

The Experiences of Unmarried Single Mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the background of the study to provide context for the research study. Then the chapter outlines the study's problem, purpose, objectives, questions, and justification. It also discusses a summary of the chapter and an overview of the next chapter.

1.1 Background and Statement of the Problem

In an article in one of the local dailies in Kenya, Hatimy (2021) observed, "Lately, I have noticed an increase in the resentment towards single mothers wherever I happen to read posts or comments on the subject". In another article in the local dailies in Kenya, Guserwa (2020) writes in a tone and articulates a positionality demonstrating the growing stigmatisation of single mothers in Kenyan society. Growing up in a Christian family in rural Kenya in Meru County, I observed the stigmatisation and seclusion of single women, including against teenage girls that were unfortunate to get pregnant before they completed their education. From my observations, the seclusion, discrimination, and stigmatisation were exacerbated for girls and women with a strong Christian foundation. These observations indicate that the perpetuation of stigmatisation and seclusion of single mothers was steeped in strong conservative Christian beliefs, values, and norms. Indeed, from a review of a biblical worldview, and by extension, a Christian perspective or worldview, the society, particularly the custodian of the laws of the society, the question that comes to the fore is does society punish those that do not adhere to the laws, norms, or values of the particular society? For example, the sixth commandment expressly prohibits adultery, which constitutes other forms of illicit sex, including sex before marriage, which in turn leads to children out of wedlock (Essien & Bassey, 2012). In fact, Mosaic Law prohibited adultery. Any individual that the leaders and custodians of the law convicted of engaging in adultery received severe punishment. For example, Leviticus 20:10-12 postulates:

"If a man commits adultery with another man's wife--with the wife of his neighbour-- both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death. If a man sleeps with his father's wife, he has dishonoured his father. Both the man and the woman must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads. If a man sleeps with his daughter-in-law, both of them must be put to death. What they have done is a perversion; their blood will be on their own heads.

Similar treatment of adulterous women is captured in the New Testament. For example, in John 8:1-11, the story of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, who were senior members of the society, and custodians of the law and teachers, brought a woman who they accused of adultery before Jesus and the gathered crowd. On engaging Jesus on what the next course of action should be Jesus wrote in the dust and said to them, that any person that had not sinned, should be the first to cast a stone. Soon, all the people that had brought the woman to Jesus had peeled away, leaving the woman in front of Jesus. Notable though, the man that was involved in the adulterous act with the woman was not brought before Jesus together with the woman.

Similar beliefs, norms, values, and practices may be traced to African society. For example, according to Kasonde (1998), within many African societies, premarital sex, adultery, and childbearing out of wedlock were deemed taboo, and the offending women would be punished according to the customs and traditions of the respective societies. A similar situation, like the one that unfolded in the story of the woman that was brought before Jesus for sinning adultery, evidently unfolded in many African societies. In African society, according to Essien and Bassey (2012), more leniency is shown to men than women, with the woman facing greater blame, and by extension, punishment, for engaging in adultery in Nigerian and the larger African society. In such a situation, and as is the case described by Vermeesch (2019), Hatimy (2021), and Guserwa (2020), where a woman gets pregnant is left to fend for her own, and is more likely, as observed by Essien and Bassey (2012), to remain an unmarried single mother. With the introduction of Christianity and the Christianisation of Africans, as Bediako (2004) observed, it is important to study norms, values, and beliefs of African Christians from a Christian worldview and African-Tradition beliefs worldview to understand the impact that the convergence and intersectionality of these two sets of beliefs and perspectives have on African Christian women that fall into unmarried single parenthood.

More specifically, in Kenyan society, Christian women face similar or near similar experiences influenced by an intersection of multiple factors. In Kenya, the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, which allows people to practice their religion without interference from the state (Kenya Law, 2010). The freedom guaranteed in the constitution has seen Kenya become a religiously diverse country. However, as the CIA World Factbook (2021) reported, a majority of the population identifying as Christians, with other religions being Islam, Hindu, and African

traditional religions. In fact, the 2019 census verified that a majority of the population identified as Christians, establishing that approximately 83% of the population identified as Christian (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

The Christian community in Kenya is composed of various denominations, such as Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, and various evangelical and Pentecostal churches (Pew Research Centre, 2011). Further, in recent years, there has been a surge in the number of independent, charismatic, and Pentecostal churches, which have gained popularity for their lively worship styles and emphasis on spiritual experiences (Gifford, 2009). These denominations differ in their beliefs, practices, and governance structures. As such, Christian religious practice in Kenya varies widely, with some adherents attending formal church services while others participate in smaller, informal gatherings or home-based fellowships (Jenkins, 2012). Many Kenyans are also involved in religious organisations and societies within their respective denominations in different ways (Parsitau, 2010). The different religious denominations, and subsequently, the Christian diversity, results in Christians, particularly women, who are the focus of this study, having different experiences.

The religious diversity in Kenya has resulted in varying religious lived experiences. However, generally, as Meyer (2004) observed, the lived religion of Christians in Kenya is often characterised by a strong emphasis on prayer, personal devotion, and Bible study. Many Kenyans integrate their faith into daily life, and religious beliefs often influence social, political, and economic decision-making (Parsitau, 2010). Religious festivals like Christmas and Easter, are widely celebrated, and religious events and activities often begin with prayers or blessings (Jenkins, 2012). Evidently, religious beliefs and practices have a major influence on different facets of the lives of Christians.

Within the context of Christian religious and cultural diversity, as Chesworth (2012) observed, the treatment of women in case of single motherhood varies significantly. For example, in conservative Christian communities, women who are found to have committed adultery or are single mothers may face social stigma, exclusion, or even punishment (Ndeda, 2008). On the other hand, in more progressive congregations, there may be a greater emphasis on forgiveness, understanding, and support for women in these situations (Ndeda, 2008). Some churches and

Christian organisations in Kenya have implemented programs and initiatives to support single mothers and their children, providing resources such as education, healthcare, and vocational training (Chesworth, 2012). As such, it is important to note that the experiences of women in cases of adultery or single motherhood cannot be generalized across all Christian communities in Kenya, as there is a wide range of beliefs and practices. However, it is clear that women's experiences in these situations are often shaped by the intersection of religious, cultural, and social factors.

Each of these factors contributes to the diversity of perspectives and practices within the Christian community, leading to a range of experiences for women in cases of adultery or single motherhood. For instance, as the Pew Research Centre (2011) reported, various Christian denominations in Kenya have distinct beliefs and teachings about gender roles, marriage, and sexuality. Some conservative denominations may emphasise the importance of upholding traditional gender roles, with an expectation that women remain submissive to their husbands and maintain sexual purity within marriage (Ndeda, 2008). In these communities, adultery and single motherhood may be viewed as moral failings, leading to social stigma and exclusion. In contrast, more progressive Christian denominations may promote greater gender equality and emphasise forgiveness and understanding in cases of adultery or single motherhood (Ndeda, 2008). These communities may offer support to women in challenging situations, recognising that they are often victims of societal pressures or circumstances beyond their control. Therefore, it is evident that the different Christian values, beliefs and practices across different denominations influence the experiences of women in varying ways.

Cultural diversity in Kenya also results in varying experiences of women in cases of adultery or single motherhood. Kenyan society is composed of diverse ethnic groups, each with its own unique cultural practices and values (CIA World Factbook, 2021). These cultural factors can influence how women are treated within Christian communities. For example, in some ethnic groups, traditional customs and practices may reinforce patriarchal norms and expectations, leading to greater social pressure for women to conform to gender roles and avoid behaviours considered taboo, such as adultery or having children out of wedlock (Ndeda, 2008). In other communities, cultural practices may be more fluid and adaptive, allowing for greater acceptance and support of women in cases of adultery or single motherhood (Chesworth, 2012). Further, as

Parsitau (2010) observed, the influence of urbanisation and exposure to diverse cultural influences can also contribute to shifting attitudes towards gender roles and women's experiences within Christian communities, resulting in varying experiences for women.

Similarly, a combination of different social factors has the potential to influence the experiences of women in cases of adultery and single motherhood. For example, social factors, such as education, economic status, and access to resources, can also shape women's experiences within the Kenyan Christian community. Higher levels of education and financial independence can empower women to challenge traditional gender norms and seek support outside their immediate community (Ndeda, 2008). Additionally, women with access to legal services, healthcare, and educational opportunities may be better equipped to navigate the challenges associated with adultery or single motherhood (Chesworth, 2012). On the other hand, women with limited access to resources or who face economic hardship may be more vulnerable to social stigma and exclusion within their Christian community (Ndeda, 2008). In these cases, women may be more likely to experience negative consequences for adultery or single motherhood, as they lack the social and economic support needed to challenge prevailing norms.

Therefore, the treatment of women in cases of adultery or single motherhood within the Kenyan Christian community is influenced by a complex interplay of religious, cultural, and social factors. Understanding this intersectionality is crucial for developing policies and interventions that promote gender equality and support the well-being of women in diverse religious and cultural contexts. These experiences and observations majorly influenced my decision to undertake this research study to endeavour to have a better understanding of the experiences of single mothers within the Christian Church, with a focus on the Methodist Church.

1.2 Purpose and Specific Objectives of the Study

This study's overarching purpose is to assess single mothers' experiences in the Methodist Church in Kenya. To support the realisation of the aim of the study, the specific objectives are:

- a) To assess whether unmarried single mothers face any sanctions, stigmatisation, and exclusion in the Methodist Church in Kenya.

- b) To evaluate whether men receive similar or near similar treatment for engaging in premarital sex and contributing to the single motherhood phenomenon from the perspective of women.
- c) To determine whether church, family, and society-based support programs are available for unmarried single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya.

1.3 Research Question

The overarching research question to guide this study is what are the experiences of unmarried single mothers in the Methodist Church in Meru? The specific research questions were derived from the stated research objectives. The research questions are:

- a) Do unmarried single mothers face any sanctions, stigmatisation, and exclusion in the Methodist Church in Kenya?
- b) Do men receive similar or near similar treatment for engaging in premarital sex and contributing to the single motherhood phenomenon?
- c) Are there any church, family, and society-based support programs available for unmarried single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya?

