



Examine the Factors Contributing to the Low Socio-Economic Status of Women in Shikoswe Compound of Kafue District, Zambia

Chisebe Sylvester and Sibanda Linda

Eden University Zambia

ABSTRACT:

This study was conducted in Shikoswe Compound of Kafue District in Lusaka Province. Approximately 200 respondents were sampled from the estimated population of 2000 residents. The study aimed to examine the factors contributing to the low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound, Kafue District. The objectives of the study were to identify and analyze the socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound, Kafue District, to examine the factors contributing to their low socio-economic status, and to propose measures to improve their situation. Data collection involved distributing questionnaires to selected individuals and gathering relevant literature from various sources such as books, magazines, and newspapers. Data generated from the questionnaires were analyzed manually as well as using software including MS Access, SPSS, and MS Excel. The analysis of the data in this study was primarily descriptive. Presentation of the data was done using tables, figures, and charts. The following are the recommendations: the government should create jobs for youths and women, as promised during their election campaigns, the government should open and revive companies in Kafue, which previously provided opportunities for many young men and women, the government must ensure that the Citizen Empowerment Fund benefits those in need, especially women in Shikoswe Compound, the government should regulate the proliferation of bars in Shikoswe Compound and ensure that operational hours are regulated, the government and other stakeholders should provide sponsorship to children of impoverished women, and the government should consider subsidizing essential commodities such as mealie meal.

Keywords: Development, Women, Empowerment, Socio-economic, Shikoswe, Kafue

1.0 Introduction

Although women make tremendous contributions to the economy of Zambia, women's contributions are not valued in the same way as men's. This is, in part, due to socially constructed ideas about the value of women's independence economically and otherwise. As a result, women consistently find themselves at a lower status than men. In order to change this picture, there is need for socio-economic empowerment of women in Zambia, particularly in Shikoswe Compound of Kafue District.

In the 21st century, women enjoyed more freedom and power than ever before. However, they are still disadvantaged when compared to men in virtually all aspects of life. Women are deprived of equal access to education, health care, capital and decision-making and powers in the political, social and business sectors, whereas men are credited with performing. Buvinic (1976) reveals that statistics indicate that women are more likely than men to be poor and at a risk of hunger because of the systematic discrimination they face in education, health care, employment and control of assets.

Women in Africa and Zambia in particular, have always been active in agriculture, trade and other economic pursuits but a majority of them are in informal labour force. Zambia's women are guardians of their children's welfare and have explicit responsibility to provide for them materially and financially. They are the household managers providing food, nutrition, water, health, education and family planning to an extent greater than elsewhere in the developing world. In fact, it would be fair to say that their workload has increased with changing economic and social situations in Africa. Women's economic capabilities and in particular their ability to manage family welfare, are being threatened.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The women in Shikoswe Compound of Kafue District face a persistently low socio-economic status, hindering their overall well-being and development. Despite efforts to address gender disparities, various factors contribute to the economic challenges experienced by women in this community. This study aims to explore and understand the root causes of these challenges, with a focus on identifying the factors that perpetuate the low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound. Through comprehensive analysis and examination, the research seeks to provide insights that can inform targeted interventions and policy recommendations to uplift the economic standing of women in the community

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is to ascertain the causes of low socio-economic status of women of Shikoswe Compound of Kafue District. The research will further try to find out the impact that the low socio-economic status has on women.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by following objectives:

1. To identify causes of low socio- economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound of Kafue District
2. To examine the factors contributing to the low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound Kafue District.
3. To find measures to improve the socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound Kafue District.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the causes of low socio- economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound of Kafue District?
2. What are the main factors contributing to the low socio-economic status of women in the Shikoswe Compound of Kafue District?
3. What are the existing challenges and opportunities for women's economic empowerment in Shikoswe Compound of Kafue District?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study will help the government, policy makers and other relevant stakeholders to address the problem of low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound and across the Kafue District. The study will also provide measures that can be taken to improve the low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by poverty theory which states that the individual is responsible for their own poverty situation. Sameti et al (2012) believe that the individual factors that cause or fuel poverty include individual attitude, human capital, and welfare participation. Sameti et, al. (2012) asserted that the belief in individualism places much emphasis on individual hard work, and responsibility to acquire basic needs including food, shelter and health care services. Therefore, this theory centres on entrepreneurship, knowledge, innovation and technological advancement as the impetuses behind economic growth.

