

Experiences Of Single Mothers Raising Children At Kware, Ongata Rongai Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract:

The process of parenting has been changing over time with single parenting becoming an increasingly acceptable phenomenon in the contemporary society. A number of households in Kenya are female headed hence the focus on single mothers in this study. The motivation and purpose of the research was to find out the demographic factors impacting single support systems and the coping techniques of single mothers raising their children at Kware, Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County.

Materials and Methods:

The participants were selected using purposive and snowball techniques. Twenty participants were selected. The study adopted qualitative research method, utilizing in- depth interviews, to collect data. The research looked at the demographic factors such as age educational background, income level, spirituality, economic, social and emotional experiences of single mothers. It also examined the existing avenues of support and assessed the coping techniques the single mothers applied. The study used descriptive design to gather qualitative data with the help of an interview guide as the main instrument. The study was based on Dr. Murray Bowen's family systems theory which is connected with individual's experience in a family. The researcher expected the results to give some insights that could help in mitigation of some of the challenges single mothers' experiences.

The only positive result from the study was the satisfaction that no one interfered on how the single mothers in Kware lived with their children.

Results:

The study findings revealed demographic factors such as low level of education contributed to low income levels and lack of steady jobs which lead to irregular incomes. Another outcome of the study was that due to financial difficulties, single mothers raising their children in Kware Ongata Rongai had negative experiences on economic, social and emotional which lead to shame, disrespect, loneliness, stigmatization, criticism, guilt, anxiety, stress fear, low self-esteem and hidden lifestyle. Finally the study established that single mothers relied on their own hard work and any social support came from family members, neighbors and friends whom were neither consistent nor dependable and may not necessarily improve the economic circumstances of single mothers raising their children in Kware, Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County, Kenya.

Conclusion:

The coping techniques used by single mothers in Kware, Rongai, were mainly resilience and spirituality.

Key Word: Experiences, Single Mothers, Raising Children.

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I. Introduction

This study presents the background information on single mothers bringing up their children at Kware, in Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County. It also contains the statement of the problem, objectives, questions, scope and delimitations of the study.

Parenting is one of the functions in a family where individuals are shaped to take up adult responsibilities as respectable citizens. It varies depending on ethnicity, class and gender which bring about hierarchical differences (Berg & Peltola, 2015). Majority of people find parenting to be a significantly emotional part of their daily lives (Berg & Peltola, 2015). Historically, divorce was generally rare although sometimes that depended on culture and the respective era. The strong involvement of ecclesiastical courts in family life made divorce especially difficult to obtain after the fall of the Roman Empire in Medieval Europe (Stephen & Uedisi, 2016).

In this study, a single mother is the primary caregiver with whom the child spends time with (Dowd, 2000). The challenges of single mothers are increasing globally. About 15% of children, globally, are from single parent families with majority of the families are being headed by female individuals (Kim, Lee, & Lee,

2018). The female headed households have a likelihood of being in danger of extreme poverty which may contribute to negative development of the emotional intelligence of their children (Kim & Lee, 2018). In 2010, South Korea had approximately 35,000 single mothers with a constant increase since then. The increasing number of single mothers in Korea has played a role to encourage the mothers to raise their children by themselves as opposed to giving them up for adoption (Kim, Lee, & Lee, 2018).

In this study, factors such as divorce, abandonment, being widowed, non-marital birth and single parent adoption contribute to single motherhood (Amato, 2000). Stress which is experienced in parenting has been found to differ considering actual parenting demands and one's available personal resources (Sepa, Frodi, & Ludvigsson, 2004). Different hardships, however, lead to varying parenting experiences (Albelda, Himmelweit, & Humphries, 2004). Many single mothers suffer moral reproach or criticism for raising children outside marriage. However, attitudes are shaped by the political, economic, cultural and national backgrounds as further claimed by Albelda, Himmelweit, and Humphries (2004).

Historically, practices such as discrimination and inequality carried out in the Irish State throughout the twentieth century against the unmarried mothers and their children criminalized single mothers (Garrett, 2000). The mothers were classified into two categories, namely, those who were able to reform or first offenders and the less hopeful cases or residue (Garrett, 2000). Discrimination and inequality practices encouraged a period of detention to be fitting for the less hopeful cases, which was primarily of benefit to the single mother and her child (Garrett, 2000). The practice further exposed single mothers to a number of disadvantages such as a sense of shame and guilt and long periods of time in incarceration or punishment in detention. For fear of incarceration, many single pregnant mothers migrated to England in order to give birth there and give out their children for adoption. Patriarchal power was reinforced in both countries through the practice of secrecy or anonymous birth fathers which protected men and their male reputation while single mothers experienced psychological distress (Garrett, 2000).

Korobtseva (2006) asserts that single mothers in Japan experienced economic and legal disadvantages because the labor environment was not friendly to women, especially for single mothers. However, the labor market situation of women has gotten better in the past couple of decades. The gap in earnings between men and women has also reduced. As a result, there seems to be an improvement in the experience of single mothers while raising their children in Japan (Rebick, 2006).