Answering these research questions will support the realisation of the study's purpose and specific objectives. Answering the research question will also support the conclusions and inferences about the overall experiences of unmarried women in the Methodist Church in Kenya in line with the overall purpose of this study.

1.4 Significance and Justification of the Study

The experience of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya is a subject that warrants further exploration because of the potential impact on the religious community and society. By exploring the unique challenges, opportunities, and support systems available to single mothers, this study aims to provide valuable insights that will inform policy, foster empathy, and promote the well-being and empowerment of these women. The findings of this research can serve to raise awareness about the experiences of single mothers and lead to a greater understanding and empathy within the religious community, ultimately fostering a more inclusive environment. The study will also provide further insights into the single mothers' unique challenges in the

Methodist Church in Kenya. Single mothers in religious contexts may face different challenges compared to their counterparts in other environments. By focusing on the Methodist Church in Kenya, the study seeks to identify and understand these specific challenges and barriers to inclusion and support.

Further, the study will likely uncover potential opportunities for single mothers within the religious community, including access to resources, support networks, and participation in church activities, which can contribute to their personal growth and empowerment. Moreover, the study provides an opportunity for further investigating the effectiveness of existing support systems, both formal and informal, within the Methodist Church in Kenya. The findings are likely to help identify areas for improvement and potential best practices to better cater to the needs of single mothers.

Additionally, by gathering evidence on the experiences of single mothers, the study can provide recommendations to both church and secular authorities to help shape policies and practices that will address the identified challenges and maximise opportunities for single mothers. Therefore, the study is significant because it can contribute to the development of strategies that empower single mothers and improve their overall well-being. Also, identifying and addressing the needs of single mothers can result in a stronger and more cohesive religious community, as all members' well-being is considered in church activities and programs. Further, this research can foster conversations about the role and experiences of single mothers in religious contexts, challenging preconceived notions and assumptions, and promoting a more inclusive and understanding environment. Finally, the study's findings can serve as a foundation for further research on the experiences of single mothers in other religious communities and contexts, broadening the understanding of the intersection between parenthood, gender, and religion.

1.5 Summary

This chapter serves as an introduction to the research study, offering essential context and outlining the key components of the project. It begins with the background and statement of the problem, providing a comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand, its historical context, and the gaps in existing knowledge. This chapter discusses the purpose of the study, which includes the primary goals and intentions of the research. This section clearly articulates the aims

of the study and how the study will contribute to the broader field of knowledge. The purpose also helps guide the research process, ensuring it remains focused and relevant throughout. The chapter then presents the research objectives and questions, which serve as the foundation for the research design, methodology, and data analysis techniques that will be employed in the study. Finally, the chapter presents the justification of the study, which emphasises the significance and relevance of the research. It explains why the study is important, whom it will benefit, and how it will contribute to the existing body of knowledge. This section helps clarify the value of the research project, justifying the time, effort, and resources dedicated to it.

Following this introductory chapter, the next chapter focuses on a literature review. This critical examination of existing scholarly and professional articles will provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge on the topic. The literature review identifies gaps in the current understanding and establishes a solid foundation for the study by drawing on previous research and theories. It also helps to situate the research within the broader academic context, highlighting its relationship to other extant work in the field. Therefore, this chapter provides the background information and context for the research study, outlining the problem, purpose, objectives, questions, and justification of the study. The next chapter delves into a thorough literature review, further informing the research process and strengthening the study's foundation.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of the thesis reviews previous publications related to the study topic. Scholarly publications, including journal articles, books, and other relevant materials, are reviewed. The review provides a further understanding of key concepts and the study's overall focus and facilitates identifying the research gap to justify the study. Additionally, in this section, the theoretical framework informing the study is also introduced through a review of pertinent literature.

2.1 Prevalence of Single Motherhood

Single motherhood has become an increasingly prevalent family structure in many countries, with a growing number of women raising children on their own. The prevalence of single motherhood varies by age group, with younger women more likely to be single mothers than older women. For example, at the international level, with a focus on the United States, research conducted in the United States has shown that single motherhood is most common among women in their 20s and 30s. According to data from the US Census Bureau, in 2019, the majority of single mothers in the United States were under the age of 40, with the highest rates of single motherhood among women in their late 20s and early 30s (US Census Bureau, 2020). In contrast, single motherhood is less common among women over the age of 40. Research conducted in Canada has shown that the prevalence of single motherhood declines significantly among women over the age of 40 (Statistics Canada, 2021). This trend may be due to a variety of factors, including higher rates of marriage and lower rates of out-of-wedlock births among older women. Overall, it is evident that at the global level, while single motherhood is prevalent, the prevalence of single motherhood varies by age group and is most common among women in their 20s and 30s. The trend towards single motherhood may reflect changing social norms, attitudes towards marriage and parenting, and economic and demographic factors.

The same trend is evident in Africa, and more particularly, in Kenya. Some studies suggest that single motherhood is also more common among younger women in these countries. In Kenya, for example, research has shown that most single mothers are under 35 (Kabue & Kabue, 2021). The same study found that many of these women become single mothers at a young age, with over 50% reporting that they became single mothers before age 25. Similarly, another study by

Ndetei and Mokua (2014) in Kenya found that single mothers were more likely to be younger, unmarried, and living in poverty. The study suggested that economic factors played a significant role in the prevalence of single motherhood, with many women becoming single mothers due to a lack of financial resources and support. Other different studies conducted over the years have ascertained that in the recent past, there has been an increase in the number of single-parent families, with the highest notable increase being in the number of unmarried single-mother families in Kenyan society (Clark et al., 2017; Mbithi, 2019; Mutai, 2014; Muthuri et al., 2017; Njau, 2017). As such, single motherhood is becoming increasingly prevalent in Kenya, with a growing number of women raising children alone.

Similar patterns have been observed in other African countries as well. A study by Tawiah and Essuman (2019) in Ghana found that single motherhood was most common among women in their 20s and 30s, with most single mothers under the age of 35. The study also found that economic factors, including poverty and unemployment, were significant contributors to the prevalence of single motherhood. Therefore, while data on the prevalence of single motherhood by age group in African countries is limited, existing research suggests that single motherhood is more common among younger women, and economic factors play a significant role in the prevalence of single motherhood.

2.2 Community and Church Behaviour Towards Unmarried Single Mothers

From a Christian perspective, or more specifically, Christian sexual morality, premarital sex, and fornication are considered grave sins (Gaca, 2003). Further, within African society, pre-marital sex, conception, and giving birth before marriage are considered deviant or a violation of common values and norms of society (Muthuri et al., 2017). In different societies, norms, values, morals, rules, regulations, and other systems regulate the conduct of individuals in society (Vermeesch, 2019). Further, according to Vermeesch (2019), within the context of 18th-century society, any conduct contravening the morals or values of society, deviance, results in the individual being excluded, becoming an outcast in society, or being punished accordingly. Notable in the article, Vermeesch (2019) uses illegitimate motherhood to refer to women who conceive and bring forth children out of wedlock. Illegitimacy, from a prima facie perspective, implies actions or decisions that contravene the laws of a particular society. Illegitimacy, associated with deviance, is punishable per a society's laws, regulations, norms, and values.

Notably, this positionality propagates condemnation, stigmatisation, prejudice, and discrimination of single mothers.

While Vermeesch's (2019) reference to single motherhood as illegitimate motherhood is used in the context of 18th-century society, recent different studies and publications demonstrate that these perceptions persist in contemporary society. For example, Omboto et al. (2013) observed that in the patriarchal Kenyan society, traditional values place a significant emphasis on the roles of men and women within the family unit. Women are often expected to marry and raise children within the context of a marital relationship. As a result, single motherhood can be viewed as a challenge to these traditional values, which can contribute to the perception of illegitimacy. Similarly, Oduyoye (2001) observed that in a predominantly Christian society, such as Kenya, some religious interpretations might contribute to societal members viewing single motherhood as illegitimate. Certain religious doctrines may emphasize the importance of marriage and procreation within the context of a marital union. Consequently, single mothers who do not adhere to these teachings may face disapproval or judgment from members of religious communities.

Other factors, such as economic factors and changing social perspectives, may contribute to societal perceptions of single motherhood. Single mothers in Kenya often face economic challenges, as they are solely responsible for providing for their children without the support of a partner (Omboto et al., 2013). In some cases, single mothers may struggle to access resources, such as housing, education, and healthcare, due to limited income and social support. These economic challenges, as Omboto et al. (2013) observed, can contribute to the perception of single motherhood as illegitimate, as it deviates from the traditional family structure where financial responsibilities are shared between partners. Therefore, in contemporary society, the perceptions of single motherhood as deviance or illegitimate may persist, informed by a combination of multiple sociocultural and economic factors.

Further, a Christian perspective or positionality is complex and varied based on different interpretations and beliefs held by different denominations and individuals. Some Christians believe that single motherhood is a result of sin and immorality and that children are best raised in a two-parent household (Walton, 2015). Others believe that single motherhood is a valid and

important choice that should be respected and supported within the church community (Walton, 2015). In fact, different studies have demonstrated the variations in Christian positionality and practices, and therefore, the attitudes and behaviours towards single mothers. For example, according to Popenoe and Whitehead (1999), at the heart of Christian teaching is the belief in the importance of family and the nuclear family unit. Many Christians view marriage as a sacred covenant between a man and a woman and the family as the foundation of society. From this perspective, single motherhood may be viewed as a deviation from this ideal. As such, as Williams (2017) observed, single mothers may be stigmatised or excluded from certain church activities.

