledge and practice in mortuary sciences that is, the study of deceased bodies through prescribed procedures and practices. The training will ensure quality delivery of mortuary services and provide acceptable bereavement and burial outcomes. The programme will also prepare graduates to exercise advanced responsibility and accountability in planning, implementing, and evaluating evidence-based strategies to improve services and provide quality psychosocial support to families. Students of this programme will be equipped with the professional expertise to conduct research relevant to mortuary sciences and develop innovations that improve the services offered."*

To conclude this section on the emergence of formal training and courses for funeral directors, there are strong indications that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the demand and supply of training and education for funeral directors. Furthermore, the collaboration and coordination among different stakeholders, such as the IFBM, the WUA, the MoH, and the ZAFSA, has also increased. This could imply that the pandemic has created an opportunity and a motivation for funeral directors to enhance their competencies, skills, and knowledge in various aspects of their work, such as infectious disease management, mental health, bereavement support, and research. This could also imply that the pandemic has raised the awareness and recognition of the importance and value of funeral directors' services for public health and society. Another area that the COVID-19 pandemic may have impacted is funeral directors' identity, status and recognition as professionals. The training courses and programmes refer to funeral directors as professionals, and this could imply that the pandemic has stimulated a process of professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe, or at least a desire or aspiration to professionalise.

4.3 Findings from funeral directors and stakeholders.

The previous section presented the findings from the grey literature review on the response of the funeral industry, government and public health sector to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the review also identified some gaps the study could fill by conducting stakeholder interviews with stakeholders. To address these gaps and challenges, this section provides primary data collection through interviews with funeral industry stakeholders in Zimbabwe. The section offers the perceptions, experiences, and needs of funeral directors and stakeholders regarding IPC in funeral services and identifies the opportunities and barriers for professionalisation. The section comprises four sub-sections, each addressing a specific research question.

This section presents the findings from the eighteen (18) interviews conducted with eleven (11) funeral directors from different funeral services companies; three government officials from the ministries of health and childcare, local government and environmental health; two local government officials from the municipalities of Harare and Bulawayo; a hospital administrator; and a privately owned cemetery manager. All the interviews were done in Harare and Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's two biggest cities.

4.3.1 Status of Funeral Directing in Zimbabwe

According to some funeral directors interviewed, funeral directors in Zimbabwe are generally considered a profession. They describe it as a line of duty that involves service delivery and providing direction and guidelines for funerals. Other reasons that justify this perception are the need for specialised skills and competencies to fulfil the service requirements. When asked if funeral directing was a profession, Kudakwashe Makoni, a funeral director, had this to say,

"...yes, being a funeral director is a profession, and no one else could do it. In my opinion, a profession is a line of duty regarding service delivery. I can give an example of doctors because, in the funeral industry, they will train on how to deal with bereavement, and we direct how funerals should be conducted. So, from the point of death up to burial or cremation, we provide service delivery, direction, and guidelines, so it is a profession."

The self-recognition by some funeral directors as professionals, whilst wrong based on the taxonomic approach, is not surprising as some of the documents circulated in the country, like training courses and programmes, refer to funeral directors as professionals. This implies that the term professional is used loosely, or at least a desire or aspiration to professionalise.

However, not all funeral directors deem they have attained professional status. This group of funeral directors believe that the industry is still on the path to professionalisation and that more needs to be done to consolidate and progress with the process. Furthermore, funeral directors in this group believed that aligning standards across the funeral industry was essential to achieve professional status. They also mention the need for self-regulation within the industry with the standardisation of education and ongoing training. This group of funeral directors' understanding of a profession is closer to the taxonomic approach used as the conceptual framework for the study. The essential traits of a profession these funeral directors refer to are related to the taxonomic characteristics of a body of knowledge, standardised culture, formal training, and mandatory professional associations. These are critical elements of a profession under the taxonomic approach that funeral directors in Zimbabwe do not yet possess.

According to this group, the stakeholders who play a crucial role in educating funeral directors in Zimbabwe are the government through the Ministry of Health and Child Care and education institutions. Most stakeholders in the funeral industry share this notion. The stakeholders, including officials from the Ministry of Health and Child Care, Municipalities of Harare and Bulawayo and education institutes, highlighted that the occupation still requires education qualifications and training. In addition to education, Tapiwa Sibanda believed that regulations were essential for professionalisation. He said, "*...I think there is still a need to develop statutory instruments to regulate their operations*". While the opinions on the status of funeral directors were not unanimous, it seems most respondents believe funeral directing is not yet a profession.

4.3.2 Demands of COVID-19 on the funeral industry in Zimbabwe

Like in most industries, the most apparent impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the funeral industry has been the adverse financial effect on many funeral businesses. The interviews reported increased costs and reduced revenue for many funeral businesses due to the direct and indirect impact of the pandemic. For example, on the funeral insurance side of the industry, policyholders have removed some products from their policies or stopped paying premiums as they find it difficult to settle. Rudo Moyo, a funeral director, had this to say about the impact of the pandemic,

" ...it [COVID-19] came to Zimbabwe; for real, we encountered COVID, which greatly impacted service delivery. We faced so many challenges, but with time, we managed to sail

through... it was like there was an upsurge of death; the death rate had suddenly gone up, affecting our capacity. We have never faced that before in terms of service delivery. In our case, delivering the services, providing coffins, removing the bodies, and reducing storage capacity were all affected because the numbers were too high. Moreover, even in the places of burials, we were running out of graves, burial places were running out, so all those challenges came at once. We were not prepared for sure."

Emergency and demanding situations such as the one created by the pandemic test professions. Standard ways of operating are a crucial component of professions, and members must adhere to guidelines. Traditional professions like lawyers, physicians, and accountants are consistent in their approach and behaviour and are guided by professional statutes and standards. The pandemic has changed some of the practices and norms of funeral directors, such as hygiene practices and wearing appropriate PPE during such processes as embalming and dressing the dead body. Funeral directing poses risks to public health in cases where the cause of death is an infectious disease that quickly and easily spreads. Therefore, funeral directors need to follow new guidelines and regulations that public health authorities have introduced and conduct research as an association to contribute to the health and safety of themselves and their clients. These guidelines and regulations may also reflect the expectations and needs of their clients regarding funeral services and rituals. The development of a body of knowledge and its use as a result of the pandemic will contribute to the professionalisation of the funeral director. Funeral directors will require key competencies and community sanctions to do this well.

Following clear guidelines and regulations, funeral directors can demonstrate professionalism, competence, and accountability in their work. They can also develop a body of knowledge based on scientific evidence, research, and innovation. This body of knowledge can help them to improve their skills, methods, and standards in various aspects of their work, such as infectious disease management, mental health, bereavement support, and research. This body of knowledge can also help them gain recognition and legitimacy from other stakeholders, such as public health officials, academics, and clients.

Funeral industry stakeholders, represented by officials from public health, local government, hospital administrators and training institutions, believed that funeral directors were unprepared for the pandemic. An official from MoH, Takunda Mhlanga, succinctly said that "*they were caught off guard*". Many funeral companies were inadequately capacitated to handle the magnitude of the workload. They needed to be made aware of the protocols to be

followed, such as providing adequate PPE, social distancing and collecting and managing bodies in the face of a pandemic. One of the areas highlighted by this group of stakeholders was the need for adequate knowledge on preventing infectious diseases. As a result, most stakeholders concluded there was a need for funeral directors to receive minimum training in public health. Funeral directors were also faced with adapting to new methods of handling bodies. One Ministry of Health and Child Care official, Ruvimbo Chibanda, summarised these sentiments: "*Funeral directors lacked the necessary competencies and training to handle the pandemic effectively*". This challenges the assertion by some funeral directors that theirs was a profession—the need for more competencies points to a need for specialised training and qualifications essential for professionals.

The sentiments of the funeral directors on the competencies they lacked resonate with what the stakeholders reported. They reported that some funeral directors may have lacked the competencies to respond to the pandemic. Overall, the identified areas of low competency seemed to be preparedness for pandemics and the need for minimum training in public health for funeral directors. Tapiwa Sibanda mentioned that the funeral industry had lobbied for meetings with the MoH and training on handling bodies following the COVID-19 outbreak. This indicated a willingness to learn and improve competencies.

Funeral directors derive their competencies from education, training and experience. The lack of competencies to respond to the pandemic means a failure to respond to all aspects of a funeral process for which they are supposed to be accountable. The MoH is responsible for the public health of the country, and the lack of competencies by funeral directors to respond to pandemics is a risk. Introducing mandatory education, training, and experience for funeral directors will contribute to their professionalisation. Courses in mortuary science and competencies in biology and chemistry can help funeral directors safely manage bodies, whilst business-related courses such as management and marketing can be helpful for those managing a funeral company. Other skills that may not be core to funeral directors fulfilling their roles include the ability to coordinate and collaborate with other key stakeholders, which was tested by the pandemic. Netsai Gumbo, a funeral director at one of the leading funeral companies in the country, acknowledges the varying levels of competencies and preparedness among industry players. She said, "*I think the industry has got several players, and I think in terms of competencies, in terms of preparedness, in terms of logistical capacity, we were at different levels.*" This suggests that not all funeral companies may have the necessary skills or resources to handle the challenges of the pandemic or other disruptions. Other funeral

directors, including Kudakwashe Makoni, support this, who emphasises the importance of training in dealing with bereavement and directing funeral proceedings, stating, "*We also undergo training of how to deal with bereavement and how funerals should be conducted*". Although this is done in-house by the funeral company, it highlights the significance of professionalism and expertise in the industry.

All stakeholders viewed meetings convened by the MoH in response to the pandemic favourably. They were considered helpful in creating a platform to discuss critical issues, managing information dissemination, and instructing funeral directors to ensure compliance with COVID regulations. Funeral directors, representatives from various companies, and stakeholders attended meetings and workshops to learn about government guidance. Stakeholders took the opportunity to participate in rare interactions and input to the response to COVID-19. The potential for such collaborations to contribute to the professionalisation of funeral directors was acknowledged by participants. Government officials were confident and reported, "*The regulations that we introduced to reduce the spread of COVID had contributed to the professionalisation of the industry.*" The call by funeral directors and the Ministry of Health and Child Care to standardise the training of funeral directors is a testament to this. Funeral directors contributed to the development, dissemination and implementation of new guidelines, as reported in the three interview quotations below;

"Funeral directors assisted the Ministry of Health and Child Care to develop regulations and guidelines..." Tapiwa Sibanda.

"...we had to share our views with the authorities and map the way forward, how best we could assist one another.... we shared notes." Kudakwashe Makoni.

"...I was deeply involved", Simbarashe Nyoni.

As the three quotations above show, the regulations introduced to reduce the spread of COVID positively impacted the funeral industry by enhancing its professionalism and standards. Funeral directors were actively involved in developing, disseminating and implementing new guidelines in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Child Care. This implies that the regulations contributed to improving the quality and safety of funeral services and protecting the health of funeral directors and the public. Through ZAFAs and the larger funeral companies, funeral industry members attended the COVID-19 meetings convened by the MoH without much encouragement. The public health safety of funeral

directors, the need to provide safe and quality service and the opportunity to engage MoH and the government were motivation enough.

