



## **Coping Strategies to Socio-Economic Challenges Faced by Single Mothers in Kisumu Central Constituency, Kisumu County, Kenya**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Coping strategies to socio-economic challenges is significant for mental well-being of single mothers across the world. There are scant of studies on coping strategies among the single mothers from low socio-economic status. The study aimed to explore the coping strategies to socio-economic challenges faced by single mothers in Kisumu Central Constituency, Kenya. The study employed exploratory research design. A sample size of 15 participants was selected through purposive sampling. Interview guide was used to collect data among the participants. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings showed the coping strategies to socio-economic challenges among single mothers were support group, empowerment of single mothers, spiritual nourishment and counselling services, access of government services to single mothers and acceptance of single mothers. The study recommends that the mental health professionals such as counsellors and psychologists to work with other stakeholders such as church ministers, social workers, community health workers to help single mothers to cope better with socio-economic challenges they face in their daily life.

**Key Words: Coping strategies, socio-economic challenges, Single Mothers, Kisumu Central Constituency, Kenya**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Family dynamics have evolved over the past few decades, and women are now predominately heading a rising percentage of single-parent households worldwide. The unique difficulties faced by single mothers are caused by several things, such as social shame, property deprivation, and patriarchal social structures (Khan et al., 2022). Zakaria et al. (2019) stated that hardships, obstacles, and high expectations frequently characterize single mothers' lives. Common issues faced by single mothers include money issues, role or task overload (juggling occupation, kids, and household duties), social issues, issues with the ex-spouse, and other unique issues like behavioural issues and health issues. Nonetheless, prior research has indicated that single moms' top concern was money or economic issues. Research has demonstrated a complex relationship between mental health issues and poverty, which can lead to unhealthy coping strategies like alcoholism, drug abuse, stimulant and antidepressant use, and solitary behaviour as a way to manage the stress brought on by shortfalls (Zakaria et al., 2019).

There are 13% of single parents with children worldwide. In the US, single moms headed 80% of the approximately 11 million single-parent families with children under 18 (Chang & Wu, 2021). However, the number of single mothers rose to 10.8% from 9.1% in 2014, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, and the number of divorce applications rose by 34% during the previous seven years (The Economist, 2019). According to more recent research, Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, has seen a steady rise in the number of single mothers. According to Dhaka City Corporation, there has been an increase in divorce filings lately, with women filing almost 70% of the cases (Khan et al., 2022). As a result, the proportion of single mothers is rising quickly without any substantial shift in the socio-cultural or economic landscape.

Additionally, the suffering of single mothers has intensified as a consequence of the current socioeconomic situation. However, there are four main themes emerged from thematic analysis that shows a variation of challenges in terms geographical setting. According to Khan et al. (2022), the obstacles faced by rural single mothers in India were social, economic, cultural, and psychological factors that make them reliant on other family members or relatives. The main causes of the problems were societal stigma, patriarchal social structures, and property deprivation. Because of their self-dependencies, instability, and lack of income prospects, single mothers in rural areas confront more complex challenges than those in urban areas.

In a study conducted in England by Marcil et al. (2020), found out that financial difficulty leads to self-blame, inadequate parenting techniques, and forced trade-offs, all of which are major contributors to mental health issues. This can lead to social isolation and loneliness hence an individual can become depressed. It is essential to acknowledge that single mothers in rich and developing nations equally deal with various issues, some specific to their nation and some not. In a developing nation, financial hardship is the main cause of suffering for single mothers. According to Crabtree and Kluch (2020), the rate of single moms in the lowest income category is greater in Australia, the USA, and other Scandinavian nations. These countries share 64% and 56% of all single women in those with the lowest earnings, respectively.