It has been extensively argued, in Poland, that parenting comes with both pressures and demands (Baranowska-Rataj, Matysia & Mynasrska, 2014). Having children may raise the adults' level of happiness though sometimes feelings of anxiety may be experienced leading to psychological distress. The authors also suggest that single mothers raising their children may encounter experiences which may negatively affect their psychological wellbeing. Married parents generally enjoy benefits such as sharing financial and emotional efforts involved in the raising of a child, while most single parents, especially women, do not receive such support (Baranowska-Rataj, et al., 2014). Single mothers have been found to experience comparatively more stress in parenting due to the differences in resources such as education, financial and emotional resources (Varner & Mandara, 2014).

The findings in a secondary analysis which examined destitute, street single black mothers from ages 18 to 35 years in Wilmington, Delaware, in the United States of America, suggested that social reproduction of attitude towards single mothers was evident as those who were raised by single mothers were then raising their own children (Hitchens, & Payne, 2017). The findings also displayed the fact that homes where women are the heads are as a result of structural forces of inequality, which drive black men with low-income from their homes making marriage not possible for most black women in low-income areas. This reality is one of the factors that have led to single motherhood.

A study carried out in the North West province of South Africa in 2015 revealed that some women under the age of 18 years became single mothers unintentionally and out of ignorance (Mturi, 2015). Some of the factors included wrong and infrequent use of contraception, external pressure, and rape. These single mothers got some support during pregnancy and after delivery mainly from family members and also from the government in the form of grants. These single mothers are legally allowed to stay in school until they deliver and may also return after delivery. Therefore, only minimum disruption is expected in the school attendance of the teenage mothers. This study came up with recommendations such as revisiting of life orientation programs in schools which should be made more effective in delivering education on sexual education. Young single women who are sexually active would be motivated to use contraception properly. The use of abortion services was to be advocated for as an option and measures would be put in place to improve communication in sexual matters between mothers and their daughters (Mturi, 2015). The researcher further reported that although abortion was legal in the country, it was unpopular thus childbearing by young women was very common.

Historical research and interviews with women from San Francisco, London and Helsinki, revealed that single mothers are labeled as lone women who have not gotten husbands or as modern town girls not interested in men (Gordon, 2016). In cultural presentation however, female headed households have been

historically identified with roles different from those of men as women are supposed to be provided for. However, women these days are more independent due to the diversification of families and changed perceptions about gender roles (Gordon, 2016).

A study performed with 1,221 of single mothers in an established Kenyan informal settlement of Korogocho revealed that roughly half of the Kenyan women became mothers due to both high levels of union dissolution and premarital birth (Clark, Henderson & Kabiru, 2023). The findings further suggest that factors such as lower levels of instrumental child care and financial help may place considerable strain on single mothers who have to juggle with being both primary caregiver and economic providers. Further, findings in the same study showed that factors beyond single mothers demographic such as age, low education level and socioeconomics may contribute to their elevated stress. The study suggested that single mothers' higher stress is not primarily driven by their lower socioeconomic status. In fact never married single mothers are protected from stress by their younger age and also, potentially, by their higher education level. In the same study, the researcher intended to find out the effects of demographic aspects on single mothers as they raise their children, their experiences, and the kind of avenues of support available for single mothers and the coping techniques used by single mothers raising their children in Kware, Rongai, Kajiado County in Kenya.

Single mothers' experiences are always challenging (Mohammad, et al, 2020). Some of the challenges experienced by single mothers are raising children without a partner, the need to play the role of a partner as well as their own, working long hours to provide for financial needs of the family, balancing between work and family, as well as societal stigma.

The current study focused on understanding the economic, social and emotional experiences of single mothers. Currently, a number of very basic questions concerning single motherhood remain unanswered. Some of the questions were: what types of problems present the greatest challenge in single motherhood and the coping strategies? Since quality of life is an important variable in parenting, the researcher was interested in knowing the different longitudinal experiences of single mothers raising their children. It was also of importance to find out the impact of demographic factors such as age, educational background, income level and spirituality on the experience of single mothers raising their children in Kware, Ongata Rongai.

II. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework relates to single mothers raising their children. Psychologists say that there is no comprehensive theory of parenting; however, several theories have been used in previous studies similar to the present study. One of them was the Behaviorism Theory by John B. Watson (1878 – 1958) who believed in observable behavior. Another one was Social learning theory developed in 1960's by Albert Bandura which was also based on observation (Mabuza, Thwala & Okeke, 2014). Another theory used in previous studies was operant conditioning by B.F. Skinner (Blackman, D. E. 2017).

Murray Bowen's family systems theory (1913 – 1990) has also been chosen for this study. It presents a family as the basic emotional unit that helps single mothers to work through issues in order to overcome any existing stressors. Family systems theory has been used to explain how to defuse anxiety among family members.

