

# Unearthing Challenges Associated with Single Parenthood at ‘JOSAM’ Church in Lusaka, Zambia: A Hermeneutics Phenomenology Approach

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## ABSTRACT

While single parenthood phenomenon is on the rise, little is known regarding lived experiences of parents exposed to such experiences especially within the faith-based organisations. This study focused on unearthing challenges associated with single Parenthood within ‘JOSAM’ Church in Zambia. A Hermeneutic Phenomenology research design within Qualitative Methodology was applied. 20 participants were purposively sampled. The findings of the study revealed that stigma against single parents and their children is high in society even in churches. Pressure among single parents to have more children is high as some are still sexually active. The study also revealed that church members who are married feel insecure and inferior when a single parent is around. The study made three recommendations, three of which are outlined below: i). the church through family life department to sensitize members about single parenthood. (i). the church have special counseling to single parents and their children iii). Church members should be told to be accommodative even to the single parents and live as a family.

**Key Words:** Challenges, Church, Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, Single Parenthood, Zambia

## INTRODUCTION

This study is an extract from the principal researcher’s dissertation from the University of Zambia. As a requirement for the award of a Master of Science in Peace Leadership and Conflict Resolution at the University of Zambia (UNZA) in partnership with the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), students are required to conduct a research study that culminates into a Dissertation (Simwatachela-Simui, Simui, Kakana, Manchishi, 2020). The UNZA-ZOU partnership has been running since 2014 via the distance learning mode. The University of Zambia is configured in a dual mode (regular and distance education modes).

The study focused on unearthing challenges associated with single Parenthood in Zambia at ‘JOSAM’ Church in Lusaka, Zambia. The church is situated in Lusaka province of Zambia. The church has a membership of about 750 members out of which there are about 25 single parents. With such a good number of single parents, my dissertation can be of help to the church and also be beneficial to many other churches. Single parents can be young girls who have an unplanned pregnancy, a woman who wants a child but not a partner, a parent deserted or divorced by a spouse, former cohabiters, or widows or widowers left to care for young children. Sometimes a parent becomes a single parent in all but name because of the other spouse’s inability, physical or mental, to share in caring for the children. Griffiths (1995). The rationale for choosing Josam Church as a study area is found in its uniqueness as a church. There are other churches in Lusaka and

Zambia as a whole which have the characteristics of my target population, but Josam Church stands out as an area of concern for this study because of the high levels of income and social status in Society of the single parents there.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by the framework of Parent-offspring Conflict propounded by Schlomer (Malcolm, 2021). Through this theory, we know that the intensity of parent– child conflict tends to increase from early to mid-adolescence and decrease or level off thereafter (De Goede, Branje, & Meeus, 2009; McGue, Elkins, Walden, & Iacono, 2005); that such conflict tends to occur over every day mundane issues, such as chores and homework (Smetana & Gains, 1999); that conflict with sons more often revolves around behavioral problems, such as acting out or hygiene, whereas conflict with daughters more commonly involves peer group issues, such as dating or friendships (Renk, Liljequist, Simpson, & Phares, 2005); that parent– child conflict tends to be more frequent and intense in divorced families and between step-relatives and that higher levels of parent– child conflict are associated with more child behavior problems (El-Sheikh & Elmore-Staton, 2004). This extensive literature demonstrates that conflict is not a peripheral aspect of family life; on the contrary, it shapes and permeates a broad range of parent–child processes.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study was bended towards a theoretical review contrasted with an empirical review of related literature to examine the corpus of theory that accumulate the concept of single parenthood and its effect on society. Hence, a basis for the study to explore socioeconomic and cultural conflicts emanating from single parenthood were established.