Funeral directors reported coordination and collaboration with other professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were some issues of incompetence among funeral service providers. Harmful or destructive practices in the funeral industry due to, among other causes, the lack of competencies by funeral directors may increase stakeholders' focus on funeral directors and the push by MoH for mandatory education qualifications and training in the interest of public health security, thereby accelerating professionalisation. This is especially true with the Ministry of Health and Child Care, which manages infectious diseases. As corroborated by the ISFBM training flyer, Figure 4, short courses are already being looked at, and funeral directors are being trained to understand how they can consider the management of cholera, COVID-19, HIV, and TB in their operations.

Funeral directors reported that together with ZAFA, they were lobbying to adapt the protocols, train funeral directors, and disseminate information. Some of the funeral directors hinted that coordination was not as good. Simbarashe Nyoni said, "*We did not always speak with one voice to stakeholders and regulators*". The professional associations for the funeral industry in Zimbabwe, ZAFA and FuSA are voluntary. Therefore, it is unsurprising that funeral directors were not always on the same page, even for those who have voluntarily become members. A code of conduct for a professional association has more sway when the consequences of undermining it are a deterrent. This highlights the importance of standards and mandatory membership in professional bodies like ZAFA. Noncompliance with guidelines is a public health security issue, and funeral directors cannot self-regulate when membership in professional bodies is voluntary. The smaller players and those outside of ZAFA were suspected of not abiding by the regulations and not being keen on standardisation. At the same time, smaller companies feared that the standardisation may be favourable to larger companies with more resources. It is likely that smaller companies are, in principle, supportive of professionalisation but are sceptical of being driven out of business through exclusionary closure strategies to control the access to and the quality of their services. The professionalisation of funeral directors can be undermined by this lack of trust or the them versus us rivalry.

The pandemic also gave the funeral industry access to government officials, such as local authorities and the MoH. The pandemic, as a result of the regulations introduced due to COVID-19 and meetings convened by the MoH, has contributed to the professionalisation of

funeral directors as they have set rules and regulations that must be followed when dealing with COVID-19 patients. The impact of COVID-19 on adaptive management within the industry has been positive, as funeral directors have had to change how they operate to protect clients and themselves. Overall, the impact of COVID-19 on the funeral industry has been significant, leading to changes in regulations, guidelines, and how funeral directors operate. Professionals follow the same standard way of doing their work. Without regulations or guidelines, funeral directors have been doing as they please. Complying with the COVID-19 guidelines, first-time funeral directors in Zimbabwe operated to the same standard as other typical professions. The pandemic has created an opportunity for the funeral industry to have more access to government officials, such as local authorities and the MoH. As a result, the funeral industry has changed its practices and procedures, making it more standardised and regulated than before.

4.3.3 Regulations introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

The Zimbabwe government introduced several guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic to curb transmission. Most of these affected the funeral industry and included regulations to control crowds, guidelines for preparedness, protocols for transporting bodies, and regulations for taking temperatures, sanitising, and maintaining social distancing in funeral homes. Funeral services companies were informed of these guidelines. The government held workshops with stakeholders to ensure adherence to the guidelines. Stakeholders also received training in public health from the Ministry of Health and Child Care, and there were efforts to formalise standards. The pandemic also highlighted the importance of self-regulation as adherence was a matter of public health safety for funeral directors.

Patience Mutasa, a funeral director and member of ZAFSA, stated that the Ministry of Health and Child Care consulted the funeral industry when developing the guidelines. The guidelines introduced standards for how funeral services were delivered. She believes that the funeral industry was formalising the funeral director by training employees. In agreement, another funeral director with one of the established funeral companies in Zimbabwe, Netsai Gumbo, suggested that professionalisation of the industry would require "*training, certification, and licensing, as well as adherence to agreed standards*". This resonated with what was suggested by Simbarashe Nyoni, a funeral director who has lived through the pandemic, who said that the pandemic had led to a shift from "*cultural practices to scientific protocols*", which had impacted how funeral services were conducted. Moving from conducting funerals

the way they have been done to conducting funerals following a body of knowledge indicates professionalisation.

Some funeral directors believe that the introduced standards, following the government guidelines, will drive the professionalisation of funeral directors. Netsai Gumbo suggested that professionalisation would require collaboration among different stakeholders. At the same time, Tichaona Zhou noted that the industry needed to engage with the government to draft more regulations for the sector.

4.3.4 Enforcing guidelines and regulations

The government was enforcing the guidelines it introduced following the pandemic with the help of funeral directors. It had systems with inspectors in place to monitor funerals and compliance with regulations. Enforcement of guidelines in the funeral industry during the COVID-19 pandemic was a multi-layered approach involving various stakeholders.

According to Netsai Gumbo, the industry worked with environmental health technicians from the local municipality and had them deployed with their teams for the collection of the deceased from their place of death, movement from the place of death to storage, and finally, at the point of dispatch from the mortuary. One funeral director mentioned that the Ministry of Health and Child Care enforced the use of PPE during burials and that they are still following those procedures. Tapiwa Sibanda said, "*The Ministry of Health and Child Care would enforce that no burial is supposed to be done without putting all the PPE, and we are still following that even though the coverage is a bit on the lower side. We still follow the government's procedures to protect ourselves or our families ...*".

Simbarashe, a funeral director, shared similar perceptions on regulating the funeral industry. He suggested that there should be self-regulation within the industry and a professional authority that cannot be questioned because they would represent the expertise of the industry. In addition, Tichaona Zhou suggested that there should be some professional authority and a code of ethics that the industry would adhere to, as the challenges in enforcing the guidelines included a need for more self-regulation. Netsai Gumbo also mentioned that the pandemic fostered cooperation among funeral directors and competing companies as they had to work together to provide services to the nation.

The funeral industry faced various challenges and opportunities in the context of the pandemic, such as increased demand and public health and safety protocols. Funeral directors have different perspectives and approaches to regulating and improving their practices and

standards, such as self-regulation, professional authority, code of ethics, and external guidelines. The funeral industry has experienced positive outcomes from the pandemic, such as increased cooperation, collaboration, and communication among funeral directors and competing companies.

The COVID-19 guidelines have affected how funeral directors operate. They must wear PPE, discourage unnecessary gatherings at funerals and take the utmost care not to spread COVID-19. The pandemic has created a need and an opportunity for the funeral industry to improve its practices and standards and collaborate with other sectors and entities. These changes can directly contribute to the professionalisation of funeral directors. Some of the changes include acquiring the necessary systematic knowledge and expertise on handling the deceased bodies, preventing the transmission of the virus, adopting a service-oriented and altruistic quality to contribute to the common good and the welfare of society and providing vital services to the deceased and their families during a difficult time that include emergencies and pandemics, and changes in recognition and sanction by state and the public.

Funeral directors have different views and suggestions on achieving professionalisation, such as self-regulation, professional authority, code of ethics, and external guidelines from the government. The perceptions imply that professionalisation is not only a matter of technical skills and knowledge but of social and cultural values and norms. Working with other actors, such as public health officials from the Ministry of Health and Child Care, Municipalities, and the police, has contributed to developing common cultural values and norms. The pandemic has also underscored the importance of training and learning about specific fields to protect oneself and conduct business professionally. Such collaboration that ensures adherence is part of the process of professionalism.

4.3.5 Impact of COVID-19 on taxonomic traits of professionalisation

The taxonomic approach of professions identifies the attributes that distinguish a profession from other occupations, such as specialised knowledge, formal education, ethical code, service orientation, autonomy, and recognition. In this section, the study findings will focus on taxonomic traits and how the Covid pandemic has affected these attributes for funeral directors, who are responsible for providing funeral services to the deceased and their families. Changes to taxonomic traits of the profession directly impact the professional status of funeral directors.

a. Education, training, and minimum entry requirements of funeral directors

According to funeral directors, the COVID-19 pandemic has likely impacted the education, training, and minimum entry requirements for funeral directors due to the competency gap brought to the fore by the pandemic. Furthermore, the new standards for the industry contribute to public health security. During the pandemic, funeral directors had to learn and comply with new guidelines to protect themselves and their clients from spreading the virus. One funeral director stated that the pandemic highlighted the need for a better understanding of the industry and the importance of training. Sekai Ncube said, "*It [COVID-19] highlighted the need to be able to understand better what we are doing.*". Another funeral director mentioned that the pandemic exposed the type of people being recruited and drove the need for a change in recruitment strategy. Rudo Moyo said, "*...for people and that did it expose. The type of people we were recruiting... were they able to comprehend what was being taught? ... the recruitment strategy is going to change...*". Generally, funeral directors believe the education, training and entry requirements will change due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Patience Mutasa provides evidence that some funeral directors know what is required for professionalisation concerning training and qualification. They said, "*For an occupation to be called a profession...there should be education that has been attained... [continued] training even after you have attained [entry education] ...and minimum entry requirements needed for you to enter an industry...*". The perceptions of funeral directors suggest that the pandemic has driven the need for a change in the education, training, and entry requirements for funeral directors and the potential for professionalisation. Pushing for entry-level or minimum requirements for education, training, and minimum qualifications can potentially drive the professionalisation of funeral directors. The recent focus of training institutions on the pandemic has unveiled the competency gap and a need for standards in the funeral industry. Funeral directors must deal with pandemics, disease outbreaks, challenges, and contagious disease risks. In general, funeral directors and stakeholders interviewed expressed the need for improved knowledge of how the funeral industry can be part of the frontline responders protecting the public from pandemics and outbreaks of contagious diseases through better training and recruitment strategies for the industry. The pandemic has driven the need for a change in funeral directors' education, training, and entry requirements for funeral directors, as well as the potential for professionalisation.

b. Self-regulation of funeral directors, professional authority, and code of ethics

After the pandemic, there are some indications of increased self-regulation among funeral directors, professional authority, and code of ethics, but this is not a consistent theme

throughout the interviews. Tendai Chikwanda stated that the regulations introduced during the pandemic were noble and still relevant today and contributed to the professionalisation of the funeral director industry. Munyaradzi Dube mentioned that the funeral directing business should be professionalised and that funeral directors should take the lead in figuring out how to do this. They also noted that other stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Health and Child Care, were mandated to improve public health security. The conversations on professionalising the funeral industry started during the pandemic.

Most of the interviewees addressed the issue of improved self-regulation, professional authority, and code of ethics. A funeral director and ZAFSA member, Tichaona Zhou, mentioned the need for a professional body to investigate issues in the funeral industry but did not elaborate on how this would improve self-regulation or code of ethics. Similarly, another funeral director, Tendai Chikwanda, said, "*There is a general understanding of what is or is not ethical. The association does not enforce at an enterprise level, so the enforcement of ethics and standards is at the business level.*" Promoting self-regulation, professional authority, and a code of ethics will accelerate the professionalisation of funeral directors.