The Family Systems Theory (Brown, 1999) provides one of the most comprehensive theories of family systems functioning. According to the study conducted by Berg and Petola (2015) about everyday life in families where it was found that parenting was part of the institution of a family in which emotional experience was very significant in everyday life for family members.

Murray Bowen's family systems theory was one of the first comprehensive theories of family systems functioning (Brown, 1999). It mainly pays attention to anxiety diffusion within families (Hornecker, & Buur, 2006). The Family systems theory therefore looks at interactions, in terms of emotional tones, attitudes and behavior among family members to reduce family challenges such as conflict, stress and anxiety as commented by Hornecker, and Buur (2006). Fusion and unhealthy distancing among family members have been identified by Murray as the major causes of anxiety in a family. Family systems theory posits that current levels of external pressure and the learning and socialization that have been practiced and carried down from previous generations do determine the level of anxiety in a family. The theory encourages family members to be able to think through their responses to relationship dilemmas (Hornecker, & Buur, 2006).

The family systems theory mainly seeks to help defuse chronic anxiety by promoting awareness of the functioning of overly dramatic system as well as enhancing individuals' levels of differentiation. It focuses on changing the self instead of expecting others to change (Hornecker & Buur, 2006). Some of the interlocking concepts of family systems theory that would be of great use in a family headed by a single mother raising her children are as follows: First, Emotional fusion which reflects a state of we- ness in which people think that they must feel alike, think alike and behave alike. Second, Differentiation where an individual is able to think and act for self while in contact with emotionally charged issues. Third, Triangulation, which happens when an outsider mediates in a conflict or in a misunderstanding in order to reduce anxiety and enhance healthy

communication. Forth, Projection process in a family is the way parents transmit their emotional problems to a child which can prejudice the functioning of a child increasing the child's susceptibility to clinical systems, Fifth, Emotional cut off which is the way family members manage their emotional issues by cutting off emotional contact. Sixth, Multigenerational transmission process, which describes how small difference in the levels of differentiations between parents and their offspring lead over many generations to marked differences of level of differentiation among the members of an extended family. Seventh, Sibling position which posits that people of same sibling position do have similar characteristics, for example, first born children tend to take leadership positions while youngest children prefer to be followers and lastly, Societal emotional process which helps in governing behavior in a family (Hornecker&Buur, 2006).

The goal of family systems theory is to assist families with knowledge towards greater levels of differentiation which means being able to separate feelings and thoughts. It also means that one may have difference in opinion and values but remains emotionally connected to the family members, encouraging less blaming, decreased reactivity and increased responsibility for an individual in the emotional system (Hornecker & Buur, 2006). Family systems theory aims to reduce family's anxiety about any symptom accepting it as part of their pattern of relating and increase levels of differentiation (Hornecker & Buur, 2006). In this Study, family system theory helps single mothers as they relate to their family members who tend to be judgmental, to help the single mothers and their children to overcome cultural stigmatization, and many other negative experiences with both her own family and her children too.

III. Methodology

The research adopted a qualitative method of research which is descriptive and phenomenological which focused on the experience of single mothers raising their children in Kware, Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County. This design was appropriate in order to describe how single mothers of Kware experience certain phenomenon using in depth interviews.

This Study was carried out at Kware in Rongai, Kajiado County. It is located in southern part of Kenya. Kajiado County. It is bordering United Republic of Tanzania in the south west, TaitaTavetaCounty to the south east of Machakos and Makueni Counties and Nairobi County to the north. It lies between longitudes 3605' and 3705' east and between 100' and 300' south. The County covers an approximated area of 21,900 square kilometers as indicated in the development profile, 2013. Kware in Rongai(Githire, 2021). It was chosen due to its high population indicating the probability of finding a good number of single mothers.

The researcher managed to interview twenty participants who were sampled through snowball technique. The first participant invited others from her acquaintances until the sample size of twenty participants was arrived at. The study interviewed individuals who were single mothers from different cultural backgrounds and were raising their children at Kware in Rongai. The participants' ages ranged between 30 and 52 years. Majority of them were of primary level of education, one never attended school at all while two had secondary level. Some of the participants were divorced while others were separated from their husbands.

The research findings represented the correct information drawn from the participants' original data and the original views of the participants was correctly interpreted. The study findings are capable of being transferred to another population in similar situation and same results is arrived at. There is possibility that if this same research is repeated by another researcher with the same population, the same results would be achieved. Data was collected from interview responses after which thematic analysis method was used. The data collected highlighted some themes regarding the feelings and perceptions of the participants. The themes exposed the main interests and opinions of the participants. This chapter presents themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews, namely low self-esteem, fear of criticism, hidden lifestyle, confidence and courage which were experienced by single mothers in Kware, Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County.