Despite the increase in the number of single-mother families in sub-Saharan Africa as a result of family breakdown and increasing premarital child bearing, little is known about the correlates of single motherhood in this region. In line with Odimegwu, Mutanda & Mbanefo (2017), the latest Demographic and Health Surveys data of four sub-Saharan African countries Congo Brazzaville (2011), Gabon (2012), Namibia (2013), and Swaziland (2006-7), this study examines the correlates of single motherhood in the selected countries. The results showed that the proportion of single mothers ranged between 27% in Congo Brazzaville and 53% in Namibia. Premarital childbearing was found to be the major cause of single motherhood in Gabon, Namibia, and Swaziland, whilst in Congo Brazzaville, separation was the main reported cause of single motherhood. Age at first birth and number of living children emerged as the correlates of single motherhood across the four countries. Also factors such as religion, level of education, wealth index and place of residence were found to be significantly associated with single motherhood in some countries. This shows that single motherhood is prevalent, and correlates vary across the region though some similarities can be observed in this region. Policies, programs, and interventions should therefore focus on empowering single mothers and their children as a way of alleviating poverty and other negative health outcomes associated with this family structure (Odimegwu, Mutanda & Mbanefo, 2017).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **A) Research Design**

The research design is a strategic blueprint explaining how a researcher embarked on a research journey, showing clearly the choice of transport mode (methodology) and the route (methods) in order arrive safely at the desired destination (a coherent and logical address to the research problem). Maree (2007) observed that a Research design could be considered as the structure of research, the “Glue” that holds all of the elements in a research project together. It is a plan of the proposed research work or strategy from

underlying philosophical assumptions to specifying the selection of participants, the data gathering techniques to be used and the analysis to be done.

In this study, a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method based on Husserlian philosophy was used. The purpose of this research design is describe human experiences as narrated by individuals who live in that particular experience under investigation (Simui, 2018). It brings out knowledge and preconceived ideas or thoughts of the state of affairs as it exists from an individual's story, as opposed to a community interpretation of events. The researcher analyses presents and discusses the research findings as they are and places the findings within the context of what is already known about the topic. Phenomenological research requires the suspension of previous assumptions about the phenomenon in question and additional reflection upon the phenomenon allows the researcher an intuitive insight into the experience being studied.

## **B) Study Site**

Selection of the research site is essential as it influences the usefulness of the information produced. The study was conducted in Josam church of Lusaka District, Zambia. The church has a number of single parents hence the need to do a research. It is located along Ngwerere road in Chelstone. The idea is to start with a large population and, through progressive elimination, end up with the actual site where data is collected (Orodho and Kombo, 2002).

## **C) Sample Size**

The sample used 20 members from the church using semi-structured interviews held with eight (8) single parents, eight (8) children to single parents, three (3) church leaders two and one (1) community leader. However, since the phenomenological research uses a small sample size for adequacy purposes, a saturation technique was used at the sample size of ten participants for the discovery of information and confirmation of previously collected data.

## **D) Sampling Techniques**

The researcher did seek to employ a non-probability heterogeneous purposive sampling technique so as to examine a diverse range of cases that might be relevant to exploring emerging single parenthood 'Josam' Church in Lusaka, Zambia. Through this technique, the study maximized levels of judgment that were to give a greater insight from as many single parenthood situations as possible. This research method pools people with differing characteristics, backgrounds, occupations, practices, or beliefs – as maybe observed from the sample size – yet shares a common interest concerning the research question (Cresswell, 1994). Nonetheless, this technique was supplemented by snowball sampling through a chain-referral strategy so as to enhance the recruitment and retention of participants (Valerio et al., 2016).

## **E) Data collection**

Also, primary and secondary data was put into consideration. Primary data refer to the forms of information obtained directly from its source through interviews, experimentation, visual or audio materials, and sometimes from the survey, observation or focus groups (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). Thus, the collection of data was be through semi-structured interviews and analysis of documented materials. Preferably, interviews were carried out face-to-face, but where technicalities failed, the researcher utilized Informational and Communication Technology (ICT). On the other hand, Kombo and Tromp (2006) stated that secondary data is the kind of information that has already been collated and published, in print or electronically. Put, secondary data production constitutes the reviewing of existing literature on the single parenthood phenomenon.

## FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Through face to face interaction with participants from targeted groups, various submissions were made and analysis of data on this objective established three major themes; stigma against single parents and their children is real, issues that cause stigma and negative attitudes towards single parents were unearthed and feeling of fear of being blamed and seeing to be loose and unprincipled.

### A) Stigma against single parents and their children is real

The sub-theme that emerged from Participants' knowledge on the existence of stigma in Josam church was the conflicting understanding that church is meant to be a place where brothers and sisters live as a family with the reality on the ground where children to these parents are not fully appreciated in the church. (FG 1-3, SP 1, CSP 1).

