



Reasons for Parents Living with Adult Married Children in Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the prevalence of adult children living with parents has increased and appears to contradict a traditional marker associated with self-reliance independent living. Many emerging adults currently rely on their parents' home as a safety nest because these increasingly common non marital paths to independence are characterized by high levels of instability that may jeopardize independent living. This study explored the Experiences of Parents living with Adult Married Children in Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County, Kenya. The study was conducted with parents who reside in Ongata Rongai Kajiado County. The study employed a phenomenological research design. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed in selecting the participants for the study. The study utilized Interview Guide in collecting data. The data collected was analyzed using thematic analysis. The results showed the reasons for parents to live with their adult married children were financial constraints, family wealthy inheritance, overprotective parenting, emotional attachment, avoidance of loneliness and taking care of the aging parents. The study recommends parents to be sensitized about cultivating sense of independence to their children in order to a meaningful life in their future.

Key Words: Parents, Adult Married children, Ongata Rongai, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the prevalence of adult children living with parents has increased and appears to contradict a traditional marker associated with self-reliance independent living (Copp et al., 2017). In the United States, marriage was the turning point signaling the establishment of independent living. In contrast, many emerging adults currently rely on their parents' home as a safety nest because these increasingly common no marital paths to independence are characterized by high levels of instability that may jeopardize independent living. Ferguson (2016) posits that young adults in the twenty-first century have a difficult time entering adulthood because of uncertainty and lack of stability. In response, more young adults than in previous generations are returning to or choosing not to leave their family homes. These broad patterns raise concerns about how they will affect families and how these ties have changed over time. Family ties become a source of social security when the political, social, and economic landscape continues to shift and grow more insecure.

Jilcha (2019) stated that the majority of young Slovenians view their family of origin as the most significant source of all forms of assistance, and they are becoming more and more dependent on it. According to research, extended co-residence is linked to extraordinarily supportive and high-quality interactions between parents (particularly mothers) and children. The relationship between parenting style and children's outcomes in later life has been the subject of extensive research in previous decades. For instance, a strong sense of self has been linked to an authoritative parenting style. Luk and Laidler (2022) argued that, while most studies on parent youth co-residence have focused on the experiences in North America and European countries, little research has explored this phenomenon in Asia, and Hong Kong in particular. Scholars in Hong Kong have generally viewed this as a 'housing' issue, to the point that more young adults who get married may now continue to reside in their parental homes. According to Hatimy (2022), many people, both in Kenya and overseas, have returned home as a result of life's storms.

Rzechula and Kujawska (2022) stated that the modern world is undergoing a lot of change. New phenomena in social life are brought about by the processes of rapid modernization, individualization, and globalization. These include new approaches than in earlier eras of realizing one's own existence. There are those that have a positive outlook on their personal growth and freedom. Another set of young adults, however, continue to reside in the family house despite reaching the appropriate age and are unable to do so. According to Xiao et al. (2014) in many developed nations, achieving financial independence has grown increasingly difficult. The transition to maturity and financial independence took longer under the current socioeconomic conditions, which led to poorer social standing for the transitioning adults, according to recent research of British and Canadian teenagers. Among some of the leading reasons why adult children are still living with parents include the highly reliant attitude of adult children and avoiding attitude. Adult children who are living with parents avoids working and education (Lebowitz, 2016). In the Asian community immigrant adult marriage children living

in the United States invites their elderly parents to live with them. This serves the purpose of sustain their cultural identities to their children and grandchildren (Subramaniam & Carolan, 2022).

A study carried out by Mazurik, Knudson and Tanaka (2020) in Canada and in the USA, stated that there is a high number of adults residing in their parental homes in North America. Postles (2018) states that survey results carried out in the American community show that financial reasons are the primary response given by parents for why their adult children are not living in a separate home. South and Lei (2015) states that in America the number of adults residing in their parent's home has increased remarkably, due to family connectively especially being emotionally attached to the mother considered to be instrumental help from family. Fingerman et al. (2012) posits that children who are students continue to receive more support from parents than non-students and this enhances a positive relationship with the parents who view the student status as an indication of the child's future success. This relationship could make the adult child to prolong their studies to continue receiving parental financial and emotional support. On the other hand, Sutor et al. (2017) in their study argued that parental favoritism or dis-favoritism to some offspring can cause prolonged stay with the parents for the favored children compared to the disfavored children.

