

Public Perceptions Towards Children Brought Up by Single Mothers: A Case of Queenstown, South Africa

Marongwe Newlin

*Walter Sisulu University, Queenstown Campus, Research and Innovation Department,
PO Box 876, Queenstown, 5320, South Africa
E-mail: nmarongwe@wsu.ac.za*

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ABSTRACT Single motherhood is becoming common in many households across the globe. The paper sought to explain perceptions upheld by community members of Queenstown, about the behaviour of children raised by single mothers. Qualitative approach and phenomenological design were utilised. Purposive sampling technique was used to draw participants from Queenstown area. Face-to-face in-depth interviews, complemented by written narratives were used to collect data. An interpretive phenomenological analysis was employed to analyse data. Verbatim and thick descriptions were used to present data. The paper established that children raised by single mothers were viewed as troublemakers who had lost values because they had no adult males to model and be disciplined by. The paper concluded that the society still views children raised by single mothers as problematic and a threat to social order. The community should accept single mother families and view them as normal families just like the 'traditional' family.

INTRODUCTION

It is generally agreed whether intuitively or empirically that the mother is the most important person in the family who takes the gargantuan task of both rearing and parenting children often causing stress (Goldscheider and Waite 1991; Malachi 2016). Recent studies agree that there is a sharp increase in the number of single mothers raising children on their own. Amato (2000) and Burns and Scott (1994) postulate that the demographics of single parenting show a general increase worldwide in children living in single parent homes echo (Popenoe 1996; Coontz 1997; Andersson 2002; DeBell 2008; Ivory 2013). The above authors agree that there was a rapid and drastic increase in the number of single-parent families in the latter half of the twentieth century to twenty-first century. According to Roshan and Kandi (1993), many of the single-parent families are headed by women and it justifies the undertaking of this study which explores public perceptions towards children raised by single mothers. In the same line a report released by Statistics South Africa (Hawkins 2015) showed that most households in 2014 were run by single mothers. In the same report according to statistician general, Pali Lehohla, who presented the report in parliament, indicat-

ed that 886 202 babies were born in 2014: more than fifty percent (50%) of the women who gave birth were single mothers (Hawkins 2015). Also according to the United States Census Bureau of about twelve million (12 million) single parent families in 2016, more than eighty percent (80%) were headed by single mothers (IBT Staff Report 2016). Given that mothers play a colossal task of raising children which is often constant worrying how their children are viewed by the community, it was deemed necessary to undertake this study. Globally, there is a great outcry that the morality and advisability of children raised by single mothers leaves a lot to be desired. In her study on 'Single Mother Stigma', Patricia (2012) established that seventy percent of Americans think that it is bad for society if single women raise children on their own, since it is causing the breakdown of families with negative effects for children, families and society (Popenoe 1996). Marcotte (2012) holds the same sentiment as expressed above that it is not a good idea for single mothers to raise children alone because there is a large body of literature showing that children of single mothers are more likely to commit crimes than children who grow up with married parents (Badger 2017). The study joins the ongoing debate that a single parent family is not even a real family especially if it is a

female-headed one. What is the public opinion of Queenstown people towards children raised by single mothers?

Statement of the Problem

The traditional belief around the globe is that a two parent family structure is considered the 'traditional' or the 'normal' family structure (Roshan and Kandi 1993) while a single female-headed family is abnormal. It is argued that there is a persistent stigma against single mothers and less so to single fathers (Patricia 2012). Given the scenario that we are standing on the threshold of a new era where there is a sharp increase in female-headed families (Burns and Scott 1994; Badger 2017), what are then the perceptions towards children raised by single mothers? Historically it was very rare to find a woman raising children single-handedly, she would be under the cover of a male figure be it a brother, uncle, cousin, brother-in-law, grandfather or even a stepfather. In this modern era, the percentage of single female-headed households has increased (Hawkins 2015; Badger 2017). This is being caused by increases in births to unmarried women, high divorce rates among couples, separation, deaths, unintended pregnancies, and 'choice single mothers' etc. (Roshan and Kandi 1993; DeBell 2008; Sawhill 2014; Zill 2014). Now that we are living with this reality, it is worth exploring the perceptions of the public towards children raised by single mothers.