However, some other Christian voices argue that the church is responsible for supporting and uplifting single mothers in their communities. Jesus himself was known to have compassion for those who were marginalised or excluded, and many Christians believe that it is the church's responsibility to provide a safe and supportive environment for all members, regardless of their family status (Smith, 2016). In fact, Walton (2015) observed that some Christian organisations have developed specific programs and resources to support single mothers, including counselling services, financial assistance, and childcare. These efforts are rooted in the belief that all Christian community members deserve love, support, and respect, regardless of their family status (Walton, 2015). Therefore, from the reviewed literature, it is evident that the Christian perspective on single motherhood is diverse and multifaceted. While some Christians may view single motherhood as a deviation from the ideal family unit, others believe that the church is responsible for supporting and uplifting single mothers in their communities. By promoting love, compassion, and inclusivity, Christians can create a supportive and inclusive environment for all members of their community, including single mothers.

2.2.1 Negative Attitude and Behaviour Towards Unmarried Single Mothers

Single motherhood has been an increasingly common family structure in many societies around the world, and Christian churches have been a significant source of social support for these women. However, research has shown that single mothers often experience stigma and discrimination within Christian communities because of their single-parent status. For example, in one study, Durrett (2015) examined the experiences of single mothers in Southern Baptist churches in the United States. The study found that many of the single mothers felt isolated and

excluded from church activities, and they perceived negative attitudes from other church members towards their unmarried status. These mothers also reported feeling judged and stigmatized for their single-parenthood, which led to feelings of shame and guilt.

Similarly, Caldwell (2018) conducted a study that focused on the experiences of African American single mothers in the Christian church. The study found that many of the mothers felt unsupported and unaccepted by their congregations, which led to a sense of disconnection and disenfranchisement. The mothers reported experiencing discrimination and marginalization due to their status as single parents, which made it difficult for them to fully participate in church life. Other studies have also come up with near similar findings, ascertaining that the patriarchal nature of society has put women at a disadvantage, including bearing the brunt of deviance in the form of being sanctioned and stigmatized (Clark et al., 2017; Essien and Basse, 2012). Therefore, some single mothers have had negative experiences in the Christian church because of their single motherhood, being victims of stigmatisation, discrimination, and other forms of ostracisation.

Within the African Christian church, similar patterns emerge. Different studies conducted in Africa have shown that single mothers may experience stigma and discrimination within religious communities, including Christian churches, due to their unmarried status. For example, Chireshe and Munyati (2017) observed that single mothers in African societies may face particular challenges related to cultural attitudes toward single parenthood and gender roles. Similarly, in their study in Uganda, Mugisha et al. (2015) found that many single mothers felt judged and ostracized by their church communities, which contributed to feelings of isolation and depression. The study suggested that the negative attitudes towards single mothers were driven by cultural norms that view single parenthood as a moral failing.

In Kenya, some studies reported similar conclusions. For instance, Kigunda and Kinyanjui (2017) in Kenya found that single mothers experienced discrimination and exclusion from church activities due to their unmarried status. The study also found that some single mothers reported feeling judged and stigmatized by other church members, which contributed to feelings of shame and guilt. Ndeti and Mokua (2014) also concluded that in Kenya single mothers experienced high levels of stigma and discrimination within their communities, including

Christian churches. The study suggested that the negative attitudes towards single mothers were driven by cultural norms that view single parenthood as a moral failing. The study also found that single mothers often faced economic challenges and lacked access to social support networks.

In another study, Bochere et al. (2021) sought to evaluate the different challenges that single mothers face in their pursuit of spiritual growth in the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Kenya, with a particular focus on Kisii County, where the Church is dominant. The researchers used a census research method, drawing a sample of 105 participants. Using a combination of data collection tools, including questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups the researcher obtain data and information. From the literature review, the researcher discussed the theology that forms the basis for single mothers' inclusion in the Church and overcoming the range of challenges they face. The researchers also ascertained the theological and Christian perspective for adopting and practicing the doctrine and teaching of accepting church members as they come and ministering to them to promote the spiritual growth of all church members, who are created in the image of God.

2.2.2 Positive Attitude and Behaviour Towards Unmarried Single Mothers

In contrast, other studies have concluded that single mothers are not subjected to discrimination and other forms of mistreatment in the Christian church and argued that religious communities can provide support and encouragement for single mothers in African contexts. For example, Uzuegbunam and Menkiti (2016) conducted a study in Nigeria that found that single mothers who attended church regularly had higher levels of social support and psychological well-being than those who did not. The study suggested that church attendance provided single mothers with a sense of community and belonging that helped to mitigate the negative effects of stigma and discrimination. Similarly, Finke and Stark (2011) found that single mothers who attend church regularly report higher levels of social support and well-being than those who do not. The study suggests that Christian churches can provide a sense of community and belonging for single mothers, which can help alleviate the isolation and stigma they may experience. Similarly, in Kenya, Kabue and Kabue (2021) concluded that some churches in Kenya have developed programs to support single mothers and provide them with resources and services. They observed that a church-based support program for single mothers in Kenya helped to improve

their economic, social, and emotional well-being. The program provided single mothers with training and resources to start income-generating activities and counselling and support groups to address their emotional needs.

2.3 Treatment of Men, A Women's Perspective

The single-parent family structure has become increasingly prevalent in Kenya, and this phenomenon has implications for women's and children's well-being. Studies conducted over the years have demonstrated that based on cultural expectations and gender roles, men are not subjected to the same treatment as single mothers. This differential treatment results in economic and psychological implications for the women.

From one perspective, studies have showed that cultural expectations and gender roles account for the differential treatment. Several studies have documented the cultural expectations and gender roles surrounding single parenthood in Kenya (Njoroge, 2017; Wambui, 2019). It has been observed that women are expected to shoulder the responsibility of childcare, regardless of the circumstances that led to single parenthood (Njoroge, 2017). Moreover, men who leave their families are often treated with less judgment than women who are left to care for children (Wambui, 2019). This unequal treatment has been attributed to patriarchal norms within the Kenyan society and the church, which often uphold male dominance and perpetuate gender stereotypes (Mutinda, 2020).

Further, other studies have showed disproportionate economic impact on women: The financial burden associated with single parenthood disproportionately affects women in Kenya (Ombati & Abura, 2018). Many single mothers struggle to provide for their families due to limited access to resources and employment opportunities, with the church offering insufficient support (Onyango, 2021). Meanwhile, men who leave their families often face fewer economic consequences, as their financial responsibilities are not emphasised in religious teachings (Mwangi, 2020). Also, the psychological implications of being a single mother in the Christian Church in Kenya have been explored by various researchers (Kagendo, 2018; Mutua, 2019). Single mothers often face stigmatisation, isolation, and judgment from their religious community, leading to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression (Kagendo, 2018). In contrast, men who leave their

families experience less psychological distress, as they are not subjected to the same level of scrutiny and condemnation (Mutua, 2019).

From the foregoing, the literature on the differential treatment of men who leave women to take care of children in single-parent families in the Christian Church in Kenya highlights the persistence of gender inequality and the need for interventions that address the underlying cultural, economic, and psychological factors. Further research is needed to better understand the experiences of single mothers within the church, and to develop targeted programs that promote gender equity, economic empowerment, and mental health support for women in single-parent families.

2.4 Synthesis and Discussion

Overall, the experiences of single mothers in African Christian churches are complex and shaped by a variety of factors, including cultural attitudes towards single parenthood and gender roles. While some studies suggest that single mothers may experience stigma and discrimination within Christian churches due to their single-parent status, other studies indicate that churches can also provide much-needed support and community for these women. In Kenyan society, with a population that is predominantly Christian, unmarried single mothers may be treated harshly. With the increase in the number of single-parent families, particularly unmarried single mothers, and the societal and implied Christian sexual morality attitude towards unmarried single mothers, there is a likelihood that unmarried single mothers in society are mistreated, punished, and become outcasts in society. Different studies have been conducted to evaluate the experiences of unmarried single mothers, but there is a paucity of studies focusing on the Methodist Church in Kenya. In addition, considering the different experiences of single mothers in the Christian Church, future research could explore the factors that contribute to the differing experiences of single mothers in Christian churches and identify ways to improve their inclusion and support within these communities.

2.5 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study of the experiences of single mothers in the Christian Church, with a particular focus on the Methodist Church in Meru, can be approached through the lenses of neo-colonialism, feminism, and critical theory. These theoretical perspectives provide different ways of

understanding the experiences of single mothers in the Christian Church. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks play a vital role in religious research studies by providing a foundation for understanding and analysing religious phenomena, guiding the research process, ensuring validity and reliability, facilitating communication, contributing to the body of knowledge, and enabling comparative analysis, ultimately enhancing the quality and impact of the research (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, using these theories will provide a more holistic evaluation of the experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya and ensure consistency and alignment to other studies.

2.5.1 Neo-colonialism Theory

Neo-colonialism is the continued exploitation of colonised countries by more powerful nations, even after formal colonialism has ended (Kabue & Kabue, 2021; Nkrumah, 1965). This exploitation can take many forms, including the imposition of cultural values and practices that are not necessarily rooted in the local culture. This can be seen in the context of the Christian Church in Africa and other non-Western countries, where Western Christian norms and practices have been imposed on local populations. In the case of single mothers within the Christian Church, the imposition of Western Christian norms and practices can lead to the marginalisation and exclusion of those who do not conform to the ideal of the nuclear family. The nuclear family structure, which is highly valued in Western societies, is often prioritised over other family structures within the Church. This can lead to discrimination and stigmatisation of single mothers who do not conform to this ideal.

From the definition and description of the neo-colonialism theory, it is evident that an application of the theory to evaluating the experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya involves an exploration of different facets of the colonialism and its consequences in the contemporary Kenyan society. For example, an in-depth evaluation of the historical context, the influence of Western Christianity, power dynamics with the Church, and cultural resistance and reinterpretation will provide an insightful understanding of how colonialism and the introduction of Western religion in Africa, which accompanied colonisation, may influence the experiences of single mothers in the Church.

