

SINGLE MOTHERHOOD AND POVERTY LEVEL IN KENYA

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July 2019

1.1 Background of the study

Single motherhood, particularly its causes and consequences, has not received considerable attention in Kenya. The challenges facing single mothers are daunting, high levels of unemployment and extreme poverty place many mothers in precarious positions struggling to pay for food, shelter, and other basic necessities critical for the health and well-being of their children. Children living in such contexts require high levels of supervision as the environment is fraught with extraordinary dangers stemming from poor sanitation, accidents, violence, drugs and alcohol abuse.

Increased conjugal instability and declining rates of marriage have resulted in a significant increase of the number of single-mother families (Le Bourdais and Lapierre Adamcyk 2008), which have been shown to have adverse effects across a number of developmental domains of individuals' lives (Heard, Gorman and Kapinus 2008). In addition, recent research suggests that not only do family structures have an immediate effect on children's well-being, but they may also be responsible for the intergenerational transmission of racial, gender, and economic inequalities (McLanahan and Percheski 2008).

In Kenya, however, research on single parenthood, per se, is surprisingly limited. Instead there is a tradition of studying female-headed households (Buvinic and Gupta 1997; Katapa 2006; Quisumbing, Haddad and Pena 1995). Of course, in many instances female heads of households are virtually synonymous with being a single mother, as many female household heads are unmarried women with young children. Despite the limited research on single-motherhood, research on premarital fertility, divorce, and widowhood, all suggests that rates of single

motherhood may be relatively high and possibly rising throughout Kenya. There are three main ways in which a woman may become a single mother. First, a woman may give birth before she is married. Premarital childbearing in Kenya is quite common especially in urban areas such as Busia and Bungoma counties associated with bodaboda riders.

A second pathway into single motherhood is through separation or divorce. Several studies have documented a rather astonishing rise in the rates of divorce in Africa (Blanc and Lloyd 1994; Hutchinson 1990; Lloyd and Gage-Brandon 1993; Mbugua 1992; Takyi 2001; Takyi and Gymiah 2007). Even in countries where divorce was historically extremely rare, like Nigeria, today an estimated 15% of ever-married women have been divorced (Isiugo-Abanihe1998), in high divorce countries like Ghana, divorce rates rose from about 45% in the 1970s to over 65% by the late 1980s among ever-married women aged 35-49 (Gage and Njogu 1994). By the age of 50 only about half of women living in Togo are still in their first marriage (Locohand Thiriat 1995) and about 45% of marriages in Ethiopia will eventually end in divorce (Tilsonand Larsen 2000).Modernization and urbanization have brought about increasing levels of women's autonomy and greater participation in gainful employment which may contribute to the rise in divorce rates (Takyi2006).

In Ethiopia, for example, girls who marry before the age of 15 are significantly more likely to get divorced (Tilson and Larsen 2000), while in Mozambique women who marry before the age of 18 have a 24% higher risk of getting divorced than those who marry at age 25 or older (Arnaldo 2004). Lastly, several studies find a large and positive effect of being childless on the probability of divorce

(Takyi 2006; Tilson and Larsen 2000). Of course, both childless women and women with adult children would not be considered single mothers.

Lastly, women may become single mothers following the death of a spouse. Older widows may have adult children who are no longer residing in the household and, in fact, these adult children may be an important source of economic assistance to their mothers. Yet, given the relatively low life expectancy for men in Kenya, the typically large age differences between husbands and wives, and the of childbearing throughout women's reproductive years, a sizeable proportion of widows are left with the care of younger children. This situation appears to be worsening in areas hit by the AIDS and cancer epidemic where life expectancy for both men and women has actually fallen.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Poverty reduction has been a major concern of development policy in Kenya and in the view of the social costs associated with poverty; its reduction is an important goal for development policy. Since independence the government identified poverty as a major problem and many policies, programmes and projects have been designed and implemented with the aim of poverty alleviation. In furthering this goal, the study investigates the relationship between poverty levels and single mother hood in Kenya with the objective of coming up with strategies that can reduce poverty in female headed households in Kenya. Strategies aimed at poverty reduction need to identify factors that are strongly associated with poverty and that are amenable to modification by policy.