2. Literature Review

2.2 Causes of Low Socio-Economic Status of Women

One of the causes of low socio-economic status of women is related to the legal aspects. It has been observed that, some laws in Africa have contributed or still treat women as minors. Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, a woman must have her husband's consent to open a bank account. This situation denies women an opportunity for them to invest their income freely so as to improve their socio-economic status. Such laws impede women from making meaningful improvement in terms of socio-economic position compared to men. Therefore, to assist women improve on their low socio-economic status, the legal system should provide them with an opportunity to do so instead of them being subjected to getting permission from their husband for them to invest their income (Turnbull, 2001).

The other prominent cause of the low socio-economic status of women especially in Africa, is lack of land ownership. Until recently, women have been denied to own land. It has been observed that despite women being front runners in food production in Africa, only a handful are allowed to own land. Vast pieces of land are owned by men. Land is a very important asset to every human being which, if utilised properly, can generate income and improve people's livelihood. Denying women access to this precious natural resource makes their lives difficult and further compounds their low socio-economic status in society. Kome (2000) it has been observed that women are known to grow 80 per cent of food produced in Africa, and yet few are allowed to own the land.

In addition, the low socio-economic status of women is caused by unequal distribution of resources. In most cases, women are deprived of resources that might help them to come out of their low socio-economic status. As Turnbull (2001) puts it, women often lack resources that might help them get out of poverty and this includes capital.

Similarly, women participation in politics in Africa leaves much to be desired. Women are often denied top positions in government, most of the positions are held by men. This situation also contributes to low socio-economic status of women. For example, in Zambia, out of the 156 members of parliament

(MPs), only 15.6% are women and the rest are men. In cabinet, there are only three female ministers out of 25 cabinet members. Waylen (1996:11) indicates that, "a very small number of women are appointed to posts which reflect the role that women so often play in the private sphere."

Lack of education among women compounds their illiteracy levels and thus, they find it hard to get out of poverty and improve on their low socio-economic status. Buvinic (1979:19) affirms that, "statistics reveal that 28% of men and 40% of women in the world are illiterate." This indicates the disparities that exist in men and women in terms of education attainment. This in itself is a reflection of why women continue to possess a low socio-economic status compared to men.

The low socio-economic status among women is indeed caused by illiteracy. Singogo and Kakompe (2001) reveal that, "the illiteracy levels for females far exceed those of their male counterparts. Even their education attainment levels are lower. Women's educational gaps include lack of leadership and managerial skills." This means that low levels of literacy among women make it difficult for them to compete with men socially and economically as well as politically. Thus, their socio-economic status continues to be low.

The nature of jobs that women are subjected to contributes significantly to their low socio-economic status. More often than not, women usually work in smaller firms and their jobs are in most cases on part time basis. These kinds of jobs are usually poorly paid and lack of security of tenure. A woman can lose employment any time. Because of this kind of scenario, women find themselves struggling to get out of the jungles of poverty and uplift their low socio-economic status. McNally (1979:2) postulates that, "women tend to work in smaller firms and often on a part time basis."

Similar to the above point, much of women's work is usually unpaid. This unpaid labour significantly contributes to their low socio-economic status. If they are paid, women earn less than men and this puts them in an awkward position to advance because they cannot even save whatever little they make is meant to sustain their empty stomachs. In support of this point, McNally (1979) suggests that women consistently find themselves in low status, low paying jobs with few opportunities for advancement, are overrepresented among part-time workers and in the informal sector.

Another cause of low socio-economic status of women is seen through the responsibilities that are placed on them at home. They are made to do a lot house chores including caring for the children. This situation not only contributes to their illiteracy but also denies them an opportunity to concentrate on income generating ventures and thus, they find themselves languishing in poverty. In view of this point, Buvinic (1976:22) elaborates that, "almost everywhere, the responsibility for home and children falls upon women, regardless of the extent to which they are involved in other socio-economic activities."