Objectives

The study sought to:

- Explain perceptions upheld by community members of Queenstown, about the behaviour of children raised by single mothers.
- Propose suggestions that could be adopted by the community and the government to help such households to raise responsible children.

Both the objectives of the study and the review of literature on the perceptions upheld by community members of Queenstown about the behaviour of children raised by single mothers, guided the study.

Literature Review

As alluded to earlier on, single mother households constitute a significant part of the family profile worldwide (Mannis 1991; Burns and Scott

1994; IBT 2016; Badger 2017). It is argued that some scholars take a cynical view by seeing single mother headed family in decline, losing of traditional values and as a breakdown of the social order (Popenoe 1993; Blankenthorn 1995). On the other hand, other researchers hold a post-modern view which suggests that families are not declining or breaking down but changing, with new family configurations emerging to cope with new work and social patterns (Stacey 1996; Patricia 2012). It is in the interest of this paper to define what is meant by single mother, give types of single mother families and explain the general perceptions held by the public towards children raised in such families.

Defining the Term Single Mother Family

Single mother family is a family headed by a woman who lives with dependent children without a spouse or a partner, there is no other adult with whom she can share decision-making, disciplining of children and financial responsibilities (Popenoe 1996; Patricia 2000). This woman shoulders all the accountabilities of raising a child or children and all rearing and parenting responsibilities cascades on her. For the purpose of this study, this woman can either be widowed, divorced, separated, single mother by choice, woman who fell pregnant unintentionally out of wedlock, a woman who has never married or any woman who is bringing up a child or children alone. The researcher deliberately widened her net to cover all these women because the bottom line is all such women would be raising children without a male figure in their lives. The term 'single mother family' was used interchangeably with female-headed household in this study.

Types of Single Mother Families

According to Miller (1992) as cited in Mannis (1999), researchers do not really agree on the reasons for non-marital births but do agree that there is a sharp increase in single mothering, concur American Academy of Padiatrics (2015) and Badger (2017). Single mother families come in different forms in this modern era unlike in the past where it was as a result of death of a father. Prior studies established that the proportion of mothers who are single is growing across all socio-economic groups. Single mothers are

therefore, categorised in the following single mother family by:

- Death of a husband/father (widowed)
- Divorce (by the increasing prevalence of divorces among couples, historically it was rare)
- In separation, either formalised or in formalised
- Unintentional pregnancy (out of wedlock births)
- Being ditched by a partner who may want to duck responsibility of bringing up a child
- Single mothers by choice (Choice Moms), they turn to single parenthood by choice

The above types have been adapted from Roshan and Kandi (1993) and Popenoe (1996). Single parenting has become a norm and research has it that recent years have seen the increasing incidence and visibility of uncoupled women who choose to be single parents.

Public Opinions towards Children Raised By Single Mothers

A multiplicity of viewpoints occurs pertaining to children raised by single mothers and they are often stigmatised. According to PEW Research Centre (Patricia 2000), stigma is difficult to shake and generally children brought up by single mothers are often seen as a bad influence to the society as shall be elaborated below though there are some studies that have argued for such children. Marcotte (2012) observes that there is a large body of literature showing that children of single mothers are more likely to commit crimes than children of married parents (Badger 2017). In support of Marcotte and Badger, a comedian Bill Cosby in Ivory (2013) believes that the fading of the black nuclear family creates a burden on society. Patricia (2000) carried out a study in America where she established that seventy percent of Americans think single women raising children on their own is bad for society in the sense that it increases school dropout rates, increases poverty, and increases the number of children who have their first child before getting married. It is further argued that children raised by single mothers show more achievement and behaviour problems than those who grow up with both biological parents (Zill 2014; IBT 2016). This is often ascribed to the

fact that children may not have a father figure to model applicable behaviour and also from whom they receive discipline. The female-headed family may be characterised by juvenile delinquency probably because single mothers often lose power to control the family (Roshan and Kandi 1993; Badger 2017). A recent study carried out by Richard Reeves and Kimberly Howard in Sawhill (2014) found that parenting skills vary across demographic groups and that forty-four percent of single mothers fall into the weakest category and only three percent in the strongest category. Weak parenting forms among single-female parents accounts to why children from female-headed households are perceived to have behavioural problems since they do not have a male figure in the household.

