



Evaluating the Challenges Facing Single Parenting in Kigamboni District of Tanzania

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Article History

Received: 2023.11.14

Revised: 2023.12.03

Accepted: 2023.12.27

Published: 2023.12.28

Keywords

Challenges

Children

Marriage

Single parenting

How to cite:

Maunde, R. M. (2023). Evaluating the Challenges Facing Single Parenting in Kigamboni District of Tanzania. *Eastern African Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(2), 77-84.

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Abstract

The study focuses on challenges facing single parenting in Tanzania and the Kigamboni district in particular. While most scholars asserted single parenting is ineffective in sub-Saharan Africa, little evidence is available on the challenges of single parenting, particularly in Tanzania. Becker's economic theory and Bowlby's attachment theories were applied in the study. The former focuses on an economic angle as the atomy of family formation and the latter shows that our attachment representation is from the sensitivity of care received from our primary caregivers. The study used a case study design in which Kigamboni district of Tanzania was the area of investigation. Qualitative data, that is, words and phrases were analysed. Ten single-parents' families were selected purposefully by using the snowball technique. Unstructured interviews were used as a method to collect the intended data from the participants. Findings have shown that the challenges of single parenting centred on the aspects of psychological, financial constraints, and academic performance. In Tanzania there is a steady rise in single parenting, which has an impact on the welfare of the children, parents, and community at large. It is recommended that alternative care and guidance and counseling programmes should be established especially for needy children and single parents.

Introduction

Single parenting is a predominant and common social issue that calls for attention. Globally, one-quarter to one-third of all families are headed by single parents, predominantly single mothers (Paul, 2021; Raphael, 2017). The growth in single parenting is seen as a part of the Second Demographic Transition that reflects changes in marriage patterns, divorce rates, the decline in remarriage rates, increase in out-of-wedlock childbearing, and disconnection between marriage and childbearing (Zaidi & Morgan, 2017; Ayebeng et al., 2022). Researchers and policymakers in both developed and developing nations are increasingly concerned about the social response to enhancing the welfare of single parents and their children (Ayebeng et al., 2022). Single parents, children and the community at large are impacted by single parenting (Ushie et al., 2021). This is because the family acts as an important social institution that directly affects the general community. Therefore, the welfare of a



single-parent family is vital in fostering a supportive home environment for parenting, which in turn contributes to the prosperity of the individuals and society at large. In Africa and Tanzania, single parenting has received negligible research attention (Ntoimo et al., 2020). In contrast, most scholars claim that single parenting affects a child's development more negatively than the family structure with two biological parents (Ahiaku & Ajani, 2022). Others claim that the detrimental effects of single parenting on children have been overstated (Paul, 2021). However, being overstated does not completely nullify the effects of single parenting. Therefore, regarding these scholars' arguments, single parenting seems challenging. It can be argued that single-parent families affect children's development.

Concerning the available literature pertinent to single parenting, it seems there is a need to study this phenomenon in different areas to discover its reality. Various scholars have reviewed their studies in different places like India, Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana and Ethiopia (Prabhakar, 2009; Abubakar & Tambawal, 2019; Ushie, 2021; Ashieku & Ajani, 2022; Mucha, 2023). None of the studies particularly deal with the challenges and effects of single parenting in the Kigamboni district of Tanzania.

On the other hand, the fact that single parenting has negative effects on children seems to be controversial. For instance, Abubakari and Tambawal (2019) believed that children raised by a single parent are more likely to experience behavioural, emotional, and financial difficulties and less success in adulthood than children with two parents. According to Ali and Soomar (2019), children from single parents have low academic performance and may often flee before completion of certain qualifications. Contrary to the previous scholars, Paul (2021) argued that single-parented children score more excellently in their studies than children from both biological parents. These contrasting arguments upsurge the need for more evidence on the effects of single parenting concerning socio-economic, cultural and psychological contexts. Thus, the current study entailed examining the challenges and effects of single parenting in Kigamboni District, Tanzania.

Raphael (2017) studied the strength of single-parent mother families in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Her research used six single-parent families headed by single mothers to explore the lived experience of strength of single mothers inside a single family in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. With the use of a phenomenological perspective as well as a qualitative approach, the study revealed that although single-parent families face a lot of challenges, they still stick together as one family with their children and tackle life with a positive perspective. Again, the study recommended that communication within and outside the family should be done to avoid negative perceptions of single-parent families. However, Raphael study did not put emphasis on the challenges facing single parenting as it dealt on the strengths of single parent family. This study therefore wants to open the other side of the coin to see the weaknesses of single parent family by assessing the challenges facing single parenting in Kigamboni, Tanzania.

