

Challenges Facing Single Mothers in Supporting their Adolescent Children: A Case of Dodoma, Tanzania

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Abstract: This study investigated on challenges facing single mothers in supporting their adolescent children in Dodoma, Tanzania. The study employed the qualitative approach with the phenomenological research design. The population of the study comprised of all single mothers of three wards in Dodoma City Council and eight Social Welfare Officers from the studied wards and city council. A sample of 30 single mothers was drawn through a purposive sampling technique, and five Social Welfare Officers were selected as key informants. Semi-structured interview guides were used to gather data from respondents and key informants and the responses were tape-recorded. Data was transcribed and analysed using the thematic analysis method. The study established that single mothers experienced manifold challenges in supporting their adolescent children. The challenges ranged from economic, social, cultural, to psychological. The study recommended that support mechanisms from government and non-governmental organisations be in place to empower single mothers with prerequisite tools that will help them become economically stable. Social cultural practices that stigmatize and deprive single women's property and consequently hinder single mothers from supporting their children adolescents should be stopped. Social welfare officers should provide training to the community on the rights of single mothers to live, to be respected, to own land and other property and to be supported.

Keywords: Adolescents; single mothers; psychological challenges; economic challenges; social challenges; cultural challenges.

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Introduction

Single mother-parenting is a dynamic process that affects childhood development (Xu, Xu, Simpkins & Warschauer, 2019; Moitra, Mukherjee & Chatterjee, 2017; Laursen, 2005; Mrinde, 2014). Xu, Xu, Simpkins & Warschauer, (2019) elaborates this effect arguing that single mother-parenting is a significant contributing factor to childhood development and

psychopathology. This effect stem from the fact that parents play a considerable role in shaping children's emotional health, particularly during the early years of childhood (Laursen, 2005). Laursen (2005) adds that, though this may differ among global continents, single mother may feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of juggling between caring for children, maintaining a job and keeping up with the bills and household chores.

Typically, family's finances and resources are drastically reduced following parents' breakups. The evidence available reveals that in western countries, the percentage of single-mother parented families has been consistently high over the past few decades (Sahithya, Manohari & Vijaya, 2019). In the European Union, approximately 15% of the children grow up in single-parent families while in the United States, about 27% of the children grow up in a single-mother parented family.

There is a justifiable evidence that the development of a child begins from his interactions with family members (Berryhill & Durtschi, 2017; Smith & Moore (2013)). Smith and Moore (2013) clarify this relationship by arguing that single mother parenting behaviour has an impact on the development of delinquent behaviour among adolescents.

It is estimated that over half of all children born in the United States spend time in a single-mother parenting household (Kroese, Bernasco, Liefbroer & Rouwendal, 2021). In Africa, data shows that over 22% of women aged 20-49 years were unmarried mothers (Ntoimo & Mutanda, 2020). For example, in Namibia, the prevalence of a child bearing before marriage among female youths was approximated to be 25.5% in the year 2014 (Palamuleni & Adebowale, 2014). In East Africa, many children grow up in a family with only one biological parent due to different factors including death, unmarried situation, separation and divorce. In 2013, Kenya had about 32% of single mother-headed households (Government of Kenya, 2014) and in 2015, Uganda had about 31% of children growing up in single motherhood (UBOS & ICF, 2016).

In Tanzania, single-mother parenting is predominantly caused by parental divorce or separation, births to unattached women, parental decease and school pregnancy whereby women are the most affected group (Mwaikwila, 2012). The percentage of children who are living with single mothers is 19% and of children living with only biological father which is 5% (National Bureau of Statistic (NBS) & ICF Macro, 2011). Poverty seems to be more prevalent among women, particularly in urban areas. About 20.3% of women-headed households are poor and for men headed ones it is 14% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Statistical report of 2016 shows that the prevalence of single mothers was 38% (The United Republic of Tanzania,

2016). Thus the problem of single mother families escalated from 19% in 2010 to 38% in 2016.

Adolescents struggle to build self-identity, self-esteem and adulthood qualities but some are affected by single parenting (Lamb, 2018). According to Women's Legal Aid Centre (2007), more than 1,138 cases related to marriage breakdowns problems in Tanzania were handled between 2006 and 2007 based on the reported cases and the number was expected to increase.

Child conflict is greater in single-mother parenting household since single mothers get some challenges when there is no biological father in their families. About one in four households in Tanzania is headed by a woman. One in ten Tanzanian children is orphaned. The child must have lost one or both parents.

At the community level, it is possible to find a mother who is willing to care for a child whose parents passed away (United Republic of Tanzania, 2016). Family composition supremely offers a good judgment of security and steadiness that is indispensable for children. When there is a breakdown in the family composition, it may have a remarkable effect on children.