Apart from that, women possess low socio-economic status because they are usually denied access to training and credit facilities. This situation deprives them of an opportunity to acquire certain skills such as entrepreneur skills that can help them improve their low socio-economic status. Besides, denying women access to credit facilities prevents them from expanding their struggling business ventures and as a result, they continue to occupy a low socio-economic status compared to their male counterparts who are given a chance to borrow money from various credit providers. Lederer (1990:75), "women are allowed no access to training or credit facilities."

Furthermore, it has been observed that traditional division of labour between men and women is one of the factors that have contributed to the low socio-economic status of women. What this means is that, in most cases when it comes to training projects, technical skills are related to men while hygiene, child care and simple tasks relate to women. Lederer (1990:72) explains that, "training projects of men always relate to technical skills whereas women's projects are much more targeted at hygiene, child care and the like." This shows that men always occupy highly paid jobs while women will always be confined at home to take care of the home and children or perform part-time or temporal jobs which are lowly paid and pushes them into poverty.

The low socio-economic status of women has also been attributed to globalisation. As Hawthorne (2004) indicates, globalisation may lessen the economic dominance by the ruling elite and, to that extent, can contribute to relieving women poverty. On the other hand, if globalisation worsens income distribution especially in poor and developing countries, it has a heavier impact on women, who are disproportionately represented among the poor. The limits placed by globalisation on state's ability to provide social protection pose a challenge to programs to respond to the needs of the more vulnerable and less visible groups, especially women and children

2.3 IMPACTS OF LOW SOCIOECONOMI STATUS OF WOMEN

One of the impacts of low socio-economic status of women is that they are likely to suffer disproportionately from nearly all diseases and the most common one being HIV and AIDS. Apart from that, persons of low socio-economic status have higher rates of mortality than people of higher socio-economic status. Gordon (1996) indicates that women with lower socioeconomic status are more at risk of suffering from physical and mental illness that include HIV and AIDS. Many women contract HIV from their intimate partners or from other men in an attempt to raise some money to survive on.

The other relevant effect of low socio-economic status of women is depression. It has been observed that prevalence of depression is so common among poor women. This is because poor women are usually struggling to take care of themselves and their children with little or no family support and with very few resources. Kome (2000) reveal that poor women have consistently reported feeling powerless and worthless. Life for them often seems bleak and they frequently have one overwhelming problem after another that compounds their depression. It is even difficult for such women to obtain or access mental health services.

Another impact of low socio-economic status of women is that of inadequate food and hunger. Women who are financially bankrupt find it very hard to provide food for themselves and their families and as a result, they are often hunger stricken and this situation brings with it other problems such as stress, anxiety and clinical depression. Malnutrition is also one of the common resultant effects of lack of food and hunger. Sakiko (1995) writes that in

addition to the problems associated with poverty, food insufficiency and hunger are ongoing in most parts of the world. It has been reported that there are estimated 31 million people living in households without food security, which means that these households are unable to obtain or are uncertain that they will be able to obtain adequate amount of food for themselves or their families.

Apart from that, the other impact of low socio-economic status of women is drug addiction. Poor women are prone to be addicted to drugs and alcohol. Drunkenness is so common among women whose socio-economic status is low.

Additionally, women with low socio-economic statuses are susceptible to domestic violence. Domestic violence against women is a worldwide problem and it spans race, class and religious lines. According to Sylvia (2006) some countries have a more serious problem with violence against women than other countries do, but where there is a high rate of poverty, there is usually a high rate of violence against women. In Bangladesh, for example, women from powerful and influential families are protected from domestic violence more than poor women are. It has been reported that up to 31% of all deaths of women in Bangladesh are caused by acts of violence, usually from their husbands or other dominant males.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design for examining the factors contributing to the low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound of Kafue District, Zambia, could be a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches. This mixed-methods design allows for a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted issues impacting women's socio-economic status.

3.2 Research Site

The research was conducted in Shikoswe Compound of Kafue District of Lusaka Province, Zambia.