Another study carried out by Emery, Dykstra, and Djundeva (2019) established that Chinese people are much more likely than Europeans to live with their adult children in their later years. Compared to Europe, a higher proportion of people in China spend their latter years living with their adult children. The fundamental difference between research on intergenerational co-residence in Europe and China has been the emphasis on the welfare state. In New Zealand, Landon et al. (2016) points out that family caregiving is a key role in mental health of family members. Additionally, parents with schizophrenic children continue providing care and support to them even at adulthood. Siperstein et al. (2013) in a study in the USA found out that adults who live with intellectual disabilities have never entered labor force or looked for employment. This is an indication that health challenges related to disabilities can cause parents to continue supporting and caring for their adult children. When children have been diagnosed with a terminal illness like cancer, parents are faced by a possible death and overwhelming feeling of uncertainties. Older parents are forced to take care of their sons and daughters even at age 33 and above (Van Humbeeck et al. 2015). Some return home and are likely to stay at home for many years, due to their incapability to work due to mental illness and substance abuse.

In Africa, changes such as labor migration, monetary economy, demographic changes, formal education, and westernization have weakened the extended family structure (Mafumbate, 2019). The communal life of brothers and sisters and the spirit of community are the basis and expression of the African extended family system. The agreement guaranteed social security for the poor, the elderly, widows and orphans and this is one of the most respected values in Africa's traditional socio-economic order (Mafumbate, 2019). These Aspects do not exist from a western point of view which embraces individualism and the nuclear family structure. Honwana (2014) draws from findings on in-depth interviews with young people in Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa, and Tunisia, four African nations. The study contends that a breakdown in the socioeconomic system, rather than youth's incapacity to obtain fundamental resources to become independent adults, is the cause of the problem. The economic system is meant to give people the chances to have a healthy childhood, a good education, work, start families, and give back to society. In Ethiopia, one of the nations with high rates of poverty, Kedir (2017), states that parents are prepared to change their preferences for their own present consumption and make intergenerational transfers of money, land, livestock, and other assets to ensure their children's future consumption. Children's financial support substitutes the lack of old age security mechanisms, the scarcity of insurance choices, and the absence of government welfare provision in a setting where there is essentially no governmental support for the elderly. As a result, decisions about children investment and transfer are made with old age security in mind.

Many parents have a hard time when their adult children are coming of age and are no longer just kids. So, these parents choose to manage many of the tasks their adult children should be doing on their own, such as doing laundry, cleaning and paying bills. In doing this, their adult children may become more comfortable and may stay at home with their parents longer since their lives are being managed (New life house, 2023). Many parents who tend to enable their young adult children may forget that their job is to help them gain life skills. It can do society a disservice to forgo teaching children independence as they become adult children (BetterHelp Editorial Team, 2023).

Munyae (2020) also observed that because couples are having smaller families today, an enabling environment has been established for adults who do not wish to leave home. However, spoiling kids can prevent them from growing up. Today, there are many adults who lack resilience and have no idea how to survive in the real world. Parents who assist their capable adult children financially or emotionally well into adulthood may be fostering maladaptive coping methods and promoting irresponsible and selfish behavior (Regain Editorial Team, 2023).

In a report carried out by Yatani and Sospeter (2019) in Kenya states that economy plays an important role in promoting family well-being. When a country achieves economic growth and development the positive effect trickles down to the family. During a high era of inflation, unemployment and macroeconomic instabilities are affected and savings can be wiped as incomes decrease. This puts a lot of strain on families and deviants trends can emerge as individuals look for coping mechanisms. Families have undergone fundamental demographic, economic and sociological changes that have stretched and, in some cases, exhausted, the socio-economic support mechanisms that were traditionally offered by extended families.

Njenga (2020) postulates that the young adult's failure to acquire the skills necessary for independent life is lack of self-esteem, academic difficulties, issues with alcohol and drug usage, or even a problem with teenage depression. Additionally, Njenga (2020) stated some men may be at home to care for parents who may have medical needs. In these situations, the son or daughter may prolong their stay at home until the parent gets well or passes away. There is a cultural expectation in Kenyan society that adult children will take up the duty of caring for their parents when they are unable to care for themselves. This expectation comes from the respect for elders and the value of strong family ties.

