

# Experience of Single Motherhood in Interpersonal Growth: A Case of Umoja Embakasi West Sub-County Nairobi, Kenya

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**Abstract:** This study focused on the experience of single motherhood in interpersonal growth among single mothers of Umoja Embakasi West Sub-county Nairobi, Kenya. The resilience theory informed the study by Norman Garmezy and the self-determination theory of psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. The study objective was to establish the attitude of the general population toward single motherhood by single mothers at Umoja Embakasi West Sub-county Nairobi. The researcher adopted a phenomenological design to capture the meaning the single mothers at Umoja give to the phenomena of single motherhood and interpersonal growth. The study used a homogenous population of Christian women at Umoja Embakasi West Sub-County Nairobi with a target population of single mothers. A snowball sampling method was adopted to get a sample size of 27 single mothers currently bringing up a biological or adopted child/ren. The researcher adopted a semi-structured interview guide for data collection through face-to-face interviews for 19 single mothers and a focused group discussion guide for eight single mothers. The collected data were transcribed, coded for themes and analysed thematically through content analysis based on the research objectives. The results revealed that single mothers are misunderstood, stigmatized, and rejected by the general population in Umoja Embakasi West Sub-county Nairobi, Kenya.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal Growth, Single Mothers, Stigma, Rejection, Single Motherhood

## I. INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this study was to establish the experience of single motherhood on the interpersonal growth among the single mothers of Umoja, Embakasi West in Nairobi, Kenya. This chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the research problem, objectives of the study and research questions. It also covers the significance and justification of the study, scope and delimitation of the analysis, and theoretical and conceptual framework.

Single mothers are women who have at least one or more biological or adopted children. They could be divorced, separated, widowed, single by choice, never married, and do not have a partner (Brown, 2019). Soomar (2019) describes single parents as a father or mother bringing up children alone, emphasising that single mothers tend to take up the responsibility of child-rearing in most cases. This is similar to the American Psychological Association's (APA, 2019)

description of single motherhood concerning all families headed by a mother, including grandparents taking care of their grandchildren.

Single mothers take the fundamental role of assisting in their child's growth and development and their family welfare. The focus of this study was on single mothers between 19 years of age and 50 years of age who are bringing up a family alone without the support of a spouse or cohabiting partner. Ntoimo et al. (2020) explicitly identify some of the significant factors related to single motherhood, including but not limited to a woman's current age, level of education, occupation, environment, and interpersonal growth.

According to Tranca and Neagoe (2018), interpersonal growth is essential in social interactions; hence verbal and nonverbal communication skills contribute to forming social connections and are intimately linked to high-quality interpersonal relationships. Therefore communication is viewed as a means of maintaining excellent quality interrelation, or even as the relationship itself in its visible form. The nature of communication clearly defines the quality of interpersonal relationships. An increased number of research conducted at the family level reveals positive communication as being at the heart of interpersonal interactions and is linked to long-term family harmony.

Most single mothers may feel inadequate, which leads to a rapid loss of self-esteem and the formation of a negative maternal identity. Most single mothers face challenging situations that influence their psychosocial well-being during or after pregnancy, such as feelings of stress, sadness, fear, panic, desperation, and even curses. The majority of the single mothers have significant unmet social support requirements, such as empathy, encouragement, instrumental help, or recognition of competence.

A recent report released by World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) revealed that the lifestyle of single mothers' interpersonal growth negatively affects the well-being of the single mothers and their families. Single motherhood is a recurring phenomenon in society, changing the traditional family structure and is not yet fully understood. This seems to create a gap between the society's

understanding of the traditional family set up of husband, wife and children and a single mother headed family. In this context, the researcher aims to determine the lived experiences of society's attitude towards single motherhood and its effect on interpersonal growth for single mothers.

The researcher argues that there is a need for an in-depth study on the experience of single motherhood and interpersonal growth. The knowledge and understanding of the challenges the single mothers encounter from society's attitude would help determine the necessary strategies to aid the single mothers in nurturing their interpersonal growth. Indeed, only through establishing an underlying issue can a practical solution emerge. Therefore in the case of single motherhood in Umoja Embakasi Sub-County Nairobi, determining the lived experiences of single motherhood would be a quick step in addressing the interpersonal relationship of single mothers.