According to Kotwal and Prabhakar (2009) the role of single parents is challenging especially where family is headed by a woman. The difficulties experienced by

single mothers are associated with nurturing the children, providing basic needs to the children. They are faced with several problems ranging from society discrimination, economic and social stress.

The proposed study therefore seeks to explore the relationship between single motherhood and poverty level in Kenya society and how do they endeavor to cope with these challenges from poverty. Although several studies have been done on the poverty levels in Kenya, the contemporary conceptualization of single motherhood poverty in modern day Kenya has not been highlighted. There is need to assess the levels of poverty in single mothers family so as to help them cope with the social-economic aspect.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The general purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between single motherhood and poverty level in Kenya

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the impact of poverty to single mothers?
2. What are the mechanisms that single mothers use to manage poverty levels?
3. What are the coping mechanisms used by single mothers?
4. What are the challenges faced by single mothers?

1.5 Objectives of the Research

The aim of this research is to explore the nature and the extent single motherhood and poverty level in Kenya. The dissertation will also explore the extent of poverty levels in single motherhood generation.

The objectives of the research are:

1. To identify the impact of poverty to single motherhood

2. To identify the mechanisms that single mothers use to manage the uncertainty arising from poverty
3. To identify the coping mechanisms used by single mothers
4. To identify challenges faced by single mothers

1.6 Justification of the study

The study would of great importance awareness on the need of engaging single mothers in gainful economic activities and also have a database of their children to train them on values and norms.

1.7 Scope and limitation of the study

The research limited itself to the study of single mothers and poverty levels in Kenya. The study concentrated in understanding the concept of single motherhood and poverty in Kenya. Furthermore the study restricted itself to social and emotional challenges faced by single mothers in Kenya and their coping mechanism.

1.8 Value of the study

i. To the Policymakers

Decision makers at the various levels of government will gain value added information on the various classes of poverty levels. The government of Kenya will also be able to understand how family breakdown impacts on its people productivity and economic growth.

This study is also significant to policy makers of the Republic of Kenya. As most government resources are not allocated appropriately, it is anticipated that policy makers will replicate findings from the study that best suit the Kenya scenario which will improve social-economic status of single mothers.

ii. To the Academicians

The findings will be beneficial to future researchers and academic institutions, especially those of higher learning can use the findings of this research as a source for future reference

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

In this paper, the researcher explores the prevalence and pathways into single motherhood and poverty across Kenya. Researcher primary research question is what the poverty levels in woman headed household are is. In addition, the researcher compares and contrasts poverty levels with the relative importance of entry into single motherhood before marriage and following a marital disruption in Kenya.

To explore single motherhood over the life course, the researcher rely on retrospective marital history calendar data from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) conducted in Kenya (2003). While these data represent a clear improvement over purely cross-sectional data, they also present some serious challenges and limitations. Most notably the monthly calendar data only cover the last five years prior to the survey. In addition, while the survey collects the date of first marriage for all ever-married women, it does not collect the date of first marital dissolution, if this disruption occurred before the start of the calendar.

2.2 Parenting

According to Booth and Booth (1988) parenting is a social process that is negotiable and flexible. Brisbane (1988) defines parenting as the process of caring of offspring and assisting them to grow and learn life skills. It includes all the aspects of bringing up a child physically, financially and socially. Further research has shown that parental supervision, positive modeling and support which are functions of provision and parental presence are linked to lower anti-social activities and improved academic performance among the children Miller (1988)

2.3 Poverty

Poverty is a complex societal issue; according to World Bank Organization poverty is hunger, poverty is lack of shelter, poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor and poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty has many faces, changing from place to place and across time, and has been described in many ways. Most often, poverty is a situation people want to escape. So poverty is a call to action for the poor and the wealthy alike a call to change the world so that many more may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health, protection from violence, and a voice in what happens in their communities.