In this study, ethical issues were considered. The participants were treated with respect and dignity. The fact that the study could touch on the single mothers' private lives, it necessitated a lot of sensitivity by the researcher. To begin with, there was an assurance of confidentiality of all respondents and protection of their identity. Informed consent of the respondents was obtained and freedom of participation was granted. This implied that the study participants were free to withdraw at any stage if they wished, and were not coaxed by any situations or institutions. There was no deception in this research which means participants were not deceived into the research study. There was physical, psychological and emotional protection of the participants, safeguarding them against any unknown risks. The researcher kept the participants in a safe and private place to avoid any interruption of any kind which made them feel comfortable to share their issues without fear, and researcher being sensitive to the experiences and feelings of the participants. A non-judgmental attitude was ensured and communicated during the interview. Cross – cultural differences was observed with respect while avoiding any kind of influence in the study. Boundary maintenance was observed and no personal relationship was developed by the researcher during the interview. Neither the participants nor their relatives were known to the researcher which allowed a fair and unbiased attitude during the interview.

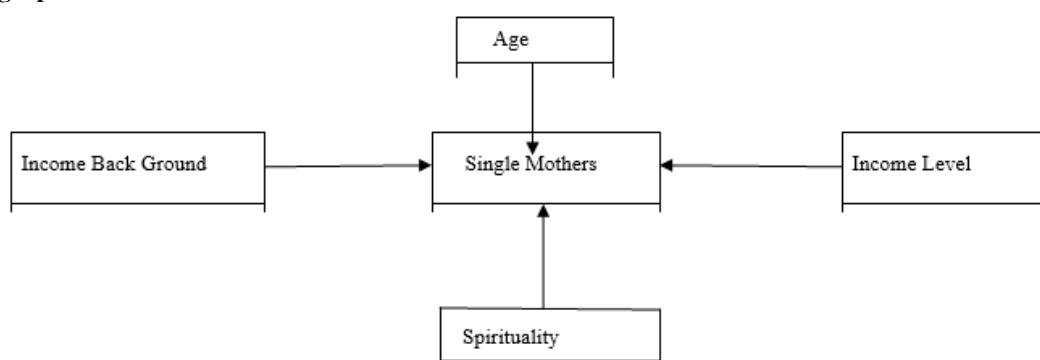
Academic integrity was observed by the researcher being transparent by the method used in research. Manipulation of data was unethical therefore preservation of the same was important, and also to be made available for future knowledge if required by peers.

The researcher had obtained ethical clearance as well as research permit from the office of the director of research at Tangaza University. The researcher had also sort permission and License from National Commission for Science and Technology& Innovation (NACOSTI) was obtained.

IV. Findings

This chapter presents the findings obtained from the interviews and observations. The research sought to find out the experiences of single mothers raising their children at Kware, Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County. This was achieved by explaining their in-depth experiences as regards the demographic impact in their parenting. Finally, the research attempted to find out whether there were significant challenges in single motherhood and coping mechanisms.

Demographic characteristics of participants at Kware in OngataRongai Demographic Table



The first objective sought to establish the demographic characteristics single mothers raising their children at Kware, Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County. Variables in terms of age, educational background, income level and spirituality were collected in order to get the insights that were related to the single mothers' demographic status. Almost all the participants indicated that they had their children at young ages. Educational background of most of the participants was primary level, though a few had obtained secondary level. One had no education at all and this explained why majority of them had low incomes, a disadvantage that made parenting difficult. With low education, these single mothers were unable to get high paying jobs.

Participant 4 said that she had chosen God and single parenting that she did not dream of any man in her life again. The participant clarified her statement: "I am saying this because I have lived with a man and I do not want another man again to come to my life and start giving me problems" (8th Jan 2024). Getting basic needs for this group of single mothers and their children in Kware, Rongai in Kajiado District was a nightmare. Most of the participants interviewed felt that despite their demographic disadvantages, they preferred to raise their children as single mothers.

Socio-economic and emotional experiences of single mothers at Kware in OngataRongai

This objective of the study was to find out the economic, social and emotional experiences of single mothers raising their children in Kware, Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County. All the participants identified disrespect, stigma, guilt anxiety, stress, fear, low self-esteem, hidden lifestyle, no father figure and shame contributed to their psychological suffering.

Social challenges of single mothers at Kware in Ongata Rongai

This objective investigated the social challenges of single mothers in Kware in Ongata Rongai. Thematic Analysis was employed to analyze the collected data to achieve the above objective. Though thematic analysis of the findings, the researcher observed that low self-esteem and stigma are some of the social challenges that single mothers face.

Social Stigma

Social stigma was identified by all the respondents as one of the challenges that they face in the community in Rongai. By social stigma, the respondents argued that the rest of the community sees them as

immoral and looks down on them. This eventually affects their level of association with the rest of the community members. According to one of the respondents,

My challenges as a single mother are that both neighbors and relatives do look down on me because I do not have a husband. They tend to regard me as a loose woman and as one without direction. As the first girl in my family, I experienced discrimination and this was because culture expected that my husband be the first one to be served food during my father's funeral before any of my sisters' husbands' were served with food and for that reason, now my younger sisters do not like me because they feel I have blocked them from practicing their cultural norms. Another challenge is that as I work in a construction site or cook for the men working in the construction who know that I am a single mother do mishandle me by improperly touching me, abusing me, snatching my money and also refusing to pay me for they know I have no mail protection. Furthermore young boys who are age of my children at the construction site treat me as if I am of their age wanting to have relationship with me and that hurts me a lot (8 Jan 2024).