Besides, a rise in single parenting, particularly among women, has become a global concern. Evidence shows that single motherhood is linked to increased poverty risks, poverty reproduction, and other adverse effects that undermine the well-being of single mothers and their children (Garcia et al., 2021). This is in line with the objectives of this study, seeking to find out the prevalence of age categories and the education level of the single mothers in Umoja Embakasi Sub-County Nairobi.

The self-determination theory by Ryan and Deci (2000) informed the current study on the basic psychological requirements for autonomy, competence, and relatedness necessary for interpersonal growth. Therefore the present study established that single mothers' self-acceptance is a significant step in the transition into single motherhood and the development of interpersonal relationships. The single mothers whose interpersonal relationships are not met become controlled, divided, and alienated, similar to Skjerdingsstad et al. (2021) highlight the tendency to avoid going to social gatherings and are prone to stigmatization. Furthermore, the lack of a secondary primary caregiver to share household demands would lead to poor self-esteem and isolation, according to Theodoritsi et al. (2018).

The single mothers' experience of vulnerability may influence the maternal mental health stability and well-being and the growth and welfare of their child (Agnafors et al., 2019). The upbringing of children, their future, and settling down in life are part of the issues that single mothers face. Children are entirely reliant on single mothers until they marry and obtain employment. This results in most single mothers experiencing periods of loneliness, helplessness, hopelessness, lack of identity, and lack of confidence (Kotwal & Prabhakar, 2019). The current study aimed to assess the connectivity and support of immediate family members and the constraints experienced by single mothers in the role of the head of the family. Therefore, single mothers are exposed to social rejection and stigmatization, rendering them

vulnerable to perceived failures in life and low self-esteem (Choi et al., 2020).

The gap in society's understanding of the life of single motherhood and the cultural and religious norms inhibit the integration of single mothers in the social circles that stigmatize single parents and their children, especially the single mothers in patriarchal family systems (Macharia et al., 2018). The current study identified the possible strategies that would enhance the interpersonal growth of single mothers, similar to Lentovich's (2014) description of interpersonal growth characterized by certainty, acceptance, agreement, or permission, as cited by Tranca and Neagoe (2018). This expresses support, enthusiasm, and peace, leading to conviction, trust, assurance, and gratitude, which are necessary ingredients for interpersonal growth that are favourable and beneficial for single mothers. The current study established that some religion, social-economic status and cultural norms are detrimental factors to interpersonal growth experienced by single mothers.

This seems to agree with a study of African American single-parent families, carried out by Theodoritsi et al. (2018), which highlighted the drastic changes in the family structure that had occurred in recent decades with an increase in single-mother families. Likewise, in Korea, the number of families headed by a single mother changed from 18,119,000 in 2012 to 19,524,000 in 2017, represented by a percentage from 9.9% in 2012 to 10.9 % in 2017 (Kim et al., 2018).

In most Sub-Saharan African Countries, the number of single mothers is rising, as affirmed by Odimegwu et al. (2017) in their study of four African countries of Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Namibia and Swaziland. The study discovered that single motherhood prevails in 27% in Congo-Brazzaville and 53% in Namibia, with children out of wedlock as the major contributing factor to single motherhood status. However, the researcher encountered limited literature about the well-being of single motherhood in the African region.

The researcher was struck by the mushrooming of single mothers' families in her line of duty as a nurse in Umoja Embakasi sub-county Nairobi, Kenya, a low-income earner settlement. Macharia (2018), in his study, discovered that in Kenya, there is increased unemployment and extreme poverty that expose many single mothers to risky situations. Moreover, the single mothers who struggle to look for food, shelter, and other basic needs for the health and welfare of their children are challenged by the limited job opportunities in Kenya, which lead to the endurance of financial, emotional, and social difficulties.

African culture generally exhibits society's cohesion through family systems that traditionally are recommended for the care and support of their members. However, the current study discovered that the family and community reject single mothers as they are looked upon as deviant family members and a source of shame. Clark et al. (2017) unveil the controversy of the extreme stereotyped attitude

about family support in sub-Saharan Africa on family cohesion and the poverty associated with single motherhood status. The active relatives' support for single mothers is limited, and roughly one-fifth of mothers receive no financial or child-care assistance from extended family members.