The pandemic has created a need and an opportunity for the funeral industry to improve its practices and standards and to collaborate with other stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Health and Child Care, to contribute to public health security. Whilst nothing has changed regarding self-regulation, professional authority and an accepted code of ethics, the interviews prove how the pandemic has contributed to a public discussion. There is some indication that increased self-regulation, professional authority, and a code of ethics among funeral directors is forthcoming.

c. Body of theory, research, knowledge management

The interviews with funeral directors and stakeholders demonstrate fragmented knowledge and minimum collective agenda on the body of theory and research for the funeral industry in Zimbabwe before the pandemic. As a result, the pandemic exposed the industry's lack of cohesion and collective knowledge. Kudakwashe Makoni, a funeral director, laments, "*A lot is to be done by the funeral industry... I think we are lacking. This is a collective agenda, yes. We really need to work on it. Come up with something.*" When asked about the impact of the pandemic on the body of theory, most funeral directors and stakeholders are concerned about the lack of a standard knowledge base for the industry. This suggests that the industry is grappling with a fragmented knowledge base, with each company operating in isolation. The

absence of a unified approach hampers the industry's ability to respond effectively to emergencies, ultimately hindering professionalisation.

While there are discussions about minimum training in public health for funeral directors and the MoH has published guidelines supporting response to the pandemic, the effect on the body of theory, research and knowledge management appears limited. In one of the interviews, a respondent working with a training institute alluded to a growing body of theory. The training institute official said, “... *So, I think from this COVID pandemic a lot was learnt. The authorities and service providers there were empowered, and even going into the future, they are now empowered to manage such pandemics.*” In support, Munyaradzi Dube said, “*Like us as an organisation, I can safely say our research and development department, I think it helped us through this pandemic era. We were kept updated on research on managing this pandemic, and we were empowered, and we thank the top management for the feedback from the research department.*”

d. Adaptive management to protect clients and funeral directors.

There are some indications that some changes introduced to the funeral industry may persist beyond the pandemic. One funeral director stated that the pandemic had highlighted the need for institutions to build resilience and that they had to get creative to continue providing services. This implies that some changes may be sustained to ensure the industry is better prepared for future pandemics. Additionally, another funeral director mentioned that the industry is evolving and better positioned to handle future pandemics. This also suggests that some changes remain in place.

However, it is essential to note that some stakeholders in the industry have expressed concerns about the regulations and guidelines introduced during the pandemic. One local government stakeholder mentioned that the regulations have changed the way funeral directors work, but only slowly. They also mentioned that some funeral homes do not comply with the regulations. This indicates that some funeral homes may resume their old practices after the pandemic.

4.3.6 Professionalisation of Funeral Directing

It can be inferred that the funeral industry in Zimbabwe was already in the process of professionalisation before the pandemic. Although membership is voluntary, the formation of ZAFSA and FUSA points to this. The big, established funeral industry companies are members of ZAFSA. Netsai Gumbo stated that funeral directing is evolving from just a job to becoming

a recognised profession in the market. Furthermore, the training of funeral directors in-house by funeral companies or by institutions that are being established is driving the professionalisation of funeral directors. As illustrated in its training calendar (annexe 3), IFBM offers two main courses: mortuary science and proficiency in funeral assurance. Mortuary science courses target mortician undertakers and service people, whilst proficiency in funeral assurance targets sales agents, underwriters, customer services and claims. The two target groups represent the funeral industry sectors of funeral assurance and services. In the calendar, the IFBM explicitly expresses its flexibility in conducting in-house training and tailor-made funeral-related courses to the needs of organisations. Whilst evidence was not collected, the fact that IFBM has this arrangement in place illustrates the move towards standardised training and formalisation of funeral directors.

Funeral directors have been at the forefront of pushing for their professionalisation. Following the pandemic, other players may be going for professionalisation as well. Tichaona Zhou mentioned that the Ministry of Health and Child Care and local authorities are involved in the funeral industry. They further say, "*...which suggests that regulations and guidelines are being put in place to professionalise the industry.*". The belief that the government is also pushing professionalisation is shared by funeral directors when they say, "*... government's statutory instrument has helped make the funeral industry a profession and has eased the process.*" This indicates that the government is also involved in driving the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe.

The COVID-19 pandemic has positively impacted the funeral industry by fostering collaborative training among funeral homes and regulators. Funeral directors and stakeholders have mentioned that regulations have been introduced and are being followed, and there has been more training on public health and infection prevention and control. The industry also faces challenges, such as a lack of professionalism in some funeral homes. These may motivate the government to push for professionalisation in the interest of public health security.

4.4 Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter illustrate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe. Introducing new guidelines and protocols by the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoH) and the World Health Organization (WHO) has led to changes in the funeral industry. These changes have required

a higher level of preparedness, adherence to public health guidelines, and adoption of new practices to ensure the safety and dignity of funeral services.

The pandemic resulted in strict guidelines for the management and disposal of bodies, which have influenced the professionalisation of funeral directors. These guidelines have emphasised infection prevention and control (IPC) practices, personal protective equipment (PPE) use, and the need for formal training and certification.

The preparedness of funeral directors for pandemics has emerged as an indicator of their professional status. The ability to handle deceased bodies safely, prevent disease transmission, and provide dignified funeral services requires specialised knowledge and expertise, features associated with professionalisation.

Funeral directors encountered various challenges during the pandemic, including removing bodies, accessing PPE, and complying with new regulations. These challenges underscored the need for better preparedness and the importance of professional standards in the industry.

Interviews with various stakeholders revealed differing perspectives on the impact of the pandemic on the professionalisation of funeral directors. While some saw the pandemic as an opportunity to enhance professional standards, others noted the need for more robust regulations and training programs.

Establishing the Institute of Funeral Business Management (IFBM) and introducing training programs for funeral directors have been significant steps toward professionalisation. These initiatives aim to equip funeral directors with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the demands brought about by the pandemic.

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe. The introduction of new guidelines, the emphasis on preparedness and IPC practices, and the emergence of formal training programs have contributed to elevating the funeral industry standards. Moving forward, it is essential for funeral directors to continue adhering to these standards and for stakeholders to support ongoing professionalisation efforts to ensure the safety, dignity, and professionalism of funeral services in Zimbabwe.

The findings showed that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the professionalisation of funeral directing in Zimbabwe. The pandemic has stimulated a process of professionalisation, or at least a desire or aspiration to professionalise. The findings revealed that the magnitude of professionalisation requires funeral directors to respond to or comply with guidelines and

decisions taken. The actions of other key stakeholders in response to the guidelines and decisions taken during the pandemic will either drive or hinder professionalisation. The pandemic has also created an opportunity and a motivation for funeral directors to enhance their competencies, skills, and knowledge in infectious disease management, mental health, bereavement support, and research. Another finding is that the pandemic has raised awareness and recognition of the importance and value of funeral directors' services for public health and society. The findings indicated that the COVID-19 guidelines are likely to have explicitly affected the professionalisation of funeral directors based on the taxonomic approach of professionalisation and, more generally, the professionalisation of the funeral industry in Zimbabwe.

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The discussion section attempts to give the study's meaning, importance, and relevance, as well as results from interviews conducted and a review of public records that include minutes and guidelines produced in response to the pandemic. It uses a literature review and grey literature from previous work done by the researcher to explain the results, show how they relate to the literature review and research topic and present arguments contributing to the conclusion. To be able to do this systematically, the introduction to the discussion includes a summary of key findings.

5.2 Summary of key findings

The funeral industry in Zimbabwe has tremendously grown over the past twenty-five to thirty years, with many funeral companies emerging to offer both funeral assurance and funeral services. During this time, funeral directing became a full-time occupation that employed many people. Furthermore, the funeral industry emerged to provide a critical service to the growing urban population and, later, the country. Once they became a full-time occupation, there are strong indications that funeral directors have been driving their professionalisation with little drive or intervention from the Government of Zimbabwe. The evidence of this includes the establishment of ZAFSA, FuSA and IFBM. As a result, some funeral directors claim that the occupation has undergone sufficient professionalisation to be considered a profession. This is consistent with the characteristic of professional authority as described by the taxonomic approach. Funeral directors in Zimbabwe are developing professional expertise through organisations such as ZAFSA, FuSA, and IFBM. This indicates progress towards achieving the professional standard.

Not all funeral directors believe they are a profession yet, and funeral industry stakeholders and clients support them. The general opinion among this group is that funeral directing in Zimbabwe is not sufficiently professionalised to claim the profession's status. The fundamental reason for this opinion is the issue of no standard training, lack of minimum entry qualifications and failure to "tick the boxes" of traits from the taxonomic approach (Greenwood, 1957). As a result, as revealed by the study findings, funeral directors did not have the competencies to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and were caught off guard. These competencies are obtained from training, education and experience, among other sources.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant, indirect and direct effect on the funeral industry in Zimbabwe. The most reported impact on the operations of funeral directors includes the increase in pressure of work due to a surge in deaths and reduced workforce due to illness and lockdowns, increased cost of operations for funeral companies due to procurement of PPE and the requirement to comply with COVID-19 regulations. The industry needed to prepare for the pandemic and struggled to cope with low income, high cost, and new regulations that were introduced to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Regulations and guidelines to reduce the spread of COVID-19 pushed the standardisation of practices by funeral directors as they were adhering to the protocols. The scope of the guidelines was to advise law enforcement agents, health workers, environmental health workers, mortuary staff and funeral homes on the rational approach to deal with possible COVID-19 cases. There are indications that the regulations affect the characteristics of a profession in the taxonomic approach (Greenwood, 1957). The taxonomic approach provides the following characteristics of a profession: structured theory, legitimacy, community approval, ethical guidelines, and cultural practices (Greenwood, 1957; Saks, 2016). Professionalisation demands accountability and standardisation of training and accreditation (Callaghan, 2014). This pressures professions to develop standardised curricula and highly regulated professional competencies. Indications are that the pandemic has strengthened the push for standardisation. The guidelines are a good starting point for standardisation. Other areas showing indications of the effects of the pandemic include the two taxonomic characteristics: training, education and minimum entry requirements, and self-regulation and associated code of ethics.

In response to the pandemic, funeral directors interacted with other funeral industry stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Health and Child Care, local government and environmental health, municipality officials, and police. In fact, before the pandemic, the Ministry of Health and Child Care hardly convened meetings where the daily operations of funeral companies and the work of funeral directors were a critical agenda. There was much greater interaction with the insurance regulator, the IPEC, and the Ministry of Finance for funeral companies offering funeral assurance. Furthermore, the pandemic also increased the interaction between funeral directors and funeral companies. The effect was that funeral directors spoke with one voice like never before and would defend themselves and demonstrate their knowledge and importance. This highlighted the importance of ZIFA and FuSA to both those in the funeral industry and stakeholders outside. Discussing is much

easier and more efficient for the government and stakeholders. As occupations evolve and become professionals, their professional identity is shaped by how they are perceived by, among others, colleagues, clients, employers, regulators and those outside of their circle.