Firstly, an evaluation of the historical context, neo-colonialism theory can help researchers understand how the legacy of colonialism continues to impact the power structures within the Christian church in Africa. Colonial powers, such as Britain, France, and Portugal, introduced Christianity to exert control over the colonised people (Hastings, 1994). As such, from this perspective, it is evident that the African church has inherited hierarchies and power structures established during the colonial era. In turn, the inherited hierarchies and power structures may continue to influence the treatment of women in the contemporary Christian Churches in Kenya. For example, colonialism left a legacy of patriarchal, hierarchical power structures, which have the potential to propagate the continued propagation of the subjugation of women in the modern Christian Church.

Secondly, in the application of neo-colonialism theory, it is imperative to evaluate the influence of Western Christianity. The introduction of Western Christianity to Africa during the colonial period was accompanied by the imposition of Western values and norms (Olupona, 2013). Consequently, the Christian church in Africa may have adopted patriarchal structures and gender roles that reflect Western cultural and religious values. By examining the ongoing influence of Western Christianity on the African church, neo-colonialism theory can provide a further understanding of how these imported values and norms contribute to the treatment and experiences of women, specifically single mothers, within the Christian church in Kenya. For example, the neo-colonialism theoretical perspective will inform the evaluation of how colonial-based beliefs, such as monogamy, emphasis on the nuclear family, and other related values, norms, and practices, inherited from the colonial Kenya, affect the experiences of single mothers in the modern Christian church, with a particular focus on the Methodist Church in Kenya.

Finally, neo-colonialism theory can be used to analyse the power dynamics within the Christian church in Africa, particularly concerning the treatment of women. It allows researchers to explore how male-dominated hierarchies and traditional gender roles contribute to the marginalisation of women in church leadership and decision-making processes (Oduyoye, 2001). Additionally, the theory can help uncover the ways in which the church may continue to perpetuate gender inequality by reinforcing cultural norms that disadvantage women. Finally, despite the influence of neo-colonialism on the African church, many African theologians and religious leaders have sought to challenge and reinterpret Western Christian traditions to better

align with African cultural values and beliefs (Bediako, 2004). Using neo-colonialism theory, it is possible to investigate how these efforts have contributed to the empowerment of women within the church and the promotion of gender equality.

Therefore, neo-colonialism provides a useful framework for understanding how these Western Christian norms and practices have been imposed on non-Western countries and how they can perpetuate power imbalances and inequalities. The imposition of these norms and practices can be seen as an extension of colonial-era power structures, in which the values and beliefs of the coloniser were privileged over those of the colonised (Kabue & Kabue, 2021). A critical analysis of the power dynamics at play within the Christian Church in Africa and other non-Western countries would therefore highlight the need to challenge and transform these Western Christian norms and practices (Bediako, 2004; Oduyoye, 2001); Olupona, 2013). This may involve promoting a more inclusive and diverse understanding of the Christian faith that considers the experiences and perspectives of marginalised groups such as single mothers. It may also involve examining the power dynamics within the Church and addressing biases and prejudices that may contribute to the marginalisation of certain groups. By examining the historical context, Western Christianity's influence, and the church's ongoing power dynamics, it is possible to gain insights into the factors contributing to women's marginalisation and potential avenues for promoting gender equality within the African Christian community. Such objectives can be achieved promoting changes that address the colonial legacies that persist in the African church, and more specifically, in the Methodist Church in Kenya, perpetuating continuous subjugation of women and therefore, negative experiences for some women.

2.5.2 Critical Theory

Critical theory is a theoretical framework that emphasises, explores, and explains the ways in which power structures and ideologies shape social relations (Kabue & Kabue, 2021). In agreement with Kabue and Kabue (2021) observations, Horkheimer (1982) defined the critical theory as a framework that seeks to examine and challenge power structures, social inequalities, and cultural norms that perpetuate oppression and marginalization in society. Within the context of single mothers in the Christian Church, critical theory can help to highlight the power dynamics and cultural and religious norms that shape their experiences. This analysis highlights

how the experiences of single mothers are often marked by inequality, discrimination, and marginalisation within the Church.

Applying critical theory to the treatment of women in the Christian church in Africa, and more specifically, in Kenya, can provide a deeper understanding of the underlying power dynamics, social and cultural influences, and potential avenues for change. More specifically, the critical theory can facilitate the process of unpacking power dynamics and how they affect the experiences of single mothers in the Christian church. Like many other social institutions, the Christian Church is not a neutral space. It is shaped by power dynamics and cultural and religious norms that can influence the experiences of its members. Critical theory acts as a lens for examining the power structures within the Christian church in Africa, particularly concerning the treatment of women. For example, Oduyoye (2001) observed that this theory helps reveal how male-dominated hierarchies, religious doctrines, and traditional gender roles contribute to the marginalisation of women in church leadership and decision-making processes.

Further, this theory provides a basis for critiquing and evaluating social and cultural norms in society. The application of critical theory enables researchers to interrogate the social and cultural norms that underpin gender inequality within the African church. By questioning the assumptions and beliefs that reinforce patriarchal structures and gender roles, critical theory can expose how these norms contribute to the subordination of women and perpetuate their marginalisation (Oduyoye, 2001). For example, single mothers may face exclusion and marginalisation due to the dominant cultural and religious norms that prioritise the nuclear family structure. The nuclear family structure is highly valued in many societies, and this can lead to discrimination and stigmatisation of single mothers who do not conform to this ideal (Makini, 2020). Within this context, the critical theory highlights the need to examine the power dynamics at play within the Christian Church and the social and cultural values and norms, as well as how they contribute to the marginalisation of single mothers. Based on the critical theory, an analysis would look at the ways in which dominant cultural and religious norms shape the Church's attitudes towards single mothers and how these attitudes may be perpetuated by those in positions of power within the Church. It would also explore how the institutional structure of the Church may be shaped by these power dynamics and contribute to the marginalisation of certain groups.

Additionally, the critical theory provides a lens for evaluating other elements that may influence the experiences of single mothers in the Christian church in Kenya. For example, as Crenshaw (1989) observed in a discussion of intersectionality, which is a part of critical theory, the theory highlights the importance of considering the intersectionality of various forms of oppression and discrimination. In the African Christian church context, considering intersectionality means examining how factors such as ethnicity, class, and culture intersect with gender to create unique experiences and challenges for women in the church. This intersectional approach offers a more nuanced understanding of the treatment of women and the different factors that influence their status within the church, such as an evaluation of differences in experiences in the Christian Church in Kenya based on the intersection of different demographic attributes.

Also, the critical theory encourages researchers to challenge dominant religious interpretations that perpetuate gender inequality within the church. By critically examining the ways in which religious texts and doctrines have been interpreted and applied, researchers can identify alternative interpretations that promote gender equality and empower women within the church (Oduyoye, 2001). Finally, central to critical theory is the commitment to promoting social change and emancipation (Horkheimer, 1982). In the context of the Kenyan Christian church, promoting social change involves advocating for the transformation of power structures, cultural norms, and religious interpretations that disadvantage women. Therefore, using critical theory, researchers can identify potential avenues for change and contribute to the development of more inclusive and egalitarian religious communities.

A critical analysis of the experiences of single mothers in the Christian Church would therefore highlight the need for the Church to challenge and transform these dominant cultural and religious norms. This may involve promoting a more inclusive and diverse understanding of the Christian faith that considers the experiences and perspectives of marginalised groups such as single mothers. It may also involve examining the power dynamics within the Church and addressing biases and prejudices that may contribute to the marginalisation of certain groups. Therefore, the critical theory provides a broader framework for understanding the ways in which power structures and ideologies shape social relations. In the context of single mothers in the Christian Church, a critical analysis highlights the power dynamics and cultural and religious

norms that shape their experiences and the need to challenge and transform these norms in order to create a more inclusive and equitable Church.

2.5.3 Feminist Theory

Feminist theory is a theoretical framework that, among several theoretical directions, emphasises the ways in which gender inequality and patriarchy shape women's experiences in society (Robinson, 2006). Within the context of single mothers in the Christian Church, feminist theory can help to analyse the ways in which women's experiences are often marginalised and overlooked within the male-dominated structures of the Church (hooks, 2000). Patriarchy, or the systematic oppression of women by men, is pervasive in many societies, including within the Christian Church (Miller, 2017). Within this patriarchal structure, women's experiences may be marginalised and overlooked.

Patriarchy and the subjugation of women are evident in various facets of Kenyan society and have a major influence on the experiences of women. For example, as Njambi and O'Brien (2003) observed, in many Kenyan communities, traditional gender roles dictate that men are the primary decision-makers and breadwinners, while women are responsible for domestic duties and child-rearing. Cultural practices and beliefs have reinforced these traditional and cultural gender roles. In turn, they have influenced the power dynamics and expectations within the Christian church, resulting in a situation where women often face limitations in accessing leadership positions and decision-making roles within the church. In fact, Njoroge (2009) observed that, Similar to the broader Kenyan society, the leadership structure in many Christian churches in Kenya is predominantly male. This male-dominated leadership can result in excluding women from decision-making processes and reinforcing patriarchal norms within the church. The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions can also contribute to a lack of gender-sensitive policies and practices within the church, further exacerbating women's negative experiences in the Christian Church.

From another perspective, within the scope of feminist theory, the interpretation of religious texts and doctrines can sometimes be influenced by the patriarchal norms of Kenyan society. For example, certain biblical passages, such as verses in the bible that present women as being men's

helpers, might be interpreted in a way that reinforces traditional gender roles or justifies the subordination of women. Consequently, women in the Christian church may face limitations in their religious roles, responsibilities, and opportunities for spiritual growth (Oduyoye, 2001). This includes the experiences of single mothers, who may face discrimination and exclusion from certain church activities and leadership positions. In fact, in agreement, Oduyoye (2001) observed that the feminist theory provides a lens to examine the patriarchal structures that underpin the Christian church in Africa. In this way, the theory helps reveal how these structures contribute to the marginalisation of women in the church, including in leadership and decision-making processes and in the interpretation of religious texts and doctrines.