For instance the following verbatim shows that stigma against children to single parents is real as they are segregated and not fully incorporated into the church programs.

*Participants FG 1: These things of stigma in church are real and do happen almost every time even children are not spared from this stigma. When you go to church you expect that we should live as one family in Love and unit but it is not the case hence stigma is just somehow endured among single parents and their children (interviewed on 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2022).*

The findings of the study revealed that stigma against single parents and their children is very much prevalent in churches. The findings of the study further revealed that church leaders are, in most cases, not aware of these happenings in their local churches, though at times, they are fully aware. The church leaders confirmed the presence of some sentiments that are not so good toward single parents. One of the themes that emerged from here was that there is a serious stigma against children of single parents in churches. For instance, participants in FG 1 stated that whenever they were at church, their presence was not so welcomed by some church members, and also, the children of single parents were not fully used to though they were such talented. The privilege was given to elders, children, and children from homes where both parents were available at church. This, therefore, made the children of single parents become inactive in church programs, especially the youth programs where they belong.

These findings resonate with Zulu (2017), who argues that the breakdown of family structure in developed and recently developing countries poses challenges for single mothers to take care of their children, in particular in Zambia. This situation makes single parents and their families believe that they are unable to control or change the situation, so they do not even do their very best because they are not appreciated. This situation breaks single parents more, and others even stop attending church services because they think they are not appreciated and their potential capabilities are not used. They feel irrelevant to belong to the body of believers.

The study conducted by Aghawenu (2019), Family Life and Single Parenthood: A Moral Assessment. God planned marriage to meet the human need for companionship, love, mutual encouragement, practical help, and sexual satisfaction. It was God's original plan that children should be born and raised in security and love created by one man and one woman in a marital bond for a lifetime. In Single Parenthood, such ideals set by God can hardly be achieved. Single parenting is a marital breakdown that challenges the contemporary church.

It is also one of the reasons why some people are not morally and socially stable in life. Single Parenthood contradicts God's will and frustrates his purpose for marriage and family life. This challenge of single

parents has always been one of the major moral issues that make families live incompletely.

Another sub-theme that emerged from the study was that, single parents' sensed insecurity from the spouses especially wives of church members hence ill-treatment, gossiping, and slandering of single parents. Every time a single parent stands with a married man the perception is that they are planning on how to meet sexually. The only way insecure spouses keep themselves busy is by destroying the names and reputation of these single parents. Participants in focus group two highlighted that there are always cases of aggression towards single parents by the spouses of church members in the church. The single parents however, do not report these cases because they have no confidence in the church's administration because, in most cases the wives of elders are involved; hence it is hard to be neutral. In their understanding, the church leadership is mainly not on their side.

*Participants FG 2: These things always happen and we just no longer report any name-calling unleashed upon us for obvious reasons. In most cases when we tried to engage church leadership we were misunderstood and the issues would backfire and we were the ones to be blamed. Church leaders and most church members team-up against us and that is the last thing you want to experience as a church member (interviewed on 29th September, 2022).*

Additionally, another theme emerged concerning the “not” reporting of these cases. As can be noticed from the following verbatim that the church's administration in most cases when single parents tried to engage church leadership they were misunderstood and the issues would backfire and they were the ones to be blamed. Church leaders and most church members team-up against single parents and that is the last thing they want to experience as church members.

*Participants FG 3: The stigma against single parents is real in churches as from our experience this stigma is caused by one or more of the following reasons; lack of trust among married hence misdirecting there problem to single parents, inferiority complex, lack of civilization, lack of self-confidence and the norm that nothing good can come out of a single parent since they are seen to be mischievous (interviewed on 7th October, 2022).*

Furthermore, the root causes of stigma among church members was highlighted which included trust issues among couples and they tend to extend their problem to single parents who are perceived to be threats and danger to their marriage. Inferiority was another factor which they highlighted these single parents are seen as more advanced in finances. Lack of civilization was another reason given which was common in some instances and discussed by the group. It is apparently clear that some single parents have earned themselves bad reputation such that sometimes elders do not even take time to know their children and make informed decisions regarding how they handle each one of them. On the contrary, they generalise what they have heard about how unprincipled single parents are and treat them likewise.