Similarly, another respondent narrated:

I have gone through a lot of frustrations as a single mother. I suffer disrespect from my neighbors. She further said: If there is anything lost in the neighborhood, we become suspects; my children would sometimes be arrested for no proper reason. She continued: On the other hand, my satisfying moment is when I feel peaceful with no one quarreling, fighting or sending me to sleep in the cold as before, I would not want to look for a husband again considering the frustrating experience I went through in my marriage (10 Jan 2024).

Low self-esteem

Low self-esteem was also identified by the respondents as a social challenge that they face. Low self-esteem, in this regards, is an experience that the respondents said they get as a result of stigma that they experience from the community members. As a result of social stigma, the respondents are unable to associate with the rest of the community members. According to one of the respondents,

I do not think of having male friends since my worry is only my children and how I can take care of them. I fear men relationships because they are fond of cheating and after making one pregnant they abandon you (8 Jan 2024).

During the same interview, some participants seemed to be happier to have left their marriages and live as single mothers with their children. They shared that there had been no freedom in their marriages and that they had experienced a lot of mistreatments that they had even lost interest in men relationships. They also shared that even their children were more comfortable without the father figure. According to one of the respondents,

There are no quarrels and that is one of the satisfying experiences. I also feel satisfied because my children do not worry about the quarrels they were subjected to when their father was still in our lives and that makes us all to feel at home and happy. The behavior of my former husband has really discouraged me from having any male relationship so my interaction with them is just not there and another reason I do not have any feelings for a male relationship, and this is because in the process of my struggling to get a job I fell in a wrong hand and I was raped by the person who I was told was to give me a job, unfortunately I got HIV that I am now struggling with in addition to my usual struggles as a single mother(8 Jan 2024).

Another participant further lamented:

I feel lonely in my parenting and I do not have any social support and the environment is very unfriendly for growing children, alcoholics are very many exposing my children to unhealthy behavior which causes me emotional pain. I wish my late husband was still alive so that I could cling to him to help my children, but my fear again was that he would take my ailing sister as a wife again considering their cultural behavior in Luo land (10 Jan 2024).

Economic challenges of single mothers at Kware in OngataRongai

With regard to the economic challenges facing single mothers in Kware of Ongata Rongai, this study identified lack of basic needs as the most pressing economic challenge. Analysis of the respondents shows that single mothers struggle to raise up their children, are unable to provide basic food, shelter and education to their children due to inadequate finances. According to one of the respondents,

For me life as a single mother has been very difficult, my salary is small and when I get it, it all goes to expenses and I am left with nothing. It is not easy to plan on any project that can give me more money. My children have not been educated because of money. Only two have gone up to secondary, but the other three left school in standard eight (8 Jan 2024).

Another respondent said that:

As a single mother, I find it difficult when it comes to paying school fees, rent and food for the family. I have always been unable to afford the above, considering that I have no proper job. Another thing is that I can only afford a single room and it becomes difficult to be with children of the opposite sex as I have three boys: ages 23years, 16 years and 12 years. I find it difficult especially when it comes to changing clothes from bathroom. Another difficulty is sleeping space as I am forced to share both bed and beddings with my twelve years old boy (8 Jan 2024).

Participants reported that because of their economic situation, they could only afford a single room which and experienced difficulties in sleeping space as well as changing clothes from the bathroom considering themselves having teenage children of the opposite sex. In the same discussion on the economic experiences of single mothers raising their children in Kware, Ongata Rongai, some participants reported their failure to get regular jobs making it difficult for them to get food, clothing, school fees, as well as rent, which led them into borrowing regularly. A participant commented as follows:

I cannot talk about my income because it is pathetic for I have no job. With low level of education getting a job is difficult and I rely on casual work which comes only by chance. I earn very low income that cannot sustain me with my four children and I keep struggling to get food, clothing, school fees and rent for the house. Right now it is three months since I got my last kibarwa/casual work. For three months, I have been borrowing from one shop to another in order to get what to eat with my children and also talking to teachers not to send my children home due to lack of school fees (9 Jan 2024).

Emotional challenges of single mothers at Kware in OngataRongai

This sub objective of the study was to find out the emotional experiences of single mothers raising their children in Kware, Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County. Most of the participants during the interview had experienced emotional challenges according to their responses. Among the emotional struggles that were identified through thematic analysis include discrimination, anxiety and disrespect.