The feminist theory highlights the need to examine the ways in which patriarchal structures influenced by gender dynamics and subsequent stereotypes and biases within the Church contribute to the marginalisation of single mothers. This analysis looks at the ways in which male-dominated power structures shape the Church's attitudes towards single mothers and how these attitudes may be perpetuated by those in positions of power within the Church. It would also explore how the institutional structure of the Church may be shaped by patriarchal values and contribute to the marginalisation of women. In fact, according to (Oduyoye, 2001), the feminist theory enables researchers to explore the gender dynamics within the African church, including the roles, expectations, and relationships between men and women. This examination can shed light on the ways in which gender stereotypes and norms contribute to the subordination of women and perpetuate their marginalisation within the church.

A feminist analysis of the experiences of single mothers in the Christian Church would also highlight the need for the Church to challenge and transform patriarchal structures and attitudes. According to Oduyoye (2001), the feminist theory encourages researchers to challenge dominant religious interpretations that perpetuate gender inequality within the church. Examining the ways in which religious texts and doctrines have been interpreted and applied can help identify alternative interpretations that promote gender equality and empower women within the church (Oduyoye, 2001). As such, applying this theory to challenge existing structures and interpretations of religious texts will promote a more inclusive and equitable understanding of gender roles within the Church that recognises the experiences and perspectives of women, including single mothers.

Changing current power dynamics and structures is consistent with an integral part of the feminist theoretical perspective. For example, as Tong (2009) observed, central to feminist theory is the commitment to promoting gender equality and social change. In the African Christian church context, this means advocating for the transformation of patriarchal structures, gender norms, and religious interpretations that disadvantage women. By using feminist theory, researchers can identify potential avenues for change and contribute to the development of more inclusive and egalitarian religious communities. In fact, over the years, despite the patriarchal structures and norms that shape the treatment of women within the Christian church in Kenya, there has been a growing movement of women advocating for gender equality and challenging traditional power dynamics guided by a feministic perspective. Women theologians, religious leaders, and activists in Kenya are increasingly raising awareness about gender inequality within the church and advocating for more inclusive and egalitarian practices (Njoroge, 2009). As such, guided by the feminist theoretical perspective and positionality, men and women in the Christian Church in Kenya have the potential to guide the formulation and implementation of changes to make the church more inclusive and equitable. They can contribute to creating an institution where women, including single mothers, are treated more fairly and have positive experiences that grow them spiritually and socioeconomically.

Finally, like the critical theory in general, the feminist theory also fosters an acknowledgement of the importance of intersectionality and the impact it has on the experiences of women in the Christian church in Kenya. Crenshaw (1989) observed that the intersection of other ascriptive characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, class, and culture with gender, results in distinctive experiences for women. For example, in line with earlier observations, the intersection of gender, and socioeconomic statuses, such as education and financial position, for single mothers will result in varying experiences. Women with higher education or strong financial positions are less likely to have better experiences than women with lower educational qualifications or from a more disadvantaged background. In fact, from my experiences, women with higher educational qualifications, good jobs, and good financial positions receive favourable treatment compared to other women in the Christian church in Kenya.

Overall, these theoretical perspectives provide different ways of understanding the experiences of single mothers in the Christian Church. By using these perspectives, it is possible to gain a

deeper understanding of the complex experiences and further pave the way for a more detailed evaluation of the social, cultural, and economic factors that shape the experiences of single mothers. The different theoretical perspectives will provide a more detailed understanding of the intersection of different factors that influence the experiences of single mothers in the Christian Church and, more specifically, the Methodist Church in Kenya. The findings will inform the development of more nuanced and comprehensive approaches to addressing their needs and concerns.

2.6 Summary

In this chapter, a comprehensive literature review was conducted, which involved an examination of various sources such as journal articles, books, and other professional and credible publications. The review focused on publications that were relevant to the topical areas pertinent to the study, providing a solid foundation for the research. The chapter also reviewed the theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning the study, offering a deeper understanding of the context and guiding principles behind the research questions and objectives. The upcoming chapter will describe the research methodology used in this study. The research methodology chapter will outline the various approaches, techniques, and procedures used to collect and analyse data, and show the research was conducted and ensuring the study's credibility and reliability.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Methodology

Different research methods were used to support the realization of the purpose of the overall research study. More particularly, the study drew upon feminist research methodologies and a phenomenological research design. According to Neitz (2013), from the perspective of feminist standpoint epistemologies, all knowledge is partial and located, which necessitates the use of different methods to collect data and information from participants to capture multiple voices and perspectives. Additionally, according to Spickard (2021), the phenomenological research design involves conducting an exploration of the subjects' subjective lived experiences in religious settings. Spickard (2021) further observed that under the phenomenological research design, the researcher does not evaluate the truthfulness of such experiences and their real referent, but endeavours to interact with the participants' world, as they understand it.

Accordingly, in line with the feministic methodologies and phenomenological design as described, it becomes necessary to leverage and use a combination of different research methods in data collection approaches, to accord the participants in the study the chance to articulate their experiences and perspectives.

3.2 Sample and Sampling Strategy

To support the continuation of the study, a sample was drawn from the local churches. A sample of unmarried single women was drawn from the congregants in the Methodist church in Kenya. A snowball and purposive sampling approach were used in the study. Snowball sampling involves recruiting a few accessible participants, and requesting them to help in the identification and the subsequent recruitment of other participants until theoretical saturation is achieved (Navarro-Rivera & Kosmin, 2013; Roof, 2013). Purpose sampling, on the other hand, involves drawing a sample in line with the overall purpose of a study, such as specifically focusing on single women in the Methodist church in Kenya. The researcher recruited an initial group of unmarried single mothers in different churches. The recruited group was subsequently requested to make recommendations for other single women in the church until the desired sample size was achieved. They were subsequently provided with a contact number to share with other single mothers interested in participating in the study.

The identified potential participants were provided with an explanation of the purpose of the study, the scope, and an overview of the study. The potential participants were then requested to think about their willingness to participate in the study. Upon meeting the conditions set out in the sampling frame, being an unmarried single mother in the Methodist Church, the prospective participants that were willing to participate in the study were requested to provide consent to participate in the study. Upon providing informed consent, the prospective participants were selected for inclusion in the study. A total of 52 participants were recruited for the survey. The same approach was used in the identification and recruitment of three participants for the semi-structured, qualitative interviews. Before the commencement of the surveys and the interviews, the selected individuals were briefed about the purpose and objectives of the study, risks and potential ethical considerations, and the data and information handling procedures of the study. The purpose was to ensure, to the greatest extent possible, that the participants clearly understood the purpose as well as the potential risks and ethical issues and the specific measures taken to mitigate and address the identified issues and risks.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

This study used surveys and interview methodologies in data collection. Independently and collectively, surveys and interviews allow for greater interactions between the researcher and the study's participants to complete the engagement in line with the study's purpose and objectives (Secor, 2010). The methods used complementarily ensured that the participants are engaged independently and as a team in interviews or surveys respectively. Interviews, according to Bremborg (2013), particularly semi-structured interviews, are appropriate for religious studies research because of the diversity of beliefs and opinions. Therefore, semi-structured interviews are appropriate for this study because they can facilitate the collection of the different opinions and positions of the target population and foster an in-depth evaluation of their lived experiences. The interviewees were requested to provide locations that were comfortable, and the interviews were conducted at the participants' houses, where they were most comfortable. The surveys were conducted in different churches' halls after the completion of church activities on Sundays.

The interviews were recorded using the in-built smartphone recorder and transcribed to provide an opportunity to review the responses later to better understand the respondents' answers. Similarly, surveys facilitate the collection of data on beliefs, opinions, behaviours, personal

characteristics, and affiliations, which is appropriate in research studies on religion (Navarro-Rivera & Kosmin, 2013). As such, interviews, combined with surveys are likely to ensure the achievement of the study's objectives and a deeper understanding of the experiences of unmarried single mothers in society.

3.4 Data Analysis and Presentation

The data collected were tabulated into Microsoft Excel for the surveys to ensure that each of the responses for each of the questions was captured for subsequent analysis. The open-ended questions from the survey as well as the responses from the interviews were coded and entered into NVIVO for subsequent analysis. The output of the NVIVO analysis, as well as a content analysis of the transcribed interviews, were evaluated to identify key themes, in line with the purpose and objectives of the study. Figures from the NVIVO analysis, including the word cloud, hierarchy chart, and explore chart were used to present an overview of important aspects of the data analysis. Tables and figures are used to present demographic and other data that were quantitative in nature. The qualitative data was presented and discussed using a comparison of the study's findings to the findings of other similar or near-similar studies.

3.5 Delimitations, Limitations, and Ethical Concerns

In research, different ethical and moral issues, especially when dealing with human beings arise. Therefore, it is important to identify and mitigate any potential ethical, moral, and potentially legal issues to ensure the validity and reliability of the study and the study's findings (Liamputtong, 2008). Considering that the research involved interacting with human participants, the university's approval was obtained before the commencement of the actual interactions with the study's participants. In addition, the researcher obtained NSD approval, Appendix II, before commencing and completing the research, which is a critical requirement before conducting research studies involving working with human subjects in non-medical and health research study.

The participants were included in the study after providing written consent to participate in the study, indicating that they participate in the study voluntarily, without any coercion, and with an understanding of the nature and purpose of the study. No incentive was provided to encourage the participants to participate in the study. The participants were not exposed to any direct risk or

harm within the course of the study, and where the participants did not understand any questions or other issues, adequate measures were taken to provide further explanations or interpretations. If participants wished to exit from the study at any point in time, they were informed that they could exit the study, without any impediments or negative consequences. However, considering that single mothers may have gone through some form of trauma from broken relationships or other reasons leading to single parenthood, the researcher recognized the potential for re-traumatization. The participants were advised that mental health counsellors were available to provide counselling services should the participants require the services.