Interpersonal growth seems crucial in the adaptability to the single motherhood status and the responsibility of being the head of their family. Therefore, the current study aimed to establish whether the age and maturity level of the single mother play any significant role in the transition process into single motherhood. The result of the study portrays that single mothers' experience of interpersonal growth influence how they perceive the status of single motherhood with the capacity to restructure their personal and family goals.

The study aimed to fill the existing gap in understanding the single motherhood family structure by establishing society's attitude towards single motherhood families and the currently mushrooming phenomena of single mother headed families. Furthermore, demonstrating the role of the religion, culture and government structure in the single mothers' well-being and determining the challenges facing single mothers would aid in establishing strategies for enhancing interpersonal growth among the single mothers.

Single mothers at Umoja Embakasi West sub-county Nairobi have been observed to be withdrawn and self-isolating over time. They refrain from social gatherings and isolation seem to have a more straightforward lifestyle than their married counterparts in the same settlement (Zhang, 2022). The general population seems to associate with single mothers with remarkable reservations, leading to single mothers appearing like second-class citizens. In church gatherings and activities, the single mothers seem to shy off from taking active roles in church participation.

It has been observed that the status of single motherhood seems to be a contributing factor for the single mothers to be isolated, stigmatized, develop low self-esteem and have poor psychosocial well-being, with several losing their purpose in life. However, some single mothers have established good interpersonal growth and resilience, enabling them to bounce back to everyday living after a challenge or adversities (Radcliffe et al., 2022).

Women's emotional health is jeopardized when they lack social support, have a low income, and are single mothers. Peer support can take the form of emotional, affirmational, informational, and practical help. However, the evidence of its impact on emotional well-being during and after pregnancy is inconsistent. Some single mothers experience a loss of self-confidence and develop social anxiety due to fear of being judged and condemned by society; hence they withdraw (Amroussia et al., 2017). Umoja, Embakasi West sub-county Nairobi, is an urban setting which seems to create an environment with limited

support for single mothers from the family of origin or extended family, religion or even government.

Therefore if the single mothers continue to be withdrawn with minimal religion, social family or government support, their children and their psychosocial well-being will deteriorate. This might affect the religious outlook, family cohesion and development of social disintegration. This study may assist in establishing strategies for developing interpersonal skills for single mothers to promote their personal and family wellbeing. The issue of the experience of single motherhood on interpersonal growth seemly has not been addressed in Umoja, and it would be likely that a new isolated generation with poor relational skills may emerge at Umoja Embakasi West sub-county Nairobi. Therefore this study seeks to establish the perceived attitude of the society toward single motherhood single mothers and the meaning the single mothers give to their lived experience of being the head of their family.

This study aimed to fill this existing gap in the body of literature and discuss how single mothers struggle with their life alone, interpersonal growth and well-being.

## II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To establish the society's attitude toward single motherhood by single mothers in Umoja Embakasi West Sub-county Nairobi

## III. METHODOLOGY

A phenomenology research design was adopted for this study to enable the single mothers to describe their lived experiences of single motherhood and the influence single motherhood has on interpersonal growth. The researcher had an in-depth understanding of the realities of single motherhood and interpersonal growth as every single mother described their unique lived experiences. The phenomenological design established the single motherhood phenomena through the resilience and self-determination theories as they establish the capability, role of autonomy and the ability to bounce back of the single mothers. Data collection was done through recording audio conversations, writing the conversations and in-depth interviews and discussions. The researcher used thematic analysis with both resilience theory and self-determination theory to analyse the data described by the single mothers' lived experiences while data collection and analysis co-occurred.

Embakasi West Sub County has a total population of approximately 187 020 and is one of the seventeen constituencies in Nairobi County, Kenya. Umoja Sub-county covers an area of 125 hectares with an estimated population of 50,739 (Kimani, 2021).

The target population for the present study were 30 single mothers currently bringing up a biological or adopted child from the three mainstream churches of Catholic, Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) and Pentecostal Church of Eastern

Africa (PCEA) in Umoja Embakasi West Sub-county, Nairobi Kenya.