I have been a single mother for now five years and it has been very hard, life has been very hard for me as a single mother and I have experienced disrespect from people around us. My children due to the lack of food go to the neighbors to ask for food and that one is a cause of disrespect that I experience from neighbors, and due to lack of school fees, my children are sent away from school and that also affects me emotionally. I fail to get my children together due to lack of basic needs and they loiter around in the estate and that comes with a lot of challenges such as having early sex, stealing from neighbors, contracting sicknesses like HIV and I experience a lot of shame, fear and guilt causing isolation from others. When my children come back home having emotional torture from school, these kind of feelings are also transferred and I also feel tortured by their experiences, we are sometimes locked out due to lack of rent and that also cause emotional disturbance to both my children and myself. This experience sometimes make me lose hope and even fail to go look for any work as I feel depressed and unable to function well, interaction is not easy for others look at me as one who keeps begging and that hinders my interaction with others, loneliness becomes my everyday life(10 Jan 2024).

Support systems for single mothers at Kware in Ongata Rongai

The third objective sought to establish the existing support systems used by single mothers as they parent their children in Kware, Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County. Majority of the participants disagreed that there were existing avenues of support systems. “There has been no possibility of support systems for me and my family although I prefer to have women as friends who can give me advice on the way forward“ said participant 1(8 Jan 2024). In the same interview, concerning existing avenues of support systems for single mothers raising their children in Kware. Another respondent said:

I have never heard of any support system in Kware, I am just alone with my children and rely only on the small jobs that I may get. On the other side of my late husband, everybody that could help me with my children died and on my side I was brought up by my mother only and there is no one else that can come to my assistance (8Jan 2024).

However, data analysis also revealed that there are some respondents who acknowledged accessing social support systems. According to one such respondent,

The only support I got was from my husband’s grandmother who also died and now I am left without any social support, I am just alone with my children” (Participant 5, 8 Jan 2024). Additional participant shared that she worked as a house help to raise her children and educate them and that they had all gone through school but alcohol had taken their lives. She continued and said: “I do not have any kind of social support as we speak, even my daughter who is the mother of my grandchildren does not give any support (8 Jan 2024).

Moreover, there were respondents who got social support from women groups. A social worker was also mentioned during the interviews as having helped one of the single mothers by negotiating with Kenyatta National Hospital who waved the hospital bill for her sick child. According to the respondent,

The house which I was living caught fire and I lost everything and my son also got burnt in that fire which left him with very serious burns which I had to struggle with as a single mother with almost no income. A social worker eventually helped me by negotiating with Kenyatta National Hospital who allowed my son to be discharged and also waving the bill which I was to pay at a later date. Another woman living in the estate also helped by giving me shelter with my sick son together with all my other children, giving us food for free to help us recover from the trauma. Another also helped by giving me shelter for six months without paying rent since my son needed a clean place for his recovery. Life is so hard and tempting that emotionally, I am unable to figure out where to start from. I have been a single mother for about three years which is like ten years considering the hardships that I go through (10 Jan 2024).

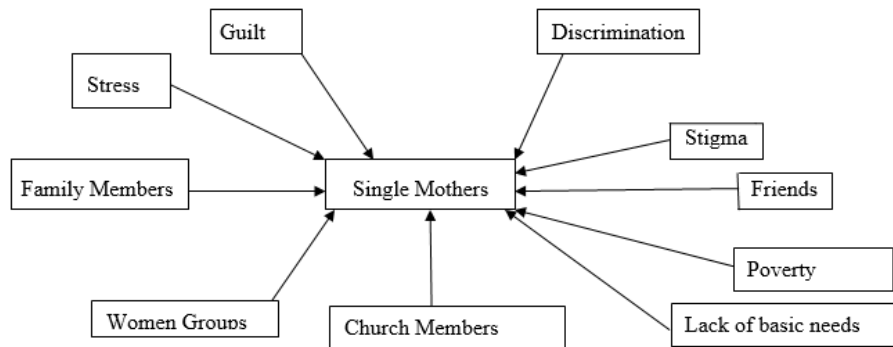
Coping techniques used by single mothers at Kware in Ongata Rongai

The fourth objective sought to establish the strategies or coping techniques that are used to improve or sustain single mothers as they raise their children in Kware. Most of the participants shared a common agreement that parenting as a single mother was very difficult and stressful as experiences such as disrespect, discrimination, loneliness and shame besides difficulties in paying rent, school fees and other basic needs was the norm of their lives.

They shared that they did not have any other coping strategies apart from looking for casual work which involved cooking for construction workers, working in the construction sites, and getting other small jobs like washing clothes and cleaning people's houses. Some of the single mothers worked as house-helps, looking for any kind of jobs like cutting grass, digging to help make ends meet. For one such participant, "my coping strategy is that I do make people's hair in my house from which I earn some income to take care of my children" (9 Jan 2024). Another participant said: "I mainly avoid interaction for fear of disrespect, by sitting inside my house without mixing so much with people, this I do by keeping myself busy in the house watching movies" (8 Jan 2024).