2.3.1 Poverty as label

Various theorists believe the way poverty is approached, defined, and thus thought about, plays a role in its perpetuation. Maia Green (2006) explains that modern development literature tends to view poverty as agency filled. When poverty is prescribed agency, poverty becomes something that happens to people. Poverty absorbs people into itself and the people, in turn, become a part of poverty, devoid of their human characteristics. In the same way, poverty, according to Green, is viewed as an object in which all social relations are obscured.

2.4 Social-economic challenges faced by single mothers

According to Kotwal and Prabhakar (2009) mainly the households that are headed by a single mother, the life of that family is a challenging one. The problems are connected to rearing the children, their future and settling down in life as a single

parent. Single mother faces a number of challenges ranging from economic, social and emotional stress.

2.5 Coping mechanism

From the existing literature, it is observed single mothers face challenges ranging from economic, emotional and social stress. With all these problems their families end up living in poverty compared to families with both parents. Since financial crisis is the major challenge among the single mothers, they should seek financial advice from the experts and other extended family members, as well as government organisation such as women enterprise fund.

2.6 Theoretical framework

The study hypothesises that single parenting leads to an increase in poverty levels in Kenya. To support the argument of this position, the researcher draws from four theories: cultural theory, resource dependency theory, structural functionalism theory and pathological theory.

2.6.1 Cultural theory

The cultural theory of poverty explains the persistence of poverty as a product of the culture of poverty. The culture of poverty became a strong idea in the war on poverty, (Oscar Lewis and Oliver La Farge 1959) on their study of poor Latin American families in an effort to explain the similarities between lower class families in Mexico and Puerto Rico. The culture of poverty presupposes that the poor has unique patterns of behavior and priorities of values that distinguish them and these unique characteristics always cause them to be trapped by poverty. That is a set of values are transmitted intergenerationally through the process of socialization and have become the sub-cultural determinants of the lower socio-economic status of the poor and this leads to a vicious cycle of poverty and is only a few who are able to get out of the poverty cycle.

2.6.2 Resource Dependency Theory

According to (Hillman, Canella and Paetzold 2000) contend that resource dependency theory focuses on the role that leaders play in providing or securing essential resources to the country through their linkages to the external environment. Indeed, (Johnson et al, 1996) concurs that resource dependency theorists provide focus on the appointment of representatives of independent organizations as a means for gaining access in resources critical to firm success.

2.6.3 Structural functionalism theory

Structural functionalism proposed by Herbert Spencer and Talcott Parsons see society as a complex system whose part works together to promote stability and solidarity. This approach sees the society on micro- level, which is a broad factor that shapes the society. This theory basically emphasizes working together as a system to promote stability and solidarity. If the family is broken from two parent family to a single parent family especially mother, she is left struggling, the stability and solidarity of the family is broken and effective parenting is not guaranteed thus making this theory relevant.

2.6.4 Pathological theory

Pathological theory (blame the victim) explains poverty as a result of the attributes that are inherent in the individual which includes the character of the person as well as his or her personal abilities in life such as intelligence. That is to say people are poor in life because of their inabilities to compete with others for resources. As a result of this, they end up being caught up in poverty and its associated effects.

This theory sees the cause of poverty as something that the individual is born with and for that matter cannot do anything about the situation and as a result, his or her life is being determined by his present condition. Another view of this theory that is related to pathology also sees poverty to be as a result of acquired or developed

personality traits such as the character and actions of people. Some people are born with the character of being lazy and as a result of that, they are not willing to participate meaningful in life and for that matter depends on others for assistance in life. An example is the case of single mother without the support of any member of the family. Such an individual is likely to be ensnared by poverty and its associated effects.

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