It is acknowledged that the increase in single mother parenting has a main influence on the social, economic and political context of family life (Mrinde, 2014). Several studies have been conducted to explore the challenges facing single parenthood and the impact of single parent families in both developed and developing counties (Berryhill & Durtschi 2017; Kotwal and Prabhakar, 2009; and Kim, Lee and Lee, 2018). However, there is a paucity of knowledge focusing on single mother-parenting in relation to adolescents' development. Thus, this study sought to establish challenges that single mothers faced in parenting the adolescents. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are economic challenges that face single mothers in supporting their adolescent children?
2. What are cultural challenges that face single mothers in supporting their adolescent children?
3. What are social challenges that face single mothers in supporting their adolescent children?

4. What are psychological challenges that face single mothers in supporting their adolescent children?

Methodology

The study adopted a phenomenological research design. Phenomenological research is a design of inquiry that describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. This design has strong philosophical underpinnings and typically involves conducting interviews (Creswell, 2018). The design was applied in this study since it was powerful in determining subjective experiences, gaining insights into people's motivations and actions, and cutting through the clutter of taken for granted assumptions and conventional wisdom.

Population and sampling techniques

The target population of the study was single mothers in Dodoma City Council. Selection of respondents was done through the purposive sampling. According to Taherdoost (2016), purposive sampling technique selects elements that would intentionally provide important information on the research problem under study. Thirty (30) single mother participants were identified and consulted. Also, a total of 8 Social Welfare Officers, of whom three from the three wards selected for the study and five from Dodoma City Council were included as key informants to better explore the challenges facing single mothers. All three SWOs from the wards were studied and two from city council were sampled for the study. The sample size was based on Bailey (1994) argument that regardless of the population size, a sample or subsample of 30 respondents is the bare minimum for studies which employ qualitative approach.

Data Collection

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods were used to collect data from single mothers. Participatory Rural Appraisal is an interactive data collection process conducted at a community level or with a specific community group of interest (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller). PRA was used through the key informant interview. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 single mothers and eight social welfare officers who were the parents or guardians of adolescent students studying in secondary schools in the selected wards. Interviews with single mothers were conducted at

their home premises after making telephone appointments. Similarly, interviews with social welfare officers were conducted at their work premises. The semi-structured interview guide for single mothers and Social Welfare Officers were used to collect data based on the specific objectives of the study. All respondents and informants participated in the study.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Data was sorted and transcribed from recording devices to texts which involved a series of technical and interpersonal issues in a particular verbatim oral versus written style (Kvale, 2007). The researcher transcribed and translated the tape-recorded interviews, then read and re-read the interviews in their entirety and reflected on the interviews as a whole for the improvement of the results. Thereafter, the results were presented using explanations and direct quotations from participants.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure that the study is ethical, a permission letter was sought from the University of Iringa. The permission letter to conduct the study in Dodoma was also secured from the Regional Administrative Secretary. Throughout the study, confidentiality of participants, voluntary participation, and informed consent of the participants were ensured. Additionally, the dignity of participants was respected in an ongoing manner throughout the study.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discusses the findings. The findings are presented in a way that they allow a logical flow of ideas as governed by the research objectives. The main objective of the study was to examine the influence of single mother parenting on adolescents' development in Dodoma City.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Single mothers aged from 30 to 59. As for the education level, 6.7% of participants had not attended formal education while 83.3% had primary level and 10% had secondary education level of education. As indicated in the table, 93.3% were self-employed while 6.7% were not employed.

Research Question 1: What are economic challenges that face single mothers in supporting their adolescent children?

Results show that economic challenges that single mothers faced included financial difficulties which affected their parenting role. This made them fail to provide basic needs like food, shelter, clothes and school requirements to their children. One of single mothers had this to say:

Due to the lack of money to satisfy the adolescent needs, I find myself doing strange things just to make sure these children are safe. For example, when I go to sell commodities (clothes), sometimes I fail to find customers. Then I try to go to clubs where I may find a man who gives me money after making sex with him. I use the money I get from sex work to feed and take care of my children (SM. 28).

Regarding financial challenges, another parent commented that:

I have three children (27, 18 and 17). The second child and the third child cannot attend classes because they lack school requirements like exercise books, pens and pencils but also school contributions like money for examinations; they are afraid of being punished by their teachers (SM.23).

One Social Welfare Officer revealed the following: "Many single mothers face economic challenges; they fail to provide basic needs to their adolescents. This makes these adolescents to engage in bad groups like using marijuana" (SWO. 2).

The findings imply that single mothers face multiple economic challenges in parenting. Adegboyega (2019), Mabuza, Thwala & Okeke (2014), Mugove (2017) and Tubei, Koderu & Kimani (2021) were of the same opinion that due to financial difficulties, single mothers cannot manage to handle the responsibilities of nurturing their children. According to Stephenson-Loiodice (2014) and Kotwal and Prabhakar (2009), the role done by single mothers in raising their children is challenged by economic issues due to poor living style.

The results indicated further that their income was very low and inadequate to support all family needs. These findings are in line with those of Franz, Lensche and Schmitz (2003) who contended that the socioeconomic (income and education) of single mothers are relatively low. Mokoke (2021) also revealed that single mothers are socially, economically and psychologically burdened. The findings imply that single mothers experience hard

time due to financial woes. This is due to the fact that the income generating activities they engage in are not capable of yielding sufficient funds for their daily needs. SWO 4 attested,

Most single mothers are economically unstable. Their life and the life of their children and those they live with are very hard. They have a heavy burden to nurture, teach, educate, shelter and cloth their children. Most of them because of economic difficulties they fail to educate their children.