Kimega (2022) notes that in Kenya there are concerns over how long young adults should remain in their parents' homes. Strange scenarios occur when middle-aged people, sometimes even well into their forties, stay with their elderly parents. Sometimes the adult children get married and settle down on

the family home with their own families. The pension of the elderly parents is what the entire family depends on. For Kenya, a country in sub-Saharan Africa this is a new phenomenon. Change of values and norms as a result of globalization, political and economic trends have enabled formation of a new norm where children are returning home to living with their elderly parents even when they are married and have their own children. This is contrary to the African tradition where once a child is of age, they are expected to leave their parent's home to start an independent life. Even though various reasons why children return home to stay with their parents are given in different situations, this study investigates reasons for adult married children living with their elderly parents in Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County, Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

Research design is the procedure of collecting, analyzing, interpreting and reporting in research studies (Dawadi, Shrestha, & Giri, 2020). The study adopted phenomenological research design. The study targeted mothers living with adult married children who were members of Church at Citam Rongai, Kajiado County which has a congregation of about 30 members. Ongata Rongai is cosmopolitan and therefore the population is comprised of different tribes of Kenya. This was advantageous to the researcher to gather a wide range of parental upbringing styles and cultural beliefs to understand about adult married children living with parents. Through snowballing sampling technique 10 parents who were living with adult married children were identified to participate in the study.

The study employed Interview Guide to collect data from the parent participants. The Interview Guide had two sections. The first section collected data on the demographic details of gender, age range, profession and number of children. The second section collected data on reasons for parents living with adult married children. Before collecting data, an authorization was sought from Tangaza University and the leadership of Citam Church in Ongata Rongai. The participants filled the consent form before participating in the interviews. The interviews took approximately 1 hour for each participant. The participants were thanked for accepting to participate in the study and assured that their data was only to be used for the purpose of the study. The data collected through interviews was recorded and transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study was set to explore the reasons why parents live with their adult married children in Ongata Rongai. The study begins by presenting the demographic information of the participants. The study presents the results of the study based on the themes that emerged from the objective of the study. The results are supported with verbatim from the participants. Furthermore, the findings are discussed with the literature.

Demographic information of the Participants

Table 1: Demographic Details of the Participants

Respondents	Gender	Age Range	Profession	Number of Children
Pr/001/2023	Female	61-70	Community Nurse	2
Pr/002/2023	Female	61-70	Clinical Psychologist	5
Pr/003/2023	Male	51-60	Accountant	3
Pr/004/2023	Female	61-70	Personal Assistant (Pa)	5
Pr/005/2023	Male	81-90	Civil Servant	6
Pr/006/2023	Male	71-80	Project Manager	3
Pr/007/2023	Male	71-80	Human Resource	5
Pr/008/2023	Female	51-60	Lecturer	4
Pr/009/2023	Male	61-70	Lecturer	4
Pr/0010/2023	Female	61-70	Teacher	3

The results in table 1 shows that gender was equally represented in the study. Most of the participants were between ages 61 to 70. The participants were coming from various professions. The highest participant had six children while the lowest had two children.

Reasons for parents living with adult married children in Ongata Rongai, Kajiado County, Kenya

The study sought to establish reasons why parents choose to live with their adult married children. Key respondents were asked to give reasons that lead parents to stay with their adult married children in Ongata Rongai. The study found out that the reasons ranged from financial constraints, over protective parenting style, security of family property, emotional attachment, management of loneliness and taking care of the sickly parents.

Financial Constraints

Financial constraints stood out as key reason why parents choose to stay with their adult married children as one respondent said,

Yeah, especially if maybe one got married when they were not ready and you find they are struggling. You can decide to assist them until they get a job, maybe they were jobless and they just found out that they are living together. You decide then to assist them so that they can get something to do. And then after that, you ask them to leave and try to manage their finances (Pr/004/2023).