These findings by Dowd correlate with the findings of this study. For instance, this study revealed that Single parents have a stigma they go through by virtue of their status; even in churches, this stigma is real.

Other studies have been conducted that hold similar views. For example, a study that was conducted in Europe on the Rise of Single Motherhood in the EU by Heine (2016) argued that single parenthood is on the rise everywhere in the world, including in the EU. Single parents now constitute about 19% of the households with children in the EU. The findings above are in line with the findings of the study. For example, participants in FG 2 indicated that there are a lot of stigmas issues against single parents who composed a good number in church. In the overwhelming majority of cases, this phenomenon concerns women. Only 15% of single parents are fathers, and their socioeconomic condition is better than that of single mothers.



Furthermore, the study findings revealed that female single parents are more than male single parents, as the can was evident even from the availability of sample size.

This issue has inspired a significant number of academic investigations and analyses that have highlighted the individual and collective difficulties related to this phenomenon. Not only are single mothers on the rise, but their situation is in many ways more problematic than that of other women. Indeed, single mothers are more likely to fall into poverty (their risk of poverty is 30%, compared to 17% for couples with children), to be unemployed, to have taken a part-time job in order to combine professional and family life, to have poorer physical and mental health – the rate of depression is particularly high among single mothers – and to have difficulties in building lasting new relationships (Heine, 2016).

The foregoing statement is in line with the findings of this study. This, therefore, entails that, in most cases, single mothers are more prone to be in socioeconomic and cultural problems hence than single fathers. This unfair treatment of single parents is attributed to various reasons, such as cultural issues, among others.

Participants in FG 3 revealed the major causes of stigma against single parents in churches which were; lack of trust among married hence misdirecting there a problem to single parents, inferiority complex, lack of civilization, lack of self-confidence, and the norm that nothing good can come out of a single parent since they are seen to be mischievous.

The consequences of stigma against single parents to some extent affect the children of single parents, and this finding resonates well with the research that was done by Stephen and Udisi (2016). Children living with continuously married parents are not faced with much stressful experiences as those living with single parents. Although various schools define stress in different ways, stress is generally seen when external demands exceed people's coping resources. This results in feelings of emotional distress, a reduced capacity to function in school, work, and family roles, and an increase in physiological indicators of arousal.

The Church Elders in responding to the prevalence of stigma, and trust issues concerning the single parents at Josam Church can be seen from the verbatim below.

*Participant CL 1: You know a Church is a community of different people. And every community experiences its own challenges. For churches, the aforementioned are some of the challenges that we encounter once in a while and they are real (interviewed on 20th October, 2022).*

Additionally, the other Church Elder also responded in the affirmative to show the prevalence of the cases under discussion although he went on to highlight that it had taken a long time since they received any reports relating to stigma and trust issues among single parents.

*Participant CL 2: Yes in Church these things happen from time to time. However, our Church has been lucky for some time in that stigma against single parents isn't so visible and felt, we are trying as a church to mitigate this wicked thing from continuing to be even mentioned amongst us as a Church (interviewed on 27th October, 2022).*

Another sub-theme that emerged from the findings was that, single parents couldn't report these cases when they are the ones who in it. The Church Leader from Josam Church highlighted one of the reasons why these cases are underreported and even not mentioned in Churches. According to him, the majority of the cases are those where the single parents as a result of a few who might have misbehaved cause all the single parents to be seen as without principles and values hence they just suffer without anyone understanding and sympathising with them.