Since the pandemic, there have been strong indications that the government will also drive the professionalisation of funeral directors and the funeral industry. The lessons from the pandemic and how ill-prepared the funeral industry was to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic provide a strong justification for the MoH to develop laws and regulations for top-down professionalisation. This will likely receive support from most funeral companies, especially the larger ones.

5.3 Interpretations

5.3.1 The funeral director is not a profession in Zimbabwe

Funeral directing in Zimbabwe is not a profession. Professions are occupational categories involving a detailed and specialist education (Callaghan, 2014) that meets a defensible set of criteria (Lester, 2015) and focuses on providing a service to the rest of society. Central to the definition of a profession is the requirement for specialised knowledge and often academic preparation. Both are not requirements for becoming a funeral director in Zimbabwe. The few funeral directors who claim to belong to a profession cite the essential service they provide to Zimbabweans, the full-time nature of their work and their contribution to the economy.

Whilst these are essential for a profession, they are inadequate as funeral directors in Zimbabwe lack other taxonomic traits, including organised theory, legitimacy, community endorsement, ethical standards, and cultural practices (Greenwood, 1957; Lester, 2015; Saks, 2014).

Funeral directors in the USA have successfully attained professional status (Cahill, 1999). This is because an individual wishing to become a funeral director or mortician must enrol for a Bachelor of Science degree with a major in Mortuary Science, studying deceased bodies through mortuary work (Cahill, 1999). Zimbabwe has yet to progress towards achieving this since no such degree programmes are offered at learning institutes. The Zimbabwean funeral directing situation is comparable to that of the British funeral industry, attempting to professionalise funeral directors over the last century (Valentine et al., 2013). Although the British funeral industry has grown significantly over the past century since the NAFD was established in 1905, no mandatory qualification remains. The requirement for specialised knowledge and academic preparation is important in realising a profession. According to the

taxonomic approach, funeral directors in Zimbabwe are not professionalised. Their status is similar to funeral directors in South Africa, the UK, and Sweden. The taxonomic approach has continuum limitations and offers a strict dichotomy between professional and non-professional (Dent, 2024; Otterlei, 2018; Reed, 2018). This simplifies professionalisation into a rigid and linear process that fails to capture professional work's evolving nature (Otterlei, 2018; Saks, 2012).

Compared to semi-professions and full-time occupations, recognised professions typically have more robust formal knowledge and a higher educational base. This fact is reflected in the case of USA and Canadian funeral directors who are considered professionals because of the robust formal education and higher educational base (Cahill, 1999). This is lacking in the case of Zimbabwe funeral directors. Professionals are individuals at an advanced performance level of work following vigorous training. They are part of a group of colleagues who adhere to standards and share common values they can enforce (Houle, 1981) As a result, professionals have autonomy and, therefore, have the approval of clients to make decisions on their behalf (House & Kerr, 1973). This is one of the reasons why funeral industry stakeholders, some of them in recognised professions, such as public health professionals, believe that funeral directors are not a profession yet. This brings to the fore the limitations of the taxonomic approach. Some professional characteristics identified in taxonomies can be challenging to measure objectively, making assessment problematic (Dent, 2024; Otterlei, 2018). Furthermore, there is no clear threshold in terms of extent or required number of traits (Otterlei, 2018).

Emergency and demanding situations such as the one created by the pandemic tested professions. Standard ways of operating are a crucial component of professions, and members must adhere to guidelines. Traditional professions like lawyers, physicians, and accountants are consistent in their approach and behaviour and are guided by professional statutes and standards. These professions best illustrate the static nature of the taxonomic approach. The development of a body of knowledge and its use as a result of the pandemic will contribute to the professionalisation of the funeral director. Funeral directors will require key competencies and community sanctions to do this well.

5.3.2 Funeral director readiness for pandemics

Funeral directors and the funeral industry, in general, were not prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the main reasons attributed to the unpreparedness and low competencies of

funeral directors is the age of the industry and low professionalisation. The funeral industry in Zimbabwe can be considered young, with most funeral companies emerging in the last twenty to thirty years. To complicate things further, the scale and scope of the pandemic meant the majority, if not all, funeral directors in Zimbabwe had never experienced anything like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reviewing and reflecting on the pandemic, specifically, the funeral industry's preparedness and competencies of funeral directors, presents a meaningful way to transform the industry and occupation. The government and funeral industry have indicated that work has already started to standardise how funeral directors operate through training and enforcing guidelines and protocols. One of the critical motivations for the professionalisation of funeral directors in Canada and the USA, the two primary examples of this happening, was to protect clients (Cahill, 1999). Public health security is a more significant motivation for pushing for improving readiness for future pandemics and the competencies of funeral directors. The public health security motivation fits very well with the top-down and bottom-up processes of professionalisation (Neal & Morgan, 2000). The existence of below-standard practices may accelerate the need for professionalisation. Furthermore, based on the views of government stakeholders and the funeral industry, a hybrid of top-down and bottom-up is likely.

Professions derive their competencies from education, training and experience (Burns, 2014; Egetenmeyer et al., 2019). The lack of competencies to respond to the pandemic means a failure to respond to all aspects of a funeral process for which they are supposed to be accountable. The MoH is responsible for the public health of the country, and the lack of competencies by funeral directors to respond to pandemics is a risk. Introducing mandatory education, training, and experience for funeral directors will contribute to their professionalisation. Courses in mortuary science and competencies in biology and chemistry can help funeral directors safely manage bodies, whilst business-related courses such as management and marketing can be helpful for those managing a funeral company. Other skills that may not be core to funeral directors fulfilling their roles include the ability to coordinate and collaborate with other key stakeholders, which was tested by the pandemic.

5.3.3 Interactions within the industry and with other professionals

Interactions of funeral directors amongst themselves and relevant stakeholders in the funeral industry, professions and non-professions increased significantly during the pandemic.

Increased interactions of funeral directors with other professions can affect

professionalisation. Increased interaction among members of an occupation can lead to increased collaboration, knowledge sharing, and a stronger sense of community. This was particularly low before the funeral industry pandemic, with much more competition and secrecy. Frequent interaction among members allows them to share ideas, knowledge, and experiences. This can foster a sense of community, and members may be more willing to work together on projects that benefit the profession or aspiring profession. Funeral directors were convinced that contributing to guidelines, participating in meetings and workshops arranged by the Ministry of Health and Child Care, and assisting each other through sharing notes improved collaboration within and without.

Although the effects of these interactions on the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe are not explicitly stated, it can be inferred that increased interactions with other professions can lead to a more professionalised funeral industry. By working with other professionals, funeral directors can learn new skills and standards to improve their services. Additionally, increased interactions can lead to developing codes of conduct and ethics that can further professionalise the industry.

In conclusion, increased interactions between funeral directors and other professions can affect professionalisation. The pandemic has contributed to a shift from competition to collaboration in the funeral industry, which suggests that funeral directors are now interacting more with other professions.

5.4 Effects of COVID-19 on the professionalisation of funeral directors

This section discusses the perceived effects and evidence of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the characteristics of a profession following the taxonomic approach. A profession has the following key attributes: systematic theory/body of knowledge, authority, community sanction, ethical codes, and culture. The taxonomy approach framework is used to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on professionalisation.

5.4.1 Effects of the pandemic on the systematic theory/body of knowledge

The body of knowledge for funeral directors includes the education and training required to become a funeral director. Professions possess a distinct body of knowledge that guides how things are done (Greenwood, 1957; Saks, 2012). The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the funeral industry and the systematic theory/body of knowledge surrounding it. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of knowledge management and sharing, with the role of schools in training becoming more prominent. The industry has also been forced to

adapt to new protocols and restrictions, with the failure to comply resulting in super spreader events. Gaps in the industry's procedures and knowledge of essential safety and health issues present the opportunity for funeral directors to prioritise continuous learning and competence in these areas.

The lack of entry requirements and standard education and training for funeral directors in Zimbabwe implies a lack of a body of knowledge (Greenwood, 1957). Funeral directors were, therefore, guided by the funeral company that employed and, in most cases, trained them rather than a shared body of knowledge. Besides education and training, like other professions or aspiring professions, funeral directors can increase their knowledge by attending conferences, workshops, and continuing education courses. Establishing ZAFA and IFBM indicates the industry-led development of a body of knowledge, but membership and qualification are not mandatory. Therefore, there is no shared body of knowledge. Voluntary membership in professional bodies has been highlighted as a barrier to the professionalisation of funeral directors.

In Sweden, funeral directors aim to professionalise and achieve greater recognition, but they do not meet the criteria based on the taxonomical approach. Membership in the Swedish Funeral Directors' Association (SBF) is voluntary, and there are no mandatory requirements to join (Bremborg, 2006). The SBF attempted to introduce compulsory academic courses for funeral businesses; however, these faced resistance and were eventually made optional (Bremborg, 2006). This situation is comparable to South Africa, where the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) established voluntary membership criteria for funeral directors.

The funeral industry has grown significantly in the UK since the National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD) was founded in 1905. Yet, formal education or preparation is not compulsory (Valentine et al., 2013). Consequently, training requirements remain limited. The NAFD has aimed for mandatory registration since its inception, but efforts have not been successful (Valentine et al., 2013). As a result, the funeral industry has not reached professional status.

The professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe follows a path more relatable to the UK, South Africa, and Sweden than the USA and Canada. Establishing the Zimbabwe Association of Funeral Assurers (ZAFA) and the International Federation of Burial and

Cremation Services (IFBCS) shows industry-led knowledge development, but membership and qualifications are not mandatory.

The pandemic revealed that funeral directors lack the competencies to deal with pandemics and minimal industry standardisation. They had to be trained and rely on MoH to provide guidelines. Funeral directors in Zimbabwe must research and publish to develop and grow their knowledge. Furthermore, conferences to gather and share knowledge of funeral directing in Zimbabwe should become more routine. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are pushing the development and improvement of a body of knowledge. The participation of the MoH in this will likely be significant.

5.4.2 Standardisation culture, values, norms and symbols for funeral directors

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the funeral industry. In addition to the increased cost of disposing of bodies due to PPE requirements and new regulations, among other direct effects, premium collections in the funeral assurance sector in Zimbabwe plunged during the COVID-19 period, resulting in financial shocks for the sector (Nyarota, 2020). The funeral industry in Zimbabwe has three main categories: funeral assurance only, bundled funeral assurance and funeral services, and funeral services only. The funeral assurance sector in Zimbabwe faced financial shocks due to COVID-19 as premium collections plunged, and the funeral services sector also had to bear extra costs for testing, sanitising, and following up on their services. Under the coordination of ZAFSA, the funeral assurance sector deferred any premium review and had to postpone any innovation due to negative cash flows and operational obligations (Nyarota, 2020). There are indications that the effects of the pandemic are extending to include the standardisation of cultural values, norms, and symbols for funeral directors, as well as critical traits of professions. Interviews with funeral directors and stakeholders suggest that the pandemic has led to a need for adaptive management and knowledge sharing among funeral service providers.