A number of studies show that children with no fathers are three times more likely to be unhappy, and are also more likely to engage in anti-social behaviour, abuse substance and engage in juvenile delinquency. The 'kids' of single mothers are viewed as troubled or troublemakers, bound for the penitentiary, suffering without a male in the home, uncared for and a bad influence on other children (Patricia 2000; Badger 2017). According to Zill (2014), single mothers are frustrated and sometimes angry, have lingering hurt, resentment and feelings of loneliness. These negative feelings may be transferred to their children who are likely to adopt the same feelings and this may lead them to have an aggressive behaviour (Ipatenco 2013). It is common knowledge and a well-established psychological principle that extreme frustration leads to aggression, particularly in individuals with low impulse control and aggressive tendencies (Zill 2014). It is further argued that children raised by single mothers are more likely to become teen parents and less likely to graduate from high school or college (Sawhill 2014; IBT 2015). In line with that McLanahan and Sanderfur (1994) posit that children have higher rates of anti-social behaviour, aggression, anxiety and social problems and these problems may be attributed to a decrease in available resources, income and continuity in social networks. In mother-only families children tend to experience higher absentee rates at school, higher dropout rates especially for boys and more delinquent activity. It is argued that children are likely to marry early, have children early and divorce early. Girls are said to be at greater risk of becoming single

mothers as a result of non-marital childbearing and divorce (McLanahan and Booth 1989; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Hawkins 2015; Badger 2017). The explanation for the problems found among such children has been the absence of a male adult in the family (Gongla 1982; Patricia 2000).

Andersson (2002) observes that children from single mother families may feel ashamed of not having a father and this may impact negatively on the child's self-esteem. Andersson (2002) argues that a child may have reduced expectations for his or her own relationship later in life and crave affection. From the literature reviewed it is evident that some societies perceive single mothering families as aberrant and a hazard to the social order since their children are viewed as mischief-makers. As observed by Sawhill (2014), it should be noted that not all children raised by single mothers are troublemakers, there are few individuals according to studies who are doing very well. This paper was looking at the common or general traits perceived by the public from the single mothers' point of view. From the literature reviewed, the researcher concluded that single mother family is no longer a new phenomenon and is a hot debate which is still attracting the attention of researchers and media. In support of the above idea Badge (2017) states that the growing number of studies in this field (single motherhood) also suggests that it is a phenomenon that needs attention. There is no consensus as to whether this family is normal or abnormal but of course depending on the society and the culture because countries have defined it differently across the globe. However, generally most people are cynical about children raised by single mothers.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the qualitative approach and aimed to describe and understand in a subjective manner the qualitative nature of a phenomenon (perception towards children raised by single mothers) rather than to explain it in terms of the laws of cause and effect as adopted in quantitative research (Babbie and Mouton 2013). Qualitative research provides depth and is suited to revealing unique meanings that underlie each single mother's experience. The paper utilized the interpretivist research paradigm which strives to understand and describe hu-

man nature. In this paradigm, knowledge is subjective and idiographic because what counts as truth is context dependent. There are, therefore, multiple realities, which are constructed (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). Given the need for disclosure of intimate life experiences in this type of research it was deemed necessary to use qualitative research techniques in this study. The study also employed a phenomenological case study design. Phenomenology is a reasoned inquiry (Stewart and Mickunas 1974) that aims to discover the inherent "essences of appearances". In phenomenology "an appearance is anything of which one is conscious" and anything that appears to consciousness is deemed a legitimate area for philosophical investigation and thus is researchable (in this case perception towards children raised by single mothers).