Many felt that they needed to make their children comfortable because they thought that their children were not adequately equipped to stay on their own as one respondent said,

I feel financial is one of the reasons children stay with their parents. If an adult child feels they are enjoying more at home, they don't want to lose what their parent was offering them, when they continue staying in that home. I may have a child who is used to a good life, and they are feeling that life will drop once they move out (Kr/005/2023).

Majority of the respondents mentioned that, few job opportunities was a reason why children may lack the means to support themselves as one respondent stated:

You know, if they were staying with you it is because of one reason or another, because nobody will just come and stay with you without any reason, either they were financially in a problem or that's why they came back. In fact, sometimes it is you who invites them to come because you don't want your children and your grandchildren to suffer. So, you bring them to come and stay with you if you are financially able as a parent (Pr/006/2023).

In order to support their children to maintain themselves parents felt the need to continue supporting their adult married children by physically staying with them as expressed by one respondent who said,

Like for me when I lived with my adult married child it was because he was not employed, he had just lost his job. And so, I felt wherever they were staying before they had to pay rent and he had to take care of the family. So, I found it better that he would come and live with me so that I'd be able to at least chip in and help him out (Pr/001/2023).

In this way the adult married children continue depending on what parents offer them. As reported by one of the respondents *"The reason why I'm living with my daughter is because during the COVID time, she lost her job. So, she definitely would want to come. It is me who suggested that she comes and stay with me instead of paying rent, yet she's not earning"* (Pr/006/2023).

The current finding concurred with Casares and White (2018) who argued that the phenomenon commonly referred to as inter-generational coresidence, is an arrangement that is viewed by the individuals as a safety nest since it offers a form of protective support in times of hardships, economic difficulty and transition. The present study found that, financial reasons was a leading factor for parents leaving with their adult married children. Few job opportunities, unemployment among adult married children causes lack of finances to sustain themselves leading them to return home to a safe nest. Additionally, the finding also concurred with Wentzel (2018) who argued that, parents who live with their adult married children can be as a result of a number of factors such as the high cost of rent in urban areas, rising cost of living, high unemployment rates and slow rise in income for the employed.

Security of Family Property

Ensuring the security of family property stood out as another key reason as why parents felt they needed to stay with their married adult children. Majority of the participants argued that since their children are entitled to their property, the only way to continue ensuring security of the property is to closely guide their children to maintain the property. It was argued that this will contribute to keeping the wealth together and continue with the family legacy. As stated by one respondent that, *"They want the children to stay if there was a monarchy or a dynasty, they do not want the children to go anywhere so that they can hold the wealth together"* (Kr/001/2023). On the other hand, there were a few parents who felt that they were not able to maintain themselves and thus requiring staying with their adult married children. They argued that in this way they would receive the support they require from their children especially when they are still young couples with energy and resources to support their ageing parents.

Parents also felt that when their children do not have a job or any income they would struggle economically. That they would have no livelihood at all for being unable to pay their own rent and accommodation as one participant said,

Like for me when I lived with my adult married child it was because he was not employed, he had just lost his job. And so, I felt wherever they were staying before they had to pay rent, he had to take care of the family. So, I found it better that he would come and live with me so that I'd be able to at least chip in and help him out (Pr/001/2023).

Majority of the parents expressed their feeling that their sons were not self-reliant and they have the wealth to take care of their adult married children and others expressed the desire of buying their sons blocks of flats as one respondent stated that,

Sometimes as parents we feel maybe that the child would be somewhere maybe that you don't like, may be for instance they're in a neighborhood that you do not like them to be in. As a parent maybe you're feeling that I am capable, I have a good block of flats so I'd like my children to be in my flats or maybe you feel like my shamba is quite huge so I want my child to come and live with me (Pr/001/2023).

In cases where some children were not financially stable parents expressed a deep desire to build them homes within their compound to accommodate them. The parents argued that they have big compounds for their sons to live in as one respondent stated: *"He works in Mombasa, but when he comes now to Nairobi we naturally say okay you can come and stay in your house because we had provided for a compound and a house of his own"* Pr/007/2023.