The researcher used snowball sampling to identify single mothers who were information-rich on interpersonal growth in single motherhood to form good interview participants to generate the data needed for the research questions.

The primary criteria used when deciding on the sample size was how it represented the population. Tenny et al. (2017) assert that, for a qualitative-phenomenological study, the ideal size is between 5 to 25 participants. The size was small because the study was concerned with an in-depth understanding of an observable fact, and the whole number depends on attaining saturation (Creswell, 2015). The sample size for this study was 27 single mothers participants aged between 19 and 50 years of age who are currently bringing up a biological or adopted child for face to face interviews and the Focus Group Discussion.

The face-to-face and focused group discussion helped the researcher attain broad responses to establish the experience of single motherhood and interpersonal growth.

Table 3.1: Sampling Matrix

Participants	Sampling Size	Snow Ball Sampling	Research Instrument
Face to Face	19	19	Interview Guide
Focused Group Discussion	8	8	Focused Group Discussion Guide
Total	27	27	Xx

#### IV. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

The participants were 27 single mothers from Umoja, Embakasi West Sub-county Nairobi, Kenya, of whom eight single mothers out of the targeted ten for focused group discussion and 19 single mothers out of the 20 for face on face semi-structured interview guide. The level of education, the church of affiliation, and the single mothers' age were essential for helping the researcher understand the respondents' background to ensure careful interpretation of the study findings. All the three churches were well represented, with the Pentecostal Church of Eastern Africa (PCEA) having the lowest of seven participants and the highest being the Catholic Church. The participants' demographic details are represented in tables as follows:

Table 4.1: Demographic Details for Face to face Interview Participants

Participant Code	Age	Education Level	Church
1	31	Secondary	Catholic
2	31	College	Catholic
3	39	College	Catholic
4	50	College	Protestant

5	37	College	Protestant
6	43	Secondary	Catholic
7	43	Secondary	Anglican
8	30	College	Anglican
9	42	Secondary	Anglican
10	48	Secondary	Catholic
11	27	college	Protestant
12	47	College	Catholic
13	33	Primary	Anglican
14	33	Secondary	Protestant
15	39	Secondary	Catholic
16	24	College	Anglican
17	21	Secondary	Protestant
18	39	College	Catholic
19	36	College	Anglican

A few participants had only a primary certificate of education, which translates to the majority having the capacity to express their lived experiences clearly.

Table 4.2: Demographic Details for the Participants for Focused Group Discussion

Respondents' Code	Age	Education Level	Church
1	35	College	Catholic
2	46	College	Catholic
3	19	Secondary	Anglican
4	-	-	-
5	31	Secondary	Protestant
6	28	Secondary	Protestant
7	-	-	-
8	35	College	Anglican
9	42	College	Catholic
10	49	College	Anglican

The single mother participants in the focused group discussion had an equal number of participants with secondary school and college/ tertiary levels of education which facilitated a balance discussion.

#### 4.3 Data Presentation and Analysis

Interview and conversation findings were transcribed, coded into patterns, analysed, and interpreted. The usage of thematic analysis for the presentation was needed to assist the researcher in coding of the data into themes. The themes from the participants sharing were observed and considered in relation to the data gathered from the previous analysis of similar and applicable literature. The researcher discussed the findings, interpreted them thematically, summarised and presented them in a continuous-written narrative form, based on the study goal, which was: To establish the society's attitude toward single motherhood by single mothers in Umoja Embakasi West Sub-county Nairobi.

#### 4.4 *The society's attitude toward single motherhood in Umoja Embakasi West Sub-county Nairobi*

The study's aim was to establish the single mothers' lived experience of the society's attitude toward single motherhood and the influence on interpersonal growth for the single mothers at Umoja Embakasi West Sub-county Nairobi, Kenya. Three themes emerged namely; Rejection with two sub-themes of stigmatization and outcast, Suspicion was another theme with two sub-themes of insecurity and social isolation. Judgement was the third theme with insecurity and social-economic vulnerability.

Most single mothers used the third person "you" instead of "I" while referring to themselves. English and Kiswahili languages were used as indicated by the choice of the participants and everything was then translated into English.