Qualitative case designs use case selection and identification which this study employed as suggested by Rule and John (2011). Case studies are ideographic research methods; that is, methods that study individuals as individuals rather than members of a population (Terre Blanche et al. 2006). The purposively selected cases for this study are on the basis of researcher's judgment about which ones would be best suited to the research purpose (Babbie and Mouton 2013). The characteristic bounding the research participants was 'a single mother raising child/children alone'. The study involved fifteen single mothers in Queenstown. Each of the fifteen single mothers was viewed as a case as each bore unique experiences of how society perceives their children. A sample size of this nature is suited to qualitative investigation (Devers and Robinson 2002). According to Terney and Dilley (2002: 461), the sample of fifteen participants is "small but theoretically significant." Patton (2002) also suggests that in qualitative phenomenological research a researcher can even use single cases of $N=1$; with only one participant. The study associated itself with what Creswell (2008) and Leedy and Ormrod (2005) recommend that the use of 5-25 cases (all of whom have direct experience of phenomenon being studied) as they feel that the range is large enough to assume that most or all of the perceptions that might be important are uncovered. Purposive selection is appropriate for a phenomenological study as it grants the researcher in-depth information of specific life experiences of participants. Stewart and Mickunas (1974) posit

that informants in a phenomenological study proffer richly-textured descriptions of their lived experiences. It was advantageous to use purposive or judgemental selection as it allowed the researcher to select unique cases satisfactory to the study needs (Cohen et al. 2007).

Data was gathered through interviews and narratives considering the sensitive nature of the topic that it is still a burning issue in most societies. Ten single mothers were interviewed and five single women wrote narratives. The aim of qualitative interviews is to see the world through the eyes of the participant (Maree 2007). The prime data collection instruments were the phenomenological in-depth open-ended interviews. The phenomenological in-depth interview is "a conversation between researcher and informant focusing on the informant's perception of self, life and experience, expressed in his or her own words (McNair et al. 2008). The phenomenological interviews were open-ended so as to capture first hand unmodified data from participants as they were accorded ample time to tell their tales in a free and flexible liaison (Robson 2002). Narratives were used as one of the biographical methods to collect data. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) define the biographical method as "the studied use and collection of life documents, which describe turning-point moment in individuals' lives. The biographical methods are valuable in understanding major shifts in the lives of participants as they sometimes detail sensitive and private experiences (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). They were valuable in this study as some of the single mothers presented more vivid private experiences than they dared give in the interviews. In support, Rule and John (2011: 65) contend that story telling gives participants the freedom over the data generated and that it produces rich data in a "rather informal, non-directive and non-threatening manner."

Data Analysis

Interpretive phenomenological analysis was employed to analyse the interview transcripts and narratives. This analysis focuses upon identifying recurrent themes across transcripts. Recurrent themes are the similar and consistent ideas, thoughts, images, and accounts shared (Moustakas 1994). On the same note, Rule and John (2011: 150) suggest that "Themes are recurrent and distinctive features of participants'

accounts, characterizing particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the goal of the study." Thick descriptions were used to analyse data.

RESULTS

From the findings themes related to the problem statement emerged. These themes are discussed below and illustrated by means of quotations from the interview and narrative texts. The quotations are presented verbatim. Coding: The participants were identified as follows: Single Mother Interviewee - (SMI 1-10) and Single Mother Narrative - (SMN 1-5).

- Public perceptions of single mothers raising children
- Feeling of single mothers towards the public perceptions
- Public perceptions towards children raised by single mothers
- Relationship of single mothers and their children
- Suggestions to the community and government

All the participants used in the study were asked to respond to the following question: "What is the public view towards single mothers raising children on their own?"

In response **SMI 3** articulated that:

Oh too bad my sister, they call us names they see us as people who do not want to be governed by men but as people who want to be independent 'bathi siyajola' (they say we are jolling/dating, want pleasures, joy and hang out with men). Do you know sisi (sister) that they see us as radicals turning the society upside, they don't even respect us, and I am a living example, experiencing it in all spheres of life? We don't have the dignity. The first question people ask you is, 'Are you married?' and the trouble comes if you say no. (SMI 3)

Similarly **SMI 7** responded that:

Men still think that this world belongs to them alone, they see us as a threat to society and a bad influence to the community. They see us as people who are now educated and do not want to submit to them. (SMI 7)

SMN 4 wrote that:

They see us as stubborn people despite everything you do for the community and your own family. My brothers don't even respect me they see me as a curse, disgrace to the family and portraying a bad picture to their children.