3.3 Population, Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The estimated population of the study was 2000. The sample size involved the total of 200 respondents which consisted of married women, single women and some men in Shikoswe Compound. The study employed both purposive and simple random sampling on different participants from Shikoswe Compound.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data in this study will be organised and analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method will be in order to analyse and summarise the collected data in form of words. The quantitative method will apply statistical package. Data generated from the questionnaires was analysed manually and also with a combination of software MS Access, SPSS, and MS Excel. Analysis of the data in this study was mainly descriptive in nature

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The researcher accepted individual responsibility to see to it that all ethical rules/issues are observed while conducting this research study. With regard to observing ethical rules, the researcher will not force participants to give out their answers instead beg them to do so. The researcher will explain to the participants about the nature of the study and get their consent before they participate to ensure that everyone participates willingly and freely, participants upon participating on voluntary basis will be informed of their right to withdraw at any given time when they get uncomfortable and feel the need to do so. The researcher will furthermore explain to the participants in clear words that the information will be treated with confidentiality and their names or faces will not be indicated on the questionnaires or anywhere else. The researcher will not in any way subject the participants to any kind of undesirable experience such as pain and the researcher will not interview participants who have a funeral.

5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The following findings and discussions were presented according to set research objectives:

5.2 TO IDENTIFY CAUSES OF LOW SOCIO- ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN IN SHIKOSWE COMPOUND OF KAFUE DISTRICT

One of the causes of low socio- economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound of Kafue District is lack of capital or money.

RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Lack of capital (money)	4	16

Lack of education	5	20
Closure of companies	5	20
Lack of women empowerment	2	8
Inability to educate children	4	16
Death of spouse	2	8
Early pregnancies	1	4
Husband neglect	2	8
TOTAL	25	100

This was revealed by 16% of those who were interviewed. They indicated that women find it hard to realise some money, which they could use to start-up businesses and as a result, most of the women in Shikoswe Compound could not afford to live on three meals per day. It was very hard for them to access medical services when they got sick or when their children were sick. Hence their socio-economic status continues to go down day by day. These women revealed that they were determined to venture some form of businesses if only they could find some capital to do so.

About 20% of those who were interviewed observed that, education was a factor that had contributed greatly to the low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound. Most of the women in Shikoswe a Compound are not educated for them to compete on the labour market and as a result, it has been very difficult for them to find jobs where they could earn some income to improve their socioeconomic status. These respondents further indicated that because most of the women have not finished their grade twelve, they find themselves at the messy of doing piece works that cannot even sustain them and their children. This means that women in Shikoswe Compound as long as they remain uneducated, they will find it challenging to improve on their low socio-economic status.

According to what they said, their small businesses were doing very fine and they could manage to provide for their families in terms of food and clothing. Apart from that, some women were employed on part time basis and some of their husbands were working there. Since the time the company was closed, the economy of Shikoswe Compound has gone down such that the socio-economic status of women has become pathetic or nothing to talk about.

Lack of women empowerment is also one of the causes of low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound. This was according to 8% of the respondents interviewed. They argued that the reason why most women are in poverty is because they have not been empowered by their husbands and also by the government. They pointed out that despite most of them not completing their education, they could also be empowered with survival skills such as tailoring, food and nutrition and also other skills that can enable them earn an income and improve their low socio-economic status. They also observed that the Citizen Empowerment Fund has not in any way benefitted them instead it is benefiting people who already have the means to survive.

Apart from that, 16% of those interviewed regretted that if only their children were educated, perhaps their socio-economic status could have been much better. However, the trend in Shikoswe Compound is that most of the women have failed to support their children to school not because they do not want but because they do not have the capacity to do so. They said that women whose children were able to get educated and are now working, they are able to support their parents and assist them to improve on their low socio-economic status.