Given the economic challenges and the assertion given above, government and non-governmental organizations need to offer economic assistance to disparate single mothers. Such kind of support would help them not only to sustain their livelihood but also to support their dependents educationally.

Research Question 2: What are cultural challenges that face single mothers in supporting their adolescent children?

Findings revealed that there were cultural factors which oppressed women, especially when they lost their husbands as brothers of the husband came to divide property to relatives without thinking about how the widowed will manage life after her husband's death. This affected parenting because single mothers lacked money because some property was taken by relatives of their husbands. This made them to live in poor life and fail to take care of their children. One of the single mothers revealed that:

I urge the government to end traditions and customs that oppress women; for example, when a husband dies, a relative of the man's side, comes at home to take property and leave the widowed without any thing to take care of children with. This tradition is the reason for us to live difficult life (SM.9).

Therefore, some of cultural practices are tools to suppress single mothers when their husbands pass away. This is supported by Fancy (2016) who states that in traditional African society, single motherhood, particularly those who are in this status due to premarital pregnancies, are highly discouraged through established traditions, cultural practices and taboos. According to Kotwal and Prabhakar (2009) cultural practices in some societies make single mothers to avoid attending social gatherings. Khan, Jakaria, Jhuma & Miah (2022) argue that the cultural challenges single mothers

face include deprivation of property, patriarchal social structure, and social stigma. Rural single mothers face more complex challenges than urban ones because of the lack of income opportunities and insecurity.

Research Question 3: What are social challenges that face single mothers in supporting their adolescent children?

Regarding social challenges, most of the single mothers were stigmatised by the community. This is because they had children without being married, which is considered to be wrong and unacceptable by communities. The relationship with families was also not good for some single mothers. Some parents refused a pregnant girl to live in their homes. The findings imply that single mothers in the study area experienced social distancing by communities. This means that their relationship with families and communities is relatively no good. This was demonstrated by one participant who said, "My family and community consider me an outcast. They do not want to talk to me. I feel rejected by my own people. I am depressed and have nowhere to run for in case of any problem" (SM 6).

Some single mothers were in conflict with the community where they lived. They are blamed for not caring and handling well their children. Further, some single mothers had no time to spend with their children because they were busy struggling for other needs for their children. This caused some of them to fail to socialize with their children and provide them social teachings which would develop them into good nationals.

A similar observation was made by Mishra, Thamunaina and Mishra (2021) who asserted that single mothers suffer from various constraints and challenges in managing families. They succumb to multiple vulnerabilities including social, physical, emotional and economical while managing families alone. Many of single mothers faced hard times to handle their responsibilities and it was difficult for them to control their families.

Research Question 4: What are psychological challenges that face single mothers in supporting their adolescent children?

Results present emotional or psychological challenges that single mothers faced in parenting. They had a sense of loneliness, depression and anger which made them rear their children unhappily. This was reported by one of participants

who said, "all children were left for me to take care of. They are now all studying. I feel lonely because no one to help me meet these adolescent needs at school. I wish the father of my children would be there" (SM.1). Another parent said, "I feel lonely and depressed especially when I fail to meet the needs of children. Anger arises when a child asks for something and I don't have it. I can beat him, insult him and even give him harsh words" (SM.8). These findings are in harmony with what Mackay and Ross (2005) opined that marital separation commonly involves major emotional trauma for child relationships. The results further reflect the findings of Bornstein and Bradley (2014) who said, adolescents may engage in unconstructive or unacceptable behaviors such as alcohol use, smoking, substance abuse, violation, harming others and suicidal attempts to release tension or for feeling relieved from their emotional pains.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

It is concluded that single mothers experienced manifold challenges in supporting their adolescent children. The challenges ranged from economic, social, cultural, to psychological. The economic challenges include financial constraints as most single mothers' income is limited and their income generating activities are not capable of gaining sufficient funds to cater for their needs and the needs of their adolescent children. Regarding social challenges, single mothers were secluded and stigmatized. The society considered them as outcast and of less value. Concerning cultural challenges, single mothers were deprived of their property and possession due to cultural practices that paved ways for the property to be taken away by males. Finally, single mothers experienced psychological challenges including absence of husbands to support the upbringing of children. This made them feel insecure and stressed.

Recommendations

It is recommended that support mechanisms from government and non-governmental organisations be in place to empower single mothers with prerequisite tools that will help them become economically stable. Social cultural practices that stigmatize and deprive single women's property and consequently hinder single mothers from supporting their children adolescents should be stopped. Social welfare officers should provide training to the community on the rights of single mothers to live, to be respected, to own land and other property and

to be supported. The government and non-governmental organizations should support single mothers in forming groups for socialization and offering counselling programmes as intervention measures to their situations.

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