Before and during the research, the researcher took different measures to guarantee the privacy of the participants and the confidentiality of the information about the participants and the information collected from them. To guarantee the privacy of the study's participants, no personally identifiable information was collected from the researcher participants, such as names, national social security numbers, or national identity numbers. Additionally, to guarantee the confidentiality of the information about the study participants and the information or data collected from them, information collected was stored in a password-protected personal computer and an encrypted external removable drive.

Furthermore, to facilitate the research and ensure the efficiency of the data collection process, I had to plan my time and work with a schedule, which fostered time management and engagement of the participants. It was easy to identify and recruit the participants of the study because I have networks in the Methodist church in Kenya. Further, as a fluent Swahili speaker, it was easy communicating with the potential participants before the recruitment and during the survey and the interviews.

However, numerous challenges were experienced during the study, which complicated the research process. For example, the fact that I am studying in Europe and had to collect data in Kenya further complicated the data collection process. I had to plan and organise my work accordingly to ensure that I had all the approvals so that I could collect data during my holiday break in Kenya. Additionally, while in Kenya, it was difficult to align and schedule times for the surveys with the survey and interview participants. This was addressed by allowing the participants time to think about their participation and schedule the surveys and the interviews

after two weeks from the day of the initial contact. Further, recognising budgetary constraints as a potential challenge during the study, I had to plan and develop a research budget, which guided various activities to ensure that lack of funds did not inhibit my ability to conduct the research, particularly the data collection and analysis because NVivo is a subscription service. Identifying and addressing these challenges ensured that the research process was completed successfully.

In retrospect, it is important to acknowledge that the survey of 52 single mothers played a crucial role in this study. However, it is also worth noting that the survey process was time-consuming. Despite this, the survey helped single mothers contextualise their experiences within the Methodist Church in Kenya by offering insights from a larger population sample. This was followed by interviews, which allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the experiences of the target group. If a larger number of interviewees had been included, it might have led to a more nuanced understanding and interpretation of the experiences of single mothers within the Methodist Church in Kenya. This could have potentially saved time and resources spent on the survey process.

Moreover, the literature review highlighted the diverse experiences of women, which I leveraged to further evaluate the factors that shape the experiences of the participants in my study, mitigating any potential biases. It is important to note that recognising these limitations emphasises the need for further research into this phenomenon within the context of the Methodist Church in Kenya. Future studies can build on the findings of this research by addressing the gaps identified and deepening the understanding of single mothers' experiences within the church community.

3.6 Reflections on Researcher Positionalities

Growing up in a Christian family in Kenya, a practising Methodist church family, I witnessed first-hand how single mothers are treated in church and the community's attitude towards them. In addition, as a single mother, I have at times felt ostracised and not involved adequately, even though I have not experienced any form of direct discrimination and exclusion. My family, including my parents, siblings, and relatives have been supportive in my single parenthood journey. My personal experiences have made me passionate about understanding how single women are treated in the Church and society. Going into this research, I felt that I was more

likely to find out that single mothers largely experienced discrimination and other forms of mistreatment.

For example, during the interviewing part, I expected that a majority of the women, in excess of 90%, would claim to have experienced discrimination and stigmatisation because of their single parenthood. I expected the same results in the data analysis. However, from the data collection phase and the subsequent reading of literature as a part of the data analysis, I realised that single mothers had mixed experiences, with a significant number of the participants in this and other studies having had positive experiences in different spheres of their lives. However, across the end-to-end research process and in practising reflexivity, I realised that my perceptions of single mothers as extremely discriminated against and ostracised were unfounded. It is possible that the Kenyan population, myself included, have become more liberal and accommodating in tandem with other societal changes.

I recognise that my experiences may have influenced not only mooting this study but also the collection of data and interpretation of the data, and I engaged in reflexivity to address the potential biases. By acknowledging and addressing biases, researchers can minimise their impact on the research process and improve the validity of their findings (Finlay, 2002). Another way that researchers can address bias through reflexivity is by engaging in ongoing critical self-reflection and analysis of their research methods and findings. This involves questioning one's assumptions, values, and biases and exploring alternative perspectives and interpretations. By engaging in this process, as Lather (2007) observed, researchers can identify potential sources of bias and adjust their research methods and interpretations accordingly.

As such, leveraging reflexivity, I was able to address biases likely to influence the research process and, therefore, the conclusions and inferences drawn from the findings of the research. Subsequently, based on the reflection, I was able to pursue the necessary level of distance in the research process, focusing the analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the findings on the experiences of the single mothers interviewed. Further, situating the experiences of the single mothers in the context of previous scholarly publications and the selected theoretical frameworks. These approaches fostered the credibility and reliability of the study's findings and the overall study.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter, the literature review is undertaken to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic and establish a solid study foundation. A thorough examination of extant literature, including journal articles, books, and other professional and credible publications, has been conducted to ensure a wide range of perspectives and insights are considered. These publications encompass various topical areas pertinent to the study, enabling a holistic understanding of the subject matter. The literature review involved an exploration of the historical and contemporary context of the research topic, examining key developments, trends, and issues that have shaped the field of study. This overview provides essential background information that situates the research within a broader context and allows for a more nuanced understanding of the specific research questions being addressed.

Next, the review delved into the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underpin the study. This section critically examined the theories, concepts, and models that have been previously employed to analyse and understand the research topic. By evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of these frameworks, the review identifies the most appropriate theoretical and conceptual lenses through which to approach the study. Additionally, this section highlights any gaps or limitations in existing literature which informed the development of the research objectives and questions.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This study aimed to assess single mothers' experiences in the Methodist Church in Kenya. The study focused on evaluating how single mothers felt that they were treated by their family, relatives, friends, and the church. This chapter of the study presents the findings from a survey of 52 single mothers and semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 3 single mothers. The data collected were coded and inputted in Microsoft Excel. Further, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcribed data from the survey and the interviews was then coded into NVIVO and analysed.

Figure 1 provides a word cloud, Figure 2 provides a hierarchy chart, and Figure 3 provides an explore chart example of the coded data that was subjected to further analysis.



Figure 1. NVivo Word Cloud

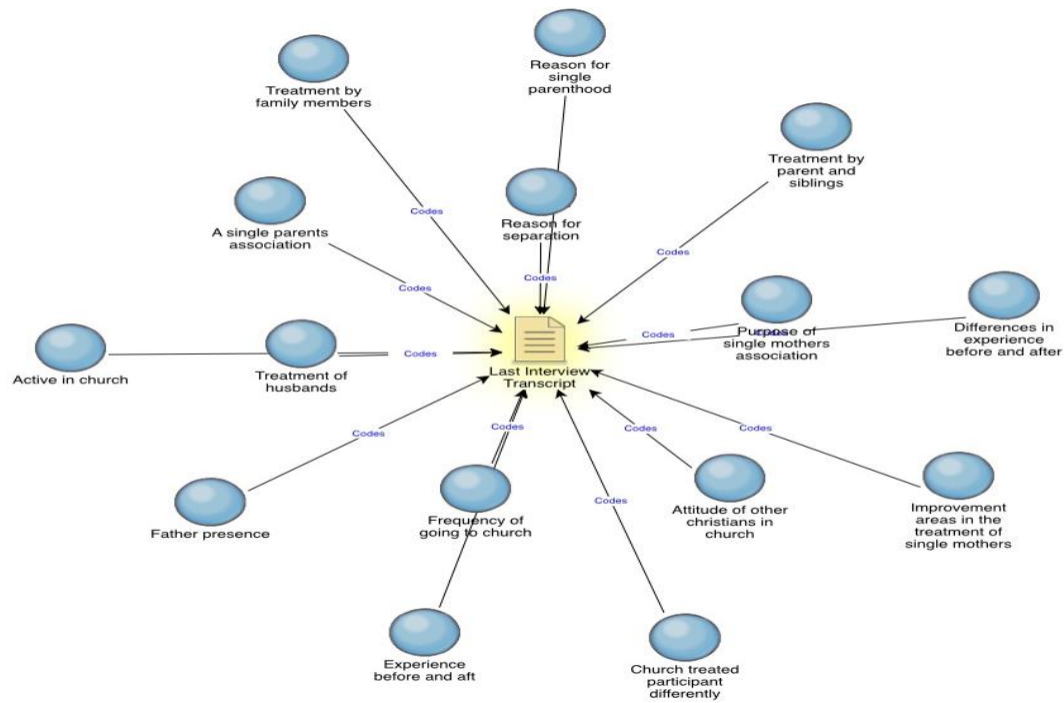


Figure 2. NVivo Explore chart

The word cloud, hierarchy chart, and explore chart derived from the NVivo analysis are important primary visualisation tools that provide an overview of important thematic focus areas. For example, the word cloud is a widely used visual representation technique in qualitative research that offers a valuable overview of the common or recurring words that emerged from the interviews and surveys transcribed, coded, and entered into NVivo (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). By highlighting these keywords, as McNaught and Lam (2010) observed, the word cloud facilitates identifying patterns and themes central to the participants' experiences and perspectives. On the other hand, the explore chart provides insight into the connections between different interview items and each interview, offering a visual representation of how various elements within the data are interrelated (Edhlund & McDougall, 2019). While the current study presents the explore chart for one interview, it can be expected that the explore charts for other interviews would follow a similar format.

Therefore, the utilisation of word cloud and explore chart from NVivo analysis plays a vital role in helping researchers identify and interpret patterns, relationships, and connections within the qualitative data. These visual tools, derived from an analysis of the data collected from the

survey and interviews, contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research findings, ultimately strengthening the overall analysis and conclusions derived from the study. As presented in Figures 1 and 2, the visualisation provides an overview of the survey and interview and data collection output from the analysis of the data resulting in the identification of key focus and thematic areas.