In contrast, 32% of the population in sub-Saharan Africa is made up of single mothers with children, and 84% of women in this age group, who are between the ages of 18 and 60, have children under the age of 15 living with them (Crabtree & Kluch, 2020). For instance, sub-Saharan single moms have the greatest rate of poverty among impoverished nations. These women typically raise children for many of their lives since they have lower life expectancies and more offspring (Crabtree & Kluch, 2020). Divorced women encounter diverse negative sentiments depending on where they live. In Turkey, women are held accountable for ending their marriages and defying social conventions since they perceive divorce as a bad quality (Kavas & Gündüz-Hoşgör, 2013). Single mothers had stress and were unable to integrate into society as a whole because of the stigmatization and negativity that hindered them from being recognized as official families by society. Living with a parent of the other gender is forbidden, and single parenting is discouraged in Pakistan, where society stigmatizes both single parents and their kids (Bashir et al., 2019).

Regnerus (2013) states that single mothers turn to spirituality as a way to receive psychosocial assistance. Having access to religious institutions is a great resource for assistance when things get tough financially for single mothers. In a Turkish study, parents enthusiastically stated that their personal and parental well-being was positively impacted by religion and its related practices (Milike et al., 2018). Religion and faith provide consolation and a sense of confidence that a higher force is capable of rescuing them from their predicament during times of despair, which helps to ease suffering and maintain mental health and sanity.

A type of psychotherapy known as group therapy involves one or more therapists working simultaneously with a group of five to fifteen individuals (Corey, 2009). Therapy groups, in Corey's opinion, assist individuals in managing their mental health or overcoming adversity. He claims that it is beneficial for those who have little access to mental health services, particularly those who live in remote locations like Luanda. Therapy groups, according to Narvaez and Withering (2018), unite people dealing with related problems.

In a support group, people who are dealing with similar problems gather together to exchange coping mechanisms, gain confidence, and foster a feeling of community (Corey, 2009). Members assess pertinent data, share personal experiences, listen to and accept the perspectives of others, offer empathetic understanding, and create social networks (Corey, 2009). Johnson and Zlontnick (2009) claims that support groups help participants build coping skills so they can successfully adjust to and manage stressful life events daily. According to Johnson and Zlontnick, when members respond to each other's difficulties and share their experiences, they are acting with empathy. By accepting and confirming each other's experiences and making them seem normal, the group leader and members assist one another in overcoming emotions of stigmatization, alienation, and isolation (Corey, 2009).

Positive human capital development, as defined by Becker (2009), is the process of enhancing incomes and job prospects in the formal labour sector through investments in education, training, and self-empowerment options. According to Rees et al. (2023), eighty percent of the twenty-five women who participated in a study they conducted had a postsecondary degree, which allowed them to get well-paying employment in the official labour market. Every woman said that investing in their education improved their human capital development and sense of self. Prior research in Germany and South Africa mostly concentrated on social protection policy measures that were put in place to make cash transfers to single moms easier. However, the drawback was that South African single moms were severely restricted in their ability to sustain their children due to the meagre money they got from the state child support award (Raniga et al., 2019).

According to the study's findings, girls' academic achievement is impacted by single parenthood in a variety of ways. That presents a significant challenge. Radeny states that, barriers to a girl's education that exist in her environment be addressed through sensitization and dialogue with mothers and the school system in order for her to compete effectively on an even playing field with children from two-parent families. Parenting becomes a serious challenge for single mothers (Radeny, 2003). The development of a supportive educational environment for their daughters, which includes career guidance and communication, is something that single mothers should advocate for. In order to prepare single mothers for the particular difficulties that their families face, the study conducted in Kisumu also suggests that they participate in intensive educational programs and awareness-raising initiatives (Radeny, 2003). There is minimal literature focusing single mothers addressing the challenges and giving them some coping strategies that they can work with to improve their living standards in Kisumu County Central Sub-County.