They don't treat me in the same way they treat my married sister because I don't have a man, I drink beer and I like partying. We are not really accepted in society, they are sceptical about us. (SMN4)

The single mothers (both interviews and narratives) shared more or less similar experiences of how the society perceives them. Among the other perceptions it was noted that single mothers are given sarcastic names, they like partying, are changing the society negatively, are not treated like how the married women are treated, are stubborn and do not command respect in society.

As a follow-up to the first question above, all participants were asked to respond to this question: **"How do you feel as a single mother raising children on your own on how the society views you?"**

SMN 3 indicated that:

I feel rejected, initially I felt ashamed of myself but now have learn to live with it. What I know is that systems change, life changes nothing is static and now I know that I am not the only single mom there are many out there and seemingly it is now fashionable to be on your own because men want to control us too much. I was like a slave to my own husband now I feel liberated and I don't care what people think about me than to live a life of pretence (SMN 3).

In the same line SMI 5 (showing a sad face and at unease) said:

I don't feel good when people talk bad about my status in the presence of my children. I feel humiliated yet I am not the first person to be a single mom neither will I be the last person no. I feel hurt, yet I am also growing my children like how the married ones do so why do they see us as abnormal? In my community now the number of single moms outweighs the number of married women which means it is now a norm, so no sweat. (SMI 5)

Generally all the responses the researcher got expressed the same sentiment of feeling hurt, hated, humiliated, rejected and so on. On the other hand, the responses again reflected a certain degree of feeling liberated and acceptance of how the society perceives them. Apparently their responses indicated that they know that there are many women out there who are raising children independent of men.

When asked to respond to the question, **"How does the community view children raised by sin-**

gle mothers?" Participants had a lot to share on this question and single mothers expressed mixed experiences though the bulk of it tilted to the negative perceptions.

SMI 10 remarked that:

Hey sisi (sister) 'kuthwe' (it is said) our children don't have values like respect because they are raised by women who don't know how to control kids. In my community they say our children steal, rape people, fight and commit other silly crimes. They accuse our children of forming gangs and ambushing people though it may be true but not every child from a single mom does that. (SMI 10)

Also SMI 1 pointed out that:

It appears as if our children are the only ones disrupting the society. There is nothing good they say about our children. My children are doing well in school but still people don't see any good out of them. If crime is committed by one child from a single mom family then all children from such families commit crime. In our community there are people especially foreigners who are selling drugs, 'ntsangu' (dagga) but it is alleged that these foreigners are assisted by our children to distribute those drugs to the community and to school children. Children are being kidnapped and other people murdered and robbed, guess what 'sisi' the first suspects are children raised by us single moms. The police once came here at my place on several occasions for questioning my boy. My boy is a target I am not talking about other people but about my own boy. (SMI 1)

SMN 5 scribed as follows:

Sometimes the community is not wrong to accuse our children because the moral fibre has collapsed especially the children we are raising without fathers. Sometimes they go crazy; they even beat us up the mothers demanding that they want to know their fathers. They become worse after coming from the initiation (circumcision ritual) when they now view themselves as the man, they won't take instructions from us women, they change and start to drink beer, they come home late, harassing old people, actually they just become wild. Now I have lost two children, I don't even know their whereabouts. My daughter was impregnated when she was in Grade 10 because of peer pressure and she wanted a child grant from the government. She goes to the taverns and her performance is very bad at school. I am writing the

truth telling you what is happening to me and other people but there are a few children raised by single mothers who are behaving well. (SMN 5)

In contradiction to the above SMN 2 wrote that:

I have never heard anything bad about our children from the society. What I know is that there is a high crime rate in our society. Girl-children from both families (married couples and single mom families) are falling pregnant at a tender age. Our children are drinking and smoking. The community is crying because of our youngsters. What I have personally observed is that there are now many households led by women, some of those who are in marriages are always fighting, and the divorce rate is higher than before. In short I can write and say things have fallen apart. Many men are abandoning their families going out with young girls. In our society these men are now called the Blesser. (SMN 2)

From the responses above, it was clear that the single mothers' children are professed negatively by the society. SMN 2 related and generalised the perceptions not focusing on children raised by single mothers only. It could also mean that SMN 2 did not want to disclose the truth about the community perceptions but wanted also to bring the fact that even married couples fight and are divorcing which too has repercussions on the children.