One of the effects of COVID-19 was the need for standardisation of pricing and services during the pandemic. Funeral companies had to discuss and agree on standard service pricing, which led to a movement towards collaboration and undercutting prices. The pandemic has also highlighted the need for minimum expectations of what is required of a funeral director or undertaker. Besides the public health security concern, the pandemic directly affected the profits of funeral companies and the well-being of funeral directors. Adaption and actions to mitigate were mandatory. The pandemic also emphasised the need for learning and

certification in the funeral industry. Funeral service providers have had to learn how to manage the pandemic. Calls for establishing an organisation to represent funeral service providers and set standards for the industry have become louder.

The pandemic has also highlighted the need for emotional intelligence and soft skills among funeral service providers. Professionals in the industry must embody these character traits of professionalism, namely people skills. The pandemic has also emphasised the need for resilience among funeral service providers, who have had to serve as front liners and assist clients during a scary and challenging time.

These effects are established in culture because professional culture is shared values, beliefs, norms, and symbols that shape the behaviour of individuals within a society. In professions, these cultural elements can influence how individuals within that profession interact with one another and with those outside of their profession (Callaghan, 2014). Values serve as cultural benchmarks that individuals rely on to discern what is deemed good or bad, as well as right or wrong (Bloor & Dawson, 1994). They serve as the ideals and guidelines for many professions. On the other hand, norms are the unwritten rules of behaviour that are considered acceptable within a group or society. Professionalisation plays a role in developing professional cultures (Bloor & Dawson, 1994). The development of professional cultures is influenced by individual sense-making, group beliefs, and culture (Bloor & Dawson, 1994).

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the standardisation of cultural values, norms, and symbols for funeral directors. The pandemic has led to a need for adaptive management, knowledge sharing, and standardisation of pricing and services. It has also emphasised the need for learning, certification, emotional intelligence, and resilience among funeral service providers. Establishing an organisation to represent funeral service providers and set standards for the industry is needed to ensure the professionalisation of funeral directing in Zimbabwe.

5.4.3 Effects on the formal training of funeral directors in Zimbabwe

The pandemic has also brought attention to the need for professionalisation of the funeral industry, focusing on skills and standards. Funeral directors in Zimbabwe were found wanting as they did not possess the competencies to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, there was no standard training or qualification programme for funeral directors. This meant that the response to the pandemic in the initial stages was not standardised. This

includes the need for training, certification, and licensing. Funeral service providers have had to learn how to manage the pandemic.

According to Anteby et al. (2016), "becoming" is one of three lenses through which occupations and professions can be understood. They suggest that "becoming" refers to individuals' socialisation and identity formation process as they enter and progress within an occupation or profession. Education qualification and training, including in-house and continuous training, provide individuals with the route to be funeral directors. Certification is a way to demonstrate that an individual has the professional skills and education that match standardised criteria for specific professional associations. Without certification, anyone can claim the skills and knowledge to be a funeral director. The pandemic has shown the authorities the risks and dangers of this. The MoH provided some training and guidance during the pandemic, and interviews with stakeholders and funeral directors highlighted the importance of standards, especially the need for a minimum requirement for entry into the occupation. It is a matter of public health safety, and the MoH is considering regulations. These are likely to be supported by ZAFSA, FUSA, and the IFBM.

In addition to imparting skills and knowledge, academic programs establish the foundation for professional identity, values, culture, and dedication to service, all of which are essential for the sustainability of professional organisations (Holm et al., 2020). The training introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to continue because there is a demand from funeral directors. The training will likely evolve and include new aspects, not just those specific to reducing the spread of COVID-19. Other diseases that could be included as part of training include cholera, as there have been outbreaks in Zimbabwe; Ebola, which has had reported outbreaks in Uganda and the DRC; and severe respiratory infections similar to COVID-19 and SARS.

5.4.4 Effects of the pandemic on the code of ethics

It is challenging to determine the specific impact of the pandemic on the code of ethics of funeral directors. However, several themes suggest changes and adaptations within the funeral industry that can be located within the code of ethics. To protect the community from abuse because of the monopoly of a profession, members of a profession sign up for a regulative code that compels ethical behaviour (Greenwood, 1957). A professional code of ethics guides a profession's conduct and educates members. It can serve many purposes, such as professionalising strategies and stating ethical positions. Furthermore, the ethical code can

express ideas about the nature and content of the funeral director in Zimbabwe as an aspiring profession, its goals and means, and its long-term ideals and strategies.

One emerging theme is the need for knowledge management and sharing within the industry. The pandemic highlighted gaps in knowledge and emphasised the need for ongoing learning and professional development. This suggests that funeral directors may need to update their knowledge through research and upskill or acquire new skills to adapt to new circumstances and challenges.

Another theme is the need for standardisation and collaboration within the industry. The pandemic led to discussions around standard pricing and expectations for funeral directors. This suggests that there may be a push towards greater consistency and transparency in the industry, potentially impacting the code of ethics. Additionally, there were discussions about the role of professional associations, ZAFSA and FUSA, in pushing standardisation and collaboration. The MoH and government may need to develop regulations and enforce greater oversight in collaboration with the professional associations, ZAFSA and FUSA.

Overall, while the pandemic's specific effects on funeral directors' code of ethics are not clear from the study findings, there are indications that the industry is undergoing changes and adaptations in response to the pandemic. These changes may impact the code of ethics in the future as funeral directors transition from occupation to profession.

5.4.5 Effects of the Pandemic on Community Sanctions

The specific effects of the pandemic on community sanction for funeral directors are unclear from the study's findings. However, some effects can be implied to suggest that the pandemic has significantly affected the community sanction of funeral directors. Funeral directors in Zimbabwe have improved community sanctions in the past twenty to thirty years. One of the reasons driving the professionalisation of funeral directors is the need to distance themselves from unscrupulous practices and overcome stigmatisation from body handling and profit-making (Parsons, 1997). Funeral directors in Zimbabwe have been dealing with the same challenge. Every profession aims to gain authority and privileges by persuading the community to sanction their expertise within certain spheres (Greenwood, 1957). In professionalisation, community sanction refers to the community's recognition and acceptance of an occupation (Greenwood, 1957). Occupations can gain community sanction by meeting specific standards and criteria valued by the community.

Funeral directors in Zimbabwe must comply with new regulations and restrictions introduced by the MoH and demonstrate to clients and all relevant stakeholders that they are concerned with public health security, not just profits. This suggests that funeral directors may have had to work harder to maintain community sanction during the pandemic, as they had to navigate new challenges and restrictions. The pandemic has tested the reputation and credibility of funeral directors.

5.4.6 Effects of the pandemic on professional associations

Two professional associations with the funeral industry were already established in Zimbabwe before the COVID-19 pandemic. These are the Zimbabwe Association of Funeral Assurers (ZAFAs), which looks after the interests of companies providing funeral insurance, and the Funeral Services Association (FuSA) for funeral services companies. No significant changes to ZAFAs and FuSA have occurred due to the pandemic. Both associations remained voluntary, and membership did not change in response to the pandemic. Furthermore, it is unclear from the study's findings whether FuSA and ZAFAs are generally accepted and representative of the funeral industry in Zimbabwe. Establishing an organisation to represent funeral service providers and set standards for the industry is needed to ensure the professionalisation of funeral directing in Zimbabwe.

Studies have demonstrated professional associations' critical roles in establishing professional status for occupations as diverse as nursing, journalism and marketing (Thomas & Thomas, 2014). There are four stages in the transformation from a simple occupation to a professional association. The first stage is to organise membership, followed by changing the occupation's name. The third stage involves the development of a code of ethics and, finally, enforcement of occupation barriers during periods of political agitation (Smith, 2020). In the USA, funeral directors' establishment of the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) in 1882 is credited with transforming a relatively open occupation into a more exclusive one (Torres, 1988). The first critical step from an occupation to a profession is establishing a professional association (Caplow, 1954) The professional association's role is to establish a membership policy, thereby restricting the evolving profession to those considered qualified by the association.

To conclude, this section reflects on the taxonomic traits that positively impacted COVID-19, thus pushing the occupation towards professionalisation. Indications are that systematic

theory, code of ethics, and community sanction may have been impacted enough to move the professionalisation of funeral directors.

Systematic theory/body of knowledge: The pandemic revealed the gaps and needs in the knowledge and skills of funeral directors, especially in dealing with infectious diseases and public health protocols. This led to a demand for training and continuous learning among funeral service providers. The role of schools, professional associations, and the Ministry of Health and Child Care in providing education and guidance became more prominent. The pandemic also created research opportunities, and it remains to be seen what publications or articles will be produced by the IFBM and other academic institutions.

Code of ethics: The pandemic challenged funeral directors' ethical standards and practices, as they had to balance bereaved families' needs and preferences with the authorities' regulations and restrictions. This required funeral directors to demonstrate professionalism, transparency, accountability, and compassion. The pandemic also highlighted the need for standardisation and collaboration within the industry, potentially leading to the development of a code of ethics for funeral directors.

Community sanction: The pandemic tested the reputation and credibility of funeral directors, as they had to prove to the community that they were concerned with public health security and not just profits. This required funeral directors to comply with new regulations and restrictions and to provide quality and timely services to their clients. The pandemic also increased the visibility and recognition of funeral directors as essential workers and front liners responding to COVID-19. This also presents established funeral services providers, ZAFSA and FuSA, the opportunity to push for exclusionary closure of their trade.

On the other hand, indications are that authority and professional associations were not significantly impacted by COVID-19 or negatively impacted the professionalisation of funeral directors.

Authority: The pandemic did not increase the authority or autonomy of funeral directors, as they had to follow the directives and guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health and Child Care and other authorities. Funeral directors had little influence or control over the policies and decisions that affected their work. They also faced competition and undercutting from smaller service providers in the industry.

Professional associations: The pandemic did not lead to significant changes or improvements in the professional associations for funeral directors, ZAFSA and FuSA. These associations

remained voluntary, and membership did not change in response to the pandemic. It is not clear whether these associations are representative and accepted by all funeral service providers in Zimbabwe. There is still a need for an organisation that can set standards, enforce regulations, and advocate for the interests of funeral directors.

5.5 Prospects of top-down professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe

Hitherto, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe was bottom-up or driven by the funeral directors themselves. Previous studies of the evolution of full-time occupations to become professions have shown three main pathways: bottom-up, driven by those who are part of the full-time occupation; state-sanctioned or top-down driven by government and instituted through legal frameworks; and hybrid route, which is a combination of the spontaneous and state-sanctioned routes (Neal & Morgan, 2000). The professionalisation of funeral directors in the USA and Canada was expedited at national and local levels by government legal frameworks to protect citizens (Cahill, 1999).