The adult married children also had a tendency of going back home because their parents were financially stable as one respondent said,

Then the other one, which I've noticed quite of late, our young people have a problem especially with children who have stayed with their parents for long, when they get married, they still feel that they have a home to go back to. So, there's that kind of loneliness in them. They'll start by visiting slowly and eventually when they disagree slightly, they come back (Pr/006/2023).

In extreme cases, some parents were not able to support themselves hence, the need to stay with their adult married children so that they are cared for maintained by them as one respondent said,

When parents get older, they need people to be closer to them. If for instance as a father like me am approaching old age and I am not having an income as well as my wife, we may need some help from the adult child who is able to maintain us. So sometimes parents may need financial support (Pr/005/2023).

Despite this some parents in turn, started controlling their adult married son's finances from the fear that they will give their money out to others as one respondent stated,

With regard to financial situation, it can be both sides, whereby maybe this married couple, which is your son and your daughter-in-law, they are financially stable. You feel you need to control them, to control their finances, to control what they do, and you fear maybe they are dishing money out and you want to control the group they are mingling with. A parent fears that if these people are left to be on their own, they will not benefit from the money they have. So, you would rather stay with them (Pr/003/2023).

This present finding agrees with the argument that parents assist their adult children financially or emotionally well into adulthood even when they are capable (Regain Editorial Team, 2023). The present study found that, parents felt that they had big compounds for their children to live in and could buy them blocks of flats for them to use as assets. However, this was found to be fostering maladaptive coping methods and promoting irresponsible and selfish behavior (Regain Editorial, 2023). The present study finding also confirms Kedir (2017), study in Ethiopia who posits that parents were prepared to change their preferences for their own present consumption to make intergenerational transfers of money, land, livestock, and other assets to ensure their children's future consumption and yet there was no governmental support for the elderly.

Overprotective Parenting Style

Most of parents had fear of losing their children to another person or fear that their sons will not make it without them. Like one key informant quoted, *"Some parents fear for their children for the unknown and would like to live with them"* (Kr/005/2023). Parents result to using some parenting styles that make them keep their sons close to them. Majority of the parents want to control their sons by not allowing them to grow and gain independence or make decisions independently *"On the other hand, some parents find their children not mature enough and they continue labeling them as, "Papa" meaning young boy or "Mama" meaning young girl as one key respondent quoted"*(Kr/002/2023). These names pamper these adult married children in the name of loving them too much. Hence, they continue living with them. As one of participant said:

They want to hold their wealth together and they want to manage their sons in such a way that these sons will not have a big say, they have the kingship that, this is my wealth, these are my children, and I want to multiply, so I want them to stay close to me so that I can micromanage them (Kr/001/2023).

Parental protection for adult married children is one reason that participants gave as to why parents continued living with their children. This finding agreed with BetterHelp Editorial Team (2023) who reported that, many parents tend to enable their young adult children and forget that their job is to help them gain life skills. The present study found that, parents applied parenting styles that enabled them keep their sons close to them. Additionally, the finding confirms Kirkpatrick (2013) results who argued that independence is still regarded as a defining quality of adulthood. The expectation that the young adult should be able to sustain themselves independently may be violated by continued financial assistance from the parent, who want to keep their children close to themselves.

Emotional Attachment

One of the reasons identified by the key respondents was parent's emotional attachment to their children. Parents were emotionally attached to their adult married children and were not willing to let go, as one key respondent said, *"Parents are emotionally attached to their children and do not want to break this bond and feel that if they separate, they will go through a loss"* (Kr/004/2023). Some parents feel insecure living by themselves; hence they want the company of their children and their grandchildren as one parent stated,

You know as you grow old, your other friends also are getting old and you cannot be able to move around. You cannot socialize with the young people so much because you cannot cope with them. You need somebody to be closer to you, maybe it's grandchildren, play with them around and talk to them around because you are alone, you find yourself so lonely and you start thinking a lot of things. Why am I lonely? I have children around who can come and give me warmth. So, there is a social life that will make you have your children around you (Kr/005/2023). In this situation parents may end up clinging to their adult married children and continue living with them.