Isolation, stigmatization, outcast, accusation, loneliness and rejection were frequently mentioned by a vast number of participants in the research. The participants shared that their life and family was happy and settled, they had freedom to interact and a sense of belonging in the society until they acquired the status of single motherhood.

##### 4.4.1 *Single Mothers Experience of Rejection by the Society*

This major theme is based on the single mothers' explanations of their own experiences and the influence it had on their interpersonal growth. There were two subthemes that arose: stigmatization and outcast.

##### *Stigmatization*

This sub-theme was an expression of a lived experience by three-quarters of the single mothers who had undergone stigmatization in their role of single motherhood. This assertion was backed up by several participants and one had this to share;

When I got pregnant I was in college and at the same time I was the first daughter in our family of seven siblings to get pregnant before marriage so my siblings were like my life is over and they didn't accept my situation and used harsh words towards me. My siblings and friends avoided me saying that I'm a disgrace to them. I felt lonely and wished to turn past events around. Many people talked ill about me which was discouraging saying that because am pregnant, my life is over, that I will just be miserable for my whole life. I felt unworthy, lonely, hopeless, judged, condemned and rejected by my family and society. I withdrew into myself to avoid the pain of being labelled deviant (Participant 17, Interview, January 19, 2022).

Similarly participant 9 concurred with this experience and shared; "Single motherhood is a life of pain. You feel incomplete in the eyes of others. You live through it feeling unaccepted. Others see you as hungry; you feel clothed, but others see you differently" (respondent 1, FGD, December 26, 2021).

In the Umoja, a metropolitan area, single mothers have a fundamental role in child upbringing. This has been a challenging experience, as expressed by the participant (Participant 11, interview, January 19, 2022);

The current society does not believe that the child is society's responsibility, so no one cares when your child is misbehaving. For example, my child had a children's quarrel with one of my neighbor's. But instead of correcting the child, both parents came outside and insulted me that my child was as bad-mannered as the undisciplined single mother (the participant wept).

Based on the responses of the participants and the observation of the researchers during the focused group discussion and face to face interviews, it is worth noting that, there was a common expression from most participants whereby their social life changed after becoming single mothers regardless of the cause. Most single mothers under-went self-blame for not meeting the informal social norms of the family of husband, wife and children, which excludes single mother headed families. Two-thirds of the single mother participants shared their lived experience of the nuclear family rejection due to the embarrassment associated with single motherhood to the family.

##### *Outcasts*

The sub-theme of experience of being an outcast was a common heart-breaking episode that the majority of the single mothers had to bear by virtue of their status. The single mothers shared their lived experiences on how dehumanizing the experience of being looked at as an outcast had bruised their self-image and negatively influenced their interpersonal growth. Two of the single mothers described their experiences with their biological family and friends.

Sometimes I feel irritated and wonder if I am an outcast. Even my biological family treats me like a stranger or an extremely needy person looking for sympathy, which was not the case before I became a single mother. I often wonder what changed in me: everyone seemed to avoid me as a single mother. I had many friends, including men friends, but when I got a child, my friends deserted me slowly, slowly and not even a call or message, can you imagine!! (Participant 9, Interview, January 19, 2022).

"Being a single mother, I feel judged and rejected by society as if I was the cause of my former marriage's dysfunction. My family looks at me as a failure and disgrace" (respondent 9, FGD, December 26, 2021).

The study findings are indicative of a negative influence to interpersonal growth from the break and change of interpersonal relationship with segregation of the single mothers. The results give an impression of disgrace attached to single motherhood status which affects the single mothers' social wellbeing.

#### 4.4.2 Society Attitude of Suspicion towards Single Mothers.

This key theme denotes the experience of the single mothers being accused and looked upon as a threat to married couples as being husband snatchers. Two sub-themes were identified: insecurity and social isolation which negatively influence the interpersonal growth in single motherhood.