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the crucial role of funeral directors in ensuring public health security. This can motivate the government to regulate the funeral industry by establishing a legal framework that sets funeral service standards, requirements and responsibilities. The professionalisation of funeral directors and the funeral industry seems to be expedited when driven by the state and delayed when left to those in the occupation (Cahill, 1999). The slow professionalisation of funeral directors in countries where it remains a full-time occupation supports this belief. Government interventions that could expedite the professionalisation of funeral directors following the COVID-19 experiences and lessons include licensing and registration of funeral parlours, cemeteries and crematoria, inspection and monitoring of facilities, equipment and practices, enforcement of health, safety and environmental regulations, protection of consumer rights and interests, and the development of a code of conduct and ethics for the funeral industry.

The government can use the sentiment and momentum established during the COVID-19 interactions with the funeral industry to consult and collaborate widely with the funeral industry associations and other stakeholders to ensure that the regulation is effective, fair, and responsive to the sector's needs. Achieving this is more likely following the pandemic, and it has the potential to expedite the professionalisation of funeral directors. The government's leadership in raising public awareness and educating the public on funeral industry

regulations and the benefits of using professional and reputable funeral service providers will likely expedite the professionalisation of funeral directors.

5.6 Updated Research Conceptual Framework

The updated research conceptual framework, presented in Figure 9, highlights the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe. The study adopts Greenwood's (1957) taxonomic approach, revealing that funeral directors in Zimbabwe have not transitioned from an occupation to a semi-profession or full profession.

As discussed in earlier sections, the pandemic has led to increased informal training, both in-house and by independent institutions, due to the realisation that funeral directors lacked the competencies to handle the pandemic. The study also observed a rise in funeral directors' active participation in professional associations such as ZAFSA and FuSA. However, membership remains optional, although the pandemic has accelerated the move towards mandatory membership.

Post-pandemic, the recognition of funeral directors by various stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health and Child Care, local governments, other professionals, and clients, as essential service providers has increased. While funeral directors in Zimbabwe are still not professionals according to the taxonomy approach, evidence from the pandemic's impact on professional traits suggests lasting effects driving the professionalisation process.

The revised conceptual framework integrates the components of a modern profession, which are commitment to public service, continuing professional development, adaptability to change, social recognition and prestige (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2012; Muzio et al., 2011a) with the taxonomic traits. Both perspectives provide valuable insights into the world of professions. The taxonomic approach helps us understand how we classify and regulate different roles; modern approaches highlight the complexities and transformations in modern professions. Together, they offer a fuller picture of what it means to be a professional today. The updated conceptual framework is a hybrid model that cross-pollinates the ideas from the two approaches to develop a more robust framework that infuses detail of what a profession should look like and, at the same time, acknowledges the modern trends that professions must adapt to.

Future assessments of the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe should consider the hybrid model of professionalisation rather than focusing only on taxonomic traits. The model combines the core characteristics of a modern profession and a full

profession according to taxonomic elements and has the specialised knowledge and expertise, ethical standards, regulatory frameworks, professional autonomy, commitment to public service, continuing professional development, professional associations, adaptability to change, social recognition and prestige. This strengthens the traits of the taxonomic approach.

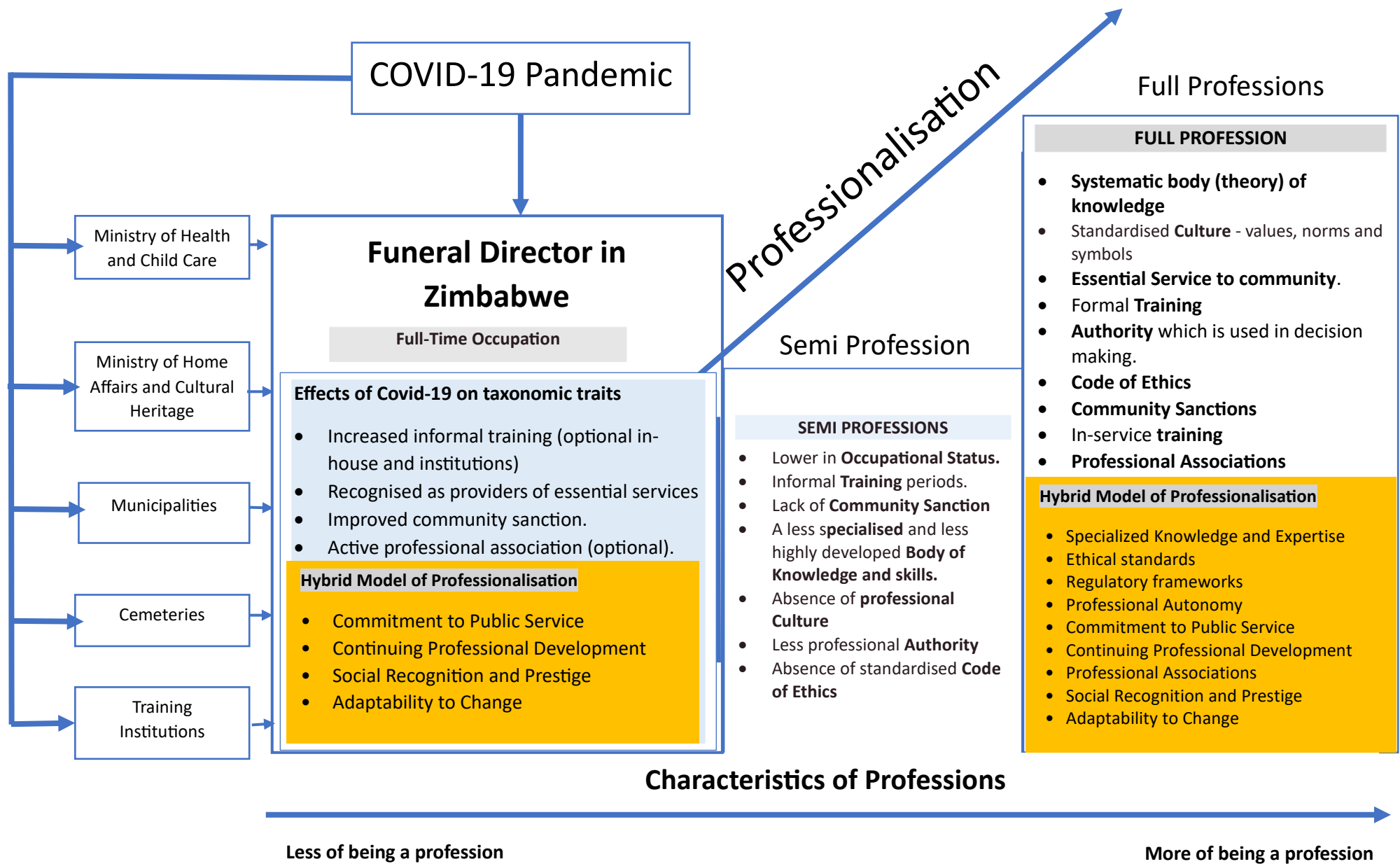


Figure 8: Updated Research Conceptual Framework

5.7 Concluding the discussion

This section summarises the impact of COVID-19 on the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe based on the criteria of professionalisation and the definition of a profession used for this study. According to Smith (2020), the most referenced definition of a profession is an occupation grounded in specialised intellectual education and training, intended to provide expert services or advice to others in exchange for payment or compensation. As expected, the definitions of a profession tend to evolve with the theory being followed. However, all widely accepted definitions suggest that a profession encompasses a recognised body of knowledge, skills, and membership within which it exercises jurisdiction or authority. This definition aligns with the key taxonomic attributes of professions, including systematic theory/body of knowledge, authority, community sanction, ethical codes, and culture. These attributes provide a clear and comprehensive framework for defining and classifying professions (King et al., 2018; Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011). The attributes allow for the identification and comparison of funeral directors' characteristics and functions as a professional group and the descriptive evaluation of their degree of professionalisation. Based on the criteria of professionalisation and the definition of a profession used for this study, the pandemic has positively impacted some aspects, while others have remained unchanged or been negatively affected.

Firstly, one of the criteria that COVID-19 has positively impacted is funeral directors' formal education and training. Due to the increased demand for funeral services and the need to comply with health and safety regulations, funeral directors have had to update their skills and knowledge to carry out their duties effectively. For example, they have had to learn how to handle infectious bodies, use personal protective equipment, conduct virtual arrangements and ceremonies, and provide grief support online. With pandemics predicted to become more frequent and the susceptibility of Zimbabwe to diseases like cholera and dysentery, standard and more regular training is necessary. The funeral industry in Zimbabwe needs to professionalise, focusing on skills and standards. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted funeral directors' insufficient skills and knowledge and the absence of a standard training or qualification programme for funeral directors. The effects of the pandemic on the systematic theory/body of knowledge surrounding funeral directing have been significant, with the pandemic highlighting the importance of knowledge management and sharing.

Another criterion influenced by COVID-19 is the public recognition of funeral directors. The pandemic has demonstrated the essential role that funeral directors play in society,

particularly during times of crisis. Funeral directors have been on the frontline of the pandemic, providing services at personal risk. This has highlighted the significance of these professionals and examined their motivations and job satisfaction. The Ministry of Health and Child Care's acknowledgement of the role of funeral directors in managing the spread of COVID-19 could be significant for the professionalisation of the funeral industry. This will satisfy the community-sanction trait of full professions.

Thirdly, one criterion that has remained unchanged is the autonomy and self-regulation of funeral directors. Professions have associations with the authority to self-regulate. A profession's members must qualify to be admitted to the association and follow a strict code of conduct. Establishing an organisation to represent funeral directors and set standards for its members has not changed because smaller funeral companies are not as willing to surrender control of access to professionals. On the other hand, larger funeral companies are keen to restrict entry into the profession. The two professional associations in the funeral industry in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Association of Funeral Assurers (ZAFA) and the Funeral Services Association (FuSA), remained voluntary. They did not change in response to the pandemic. However, the pandemic has highlighted the need for top-down and bottom-up processes of professionalisation, with the government likely to play a role in driving professionalisation. Funeral companies and their associations, ZAFA and FuSA, should leverage on inroads made during the COVID-19 pandemic and lobby the government for legislation for operating in the industry.

Without certification, anyone can claim the skills and knowledge to be a funeral director. The pandemic has shown the authorities the risks and dangers of this. It also highlighted the need for funeral directors to comply with new regulations and restrictions introduced by the Ministry of Health and Child Care and demonstrate to clients and all relevant stakeholders that they are concerned with public health security, not just profits. The public health security motivation fits very well with the top-down and bottom-up processes of professionalisation.

The taxonomic attributes of a profession have been identified in the case of funeral directing in Zimbabwe. Still, the framework is limited regarding the extent or threshold for professionalisation and objectivity of measure. The traits identified in this study align with the funerals' progression towards the professional ideal. It is, however, challenging to measure objectively; hence, assessment and evaluation might not be conclusive. Furthermore, the taxonomic model has limitations in its application to the distinction between professions and

non-professions. The model implies that all professions require professional licenses or certifications.