4.1 Demographics

In this part of the research, the demographic details of the participants involved in the study are presented. Essential demographic factors, such as the age of the respondents, are highlighted and discussed in this section. Understanding the demographic characteristics of the participants is crucial, as it enables researchers to contextualize the findings and draw meaningful insights that are representative of the target population.

4.1.1 Age of the Respondents

As shown in Figure 4, the age distribution of the respondents revealed that the majority, 62%, fell within the age range of 18 to 35 years old. The remaining 38% of the respondents were aged between 35 and 60 years old. Notably, there were no respondents in the age group above 60 years. The age distribution provides insights into the perspectives of different generations and age groups, which can help in understanding the nuances of the research topic, particularly the age distribution of unmarried single mothers in the Christian Church.

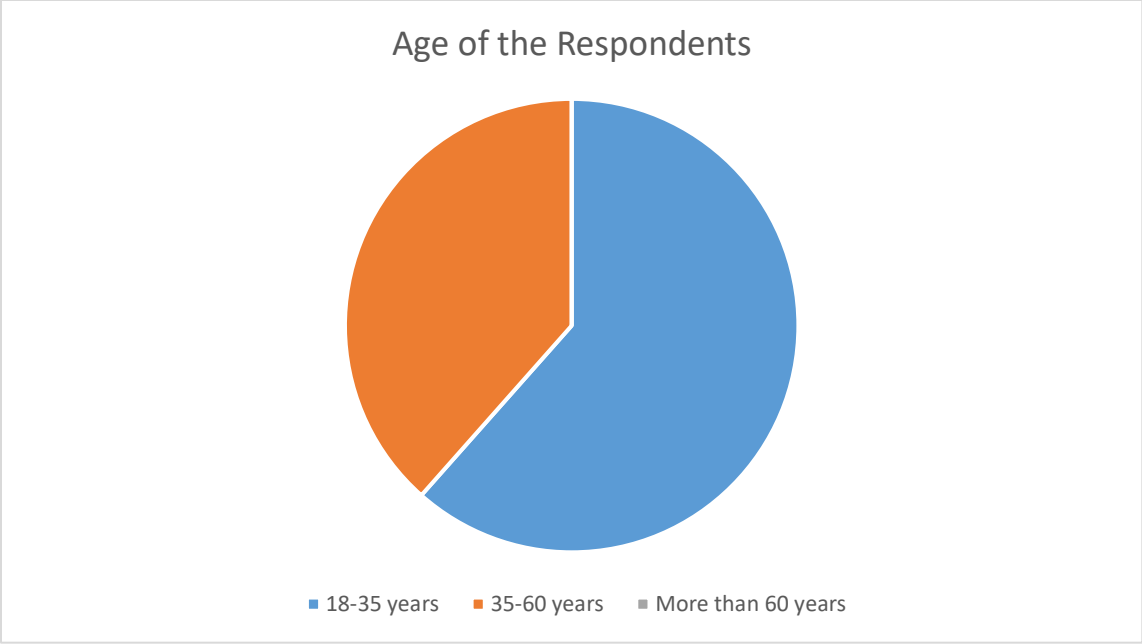


Figure 3. Demographics, age distribution

4.1.2 Number of Children

When asked about the number of children they had, as illustrated in Figure 5, the majority of respondents (61%) reported having one to two children. A smaller percentage, 29%, indicated that their family size included between two and four children. The remaining 10% of respondents shared that they had more than four children. This information provides valuable context about the family sizes and demographics of the respondents, which can help in understanding the varying perspectives and experiences of individuals from different family backgrounds, which will be important in the analysis and discussion parts of this research.

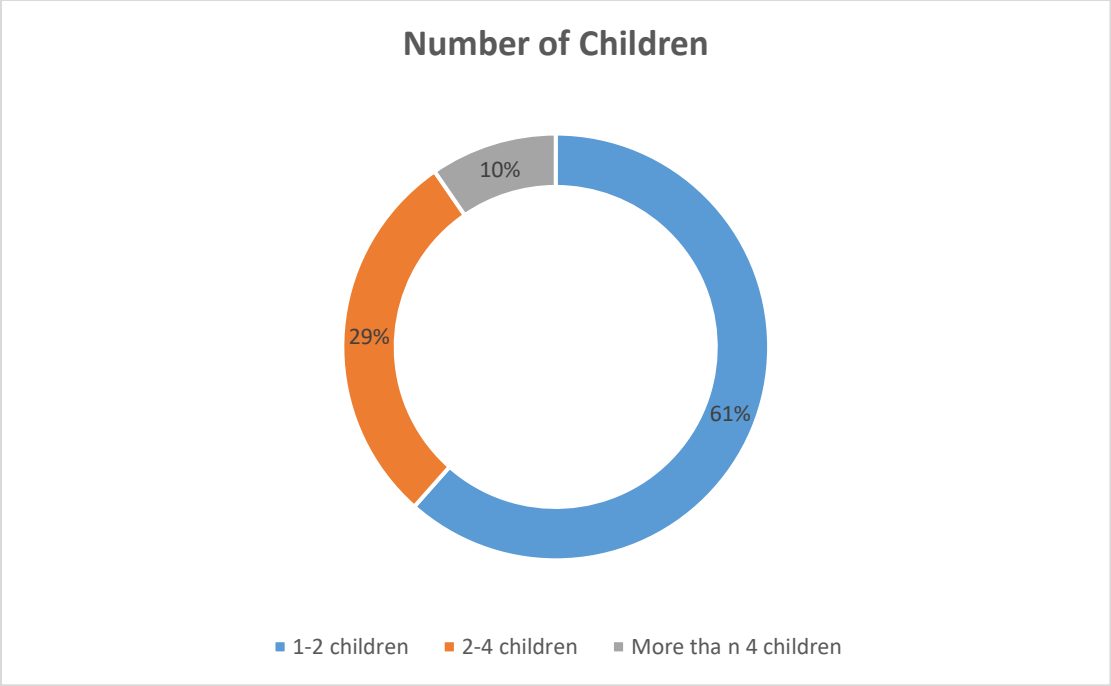


Figure 4. Demographics, number of children by the respondents

4.2 Married in Church

In the study, one of the questions posed to the respondents inquired about their marital status to determine whether they had ever been married in Church. The majority of respondents, comprising 85%, revealed that they had never been married in a church ceremony. Conversely, 13% of the respondents confirmed that they had been married in church. Interestingly, 2% of the respondents chose not to provide an answer to this specific question, even though they were instructed to complete all survey questions. This data sheds light on the respondents' experiences because a key element of the inclusion and exclusion criteria was single motherhood, and therefore, can contribute to a deeper understanding of their views and beliefs related to the research topic.

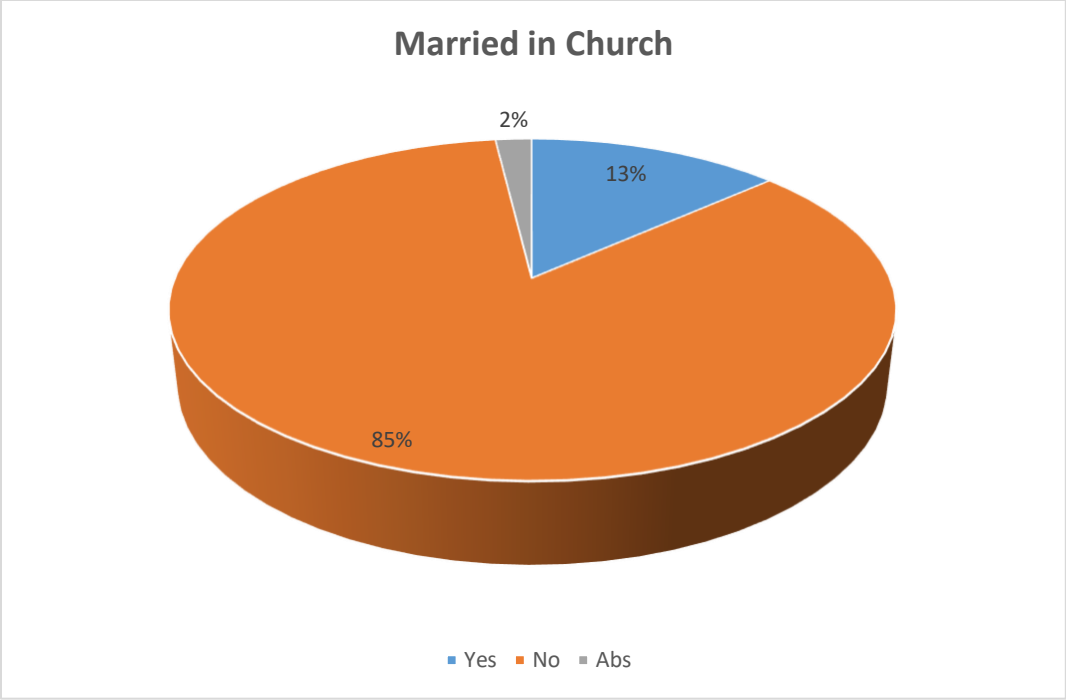


Figure 5. Demographics, Married in church

4.3 Reason for Separating with Spouse

It is noteworthy that, based on the previous question, some participants in the study reported being married, which could potentially imply that they did not meet the set inclusion criteria. However, recognising that some participants might have been married but were no longer living with their spouses, the respondents were asked to specify the reasons for their separation. As depicted in Figure 7, the majority of respondents, 56%, indicated that they were indeed separated. The remaining participants provided a range of reasons for their separation, such as divorce, death, and other unspecified factors, as illustrated in Figure 7. Notably, 2% of the respondents chose not to answer this question. This information helps to clarify the relationship status of the respondents and ensures a more accurate representation of the target population in the study.