##### *Insecurity*

This sub-theme revealed that the single mothers at Umoja Embakasi Sub-county experience being victimized by society as the needy and vulnerable population who steal married women's husbands. This was a very painful experience for the single mothers at Umoja Embakasi West Sub-county, Nairobi. (Participant 10, interview, January 20, 2022) expressed that as a single mother, she has been accused from suspicion of having an affair with a man on several occasions. She explained her painful experience of being misjudged as a husband snatcher with much bitterness while most often she has been with her male siblings and relatives. The participant shared her experience of the cruel society, who even checked if there were any man's shoes by the house entrance, which signifies having a man in her house. Some neighbours would often knock on her door with an excuse to borrow something just to scan inside the house for the man's identity visiting her home. Other people usually enquire from her child about the visitor which has been a very dehumanizing experience for her. "I do not feel free to socialize with anyone, especially regarding the opposite sex, which makes me angry" (Participant 10, interview, January 20, 2022).

My Luhya culture is hard and strong. After my husband's death, I was to be inherited by a relative, but I refused and stood my ground. The repercussion was that I was not allowed to build a house without a male partner as a single mother. I dared the culture and started making it on my late husband's property. Unfortunately, the builder got sick with malaria, which is common in my region and died. The people condemned me for going against the culture and bringing a curse to the builder. I was called a murderer, and the house structure was broken down (Participant 16, interview, January 18, 2022).

Several single mothers' participants had similar experiences and expressed many painful feelings toward society's suspicion, which limits their freedom of interpersonal relationships. A participant shared her frustrating experience.

The men see them as being available, while the married women see single mothers as a threat to their marriage. "Often some men have knocked on my door at odd hours which is very irritating. Being a single mother with young children, I have no security. I get scared although I don't open the door" (respondent 6, FGD, December 26, 2021).

##### *Social Isolation*

This sub-theme expressed the influence of the anti-social attitude on the interpersonal growth.

All the single mother participants expressed their frustration of being looked down upon as socially deviant and disadvantaged due to taking the entire responsibilities of bringing up their family. This indicated the nature of single motherhood such as the isolation and social withdrawal the single mothers undergo which influenced their interpersonal growth. In addition, three-quarters of the single mothers at Umoja expressed a reduction in the circle of friends which was being interpreted as rejection due to single motherhood status. Two single mother shared their experience.

The life of a single mother is not easy. There is no one to share what you are going through with your children. The outside world is not friendly and does not understand the struggles of a single mother. Society is harsh and judgmental. So unfriendly and people look at you like a burden, especially in-laws who think that you are looking for help whenever you call. It is a lonely life where you feel neglected and rejected. Most men will have the wrong impression that you are needy, yet society judges and abuses you as a prostitute (Participant 4, interview, January 3, 2022).

In the focused group discussion, one single mother shared her experience with society's attitude toward single mothers in tears, which most group participants agreed with.

I experienced a lot of challenges when I lost my husband, especially from the in-laws. They call me a prostitute, and no one respects me, which is very painful because when my husband was alive, my family was always hosting relatives and contributed a lot to my in-law's family. No one wants to know or have anything to do with me or my children, and it is as if we do not exist. I even stopped frequenting the village because of the abuses and ridicule from the family and being accused of being unfaithful while in Nairobi, which was very painful for me. I feel like an outcast. My family rejected me, and society was very unfriendly and judgmental. Participant stopped talking suddenly and seemed to be deep in thought with much tears (respondent 2, FGD, December 26, 2022).

The study findings on suspicion are inconsistent with Van Gasse and Mortelmans (2020) assertion that the society's attitude towards divorce is related to a failure of the woman to submit to the husband, and the quality of life after divorce varies significantly between individuals. The family and society scorn the divorced single mothers as deviant and a threat to the married women in the community.

#### 4.4.3 Judgmental Attitude of Society towards Single Mothers.

The Society attitude of judgement towards the single mothers was a major theme that emerged from this study. Three quarters of the single mothers shared their painful lived

experience of having wrong judgement from the society. There were two sub-themes which were revealed by the study: Prostitution and social economic vulnerability.

### *Prostitution*

Majority of the single mothers shared their experience of being misjudged as prostitutes by the virtue of their single motherhood status. This had been very damaging misjudgement and a double trauma which negatively influenced the interpersonal growth of the single mothers. Five participants shared their lived experiences.

It is even better *ukikaa kwa nyumba (to remain indoors)*... you feel more peaceful no one will judge you in the house since it's just you and your children. However, life is painful, lonely, not satisfying, it is not complete, and you are seen as a threat. Once you are a single mother, you have to live a restricted life; you are not free to even interact with other people because you are known to be a single mother, and you do not want to be mistaken. The participant broke down in tears (respondent 3, FGD, December 26, 2021).