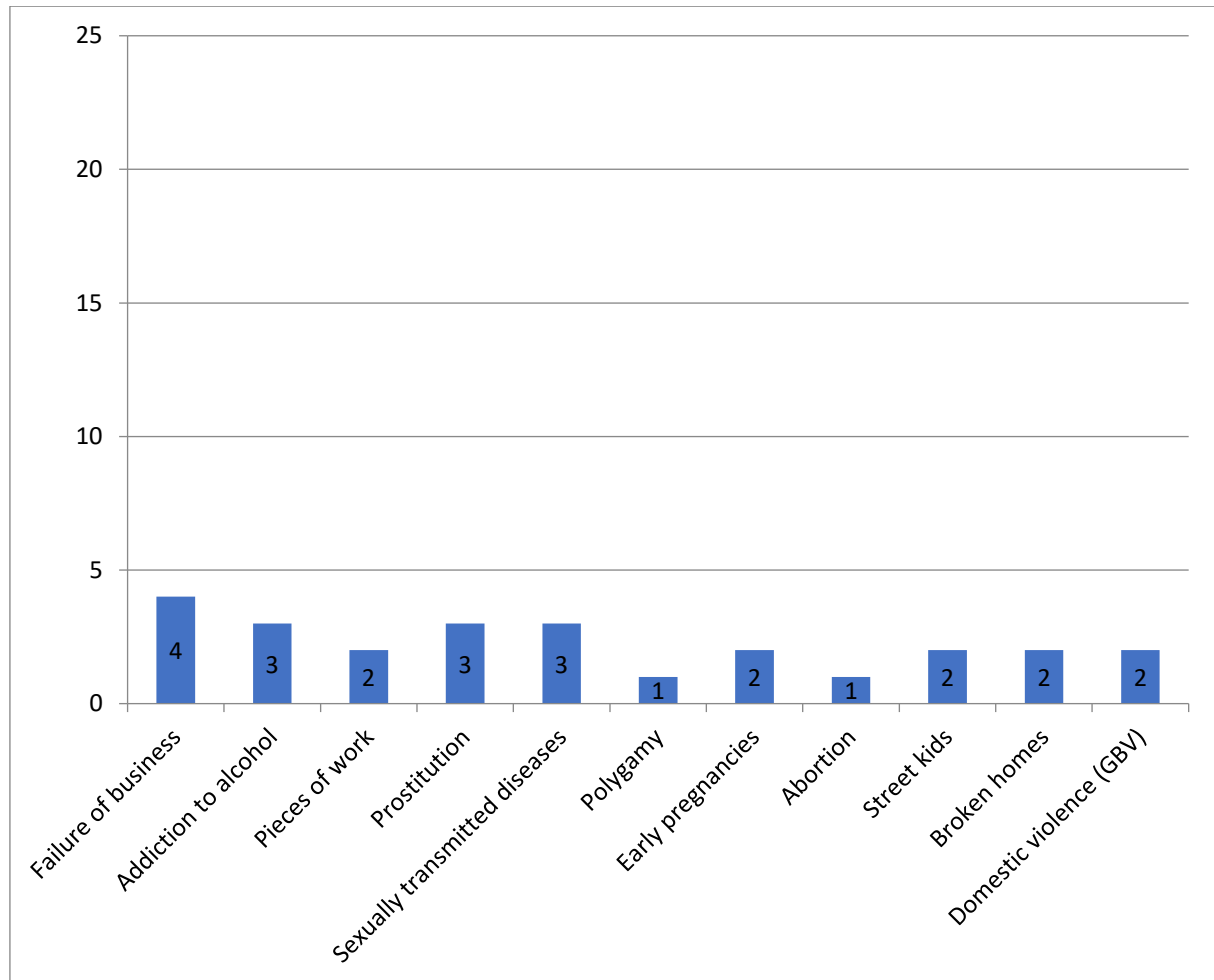
Additionally, 8% of the respondents attributed the low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound to the death of their spouses. Women whose husbands were the sole providers for the family have remained in poverty after the demise of their husbands. One woman revealed that since her husband died, she has been suffering such that she can only survive on the little she gets from neighbours and the church. She further revealed that there was no one to give her some money probably she can start some business. As a result, her socio-economic status has been or has remained dangerously bad.