The study asked further (as follow-up of the above question) the single mothers to explain how they were relating with their own children. Some of the explanations showed doubts reflecting a bit of tension in some families.

SMI 9 related that:

Personally I have a good relationship with my children but of late because of tight work-related issues ummmh my daughter is giving me some problems. I also had a friction with my boy soon after his circumcision, he did not want to listen to me but now slowly yes, he is coming well. So I can't complain. (SMI 9)

SMI 2 also remarked that:

Yeah we relate well but as a mother you always see that there is a gap especially with my boy-children. They ask too many questions and they want to know about my every movement, my boys are very jealousy and would want to know every person I talk to. Sometimes they become angry because of little minor things. I am waiting to see how we would relate after

their circumcision because I have heard negative stories about that ritual and that's my greatest fear but otherwise so far so good. (SMI 2)

From the narratives side SMN 1 wrote that:

My children are still young and we relate very well though I can spot that my son has signs of being naughty but I use an iron hand to instil discipline and I am watching him closely. I sometimes punish him but before punishing him, I sit him down for a discussion and point out which rule he would have broken after that I ask him to tell me what happens if a rule is broken and which type of punishment is to be administered. I have found this working because the rules were formulated by both of us. (SMN 1)

Lastly all participants were asked to respond to the question: **"What can be done by the community and the government to assist you in raising your children?"** In response to this question SMI 5 suggested that:

We want to be treated with respect and this will assist us to raise well respected children. (SMI 5)

We need equal recognition now we are men in our own right, no name calling. (SMI 10)

I am against how the child grant is administered, it is attracting our girls to fall pregnant for them to receive the grant and it is too little considering the cost of living. The girls will dump their children and go and freak out, it's hurting. (SMI 7)

There should be policies made in favour of us and our kids to protect us since such a family is real (SMN 4)

The participants came up with many suggestions showing that single mothers needed the society to treat them and their children with respect just like any other person in society. The responses also showed that the government should review the child grant.

DISCUSSION

The study sought to explain perceptions upheld by community members of Queenstown, about the behaviour of children raised by single mothers. The intention was to find insights and come up with suggestions that can be adopted by the community and the government on how they can make a meaningful contribution towards raising children who are brought up by single mothers for them to become meaningful citizens of South Africa.

It emerged from the study that that single mothers are given sarcastic names, they like partying, are changing the society negatively, are not treated like how the married women are treated, are stubborn and do not command respect in society. A study on 'Single Mother Stigma' by Patricia (2000) which was carried out in America established similar findings that some Americans called these 'moms', *easy, slutty, they got pregnant with some random guy, whatever they do is never as good as what a married woman does, they leave children alone*. In the same vein (IBT 2016) reported that single parent was a double duty and no one was honouring single parents: as result a National Single Parent Day was set aside to honour them. Also Zill (2014) notes the same that these mothers are called by names. From this finding it can be noted that negative name calling of single mothers in society has a negative impact on how they raise their children which in turn affects the children. It is a common belief in Sociology that labelling either good or bad influences how one behaves leading to self-fulfilling prophecy and stereotyping (Sumner 1994; Macionis 2012). The study further established that such perceptions imply that these women are in that position because of choice like SMN 4 who wrote that she was seen as a disgrace to the family, Amato (2000) noted the same. It is noted from all the responses given that these women are a threat to the society causing a social upheaval because it is argued that they are a problem and their children a problem too since there is no father figure to instil discipline (Gongla 1982; Faust and McKibben 1999). Badge (2017) concurs that children of unmarried moms face more obstacles and experience more family instability. Badge goes further to state that such children have more problem behaviours and more trouble finishing at school (Similar observation made by McLanahan and Jencks in Badge 2017). This finding is in line with what was observed by Richard Reeves and Kimberly Howard in (Sawhill 2014) in their study which they found out that majority of single mothers were in the weakest category of possessing weak parenting skills.