## **B) Issues that cause stigma, negative attitude towards single parents at Josam Church**

The researcher wanted to find out what causes this stigma towards the single parents are at Josam Church. To achieve this, he put the question to the participants who gave their various responses as presented below. From the responses that were given, two four-themes emerged. On one hand participants pointed out that mostly, trust issues among married women with their husbands is an issue hence seeing single parents as threats. Lack of civilization, inferiority and the wrong impression that nothing good can come out of a single parents as they are seen be lacking in morals. This can be seen from the following verbatim quotations:

*Participants FG 1: At this church, elders, most church members especially married women see nothing good in us. On one hand if they like you, you usually because you have a good financial stance, a good business, they will start bringing you closer to them. Sometimes it is possible that you are invited if they need your financial help but immediately you are there financially you ignored, this is seen during things like birthday parties, weddings and other social events were we are sometimes invited just to provide finances and on the actual day we are seen as people who have nothing good to bring on the table. We are seen as people who know nothing about marriage no matter how good the advice may be we are seen as people we are moral imbalanced as we thought of as people who can sleep with different men daily. (Interviewed on 15th September, 2022).*

It can be seen from the report by participants in focus group two that immediately the status changes, even the attitude from people change

*Participants FG 2: church members have a clever way of shutting you up and breaking you down. If they don't like you, they will first begin by painting you black so that when they descend on you, you will have nowhere to confide and ultimately make you feel that you deserve all the bad words and the punishments. There have been moments when we have been isolated from church and at times left without attention on days when there is a family life program for couples and we cannot do anything about it because it looks even elder comfortable with that. (Interviewed on 29th September, 2022).*

On the other hand, it was pointed out that single parents sometimes provoke church members to behave in the manner they do. In the case of female single parents, it was reported that some single parents are so loose such that they don't respect their bodies hence all single parents are sees as such. This can be seen by the type of clothes they put on when coming for worship. Sometimes they sit in any seductive way possible to attract the attention of the males in front who they want to entice. Participants in focus group three highlighted that due to the continuous unprofessional and unspiritual way of behaviour by single parents, the situation has been perpetuated to the extent the issues of immorality are more head of in churches are it is slowly becoming a norm when it is wicked and evil regardless of who is involved. The following are verbatim quotations from the responses of the participants to support the findings above.

*Participants FG 3: Both single parents and church members make these things to happen, but it is so much on the single parents which has consequently made church members to start thinking that it is normal to go out with a single parents and treat them as a girlfriend from church. But again, sometimes you cannot even blame the elders or male church leaders. Some of these single parents in our churches, when they just know that the forthcoming worship program is going to be conducted by elder so and so who they love, they dress in such an alluring way. And then during the worship, they change their accent and seek too much attention. So sometimes it is just the single parents, who force the elders to do some of these things (interviewed on 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2022).*

## **C) Fear of being blamed to be loose and unprincipled**

Therefore, a sub-theme that emerged from the overriding theme above is that the single parents usually have

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fear of being blamed for something they did not willingly do. Most participants from FG 1-3 who indicated having been subjected to stigma either they themselves or their children. Majority of them did not report the stigma and attitudes, not to the church leadership. The explanation for concealing the stigma was that, the first instincts of the church elders or administrators is to shield and protect one of their own. And therefore, if a single parent would be strong enough to go and report any such issues, they should carry with them enough tangible courage to endure all the negative attitudes from church leaders and members. Therefore, they blame it on them as they are termed loose and unprincipled. And to avoid being blamed and being thought of as careless, they resort to keeping quiet. The following are verbatim quotations from the responses of the participants to support the findings above.

*Participant FG 1: When I was board enough to report the challenges that we go through as single parents, every time I reported, the issue was blamed on me. Being a single parent is not easy as everyone sees you as an enemy. One time, I was given the transport by one of the elders who stay within the compound where I stay, upon arrival at church the elders were the first to approach the elder's wife to be careful with me saying she was going to lose her marriage if she allowed a loose and unprincipled single parent to be close to the husband. With such misconceptions, where do you report the matter except to God through prayers (interviewed on 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2022).*

Additionally, another theme that emerged was that, those sometimes church members who have some positions attempt to abuse their authority and this they do by first trying to be nice to the single parents and later abuse them emotionally or sexually at times. They continue with this behaviour for an extended period and then subsequently when an opportunity arises to abuse, they seize it as can be seen from the following verbatim. It is also clear that the female single parents do not have confidants in most cases among the church leaders and even among the elders. This makes it difficult for them to report cases that seem to be sensitive.