“I was even physically abused without any cause. Men came to me several times, and as I refused to engage sexually with them, they beat me. I felt so helpless and being looked at as a prostitute” (Participant 7, interview, January 19, 2022). “Often some men have knocked on my door at odd hours which is very irritating. Being a single mother with young children, I have no security. I get scared although I don't open the door” (respondent 6, FGD, December 26, 2021).

My Luhya culture is hard and strong. After my husband's death, I was to be inherited by a relative, but I refused and stood my ground. The repercussion was that I was not allowed to build a house without a male partner as a single mother. I dared the culture and started making it on my late husband's property. Unfortunately, the builder got sick with malaria, which is common in my region and died. The people condemned me for going against the culture and bringing a curse to the builder. I was called a murderer, and the house structure was broken down (Participant 16, interview, January 18, 2022).

“After I left my domestic abusive husband, people nicknamed me a prostitute, because I could not manage marriage life. It has been cutting me like a knife. As a result, I live a restricted life” (Participant 8, interview, January 19, 2022).

The research listened to the in-depth experiences of the single mother participants which gave the impression of the vulnerability of the single mothers. In a patriarchal society single motherhood is associated with promiscuity which renders the single mothers unprotected with an exposure to sexual harassment and abuse.

### *Lack of Social-economic Support.*

This sub-theme indicates the society misconception of the capability of the single mothers' social-economic status and looks down on them as ever needy. This had been abusive for majority of the single mothers who find pride in providing for their family. Two single mother participants shared their painful experience

After my husband's death, I was to be inherited by a relative, but I refused and stood my ground. The repercussion was that I was not allowed to build a house without a male partner as a single mother. I dared the culture and started making it on my late husband's property. Unfortunately, the builder got sick with malaria, which is common in my region and died. The people condemned me for causing the death of the builder and continued to accuse me for having male partners who were giving me the construction money. I was called a murderer, and the house structure was broken down because people believed that no single woman (mother) could have enough resources to construct a house without a male counterpart (Participant 16, interview, January 18, 2022).

“My family looks at me as a burden and when I visit home or call my family members, tend to think that I am looking for financial and material help and they avoid me (Participant 4, Interview, December 29, 2021).

Economic struggles... Waah! It's a big challenge; I reached sometime and said, 'if only I were married, the rent and the school fees would have been paid'. Now I have to do everything from food, clothing, upkeep, school fees and school requirements and pay the house rent. My salary as a teacher is hardly enough, and therefore, I had to start a business to enable the ends to meet. It's not easy economically because sometimes you become financially strained, yet you have to do everything, and most often, I forego my personal needs. I often feel very bitter when I am doing my best for my family and yet I get accused of getting financial support from men by my relatives and neighbours (Participant 15, interview, January 3, 2022).

Some participants shared their disappointing experience in the attempt to re-insert themselves in the society. “Occasionally I have proudly come out as a single mother, but I get a rude comment like “woo” or people exchanging eye contacts when I am in a general group gathering. This makes me feel humiliated and out of place” (Participant 8, Interview, January 19, 2022).

In general the study results revealed that there is traumatization of single mothers in the society by the virtue of their single motherhood status. This negative society attitude have a major impact on the wellbeing of the single mothers with a negative influence on their interpersonal growth.

#### 4.5 Discussion

The study on the experience of single motherhood in interpersonal growth was carried out at significant time when the number of single mothers headed families are escalating.

The research on the attitude of the society towards the single motherhood has revealed that interpersonal growth largely relies on interrelationships. The results affirms the resilience theory by Cicchetti and Garmezy (2021) on the emphasis that dealing with hardship is more significant than the element of trouble. The interpersonal growth was mainly negatively influenced by society attitude towards single mothers regardless of the nature of the single motherhood. The participants were able to bounce back in their daily lives despite of the emotional turbulence of rejection, suspicion and misjudgement but not necessarily being brave.