Another finding highlighted by the study is that single women raising children alone felt hurt, hated, humiliated, rejected and so on. Usually a spirit of anger, hurt, hate, rejection and so forth is transferrable to immediate people surrounding you. The same line of thought is advanced by Zill (2014) and Peterson and Zill (1996) who

argue from a psychological point of view that frustration, hurt, resentment and anger can lead to aggression tendencies and if not guarded can spread and impact negatively on how one raises a child. The child is likely to pick up the same tendencies and becomes a menace to the society (McLanahan and Sanderfur 1994; Ivory 2013; Hawkins 2015). The implication is that if single mothers feel hurt, rejected, etc. because of the comments from the community (especially low income single mothers), then their children will tend to behave the same and move around carrying anger. It is that same anger they will manifest to the community in a revulsion manner. In support of the view above Ipatenco (2013) argues that single-parenting can cause children to feel angry, frustrated impacting on his whole-being. McLanahan and Sandefur (1996) and Andersson (2002) in the same vein state that children of single mothers harbour such feelings but only to be manifested later in life affecting his own life and the society at large. On the other hand, the responses again reflected a certain degree of feeling liberated and acceptance of how the society perceives them. Apparently their responses indicated that they know that there are many women out there who are raising children independent of men as established in the Single Mother Guide in IBT (2016). That knowledge is used by some of the single mothers as a source of comfort and hope.

It also emerged from the study that the community perceived children raised by single mothers in a dubious way. Nearly all participants agreed that the perception is bad; the society thinks that these children's behaviour is unbecoming, unruly and unacceptable to the society. Their argument boils back to the fact that a household without a father figure is abnormal. The Single Mother Guide in IBT (2016) observes that the prevalence was due in part to the growing trend of children born outside marriage- a societal trend that was virtually unheard of decades ago. The study found that it is alleged in some cases that some of these children connive with foreigners who smuggle and sell drugs unlawfully; both boys and girls are heavy smokers and drunkards, girls fall pregnant early. Some of the children beat up even their own mothers, refuse to take instructions from the mothers, perform ill at school and all other bad things. Some of the mothers confessed and admitted that some of their children are uncontrollable because things have fallen apart. This key find-

ing is in line with other prior studies that established that single women raising children on their own is immoral for the society because they increase crime, poverty, early child production, drug addicts, school dropout, violence, etc. (McLanahan and Sanderfur 1994; Patricia 2000; Ivory 2013; Zill 2014; Sawhill 2014; Hawkins 2015; IBT 2016; Badge 2017). To sum it up in support of the above key finding Marcotte (2012) and Badge (2017) state that the bottom line is there is a large body of literature showing that children of single mothers are more likely to commit crimes than children who grow up with married parents. In addition to that Faust and McKibben (1999) concur that such children are seen as deviant and a threat to the social order.

The implication drawn from the above key finding is that there is a problem with some children raised by single mothers. This may be attributed to the fact that things are fast changing and some fathers are never in the lives of their children and also male adults from families are reluctant to interfere with some female-headed households. In support of the above observation, a report by IBT (2016) indicates that according to the Single Mother Guide, today, 1 in 4 children under the age of 18, a total of about 17.4 million, are being raised without a father. It should be noted that the study did not go further to find out why fathers are not showing up and why male adults are reluctant to help. However, from the study it is evident that the society thinks that some single mothers want power, are stubborn, want independence. The study also revealed that society has changed and the old social order is slowly facing a natural death, it is now cry the beloved country. It should also be noted that the some of the single mothers raised a very sensitive issue of circumcision that their children become wild after being circumcised. One of the mothers even pointed out that she fears that rite of passage when time comes for her boys to be circumcised. The question is: does it mean circumcision changes men to become hostile towards their mothers and the society at large? It is another gap that needs to be researched on.

It also stemmed from the study that generally single mothers have a bitter-sweet relationship with their children depending on the age of the children and how firm the mother is. The relationship as related by some mothers show a bit of tension and a gap that has to be closed, concur the American Academy of Paediatrics

(2015) and McLanahan and Jencks in Badger (2017). The single mothers have a problem with their daughters who fall pregnant earlier than expected because of peer pressure and they end up going to taverns neglecting schooling. This finding confirms what was established by McLanahan and Booth (1989), McLanahan and Sanderfur (1994) and IBT (2016) that girls are likely to have children early, are at a greater risk of becoming single mothers as a result of non-marital child-bearing or divorce.