Besides that, 4% of the respondents pointed out that early pregnancy was also one of the causes contributing to the low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound of Kafue. They revealed that most of the women are suffering today because they got pregnant when they were supposed to be in school and ended up dropping out and as such, it has been very difficult for them to find meaningful living. Some of these women ended up having a lot of children who have even compounded the whole situation.

Furthermore, it was observed that women have been subjected to low socio-economic status because of lack of support from their husbands. This was indicated by 8% of the respondents interviewed. According to the reports from those interviewed, they said men were not willing to support their wives to improve on their socio-economic status because they want to maintain their dominance. They feared that if a woman was able to make money, she could easily ditch them and also become rebellious. However, this was not the truth; it was just selfishness from the male counterparts.

5.3 TO EXAMINE THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN IN SHIKOSWE COMPOUND KAFUE DISTRICT.

Failure of businesses is one of the factors contributing to the low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound Kafue District. Due to poverty, most of the women have failed to improve on their businesses and there is loss of business as most of the people are poor and the majority of these are women.



This was the idea of 16% of those interviewed. They indicated that if women were doing well economically, it was going to be very easy for them even to expand their business. However, this has not been the case as most of them are struggling to survive.

It was also discovered that due to the low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound, most of them had engaged themselves in alcohol and drug abuse. This information was made available by 12% of the respondents interviewed. It was revealed that a lot of women were going to the bars to drink beer because they did not have what to do and their living conditions were not good enough and hence, they resorted to drinking beer so as to forget about their problems. Some of the women go to the bars with the motive of finding some men who can give them some money in order for them to find food on their table.

The other common feature of low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound is prostitution. According to the people who were interviewed, about 12% revealed that women who were in poverty were prone to prostitution. This is because they had nowhere where they could lay their hands on and as a consequence, they had no choice but to engage themselves in prostitution.

On the other hand, due to indulgence in prostitution, which was as a result of low socio-economic status of women, 8% of respondents confirmed that a lot of young women had fallen pregnant. Early pregnancies are not good especially if the living conditions of the mother were not good. There are a lot of complications that are attached to such pregnancies because a young woman was not prepared and ready to have a child. In the same vein, due to these early pregnancies, 4% of the respondents responded that abortion cases had been recorded in Shikoswe Compound because these young women had no means to take care of their unborn babies; as a result, they viewed abortion as a solution to their problem.

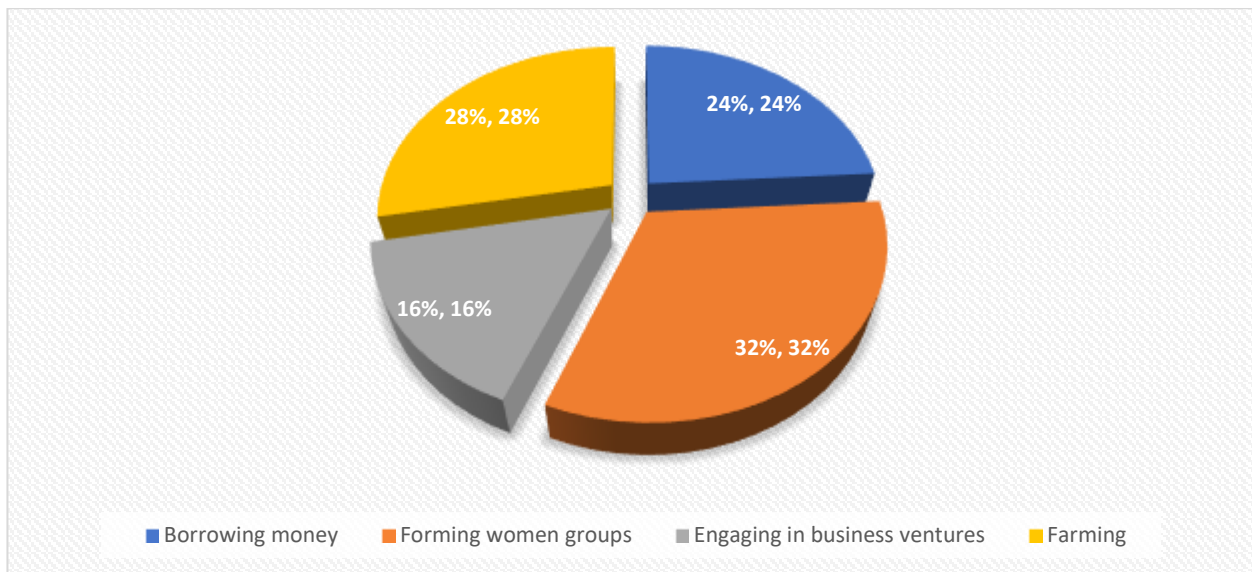
Apart from the, another 4% of the respondents indicated that due to the low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound, some women were being forced to be married to a polygamist who had the capacity to support them. This situation also placed them at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. It was