The results were indicative of the need for integration of the single motherhood phenomenon in the society. All of the single mother participants in this study were either stigmatized or socially withdrawn due to a lack of support from their family, friends and society. Despite of the basic human need for socialization and interpersonal connection, the most common theme in these interviews was rejection or diminutive attitudes of the society towards single mothers. However the result show that the single mothers have strong coping skills hardiness, risk-taking, low fear of failure, determination, perseverance, and a high tolerance of uncertainty which assist them to have a stability despite of the society attitude (Van Breda, 2018).

As an outcome of what had been shared, it was possible to conclude that the society has a negative attitude towards single mothers which negatively influenced the interpersonal growth in single motherhood at Umoja Embakasi West Sub-county.

The study affirmed the self-determination theory through the strenuous experiences of single mothers struggling to maintain their autonomy and achieve their goals in life despite the negative influence of society's attitude.

The in-depth study of the single mothers at Umoja Embakasi West Sub-county in Nairobi Kenya was enriched by the sharing and observation of the single mothers' experience. The majority of the single mother participants had painful experiences of the attitude of the society who accused them of promiscuity undermining their capability to sustain their family. The suspicion and judgmental attitude of the society toward single motherhood, negatively affects the wellbeing of the single mothers which inhibits their personal growth.

This study shows that single mothers are not free to be themselves and cannot be able to interact freely due to the insecurity of their counterpart married women who view them as a threat of being husband snatchers. If the single mothers were understood as ordinary as any member of the society, their interpersonal growth would be enhanced and the single mothers would feel supported and more productive in the

society. The study revealed that the single mothers at Umoja Embakasi Sub-county experience being victimized by society as the needy and vulnerable population.

#### V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The researcher held a focus group discussion and face-to-face interviews to gain input from the participants' personal memories, values, experiences, and behaviours through a moderated interaction, which validated the current phenomenological study. This purely qualitative in-depth research approach mainly extracted material from direct quotes from the participants lived experiences.

##### 5.1 Summary

The main purpose of this study was to establish the society's attitude toward single motherhood by single mothers in Umoja Embakasi West Sub-county Nairobi

A phenomenological study design was adopted to establish the influence of society's attitude in interpersonal growth for single mothers.

The data collection was done through semi-structure interviews and a focused group discussion. A total of 27 single mother participants were selected through snow ball method and the study findings revealed that stigmatization and social isolation negatively influenced the interpersonal growth for single mothers.

The family of origin, married women and friends were the initial parties to victimize and reject the single mothers which negatively influence their interpersonal growth. Furthermore, single mothers preferred to associate with fellow single mothers who understand their lifestyle and accept them.

##### 5.2 Conclusion

The majority of the participants expressed that suspicion, social-economic status and undermining of the capability of the single mothers were the main cause of stigmatization affecting their interpersonal growth. Besides the participants shared that cultural norms of the traditional structure of the family, patriarchal family system and social reputation were the contributing factors to negative society attitudes influencing the interpersonal growth.

The study result revealed several factors that influence the interpersonal growth for the single mother. First, the accusation of acquiring a pregnancy outside wedlock; second exploitation and rejection by relatives in-laws for widows and finally the negative society attitude towards single motherhood.

The single mothers' solidarity with each other is a major tool for enhancing their interpersonal growth. Finally regardless of the adjusting stress towards acquiring the single motherhood status and being the head of their family, a shift in the society attitude would uplift the single mothers' sense of belonging and facilitate interpersonal growth.



### 5.3 Recommendations

The research's recommendations based on the study result includes;

- According to the literature review, the field data, observation and personal life experience of the single mothers, the study recommends that the Umoja Embakasi West Sub-county would benefit from psycho-spiritual counselling and other counselling programs to address the psychosocial, cultural, spiritual needs of the single mothers.
- Reinforcement of the phenomena of single motherhood in the society would enhance a sense of belonging and foster dignity for single mothers through support groups in monthly meetings, workshops, and seminars for single mothers.
- Introduction of entrepreneur workshops and seminars for sustainable income-generating programs would empower single mothers and reduce the stigma associated with social-economic stress for single mothers.
- Sensitization and psycho-education of the society would enlighten and challenge the society's mind-set on the escalating phenomena of single-headed families.

### 5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

The researcher suggests a similar study on interpersonal growth in single motherhood using a quantitative method.

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