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## METHODOLOGY

The study employed an exploratory research design. The research design is used when the researcher aims at exploring the experiences of a particular group of people on a certain phenomenon. The research design was suitable for this study because it aimed at exploring coping strategies to socio-economic challenges faced by single mothers. The study employed purposive sampling technique in order to select information rich cases and people with more information on the topic of interest. Through purposive sampling, a sample size of 15 participants who were single mothers in Kisumu Central Constituency and were selected to participate in the study.

The study utilized Interview Guide to collect data. The interview guide contained open-ended questions to elicit open responses from the respondents. The interview guide had two sections. The first section captured the demographic information of the participants including age, religion, level of education and number of children. Section two captured open ended questions on captured the psychological stressors faced by single mothers. The study employed thematic analysis to analyze the collected data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study was set out to explore coping strategies to socio-economic challenges faced by young single mothers in Kisumu-Central Constituency Kisumu, County, Kenya. Using thematic analysis, the themes from the data collected was identified and supported by verbatim from the participants. Also, the discussion of the findings was provided. Before presenting the findings as per the research objective, the study presented the demographic details of the participants.

### Demographic Details of the Participants

The study presented the demographic of the participants. The demographic details for the single mothers who were interviewed captured their age, religion, educational level, number of children and social status. The results are presented in table 1.

**Table 1**

Participant Number	Age	Religion	Educational Level	Number of Children	Social Status
1	27	Christian	Diploma	1	Single
2	23	Christian	Form 4	2	Single
3	36	Christian	Diploma	2	Single
4	25	Christian	Form 4	1	Single
5	34	Christian	Form 4	2	Single
6	20	Christian	BA	1	Single
7	31	Christian	Certificate	2	Single
8	23	Christian	BA	2	Single
9	35	Christian	Form 4	3	Single
10	27	Christian	Form 4	2	Single
11	28	Christian	Diploma	1	Single
12	26	Christian	Form 4	2	Single
13	35	Christian	Form 4	3	Single
14	24	Christian	Diploma	1	Single
15	30	Christian	Form 4	3	Single

Table 1 show that participants were between ages of 20 years to 35 years. All the participants were Christians. Majority of the participants had form 4 level of education. The least of participants had certificate followed by those who had bachelor's degree while several had a diploma in their level of education. Majority of the participants had two children followed by those who had one child.

### Coping strategies for socio-economic challenges facing single mothers in Kisumu County

From the data, six themes emerged as coping strategies to socio-economic challenges faced by single mothers in Kisumu County. The themes emerged were support groups, Empowerment of single mothers, spiritual nourishment and counselling services, accessible government services to single mothers and acceptance of single mothers.

#### Support group

Almost all the participants mentioned joining support group as one way of managing the socio-economic challenges. When single mothers join chamas, it helps them to generate some money to take care of their needs. Apart from joining support group, they also engage in other activities such as casual work. The theme of support group echoed by a participant when said *"First I joined a chama (merry-go-round) to help me as one of the coping strategies, at the same time I still work as shopkeeper and doing laundry for people over weekends (Participant 1).* The theme is also expressed by another single mother who said *"I have joined Chama's (merry go round) together with other single mother to help us manage our challenges, here we also do some on line businesses. I also do my laundry work for people over the weekends, and my normally daily job of shop keeping (Participant 2).*

The support group helps single mothers to share the challenges they go through. Some of the support groups operate in the churches where they support each other and also they are supported by the church. This was clear when a single mother said *"I joined chama with fellow single mothers and through*

*these chamas; the money we exchange here helps me manage financially. The church has been of much help, we do get some well-wishers and some handouts from church* (Participant 4). The same theme was also supported by another participant who said,

I have joined up chamas with my fellow single mothers so as to help us manage some of this challenges, we also try to share our issues amongst ourselves and personally I belong to a church where the pastor and his wife are friendly to me, so I share with them too which in return they have been a source of encouragement to me (Participant 7).