*Participants FG 3: One of the church leaders had been asking me how my experience has been raising a son without the father figure and suggesting he could be helping out when a father figure is needed. He would always compliment me in church, on phone and act nice towards me. I did not pay much attention to it because I thought he was just being a caring leader. This went on for some time until one day he called me and told me how beauty and attractive I was to him and something strange happened. This had continued till one day I told him that if he continued I was going to tell the wife and he has since torn down. (Interviewed on 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2022).*

Although single parents do not often report cases of sexual harassment, it is clear that those who are interested to know will know, as there are indications to point to the problem that a single parent will be going through. This is according to the findings in the following verbatim where church elders observed some changes in the single parents who was undergoing sexual harassment and stigma. The sub-theme that emerged from the above was that the behaviour of a sexually harassed or emotionally broken single parent usually changes such as avoiding church attendance or becoming inactive in church programs.

*Participant CL 1: Usually we as church leaders do not know about these relationship and stigmas that single parents go through. Like I said earlier, in the case of the single parents sometimes their dress is so suggestive that men are literally seduced by the dressing. When such sexual harassments happen single parents don't report them to anyone hence they just leave the church. When asked what the problem could have been, she said nothing. You can see from this that there are indications sometimes that can give you hints of what might be happening to the single parents when visited but it is difficult to tell if they do not reveal (interviewed on 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2022)*

The findings above resonate with the findings by Aghawenu et al. (2019). The prevalence of single mothers



as primary caregivers is a part of traditional parenting trends between mothers and parents. In his research on marriage and family and gender roles, Benokraitis defines mothers as the expressive role players who provide the emotional support and nurturing that sustain the family unit. Because of this, mothers outshine fathers, who tend to be stricter and more distant.

One of a woman's expressive roles is that of kin-keeper, an important communication link among family members.

The other finding was that the children who are raised by single mothers are better than those raised by single fathers in terms of morality and their whole development. This resonates well with the research that was done by Aghawenu (2019). Children tend to drift towards preferring of parent depending on how involved a particular parent is, and a common problem in society today is absentee fathers; therefore, children are more likely to show a preference for their mothers as they are more involved with them than the fathers. Single parents tend to find difficulty with the lack of help they need. A great deal has been done on the hardships of single-parenthood. More often than not, a single parent finds it difficult to find help because there is a lack of support, whether it is a second parent or other family members. Furthermore, dependency is a hardship that many parents find difficult to overcome. As the single parents become closer to their child, the child grows more and more dependent upon that parent. This dependency, while common, may reach post-childhood, damaging the child due to their lack of independence from the parent.

The findings also revealed that single parents, as a result of the stigma, are stressed, and this stress, to some extent, is transmitted to their children. Social isolation of single parents might also be a stress factor that they transmit to children. This can have a negative impact on the child's relationship.

The study findings also revealed that the church leaders were not fully aware of most of these stigma issues due to not reporting the same cases affected by single parents who would just leave the church without informing anyone they would just go missing. It was further revealed that what causes the not reporting of these cases is the fear of being condemned. By the very fact they have evidence of being immoral at one point, many would see them be loose and hence would not want to share with anyone what they are going through. This was applicable to single parents who have never been married.

Besides the fear of being condemned for their past actions, the single parents were also not able to report cases of stigma, even sexual harassment, because they did not feel protected by the church leadership. The participants in FG 1-3 all revealed that it was difficult to report cases to the church leaders, who always saw them to be unprincipled. This made them feel uncomfortable. The participants in FG 1-3 further claimed that school administrators usually protect their spouses, who would be the main perpetrators of social stigma against single parents, especially women.

According to the literature and the findings above, it is clear that single parents experience socio-economic and cultural conflicts in the way they respond to issues of stigma and negative attitudes toward them. This is due to being exposed to such problems for an extended period of time which has resulted in them learning to live and deal with their problems without mentioning them to the church leadership, and if it is unbearable, they simply leave. And learning that is acquired in this manner weakens their full potential and leads to inactivity. This is very true and common among socially stigmatized women.