Abubakar and Tambawal (2019) conducted a study on parent's age, education level, level of income generating capacities of the family and family support system as the psycho-social disposition of single parenthood of children born out of wedlock. On Contrary to Raphael (2017), their study revealed that single parenting most certainly affects the children. Children in single parent families often must contribute more to the household and family than children with two parents. Children learn to work as a team. This paper concluded that, single-parents household (out of wedlock) found to have less income and lacking support which tend to have increase in stress and conflict. Also, they often struggle with time management issues due to balancing of many different areas of life on their



own. Thus, their study suggests that, since there are little conclusive evidence that single-parent families are harmful, society should stop stigmatizing families headed by single mothers and give them the support they need. However, these studies help in understanding the general phenomena of single parenting, there is controversy as two different perspectives are raised. Thus, the present study has a task to attempt to evaluate the general known understanding that single parenting results to poor family care hence failure of academic, health and other basic needs accessing.

Furthermore, Ushie et al. (2021) examined single parenting and spousal mental health applying a demographic approach. The results showed that single parent families have been on the increase globally which some schools of thought have linked the growing rate of single parenting to stress and falling economy. Again, it was revealed that the effects of mental health on the parents manifest in forms of anxiety disorders, panic disorders, phobia, post and traumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, substance abuse as well as intake of other psychotropic substances. Hence, the implications of single parenting affect the spouses and the children of the union. In most cases, children are usually the ones who are affected in relation to single parenting. Therefore, the current study assesses the challenges facing single parenting in Kigamboni Tanzania.

Paul (2021) investigated on the Church and single parenting in Africa and Nigeria in specific. The author argued that the challenge of single parenting has negative effects on parents and children alike, and the death of a spouse causes this situation. Divorce, war, desertion, rape, sexual harassment, and violent crisis are factors for this debacle. The author continues arguing that the remaining parent not only inherits the responsibilities of the missing parent but also takes custody of their children, in addition to his/her roles as father or mother. However, Paul's study discussed that children from single-parent homes are commonly described as more hostile, aggressive, anxious, fearful and hyperactive. When they go to school, they score excellently in their studies than children from both biological parents. This is different from when both parents are actively involved in their education as the result their academic performance is good. From this base, the current investigation stands in opposition following the fact that not all single-parented children fail in academics or are aggressive and hyperactive; the current study examines the challenges and effects of single parenting emphasis from Kigamboni, Tanzania.

On the other hand, Ashieku and Ajani (2022) examined how single parenting in South Africa impacts children's welfare and development. The study revealed that most African children are raised by single parents in diverse South African communities. Using 165 single parents as respondents and descriptive and thematic analysis of questionnaire and interview, it was discovered that most of the single parents sampled struggle to provide for their children. Also, the study showed that single parenthood influences children's physical and spiritual development. This means that the socioeconomic status of single parents impacts children's education, feeding, housing and protection. It is suggested that adequate attention be paid to marriage among young youth by looking at the current cultural marriage rites, which are crucial in building a sustainable and healthy family. The author argues that marriage allows partners to put available resources together to take care of children, and this enhances the welfare and social development of the children.

This study contradicts other studies like those of Raphael (2017) and Paul (2021), who prove that single parenting is a problem and affects children's upbringing. However, Ashieku and Adjani's study was done in South Africa; it builds a strong base for the current study to assess the challenges and effects of single parenting in Kigamboni, Tanzania, and see what is wrong. Another study which the most



recent study, perhaps up to now, about single-parent families, is that of Mucha (2023), which aimed to explore the psychosocial effects of Single parenting on Female Adolescents in Gambella People's National Regional State, Gambella, Ethiopia. Using a qualitative research approach with a case study design and eleven semi-structured interviewees, seventeen focus group discussants, and seven key informants with the thematic data analysis technique, the study found out that single parenting has psychological and social impacts on the life of female adolescents. Therefore, the study recommends that parents, community, government, and non-governmental organisations work together to brighten the future of female adolescents from single parents. This study catalyses the current research as it stimulates the desire to study the challenges and effects of single parenting in Kigamboni, Tanzania, to see if the case is similar or different. This will add to a body of knowledge from different perspectives.

However, Raphael (2017) dealt with the strengths of single-parent families in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; there is still a gap to be filled, and that is about the weaknesses by looking at the challenges and effects of single parenting. On the other hand, literature reviewed shows that there is still a controversy on the effectiveness of single parenting as some scholars argue that single parenting is not harmful as children raised in single-parent families better in life, including schooling (Paul, 2021). While some other scholars, as discussed above, see that single parenting, if not cared results in various problems, including mental health problems, poverty, bad behaviours etc. Studies by various scholars such as Gupta and Kashyap (2020) and Abubakar and Tambawal (2019) showed that children from single parenting learn to be responsible at a young age. They participate actively in domestic activities as well as in productive activities. Contrary to the previous author, single parenting is associated with negative social behavior (Gupta & Kashyap, 2020). Therefore, having twofold benchmarks imposes more evidence and desire to study the challenges and effects of single parenting in the Tanzanian context.