The taxonomic model tends to present a static view of professions, not accommodating the evolving nature of professional practices and the influence of organisational contexts, as evidenced in the case of funeral directing in Zimbabwe. Muzio et al. (2011a) emphasises that the taxonomic model does not adequately consider the regulatory frameworks and ethical standards that define professional practice, which are essential for understanding the distinctions between professions and non-professions. These limitations suggest that a more flexible and integrated approach is necessary to accurately represent the complexities of professional classifications and their context requirements, and the taxonomic model does not inherently capture career progression.

The profession's concept based on the taxonomic approach has evolved over the decades and continues to appeal in everyday discourse. It is important to highlight that the issue of trust, which was once taken for granted, is now central to the belief of professions (Dent, 2024). As seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, the public and governments no longer assumed that professions were responsible enough to self-regulate, and some levels of external regulation were legislated. Moreover, the institutional arrangements that define professions are not fixed or rigid, contrary to widely held beliefs (Dent, 2024).

6 Conclusion

This study explored the perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 on the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe. It found that while funeral directors have mixed views on whether their work is a profession, they agree that the pandemic has exposed gaps in their competencies and limited standardisation of practice across the funeral industry. Funeral industry stakeholders agreed that funeral directors in Zimbabwe were not a profession. Like some funeral directors, industry stakeholders believed that funeral directors do not possess the critical traits of a profession and, therefore, cannot claim to be a profession. The study also revealed that funeral industry stakeholders support professionalisation and see the pandemic as an opportunity for collaboration and improvement. This is particularly evident in the tone of the Ministry of Health and Child Care stakeholders. Stakeholders acknowledge the funeral industry's role in the economy as an employer and that funeral directors provide an essential service.

The study suggests that COVID-19 will likely have a lasting effect on the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe by highlighting the need for minimum qualifications for entry, development of a body of knowledge, standardised training, certification and accreditation, and code of ethics. The pandemic revealed that funeral directors lacked the competencies to deal with pandemics and that the industry had minimal standardisation. This is a public health security concern for the Ministry of Health and Child Care and the government in general. ZAFSA and FuSA can lobby for the standardisation of funeral directing and push for mandatory membership. The limited competencies of funeral directors to respond to pandemics, which the pandemic has highlighted, is an opportunity training institutions and colleges have shown interest in, given the increase in number of those calling themselves funeral directors and the possibility that legislation may require them to be registered and certified.

This study contributes to the literature on professionalisation and funeral services by providing empirical evidence from the context of Zimbabwe, a developing country with an emerging funeral industry. It also has practical implications for funeral directors, industry associations, training institutions, and policymakers interested in enhancing the quality and recognition of funeral services. However, the study also has some limitations that warrant further research. First, the study mainly sampled funeral directors and stakeholders who were more available and established, which may have introduced some bias or overlooked some

perspectives. Second, the study was conducted at the tail end of the pandemic in Zimbabwe, which may have influenced the perceptions and responses of the participants due to recency and salience effects. Third, the researcher's position as a senior manager in a large funeral company may have affected the study's design, analysis, and interpretation. Therefore, future research could benefit from expanding the sample size and diversity, conducting post-pandemic follow-ups, and employing multiple researchers to ensure validity and reliability. Future research could further advance our understanding of how pandemics affect professionalisation processes in different contexts and sectors by addressing these gaps.

6.1 Practical contributions to the Funeral Director “profession” in Zimbabwe

This study provides several practical contributions and significant insights into the professionalisation of funeral directors in Zimbabwe. It also sheds light on how funeral directors can use the lessons from the pandemic to enhance their professionalisation. Some of the key contributions to emerge are:

- **Enhanced Training and Competency Development:** The study highlights the critical gaps in competencies among funeral directors, particularly in handling pandemics. Whilst this has contributed to increased informal training initiatives and the involvement of independent institutions, formalisation of the training and accreditation is essential for professionalisation. The findings can guide the development of formal training programs, ensuring that funeral directors are better equipped to handle future crises.
- **Standardisation of Practices:** By identifying the lack of standardisation in the funeral industry, the research underscores the need for uniform practices. This can drive the creation of standard operating procedures and guidelines, improving service quality and consistency across the industry.
- **Professional Associations and Mandatory Membership:** The study's findings on the increased participation in professional associations like ZAFSA and FuSA and the push towards mandatory membership can help these associations advocate for regulatory changes. This will enhance the credibility and recognition of funeral directors as professionals. This will probably face resistance from small, local, and family-run funeral homes as it benefits larger and more established funeral companies.
- **Recognition as Essential Service Providers:** The research has highlighted the essential role of funeral directors in public health and the economy. Management and control of the pandemic will require competent funeral directors who understand their role in public health security. This recognition by stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health and

Child Care and local governments, can lead to better support and more resources for the industry, further professionalising the role of funeral directors.

- **Policy and Legislative Influence:** The study's evidence on the need for minimum qualifications, certification, and accreditation can inform policymakers. This can lead to establishing regulatory frameworks that ensure all funeral directors meet specific professional standards, thereby protecting public health and enhancing the industry's reputation.
- **Economic and Employment Impact:** By acknowledging the funeral industry's role as a significant employer, the research highlights its economic importance. This can attract investment and support from both the government and private sector, fostering growth and development within the industry.
- **Public Health Security:** The study's emphasis on the public health implications of unstandardised funeral practices can prompt the Ministry of Health and Child Care to act. This can improve public health security measures and better preparedness for future pandemics.

Overall, this research contributes to the academic literature on professionalisation and offers practical insights and recommendations that can drive meaningful change in the funeral industry in Zimbabwe.

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Annexes

A. Research Ethical Approval

Message sent on behalf of the Chair of the Schools of Business, Law and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dear Mavis

Thank you for the recent resubmission of your research ethics application (no. 2022/94) to the Schools of Business, Law and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BLSS REC) on 11 April 2022 requesting an ethics opinion for the project entitled: *Has the COVID-19 Pandemic Enhanced the Professionalisation of Funeral Directors in Zimbabwe?*

Following resubmission, we are pleased to inform you that the reviewers were happy to verify that in their judgement there were no outstanding ethical concerns that required further discussion or exploration prior to data collection and as a result the Committee is satisfied that your research ethics application has met with a favourable ethics opinion*.

The favourable ethics opinion of your application is valid until **31 December 2022**. Should your project extend beyond this time then an application for an extension would need to be submitted to the BLSS REC.

Receipt of a favourable ethics opinion does not constitute permission to proceed with the research. A 'breach of integrity' would technically occur if the researcher goes ahead with the project without the correct governance approvals being in place first, which could be considered to be Research Misconduct.

REC documentation should require an explicit commitment from research teams to consider the possible impact that any changes to their research project, but in particular changes to research design and methods of data collection, have on research ethics; and, therefore, whether a follow-up ethics review of a substantial amendment is required. If researchers are unsure, they should discuss the matter with their REC Chair in the first instance.

Examples of substantial changes that would require a research ethics application for review of a substantial amendment include:

- (i) the safety or physical or mental integrity of the research participants (normally requiring amendments to information sheets, consent forms and other participant facing documents);
- (ii) the scientific value of the study (normally requiring changes to the study methods);
- (iii) the conduct or management of the study, (this might include changes in recruitment strategies, data management, or changes that might affect risk assessment);
- (iv) the quality or safety of any equipment used in the study.

We would like to wish you well in the completion of your project.

Sent on behalf of

Chair BLSS REC

B. Interview Guide A: Senior Management of Funeral Company in Zimbabwe

Specific objective 1:

To examine the perceptions of the management of funeral companies on how COVID-19 has impacted the professionalisation of funeral directors.

- How long have you been in the funeral industry?
- In your opinion, is funeral directing in Zimbabwe a profession? Please explain why.
- What has been the impact of COVID-19 on the funeral industry?
- What regulations have been introduced for the funeral industry in response to the pandemic? Who has introduced them?
- How are the regulations being enforced? Who is enforcing the regulations? What role do ZAFSA, FuSA, and the management of funeral companies play?
- Have these regulations changed how funeral directors work? What has changed? What new standards have been introduced by your company?
- What competencies did funeral directors lack to respond to COVID?
- Comment on the impact of COVID-19 on:
 - Education, training and minimum entry requirements of funeral directors
 - Self-regulation of funeral directors, professional authority and code of ethics
 - Body of theory, research and knowledge management
 - Adaptive management to protect clients and funeral directors.
- Has the COVID-19 pandemic put into focus the need for minimum training in public health for funeral directors?
- Tell me about meetings with the Ministry of Health during the pandemic. Did the funeral industry or funeral Directors feel the need to defend themselves or their competencies in meetings with MoH officials during the pandemic? Were the meetings useful?

Specific objective 2:

To postulate whether the impact of COVID-19-inspired changes in funeral guidelines and regulations will have a lasting effect on the professionalisation of Funeral Directors in Zimbabwe.

- Have the regulations introduced to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the professionalisation of Funeral Directors? Why do you say so?
- Are the changes in the Funeral Industry to reduce the spread of COVID-19 likely to remain beyond the end of the pandemic? Why do you say so?
- How does this disruption (COVID-19 pandemic) impact management planning and decision-making?
- Now that clients have been exposed to cheaper and less elaborate funerals, will this spending less on funerals continue to affect the funeral industry post-pandemic?
- What are the indications of budgetary impact for the funeral industry?
- Similar pandemics of highly infectious diseases like COVID, Ebola and Smallpox are predicted to occur more frequently. Is the funeral industry prepared? Why do you say so?
- Who should drive the professionalisation of FD?

C. Interview guide B: Ministry of Health and Child Care, Ministry of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage, and Municipalities

Specific objective 1:

To examine the perceptions of key stakeholders in the public health domain, the Ministry of Health and Childcare, the Ministry of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage, and Municipalities, on how COVID-19 has impacted the professionalisation of Funeral Directors.


1. Tell me about your role in public health and interactions with the funeral industry/ funeral directors.
2. In your opinion, is funeral directing in Zimbabwe a profession? Please explain why.
3. With regards to funerals and the funeral industry, how have you, as public health decision-makers, responded to the pandemic? What regulation have you introduced? Has your interaction with funeral directors changed?
4. Have these guidelines and regulations changed how funeral directors work? Are funeral directors complying? What new standards have you introduced?
5. How are ZAFA and FuSA contributing to enforcement and compliance?
6. Comment on the impact of COVID-19 on:
 - a. Education, training, and minimum entry requirements of funeral directors
 - b. Self-regulation, professional authority and code of ethics
 - c. Body of theory, research and knowledge management
 - d. Adaptive management to protect clients and funeral directors.
7. Has the COVID-19 pandemic brought into focus the need for minimum public health training for funeral directors?

Specific objective 2:

To postulate whether the impact of COVID-19-inspired changes in funeral guidelines and regulations will have a lasting effect on the professionalisation of Funeral Directors in Zimbabwe.