also discovered that some women go as far as breaking other women's homes because a man they felt could actually manage to take care of them. According to 8% of those interviewed, they pointed out some women were ready to do whatever it could take them to grab a man from their friends.

Not only that, low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound led to an increase in the number of street kids roaming around Kafue town. Children whose parents were unable to provide all the necessary needs resorted to go to the streets and beg for money in order to find something to eat. Some of these children have ended up spending nights on the streets and engaging themselves in alcohol and drug abuse. Sometimes, young girls have been sexually abused and fallen pregnant in the process, thereby making the whole situation even more badly. This assertion was supported by 8% of those who were interviewed.

Finally, but not the least, 8% of the respondents also indicated that the other effect of low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound was domestic violence. It was revealed that women with low socio-economic status were susceptible to domestic violence because it was difficult for them to protect themselves. Men took advantage of their vulnerability and they were at the mercy of being abused. Even when they were abused, most of them had no choice but to stick with their violent husbands because they were still able to provide for their needs.

5.4 TO FIND MEASURES TO IMPROVE THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN IN SHIKOSWE COMPOUND KAFUE DISTRICT

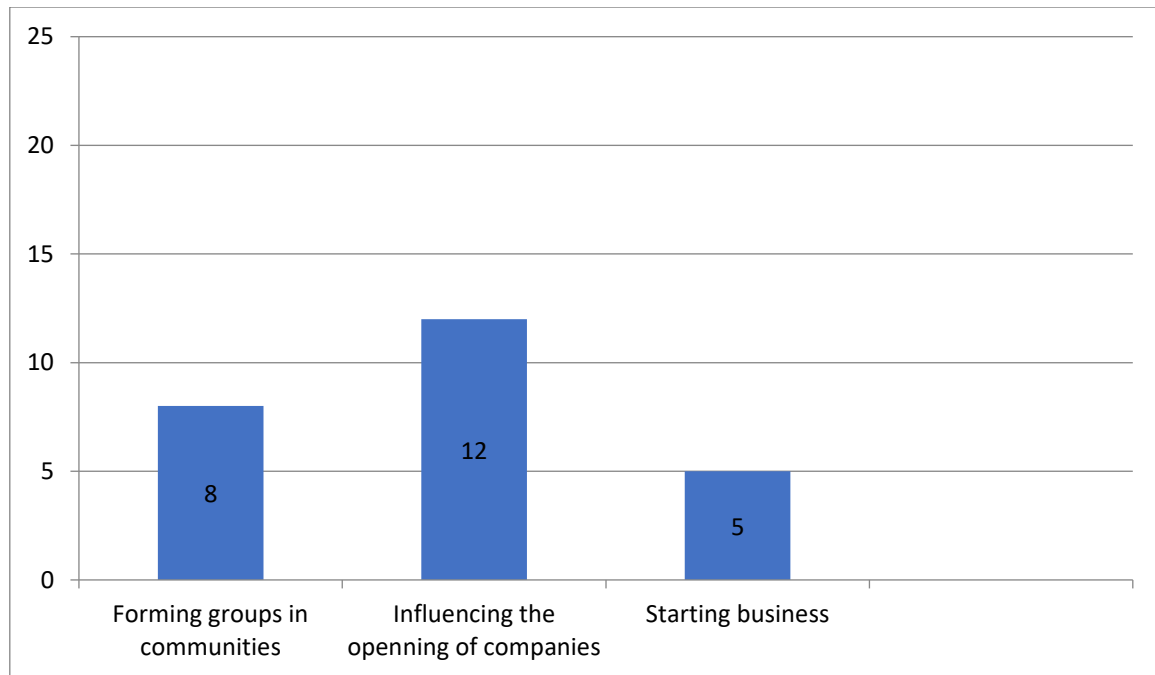


According to the research findings, 24% of the respondents suggested that women should be given an opportunity to borrow money from microfinance institutions so as to enable them start small businesses. They argued that if that money was properly invested, in the long run, their socio-economic status would greatly improve such that they would be able to provide for their children's needs.

Some women who were interviewed also indicated that forming groups as women could actually put their resources together and help one another could contribute positively to improving their socio-economic status. They said that these groups which are locally known as 'icilimba' are very helpful in improving the living conditions of women in any society particularly in Shikoswe Compound because women are able to put money together for one person per month and another one the following month and the trend continues like that. This is good because it helps in the accumulation of enough capital to start a business for women. This idea was supported by 32% of the people who were interviewed.

Not only that, 16% of the people interviewed suggested that women in Shikoswe Compound should not wait for a miracle for their socio-economic status to improve, instead, they should be engaged in various business ventures that may not necessarily require them to borrow money. They should be innovative and fight hard to help themselves come out of poverty. Some of the respondents advised that women should find pieces of works or part time jobs which could help them to raise a few monies which could support their livelihood. Just sitting at home would not provide them with food and other things they needed to survive.