The issue of circumcision featured again when single mothers were remarking how they relate with their children. They indicated that some of their boy-children challenge them after circumcision and want to dominate and control the whole household including the mother. The study drew that there could be a problem probably on the way boys are trained when they go for circumcision and teachings they receive. Traditionally circumcision is administered by males to boys (though there are some cultures that administer it to girls), (Wilcken et al. 2010). It is a rite of passage marking the transition from boyhood to manhood and it is alleged that the training is a bitter pill to swallow if not properly administered (Doyle 2005; Wilcken et al. 2010). So it could be that such trainings harden them and make them to undermine their mothers (an assumption-further research is needed).

Finally, it also emerged from the study that the community and the government can take a proactive position in order to protect single mothers and their children through formulation of policies in favour of their households. This finding concurs with the view that was raised by DePaulo (2015) that married people have laws and practices that favour them economically and otherwise. DePaulo continues to argue that such laws and practices have implications for children; some grow up in less economically secure households simply because of the marital status of their parents (Hawkins 2015; IBT 2016; Badge 2017). The reflection is that some female-headed households struggle financially and may be a push factor for children to engage in theft and promiscuity behaviour for survival. **SMN 2** wrote about old men known as 'blessers' who are running after girls and this is promoting moral decadence. The study further established that in as much as the single mothers appreciate the child grant paid by government to their daughters they felt the policy needed a review. They saw it as promoting young girls to fall pregnant

for them to receive it and they felt that the grant was too little an amount. Some single mothers who participated in the study appealed and proposed that the least the community and the government can do is to treat them with respect and acknowledge the existence of their households without being judgemental since things have changed.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the society still views children raised by single mothers as problematic and a threat to the social order. Such perceptions stemmed from the fact that the society had not really accepted the single mothers who are seen as rebelling against the social norm of that a family should have a male adult for it to be complete. The society believes in a saying which says, 'A crab cannot teach her children to walk straight when the crab herself does not walk straight', meaning to say how can a single mother teach her children societal values when she is living contrary to the societal norms upheld, i.e. heading a family without a male adult to instil discipline. The study has reached the conclusion that despite having a widespread increase across the globe in the number of single mothers heading families; it is still difficult for society to accept them. The government and the community can also play a role in assisting such households to raise their children, than to blame them. Female-headed households just like child-headed households are now a reality in our society and should not be seen as a new phenomenon that should puzzle the society. Yes, dysfunctional, deprived female-headed households should be a thing of the past if there is grander responsiveness and a will to exterminate their handicaps that necessitate them to behave in a way society perceives them. The society should not let the situation depreciate further, anticipating it will just go away, no, yes united we stand, divided we fall. The study concluded too that researchers can aid inspiration to the public perceptions by understanding the common factors underlying the establishment of single mothering in edict to support them and their children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the study findings, the following recommendations were made that:

The society has changed; therefore, the community should accept single mother families and view them as normal families just like the 'traditional' family. The study noted with great concern the plea of single mothers in raising their children; the community and government should join hands with these households for them to bring up their children rather than calling them names. The government is encouraged to review the child grant policy including the package given out to young girls who would have given birth out of wedlock. The community and the government should address the issue of circumcision and have checks and balance to ensure that, that transition will not affect the single mothers and the entire society in an undesirable manner.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE

As pointed out earlier on, the study was limited to one area and used a small sample; therefore future studies may investigate the same issue on a bigger and wider scale to come up with generalisations of results. Any future study may also try to solicit the perceptions from the community's point of view, relatives and the children rose by single mothers since this current one gathered views from the single mothers only. This study did not have a comparative dimension, hence encouraging future researchers to compare children raised by single mothers and children raised by single fathers. Also compare children raised by single mothers in urban and those in rural areas since the environments are different. It is generally believed that environments have a bearing on the behaviour of children; this therefore needs researchers to take a look at environments. Future researchers may even compare children raised by single mothers in South Africa and children in other Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries or beyond SADC and establish the differences and the similarities of perceptions held by the communities. Lastly, the circumcision issue highlighted as problematic by some single mothers needs to be researched again to establish the impact it has on the behaviour of such children.

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