The study was underpinned by two theories, namely, Becker's economic theory and Bowlby's attachment. Becker's economic theory was propounded by Becker (1973). Becker draws on economic perspectives to explain decisions on union or family formation. Becker's economic theory stresses that women would choose divorce or separation when the value expected from being single exceeds the value of marital union and vice versa (Becker, 1973). From Becker's perspective, single parents would choose remarriage to access psychological and economic support. Moreover, parents would choose to be single parents when they detect no value in marriage unions. This theory is useful in the current study of this paper because it gives a direction on two important issues about single parenting. It first clearly stipulates the possible source of single parenting: divorce. Again, it goes further by showing the options that are likely to be taken by divorced people. It is argued that they sometimes go to remarriages, and in some cases, they opt to remain single, hence single parenting. The theory is relevant to this study as it helped identify the sources of single parenting and determine the challenges facing single parenting. However, despite the relevance of Becker's economic theory in this study, the theory cannot handle some parenting issues, such as the effects of single parenting and possible solutions to the challenges of single parenting. This made me adapt the attachment theory.

Bowlby attachment theory was proposed by John Bowlby (1973), a British psychologist and psychoanalyst who developed an interesting framework work to explore the effects of parenting and caregiving for several reasons. Bowlby proposed that our attachment representations developed from the sensitivity of care received from our primary caregiver and attachment security resulted from responsive and appropriate caregiving (Bowlby, 1973). Ideally, children should feel secure in the



presence of caregivers, and when threatened, they should seek proximity to caregivers for protection. The theory stipulates four levels of attachment of children to their caregiver. These include pre-attachment, attachment in making, clear-cut attachment, and formation of a reciprocal relationship. The levels are said to build an emotional bond between parents and children. This theory argues that when children are separated from their caregivers, they experience three stages: detachment, protest, and despair. However, from Bowlby's perspective, single-parenting children can receive alternative responsive and appropriate caregiving from other caregivers. This theory gives us the idea that children who are single-parented face various challenges such as missing care from both parents. But it is explained that there are still several caregivers apart from parents, thus reducing the damages of missing care from both parents. Therefore, this theory guided this study in identifying the challenges of single parenting in the Kigamboni district of Tanzania.

Methodology

The study adopted a case study design. Case study design is qualitative research in which in-depth data are gathered relative to a single individual, program, or event to learn more about an unknown or poorly understood situation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Thus, this study dealt with in-depth data collected from the Kigamboni district in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. This was because of the poorly understood situation about the challenges and effects of single parenting. Therefore, the qualitative research approach was suitable for this study as it provided an in-depth understanding of the phenomena of single parenting. Kothari (2001) defines a sample as a small group of respondents drawn from a population where a researcher is interested in getting information to arrive at conclusions. Thus, this study sampled ten (10) single parent families in Kigamboni, Tanzania. Non-probability sampling was used where ten single parents' families were selected purposefully using the snow boring technique. Primary data were collected through unstructured interviews with members of single-parent families. In contrast, secondary data were collected through literature reviews extracted from publications like journals and books about single parenting. Primary data and secondary data were analysed through content analysis. Qualitative content analysis involves processes to condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation (Cohen et al., 2000; Masinde, Mandillah & Barasa, 2023). These processes used inductive reasoning by which themes and categories emerged from the data through the researcher's careful examination and constant comparison.

Results and Discussion

Psychological problems: Single-parent status, especially for women, has psychological effects such as loneliness, sadness, hopelessness and upset. While looking for psychological support, especially from men, they are accused of interfering with other marriage partnerships. Single parents are free to move anywhere (Gupta & Kashyap, 2020), and when they fail to maintain self-control, they enter multiple relationships with married men. Usually, this situation increases the chances of having more children out of wedlock. This was observed in some single parents who remain single after having multiple relationships. One of the single mothers stated:

I have three children from different fathers and yet I am cohabitating with a married husband and already we have one son. I don't feel good for having children from multiple fathers.

It is clearly shown that single parents are stressed due to limited access to family resources. According to Gupta and Kashyap (2020), single parents face difficulties in accessing basic needs such as healthy food, clothes and school fees. Due to those difficulties, single parent suffers anxiety disorders, eating



disorders, addictive habits, despair, poor physical and mental health, and difficulty concentrating. In adjusting to the difficulties, single parents engage themselves in multiple marital relationships to gain access to family resources. Therefore, they choose cohabitation as an alternative means to access psychological support, and ultimately, they end up with an increasing number of children out of wedlock.