Majority of the parents expressed fear for their children and were not able to launch their children properly. They feared what will happen to their children and believed that their children cannot survive on their own. Some feared that their children cannot take care of themselves hence they provided a lot of emotional support to their children resulting in their stay as one respondent stated: *"One of the reasons parents stay with their children is they do not want to part with them. They fear that they are not comfortable if the adult has mental health issues, or are not responsible, or they do not have the confidence in the way they live"* (Pr/03/2023). In some situations, parents argued that they invited their children to stay with them because they felt that

the environment was not conducive and that they were not confident enough to live on their own as one respondent stated *"You just want to keep that child, to protect that child, take care of them and the grandchildren"* (Pr/002/2023).

Parent's emotional attachment to their adult married children is a reason identified why mothers lived with their adult married children. This finding affirms South and Lei (2015) findings who points that in America the number of adults residing in their parent's home has increased remarkably, due to family connectivity especially being emotionally attached to the mother who is considered to be an instrumental help to the family. Additionally, Polenick et al. (2018) found that parents maintain strong ties with their children and continue to provide emotional and financial assistance throughout their life course and this may be a contributing factor to marital strain as the couple may not agree on how often the adult children should receive support.

Management of loneliness

As a parent grows old and have gone through loss of a spouse and living alone, they start feeling lonely. This loneliness makes the parents to feel uncomfortable, thinking a lot and wanting some company as one parent respondent was stated. *"Sometimes it could be loneliness, when the children lose one parent before deciding what to do, the adult children can come in to live with the remaining parent to keep them company"* (Pr/010/2023).

Moving back to parent's home could sometimes make the children get comfortable; become irresponsible and not able to make any decisions. Some children when their marriages are not working, they are left with no option but to return to their home to be close to their parents and do not want to be far from them as one parent was said, *"Sometimes it's because of broken marriages. If they were married, they may want to come back home and as a parent you cannot tell them to go away, so you end up living with them"* (Pr/006/2023).

Loneliness stood out a social factor that lead parents to leave with their adult married children. Majority of the parents stated that they just wanted a grandchild to talk to and play with. This confirms the finding of Marco and Grundy (2018) who argued that parents living with adult children were a source of emotional and instrumental support for older parents. So, these parents choose to manage many of the tasks their adult children should be doing on their own, such as doing laundry, cleaning and paying bills (New life house, 2023) to keep their children close to them.

Care for Sick Parents

Parents expressed a great need of living with their adult married children when they had health challenges. They needed their children to help them during medical emergencies like taking them to the hospital. One parent expressed her willingness to live with her adult married children to help her take care of her sickly husband when she said, *"Yes, I lived with my son and his wife for a short time. It was necessary for them to relocate from their place of work when my husband got sick. They needed to help me take care for him. So, I lived with them for a short time, like six months in the same hours"* (Pr/010/2023).

Another parent was also supported the theme when she said, *"Where the parent is incapacitated and needs some medical attention and they are not able to, then they would feel they'd rather have their children come and live with them so that the children can be able to provide the resources that are required such as food and medical care and all that pertains to taking care of a parent"* (Pr/001/2023).

Others wanted to live with their adult married children because they had health issues as one parent said:

And sometimes it also depends on your health. Right now, I'm hypertensive. And sometimes you find that if you have somebody close to you, should anything happen to you, it is easier for them to know. There is also that need of somebody to be close to you so that in case of any need of medical attention, there is somebody within reach whom you can just call or you can go to and you can be taken to the hospital (Pr 002/2023).

The study found out that most parents who were living with their adult married children had medical needs. This finding confirms Njenga (2020) findings which stated that some adult married children may be at home to care for parents who may have medical needs. In these situations, the son or daughter may prolong their stay at home until the parent gets well or passes away. Parents needed their children to help them take medication and taking them to hospital in case of medical emergencies.

CONCLUSION

Experiences of parents living with adult married children in Ontaga Rongai, Kajiado County, is a concern that has contributed to the emerging issue of adult married children who have continued to live with their parents. Some of the factors that have led to this phenomenon, is financial, protection of family property, overprotective parenting style, emotional attachment, management of loneliness and taking care of the sickly parents. There is a need to psycho-educate the parents on the importance of helping adult children to take full responsibility of their lives and that of their ageing parents. This could be achieved through trainings to sensitize them on effects of different parenting styles and guidance and counseling to empower the adult married children to gain independence and become responsible people in society.

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