The findings of the study concurred with findings of Corey (2009) who found that in a support group, people who are dealing with similar problems gather together to exchange coping mechanisms, gain confidence, and foster a feeling of community. Also, members assess pertinent data, share personal experiences, listen to and accept the perspectives of others, offer empathetic understanding, and create social networks (Corey, 2009). In addition, the findings were confirmed by the findings of Johnson and Zlontnick (2009) who found that support groups help participants build coping skills so they can successfully adjust to and manage stressful life events daily. According to Johnson and Zlontnick, when members respond to each other's difficulties and share their experiences, they are acting with empathy.

### **Prayer**

Majority of the participants reported to have utilized prayers in coping with socio-economic challenges. Through prayers the participants experience comfort from God. Prayers have helped single mothers to experience peace of mind to overcome the challenges of socio-economic challenges. This is echoed by a participant who said *"I pray a lot because I get a lot of comfort from God and this way I am able to handle my challenges. The church has also organized with some professional counsellors to be helping single mothers and every other member who needs help* (Participant 2). The theme is also expressed by another single mother who said *"I still face a lot of stigma and I had thought that by going to university would remove this, but its still there, so I have sorted to just working hard in school and focusing on finishing my studies, I also pray a lot for peace of mind, actually prayers has worked well for me* (Participant 6). Likewise, the same theme was supported by another single mother who said *"I really pray about my challenges and find peace with myself after prayers. I also joined Chama's with fellow single mothers where we meet to encourage one another and support one another through the chamas a single mother* (Participant 12). Also, the theme is supported by another participant who said *"It is difficult to handle these challenges and I take them to God in prayer for peace, I am in two support groups where we share a lot and help one another, moral support, encouraging one another"* (Participant 14).

The findings of this study resonated with findings of Regnerus (2013) who stated that single mothers turn to spirituality as a way to receive psychosocial assistance. Having access to religious institutions is a great resource for assistance when things get tough financially for single mothers. The findings were also supported by the findings of Milike et al. (2018) who conducted a study with parents in Turkey and found religion and faith provide consolation and a sense of confidence that a higher force is capable of rescuing them from their predicament during times of despair, which helps to ease suffering and maintain mental health and sanity.

### **Empowerment of single mothers**

Majority of the participants expressed the need of empowerment of single mothers by the Church and government. The government and the Church can empower the single mothers by offering counselling services to them and also psycho-educating them towards managing the challenges they face every day. This was expressed by a single mother who said,

The church can increase the counselling services and even teach and help the single mothers to start small businesses, which can help them cope with the challenges. The church can also be involved in psycho educating the young single mothers, about self-care, self-value and resiliency (Participant 2).

The theme was also expressed by another single mother who emphasized the importance of government to empower the single mothers by training in small business when said,

I feel the government should find a way of helping single mothers; even if they have to help them form self-help groups, try to train them on small businesses, about health care and mental health. The government should also offer to equip the public health facilities so that single mothers are catered for free of charge (Participant 7).

Empowering single mothers was also supported by another participant who said *"To the government I think there so much they can do to help single mothers cope with these challenges. First, they let them form groups train them then give financial support through these groups to help single mothers"* (Participant 11).

The findings were in agreement with the findings of Diraditsile (2017) who posits that unemployment among the young single mothers has become the main issue of concern to policy makers in African government including in Botswana and thus there is need for the creation of job opportunities for this group in particular. The findings on empowerment were also confirmed by findings of Radeny (2003) who stated that, barriers to a girl's education that exist in her environment can be addressed through sensitization and dialogue with mothers and the school system in order for her to compete effectively on an even playing field with children from two-parent families. The development of a supportive educational environment for their daughters, which includes career guidance and communication, is something that single mothers should advocate for.

### **Spiritual nourishment and counselling services**

Majority of the participant expressed the need of the Church to offer spiritual nourishment and counselling services to cope with socio-economic challenges. The theme is expressed by a participant, who said,

The church can help with spiritual nourishment, counselling single mothers and encouraging them 'organize some church activities to keep them in touch and busy. For the society, I think they can help by counselling and advising single mothers, encourage them try to understand them and to reduce their judgmental attitude towards single mothers (Participant 3).