The researcher also found that about 28% of the respondents suggested that women in Shikoswe Compound should engage themselves in farming. Farming has been discovered to be one of the incomes generating ventures which could help improve the socio-economic status of women. These respondents revealed that even at a small scale, farming can make a difference in the lives of most women. Therefore, they encouraged women to consider farming even in the backyard in Shikoswe Compound so as to improve on their low socio-economic status.



One of the suggestions that were advanced by 32% of the respondents was forming of women groups in which they could help uplift one another. Therefore, the community should be supportive to this idea and facilitate its success. The respondents indicated that men should be supportive if such an idea was to be a success in Shikoswe Compound.

The respondents were for the idea that as a community in Shikoswe Compound, it was important to start or encourage women to engage themselves in businesses such as rearing of chickens, goats and pigs and indeed other socio – economic activities that could help them realise some income. This idea if properly utilised, could significantly contribute to uplifting the low socio – economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound.

6.1 CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the study was based on what the researcher found in the field. The findings of the study clearly demonstrate that women's socio-economic status in Shikoswe Compound is indeed very low. The researcher found out that women were facing a lot of challenges in their living conditions. Furthermore, it was discovered that women, especially those who were single parents, hardly had food on their table. Those who could find something only managed a single meal per day.

According to the research findings, the causes of low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound can be attributed to a number of factors. These factors included, among other things, lack of capital to start businesses, lack of education, closure of companies, lack of women empowerment, early pregnancies, death of spouses and lack of support from their husbands.

The researcher also discovered that due to the low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound, most of the women engaged themselves in drinking alcohol in bars. According to the research findings, some start drinking as early as 10 hours through to evenings. Prostitution was also rampant which has contributed to increased cases of HIV/AIDS. The other effect of low socio – economic status of women was being subjected to polygamy, abortion, broken homes, street kids, failure of businesses and domestic violence.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the study has revealed the causes of low socio-economic status of women in Shikoswe Compound and its effects, the following are the recommendations:

1. Government should create jobs for the youths and women as they promised during their election's campaigns.
2. Government should open and revive companies in Kafue, which was empowering a lot of young men and women.
3. The government must ensure that the Citizen Empowerment Fund trickle down to benefitting people in needy especially women in Shikoswe Compound.
4. Government should quickly move in and regulate the mushrooming of bars in Shikoswe Compound and also ensure that operational hours are regulated.
5. Government and other stakeholders to provide sponsorship to children of women in poverty especially girls for their education.

6. Government should consider subsidising essential commodities such as mealie meal.

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