Conceptual Model of Findings

Diagram of Themes



The diagram above represents the themes emerging from the experience of single mothers raising their children in Kware, Ongata Rongai.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to the economic, social and emotional experiences of single mothers and its impact on raising their children at Kware, Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County and not in any other place in Rongai. It also reviewed the single mothers' existing support systems as they raise their children. In addition, it addressed the coping techniques used by single mothers as they raise their children. There were elements which were outside of researcher's control such as participants' limited finance, communication problem and their expectations.

The findings were obtained from in-depth - interviews of the participants concerning their experiences as single mothers raising their children at Kware, Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County.

V. Discussions

Demographic factors on single mothers

The study established that low income due to low education level leading to great financial difficulties had a negative impact on the single mothers as they raised their children. A lot of struggle to make ends meet during parenting was expressed by single mothers. For example, participant one commented: "I struggle to get food, pay school fees with the little money I earn from washing clothes, utensils, dishes and digging for people to feed my children" (8 Jan 2024).

Participant5 said:

My salary is small and when I get it, it all goes to expenses and I am left with nothing. It is not easy to plan on any project that can give me more money. My children have not been educated because of money. Only two have gone up to secondary, but the other three left school in standard eight (8 Jan 2024).

Most of the participants interviewed had attained only primary level of education which subjected them to very low chances of attaining high income. During the interview, spirituality also came out as a single mother confessed: "I have chosen God and single parenting that I do not dream of any man to be in my life again" said Participant 4(8 Jan 2024). During the same interview, the observation was that these single mothers were more comfortable to talk about low income and other experiences but somehow never mentioned their own low education nor their young ages as part of their setback to better lives in their parenting.

Single mothers experienced a lot of discrimination, stigmatization, shame, loneliness and disrespect to the extent that it was hard for them to seek for help from relatives and neighbors. Most of the their friends were also single mothers like them experiencing financial difficulties and those mothers with husbands did keep the single mothers away for fear their husbands might be grabbed.

These findings concur with Gemelli(2008) who asserted that single mothers in low income bracket experience day to day struggles in order to meet their needs and those of their children. Discriminative issues of racism and motherhood as well as low wages and conflicts were highlighted. The single mothers in the same findings felt that it would have been better to have a responsible bread winner to finance the family and their children. It was recognized that single mothers raising their children who belong to low income categories despite race and ethnicity go through various issues, both from work and family levels. Their worries on how best to meet theirs' and their families' needs, both monetary and psychosocial in the best way possible were similar (Gemelli, 2008). Furthermore Mkhize & Msomi, (2016) said that single mothers raising their children lacked sufficient funds to take care of their families, and that low paid mothers mostly experienced financial distress and reported borrowing money from friends and relatives, being perpetually in debt and expressed their vulnerability to poverty.

Economic, social and emotional experiences of single mothers raising their children

Second objective was to find out the economic, social and emotional experiences of single mothers raising their children in Kware, Rongai, Kajiado County. The study revealed as was shared by the single mothers that low income, disrespect, stigma, guilt, anxiety, stress, fear, low self-esteem, hidden lifestyle, no father figure and shame contributed to single mothers' psychological suffering. Culture and traditional beliefs were some of the elements that contributed to single mothers' frustrations as mentioned by some participants. Some beliefs had it that a single mother was one who had several sex partners and could be treated any how without respect and did not have any body to defend her as disclosed by one participant: "As I work in the construction and the workers know that I am a single mother, they mishandle me by touching me disrespectfully, abusing me even snatching my money or even refusing to pay me for they know I have no male protection" (Participant 2). Culture also contributed in the stigmatization and victimization of single mothers as expressed by Participants two, three, five, eight, seventeen, eighteen and nineteen.

In an interview participant two said:

My challenges as a single mother are that both neighbors and relatives do look down on me because I do not have a husband. They tend to regard me as a loose woman and as one without direction. As the first girl in my family, I experienced discrimination and this was because culture expected that my husband be the first one to be served food during my father's funeral before any of my sisters' husbands were served with food. Now my younger sisters do not like me because they feel I have blocked them from practicing their cultural norms (8 Jan 2024).

Another one shared:

One of the reasons I fear involving with men friends is for fear they might lack respect and I do not want to experience that. I am satisfied to be with my children instead of bringing in another man that will start beating and mistreating my children. When anybody tries to interact with me concerning love and relationship, I just tell them I am not ready for that. Said Participant 3(8 Jan 2024).

These findings agree with Coakley and Berrick(2008) who reported that meeting daily basic needs was a big struggle for single mothers who blamed this on their economic situation, which they claimed was full of financial scarcity and led them into the habit of purchasing on credit and eventual failure to pay ruining their credit rating and that maintenance of hope was difficult. Furthermore, DeJean, McGeorge, and Carlson (2012)assert that single mothers are viewed and associated with immorality, and are believed not to recognize traditional values such as marriage and are thought of to be promiscuous, miserable, divergent, full of problems and lack parenting skills. Baranowska-Rataj et al. (2014)said that there are both positive and negative aspects

affecting single mothers raising their children. Mwanzia (2014) asserted that a higher percentage of female households experience high level of poverty and live below poverty line. Due to their low education level, they secure low paying jobs which do not give them enough money to feed their families of four to six children, pay their school fees and take care of their old parents at the same time. And that only a few of the single mothers are able to pay their children's school fees regularly which indicate that they are likely to drop out of school. Kim, Lee and Lee, (2018) also asserted that single mothers were discriminated against and getting jobs was difficult due to the stigma and therefore preferred to hide their identity as single mothers so that they may maintain stable jobs. LaHaye, (2012) also found out during an interview that single mothers might have all kinds of pressures including financial but first on their list was the wellbeing of their children. He further explained that single mothers never come closer to sheer panic than when their children are in jeopardy, which is not unusual since it is part of the maternal instinct and true femininity.