The findings of this study are contrary to the findings and measures that have proved to be effective in ensuring that socioeconomic and cultural conflicts are dealt with. For instance, Zulu (2017) argued that the only key aspect single parents needed liberty on was the economic aspect neglecting the socio and cultural aspects, which are important too. Work was the main thing that single parents needed neglecting the socio and cultural aspects. He argued that Work is at the core center of everything as it facilitates one to meet

daily needs in life. In a society where the state does not provide support to vulnerable groups, work becomes vital. Small businesses or being engaged in different income-generating activities in order to be able to meet the endless family needs. They were caught in a web where they had no other means of survival than to be involved in occupations to earn some income that could enable them to take care of the children's needs. Most of the single mother's businesses were hand-to-mouth; they were involved in the following economic activities: Part-time work, washing clothes for others, and buying and selling things on the street or on the market.

Furthermore, this study also revealed that the family life Department which the church leaders believed was taking care of all the cares and concerns of its members, was limited in many respects. For example, some participants revealed that if the family life department would speak to them, it was perhaps once in a while, especially when was during camp meetings when they are somehow recognized and given a presenter, and such a presentation would just trigger a chain of concerns without being very helpful.

Additionally, the single parents expressed their lack of confidence in the people who served in these offices, stating that they were not a good example in their marriage or that their moral standing would be questionable and sometimes not very professional. This was originating from the female single parents' experiences where they reported some cases which ended only with the assurance that they would be worked on, and then nothing was done.

This, therefore, entails that there is a need to reform the family life department by church leadership in order to be able to work effectively. Paul (2021) posits that the family is the school of love and where children build character, virtues, norms, and manners. The children's intellectual and moral development depends on the family's education. Social virtues, charity, and justice are basically taught in family life. Ethically speaking, harmonious and successful families are built on moral and spiritual foundations.

## CONCLUSIONS

### A) Conclusion

Single parents in churches experience socioeconomic and cultural conflicts. The victims of these conflicts are mostly single parents. This study found that single mothers are more prone to negative attitudes and stigma than single fathers. Eighteen participants consisted of female and male single parents, children single parents, and church leaders. Additionally, the study also found that there are four main reasons why single parents are victimized by a stigma which are; (1) lack of trust among married hence misdirecting their problem to single parents, (2) inferiority complex, which is a lack of civilization, (3) lack of self-confidence and (4) the norm that nothing good can come out of a single parent since they are seen to be mischievous.

Further, the study found that the perpetrators of stigma and negative attitudes in churches are usually people with influence. Either spouses to church leaders or leaders themselves. However, the study also revealed that sometimes these issues of stigma are perpetrated by the single parents themselves because of how they behave.

Therefore, the study established that children in churches are experiencing some stigma as they are seen to be the result of sexual immorality, which is seen to be a sin. Hence the involvement in programs is not very well balanced as the same children are seen to be performing every time there is a youth function.

The study also established that single parents' potential is not utilized; hence they become ineffective and inactive in church programs as they feel they are not appreciated. This makes it difficult for them to engage church leadership as they feel they are not so important; hence they just leave. Thus, in the face of danger

and oppression, they remain passive and feel helpless, believing that they cannot do anything to change the situation even when they can.

The study also established that the church has measures in place to ensure that all its church members are protected. However, these measures are not effective and need to be revisited and revised if not reformed. Furthermore, churches usually take a lot of time to take action on issues they receive from single parents. This makes them lose trust in the credibility of the effectiveness of church leadership to be able to help them with the concerns they have. It was also apparent from the study that single parents who were injured would either become passive, inactive, or even stop attending church.

## B) Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher provides five (5) recommendations.

1. The church, through the family life department, should strengthen the sense of belonging to the church regardless of marital status. This will help single parents to face issues of stigma and negative attitudes with confidence. This will further help the single parents know that they are protected when they are in the church.
2. Church leaders should always ensure that their members, especially those with influence, are mature and professional enough to uphold high ethical standards in the manner they deal with single parents and all church members at large.
3. The church, through the family life department and religious liberty department, should introduce a course for all the leaders selected for those sensitive positions so that they help the church. The course should also equip them with basic conflict resolution skills so that some of these grievances are dealt with by them. They should also use committees.
4. Church leaders (Elders/Pastors) should get more involved in the activities of the family life department rather than just receiving reports that sometimes may not present the reality on the ground.
5. Church leaders who interact with these single parents should be encouraged to report if they notice any significant change in behaviour or some absence from the church in the single parents.

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