This study's findings are linked to Berker's theory, which posits that women choose marriage or separation concerning the value they get from that relationship. Most single parents would like re-marriage; however, most men would prefer a new marriage. However, the relationship's stability remains challenging as single mothers are traditionally untrusted. Therefore, cohabitation becomes an option for many single mothers. Cohabitation, among other reasons, is the source of marriage dissolution; it brings conflicts among couples and consequently affects the emotions of children and parents.

Meeting the Requirements: Findings from this study indicate that even single-parenting children can perform well. This stands in opposition to scholars (Paul, 2021), who argued that children with both two parents are likely to perform well in academic aspects. However, the study has evidence of some single parents whose children perform well. Thus, one of the children whose mother is single stated:

I passed well at the level of secondary schools and joined University level in 2022. At the University, I am committed to study hard. My performance is always excellent, last two semesters I attained a Grade Pass Average of 4.7

This quotation shows that children with single parents can perform as well as those with two parents. From this base, the argument of preceding scholars that only children with two parents perform well academically is doubtful because, in our community, some can do well despite having single parents. Under the level of analysis, performances (passing or failing) can be attributed to multiple factors; as such, even students with both parents have been observed failing in their academic results. One of the parents stated:

My husband died last year and left me with three sons and one daughter. We provided all academic support for our children, such as school fees, books, pocket money, and other school needs, yet my children couldn't perform well at form four level.

It is clearly shown that even children with both parents can fail regarding academic performance. This draws attention to the fact that sometimes the failure or passing of the child or children depends on factors other than the single parenting system. However, this is true in accordance with attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973); the theory contextualises how children and parents' relationships emerges and how it influences the emotional and social development of the child. This means that if children are closely attached to either single or two parents, especially from infancy, they are likely to grow well academically. This also can be observed in Connor and Scott (2007), who were of the opinion that attachment stages pre-attachment, attachment in making, clear-cut attachment, and formation of reciprocal relationship; thus, all these stages build a bond, and this bond binds parents and children emotionally and socially.

Financial constraints: Single parenting has been affected economically. This is evidenced where the mother fails to accommodate children needs as in tuition fees, medical expenses, cloth to mention just but a few. Based on my current investigation into single parenting in Kigamboni, it has been observed that financial constraints resulting from single parenting have negative trickledown effects on the



child's developmental stages, leading to unmet basic needs and deprived opportunities. One of the parents stated:

My son postponed the school when at form two level of education due to financial difficulties. Now he is at home doing other domestic activities though I don't prefer my child to be at home doing domestic activities. Even my child has been asking when he will go back to school...it is here I feel tears.

Findings indicate that single mothers experience challenges on accessing financial resources. Due to systematic discrimination in education, many women have limited access to productive resources, employment opportunities as well as income-generating activities. With this effect, it has been observed that some of these single parents struggle to establish marital relationships, especially with employed and well-off men who can provide financial support as well as psychological support. Within the same line of thinking and economic theory in particular, Becker (1974) stresses that women choose marital union when they expect benefits from the relationships. However, this nature of the relationship is not sustainable and may result in untruthful and isolation of women and finally being affected.

Conclusion

The study has assessed the challenges facing single parenting and its effects at Kigamboni district of Tanzania. These are psychological problems which led to various effects to children including anxiety disorders, eating disorders, addictive habits, despair, poor physical and mental health, and difficulty concentrating. Another major challenge is the school requirements and the academic performance of children. However, findings show that some single parents work hard to ensure they meet the requirements hence good academic performance of their children. It was evidenced that even students from single parents have chances to get excellent performance in academic results. Student with high level of self-determination can perform well despite of their unfavorable learning environment. Generally, academic performances of children could be attributed by multiple factors such as socio-economic, cultural, psychological, and biological. Again, financial constraint has been revealed as the challenge that face single parenting in Kigamboni which affects children needs as in tuition fees, medical expenses, clothes, and food. Therefore, a financial problem among single parents has direct effects to children as they miss their important needs a result emergence of street children and drug users.

Basing on the above findings, it can be said that special interventions should be introduced especially to the needy children and parents. For example, in children, alternative care programmes should be established in such a way that children get access to educational necessities as well as psychological needs. This necessitates participation of various stakeholders such as government institutions, NGOs, private sectors parents and community at large. This can help children from single parent families who have poor economic status to the point that they fail to deliver basic needs to children. Also, the established programs may help in taking care the psychological problems facing single parented children. Another suggestion is that counselling programmes should be established at different levels such as the community and school levels. At the community level counselling could be organised within the department of community development. Professional counsellors should be recruited to do this important service for children and single parents who are psychological effected.



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