Existing support systems for single mothers

The third objective was to find out the existing support systems of single mothers raising their children in Kware, Rongai, Kajiado County. The majority of the participants shared a common disagreement that there were existing avenues of support systems and one of the participants commented: "There has been no possibility of support systems for me and my family although I prefer to have women as friends who can give me advice on the way forward" (Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9). However, some of the participants disclosed having gotten social support from parents, friends and relatives with in-kind support, social work, and emotional support from church members, women groups and neighbors in form of shelter and food (Participants. 4, 7, 10, 11, 16 and 17). These findings agree with Clark et al. (2017) who assert that opposed to stereotypical attitude towards sub-Saharan African families, the support system for single mothers is inadequate, therefore almost one fifth of single mothers fail to benefit from the available support.

Coping techniques used by single mothers

The fourth objective was to establish the coping techniques used by single mothers raising their children in Kware, Rongai, Kajiado County. Almost all of the participants shared a common agreement that they did not have any other coping strategies apart from looking for casual work which involved cooking for construction workers, working in the constructions and getting other small jobs like washing clothes and cleaning people's houses, working as house helps, looking for any kind of jobs like cutting grass, digging and doing any kinds of casual work to help make ends meet. Some shared that they avoided talking to neighbors to avoid conflicts and shame. The findings are in line with Kalil, and Ryan, (2010), who highlight that single mothers' relied on family members and friends for both financial and other assistance which were neither consistent nor dependable and would not necessarily improve the economic circumstances of single mothers.

VI. Conclusion

The findings exposed that the demographic factors on single mothers raising their children in Kware, Rongai, Kajiado County, are low level of education which contributes to low income levels and lack of steady jobs which lead to irregular incomes.

It has also been established that single mothers raising their children in Kware, Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County, in addition to financial difficulties, experience shame, disrespect, loneliness, stigmatization, criticism, guilt, anxiety, stress, fear, low self-esteem, hidden lifestyle as well as satisfaction that no one interferes on how she lives with her children. There has been a revelation that social support received by single mothers raising their children in Kware, Ongata, Rongai, Kajiado County, came from parents, relatives and friends, neighbors, social work, women groups and church members. Finally the study established that single mothers relied on their own hard work, family members, neighbors and friends for both financial and other assistance which were neither consistent nor dependable and may not necessarily improve the economic circumstances of single mothers.

Social experiences

Discrimination and Stigma

Themes from social experiences of single mothers raising their children have been highlighted in this section. Discrimination and stigmatization among others have been severally mentioned by single mothers in Rongai as the major negative experiences as they interact with their acquaintances, neighbors, friends, and workmates and family members.

Economical experiences

Poverty and lack of basic needs

Themes that arose as a result of economical experiences of single mothers in Kware, Rongai were poverty and lack of basic needs among others. These themes were the most economical negative elements in the lives of single mothers as they raise their children in Kware.

Emotional experiences

Guilt and Stress

Emotional experiences come as a result of other negative ones. Any kind of experience is known to affect ones emotion. In this case single mothers raising their children in Kware, Rongai expressed guilt and stress among others. They felt a lot of stress and as a result were guilty of their situations.

Support system

Family members and friends

Most of the Single mothers raising their children in Kware, Rongai said that they mainly got support from family members and friends which according to them was neither regular nor satisfactory.

Coping techniques

Women groups for guidance and Church members for consolation

Sing mothers in Kware, Rongai mainly confided in women groups in which they got guidance to keep themselves going and also church members who were there for them for their consolation as they went through their experiences. That is how they managed to cope as single mothers.

VII. Recommendation

Nonprofit organizations could collaborate with the churches to come up with measures to deal with the issues affecting the single mothers raising their children within the community. The government through the Ministry of Gender and Special Programs could also collaborate with the community ministries to support the single mothers raising their children with their challenges within the national and county level. This will would help in the management of many challenges facing single mothers raising their children in the community and society at large.

The most common recommendation therefore was the need of societal stakeholders such as non-profit organizations, churches and community leadership with other relevant stakeholders to collaborate with various ministries to initiate and develop mitigation measures to deal with negative effects on single motherhood within the community. Future studies can be done on the economic, social and emotional experiences of single fathers raising their children in Kware, Rongai, Kajiado County, to explore other aspects of their lives.

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