The theme is also echoed by another participant who said,

The church through spiritual nourishment, counselling the single mothers, the church can also start some groups for training the single mothers on how to cope and handle these challenges; the church can also sensitize the community or society as a whole against stigmatizing the single mothers (Participant 6).

The theme was also supported by another participant who said "*For the church I think should continue giving spiritual nourishment, continue to offer counselling services to these single mothers, I see a lot of this in the church that I attend which has been of great help to us form groups to create more awareness of the stigmatization of single mothers even in church* (Participant 11).

The findings concurred with findings of Matsai and Raninga (2021), who reported that to avoid depression when overwhelmed by issues, the single mother should seek medical and professional help. Since financial crisis is the major challenge among the single mother, they should seek advice from financial experts.

### **Accessible government services to single mothers**

Majority of the participants expressed the need of the government to ensure that single mothers can easily access services. These services include medical and education services. The theme was mentioned by a single mother, who said,

The government to make medical services more available especially to the single mothers, educational facilities, which are public, should also be open to everyone including the single mothers, the government to try to consider the single mothers who are not able financially (Participant 4).

Likewise, the theme was echoed by another participant who said,

To the government, let the government make sure the public facilities they have are functional so that the single mothers can get help from them. For example if the health facilities in this country were functioning well the single mothers would have free medical services for their children, same to the government institution if the public school were readily and well equipped the single mothers would have it easy taking their children to these schools to get free education (Participant 5).

The theme was also echoed by another participant who said "*The Government to look for away of stepping into help single mothers in whichever way they can for example they can even help by making sure their public institutions and public medical facilities are functional to help alleviate many challenges faced by the single mothers*" (Participant 13).

### **Acceptance of single mothers**

All the participants expressed the need of the society to stop discriminating single mothers but rather to embrace them. The society needs to change attitude towards single mothers and accept them by offering counselling services to them. A participant supported this theme by saying "*Society must move from the judgmental attitude towards single mothers and find a way of helping young single mothers to feel accepted in the society, because not all single mothers are prostitutes, home wreckers and rebellious as the society has labelled most single mothers*" (Participant 5).

Another participant urged the society to stop been judgemental when said "*The society should stop being too judgmental with the single mothers, because these is destroying them so badly , the society can also find a way of helping the single mothers even if it's about helping them in counselling the children*" (Participant 8). The theme was also emphasized by another single mother who said "*The society can start a campaign to stop stigmatizing and judging single mothers and instead look for a way of helping them out with their children; positivity towards them may give them hope*" (Participant 10). Likewise, the theme is echoed by another participant who said "*To the society, can they try to accept single mothers and treat them fairly as normal human beings, stop stigmatization and the judgmental attitude towards single mothers*" (Participant 11).

The findings were in agreement with findings of Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (2016) in Japan which found the main coping strategies for Japanese young single mothers include informal social support from family and friends, formal social support from municipalities and NPOs, and self-coping strategies such as accepting responsibilities. A nationwide survey in Japan in 2016 revealed that 33.3% of single mothers reported acquaintances and neighbours as the most common sources of advice.

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## **CONCLUSION**

Single mothers cope with challenges of socio-economic challenges through joining support group, prayer and seeking spiritual nourishment and counselling services in the Church. Through joining support group such as chamas, single mothers are able to manage the socio-economic challenges by generating some money to take care of their needs. Through prayers the participants experience comfort from God. Prayers have helped single mothers to experience peace of mind to overcome the challenges of socio-economic challenges. The government and the Church can empower the single mothers by offering counselling services to them and also psycho-educating them towards managing the challenges they face every day. There is a need of the society to stop discriminating single mothers but rather to embrace them. The society needs to change attitude towards single mothers and accept them by offering counselling services to them.

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