8. Have new regulations following the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the professionalisation of funeral directors?
9. Are the changes in response to COVID-19, to reduce the post-mortem spread, likely to remain beyond the end of the pandemic? How are these enforced?
10. Similar pandemics of highly infectious diseases, like COVID-19 and Ebola, are predicted to occur more frequently. What is the likelihood that the guidelines and regulations introduced because of COVID-19 will institute a standard way of doing things by all funeral directors?
11. How will you protect the industry and clients from those who are lured to the sector by recent growth?
12. Will enforcement and compliance continue?
13. What are the indications of budgetary impact on the funeral industry?


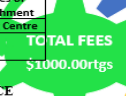

D. IFBM Training Calendar


INSTITUTE OF FUNERAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
IFBM TRAINING CALENDER 2020 INTAKES

JANUARY INTAKE


1. MORTUARY SCIENCE (MORTICIANS, UNDERTAKERS/ DRIVERS-SERVICES PEOPLE)

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	DATES	VENUE
1.	Registration	15 December 2019 to 20 January 2020	Telone Training Centre
2.	Tutorials	25 January 2020 29 February 2020 28 March 2020	Telone Training Centre
3.	Practical Assessment	17 April 2020	Respective Places of Industrial Attachment
4.	Examination	25 April 2020	Telone Training Centre
5.	Results	15 May 2020	IFBM Offices


REGISTRATION FEES \$100.00 rtdgs

TOTAL FEES \$1000.00 rtdgs

INCLUSIVE OF TUITION, TUTORIALS AND EXAMINATION FEES


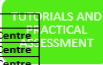


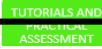

2. CERTIFICATE OF PROCIENCY IN FUNERAL ASSURANCE (SALES AGENTS, UNDRWRITERS, CUSTOMER SERVICES, CLAIMS)

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	DATES	VENUE
1.	Registration	15 December 2019 to 20 January 2020	Telone Training Centre
2.	Tutorials	25 January 2020 29 February 2020 28 March 2020	Telone Training Centre
3.	Examination	25 April 2020	Telone Training Centre
4.	Results	15 May 2020	IFBM Offices


INSTITUTE OF FUNERAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
MARCH INTAKE

1. MORTUARY SCIENCE (MORTICIANS, UNDERTAKERS/ DRIVERS-SERVICES PEOPLE)

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	PERIOD	VENUE
1.	Registration	1 February to 20 March 2020	Telone Training Centre
2.	Tutorials	28 March 2020 25 April 2020 30 May 2020	Telone Training Centre
3.	Practical Assessments	17 June 2020	Respective Places of Industrial Attachment
4.	Examination Dates	27 June 2020	Tel One Training Centre
5.	Results	17 July 2020	IFBM Offices


REGISTRATION FEES \$100.00 rtdgs

TUTORIALS AND PRACTICAL ASSESSMENT

EXAMINATION

REGISTRATION FEES \$100.00 rtdgs

TUTORIALS AND PRACTICAL ASSESSMENT

TOTAL FEES \$1000.00 rtdgs

2. CERTIFICATE OF PROCIENCY IN FUNERAL ASSURANCE (SALES AGENTS, UNDRWRITERS, CUSTOMER SERVICES, CLAIMS)

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	PERIOD	VENUE
1.	Registration	1 February to 20 March 2020	Telone Training Centre
2.	Tutorials	28 March 2020 25 April 2020 30 May 2020	Telone Training Centre
3.	Examination Dates	27 June 2020	Tel One Training Centre
4.	Results	17 July 2020	IFBM Offices

MAY INTAKE

1. MORTUARY SCIENCE (MORTICIANS, UNDERTAKERS/ DRIVERS-SERVICES PEOPLE)

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	DATES	VENUE
1.	Registration	1 April to 20 May 2020	Telone Training Centre
2.	Tutorial Classes	30 May 2020	Telone Training Centre
		27 June 2020	Telone Training Centre
		25 July 2020	Telone Training Centre
3.	Practical Assessments	14 August 2020	Respective Places of Industrial Attachment
4.	Examination Dates	29 August 2020	Tel One Training Centre
5.	Results	18 September 2020	IFBM Offices

2. CERTIFICATE OF PROFICIENCY IN FUNERAL ASSURANCE (SALES AGENTS, UNDRWRITERS, CUSTOMER SERVICES, CLAIMS)

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	DATES	VENUE
1.	Registration	1 April to 20 May 2020	Telone Training Centre
2.	Tutorial Classes	30 May 2020	Telone Training Centre
		27 June 2020	Telone Training Centre
		25 July 2020	Telone Training Centre
3.	Examination Dates	29 August 2020	Tel One Training Centre
4.	Results	18 September 2020	IFBM Offices

JULY INTAKE

1. MORTUARY SCIENCE (MORTICIANS, UNDERTAKERS/ DRIVERS-SERVICES PEOPLE)

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	DATES	VENUE
1.	Registration	1 June to 20 July 2020	Telone Training Centre
2.	Tutorial Classes	25 July 2020	Telone Training Centre
		29 August 2020	Telone Training Centre
		26 September 2020	Telone Training Centre
3.	Practical Assessment	16 October 2020	Respective Places of Industrial Attachment
4.	Examination Dates	31 October 2020	Tel One Training Centre
5.	Results	13 November 2020	IFBM Offices

2. CERTIFICATE OF PROFICIENCY IN FUNERAL ASSURANCE (SALES AGENTS, UNDRWRITERS, CUSTOMER SERVICES, CLAIMS)

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	DATES	VENUE
1.	Registration	1 June to 20 July 2020	Telone Training Centre
2.	Tutorial Classes	25 July 2020	Telone Training Centre
		29 August 2020	Telone Training Centre
		26 September 2020	Telone Training Centre
3.	Examination Dates	31 October 2020	Tel One Training Centre
4.	Results	13 November 2020	IFBM Offices

E.

SEPTEMBER INTAKE

1. MORTUARY SCIENCE (MORTICIANS, UNDERTAKERS/ DRIVERS-SERVICES PEOPLE)

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	DATES	VENUE
1.	Registration	1 August to 20 September 2020	Telone Training Centre
2.	Tutorial Classes	26 September 2020	Telone Training Centre
		31 October 2020	Telone Training Centre
		28 November 2020	Telone Training Centre
3.	Practical Assessment	11 December 2020	Respective Places of Industrial Attachment
4.	Examination Dates	15 December 2020	Tel One Training Centre
5.	Results	15 January 2021	IFBM Offices

**2. CERTIFICATE OF PROFICIENCY IN FUNERAL ASSURANCE
(SALES AGENTS, UNDERWRITERS, CUSTOMER SERVICES, CLAIMS)**

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	DATES	VENUE
1.	Registration	1 August to 20 September 2020	Telone Training Centre
2.	Tutorial Classes	26 September 2020	Telone Training Centre
		31 October 2020	Telone Training Centre
		28 November 2020	Telone Training Centre
3.	Examination Dates	15 December 2020	Tel One Training Centre
4.	Results	15 January 2021	IFBM Offices

NOVEMBER INTAKE

1. MORTUARY SCIENCE (MORTICIANS, UNDERTAKERS/ DRIVERS-SERVICES PEOPLE)

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	DATES	VENUE
1.	Registration	1 October to 20 November 2020	Telone Training Centre
2.	Tutorial Classes	28 November 2020	Telone Training Centre
		19 December 2020	Telone Training Centre
		30 January 2021	Telone Training Centre
3.	Practical Assessment	19 February 2021	Respective Places of Industrial Attachment
4.	Examination Dates	27 February 2021	Tel One Training Centre
5.	Results	12 March 2021	IFBM Offices

**2. CERTIFICATE OF PROFICIENCY IN FUNERAL ASSURANCE
(SALES AGENTS, UNDERWRITERS, CUSTOMER SERVICES, CLAIMS)**

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	DATES	VENUE
1.	Registration	1 October to 20 November 2020	Telone Training Centre
2.	Tutorial Classes	28 November 2020	Telone Training Centre
		19 December 2020	Telone Training Centre
		30 January 2021	Telone Training Centre
3.	Examination Dates	27 February 2021	Tel One Training Centre
4.	Results	12 March 2021	IFBM Offices

TRAINING CALENDAR FOR SHORT COURSES

DATE	COURSE	TARGET MARKET	VENUE
24 January 2020	Customer Service Excellency a Funeral Industry Perspective	Sales Agents, Underwriting Personnel, Front Office Managers, Claims Officers, Undertakers, switchboard Operators	Tel One Training Centre
14 February 2020	Stress Management	All Funeral Practitioners	Tel One Training Centre
28 February 2020	Wellness and enhanced Self Esteem	Morticians, Undertakers and Operations Managers, Claims Officers, Accountants, Finance, Administrators	Tel One Training Centre
20 March 2020	Premium Collection Management & Claims Processing Management	Sales agents, underwriting staff, frontline officers, claims officers, undertakers	Tel One Training Centre
10 April 2020	Infectious Diseases Management for Funeral Practitioners	Morticians, Undertakers and Operations Managers	Tel One Training Centre
24 April 2020	Stress Management	All Funeral Practitioners	Tel One Training Centre
22 May 2020	Customer Service Excellency a Funeral Industry Perspective	Sales Agents, Underwriting Personnel, Front Office Managers, Claims Officers, Undertakers, switchboard Operators	Tel One Training Centre
19 June 2019	Stress Management	All Funeral Practitioners	Tel One Training Centre
17 July 2020	Selling and Marketing Skills for Funeral Products	Sales and Marketing Practitioners, Public Relations Managers, Sales and Policies Agents	Tel One Training Centre
21 August 2020	Wellness and enhanced Self Esteem	Morticians, Undertakers and Operations Managers	Tel One Training Centre

- Learning Structure
- Short courses/ Training Workshops
- First Session: 8am to 10am
- Breaking Session: 10.30- 11am (Tea Provided)
- Second Session: 11am-1pm
- Breaking Session: 1pm- 2pm (Lunch Provided)
- Third Session: 2pm- 4pm
- Stationery is provided.
- Certificate of Attendance Issued
- COST \$350.00RTGS

25 September 2020	Stress Management	All Funeral Practitioners	Tel One Training Centre
30 October 2020	Infectious Diseases Management for Funeral Practitioners	Morticians, Undertakers and Operations Managers	Tel One Training Centre
27 November 2020	Premium Collection Management & Claims Processing Management	Sales agents, underwriting staff, frontline officers, claims officers, undertakers	Tel One Training Centre
18 December 2020	IFBM 2 ND GRADUATION CEREMONY	FINISHED STUDENTS	TBA

NB: IFBM IS FLEXIBLE TO CONDUCT INHOUSE TRAININGS & TAILOR MAKE FUNERAL RELATED COURSES FOR YOUR ORGANISATIONS

THANK YOU FOR YOURSUPPORT