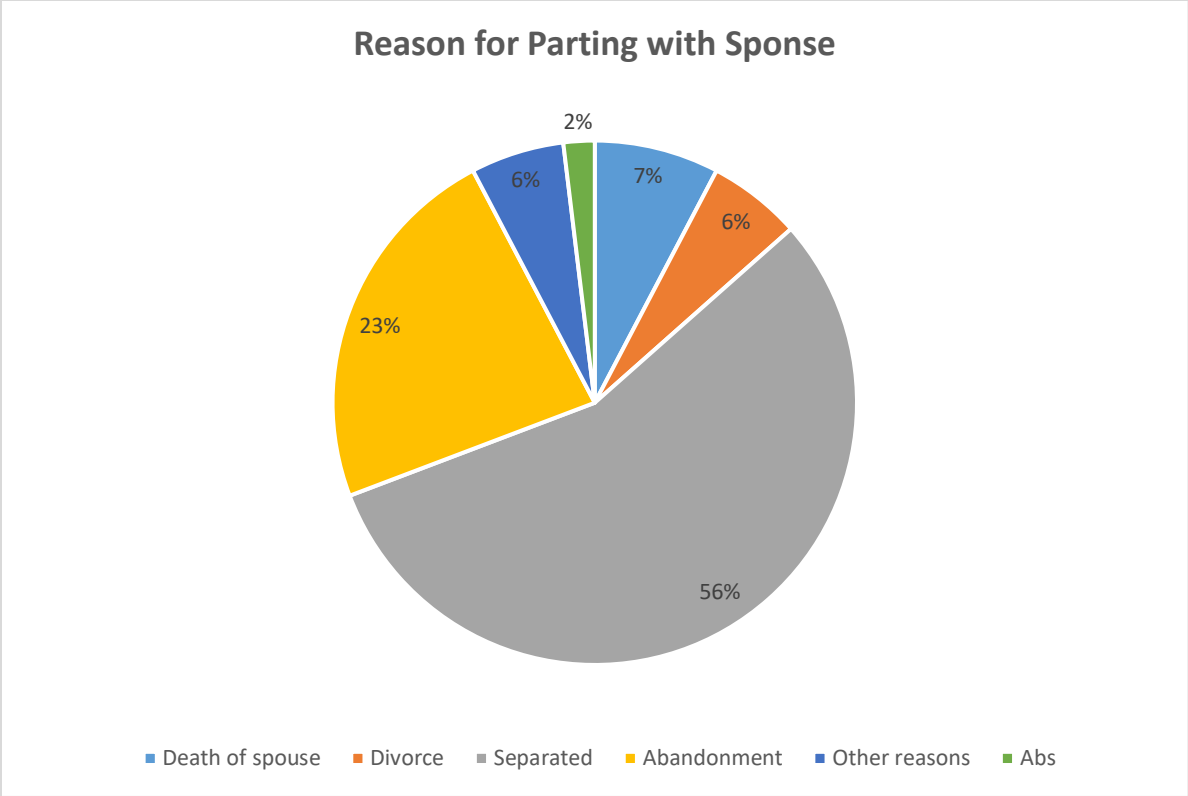


Figure 6. Demographics, Reason for separating with spouse

4.4 Reason for Single Parenthood

Acknowledging the various potential reasons for single parenthood, the respondents were asked to select the statement that best described their reason for being a single parent. As illustrated in Figure 8, the majority of respondents, 42%, indicated that they became single parents because the baby's father had intentionally abandoned them. Twenty-three percent of the respondents reported that they had no choice in the matter, while 19% stated that the pregnancy was accidental. Furthermore, 14% of respondents shared that they were single parents by choice. It is important to note that 2% of the respondents did not provide an answer to this specific question. This information offers valuable insights into the diverse reasons behind single parenthood, which can help in understanding the unique challenges and experiences of single parents in the context of the study.

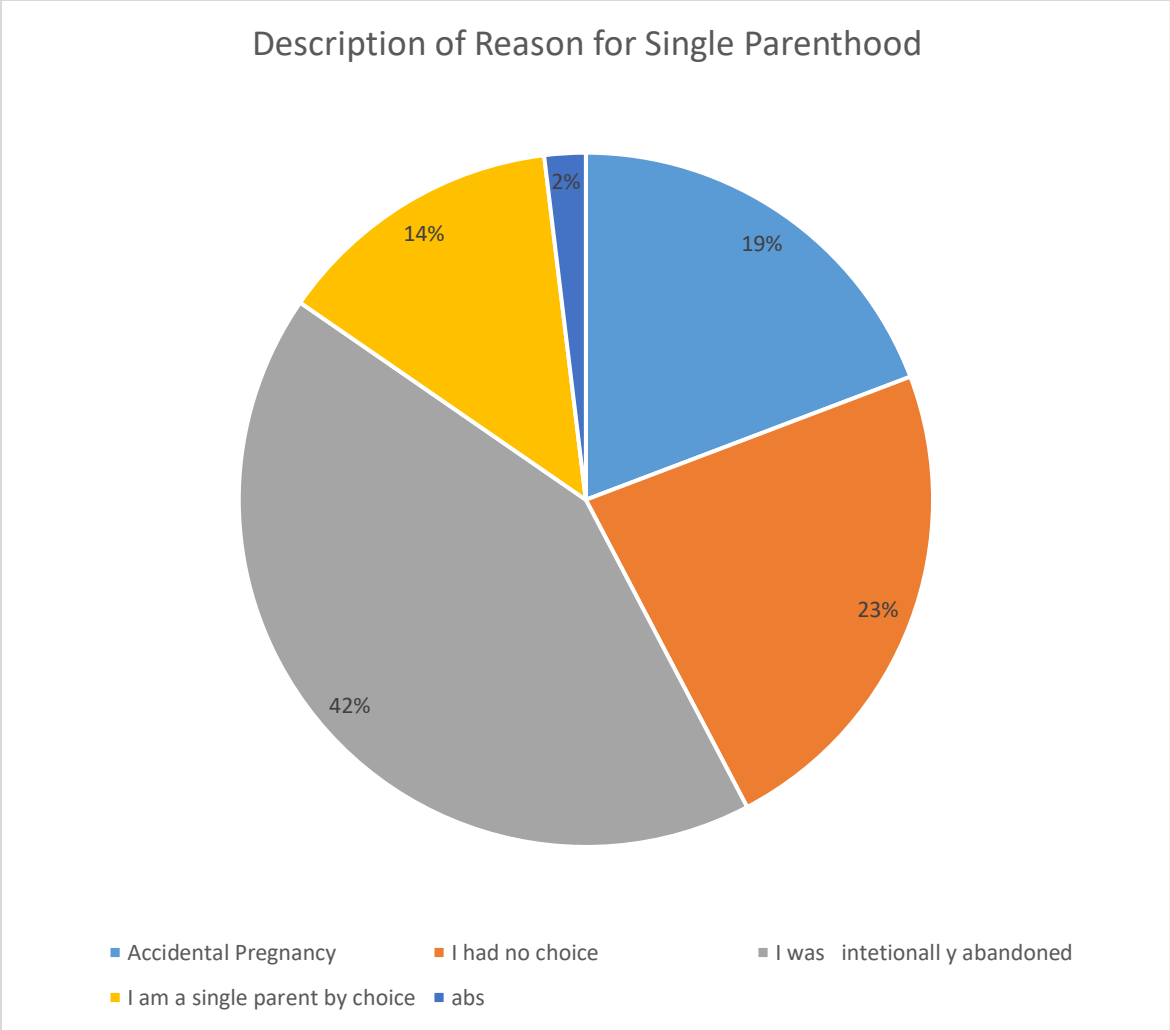


Figure 7. Demographics, Reason for single parenthood

4.5 Baby’s Father's Presence

Recognising that in some cases, the fathers of single mothers’ children did not participate in the upbringing of the children, the respondents were presented with the statement, "My baby's father is very present in the baby's life," and were asked to select the option that best described their situation. As shown in Table 1, the majority of the respondents, totalling 34 out of the 52 survey participants, strongly disagreed with the statement. This suggests that, for a significant portion of the respondents, the baby's father was not actively involved in the child's life. Further, thirteen respondents disagreed with the statement, further indicating that the baby's father was absent in their situation. Two respondents remained non-committal, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement, which may suggest uncertainty or a neutral stance on the father's involvement.

Notably, none of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement, which would have indicated a high level of involvement from the baby's father. However, two respondents did agree with the statement, implying that some fathers were indeed present in their child's life. It is important to mention that one respondent chose not to provide an answer to this particular survey question. This information offers insight into the varying degrees of involvement from the baby's father in the lives of single-parent families, which can help to better understand the dynamics and support systems in place for these families within the context of the study, and therefore affect the experiences of single mothers in the Christian Church.

| Presence of baby's father | |
|----------------------------|----|
| Strongly disagree | 34 |
| Disagree | 13 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 2 |
| Agree | 2 |
| Strongly agree | 0 |
| Abs | 1 |
| | 52 |

Table 1. The Presence of the baby's father in the life of the child

4.6 Church Membership

4.6.1 Time has been a Member of the Methodist Church

The literature review revealed that one of the factors influencing the experiences of single mothers in the Christian Church was the duration of their membership within the church community. Consequently, participants were asked about the length of time they had been members of the Methodist Church to further explore this factor. As displayed in Table 2, the majority of respondents, totalling 20 out of 52, indicated that they had been members for a period ranging between 0 and 5 years. Additionally, a significant portion of respondents, 18 out of 52, reported that they had been church members for a duration of 5 to 10 years. A smaller number, 7 out of the 52 respondents, shared that they had been members of the church for more than 7

years. It is important to note that one respondent did not provide an answer to this particular question, as shown in Table 2.

This information offers valuable insights into the varying levels of engagement and familiarity of single mothers with the church community. Understanding the duration of their membership can help shed light on how the experiences and perceptions of single mothers within the Christian Church may be influenced by the length of time they have been a part of the religious community.

| Church Membership | |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| 0-5 years | 20 |
| 5-10 Years | 18 |
| 10-15 years | 6 |
| More than 15 years | 7 |
| Abs | 1 |
| Total | 52 |

Table 2. Time been a Member of the Methodist Church

4.6.2 Frequency of Going to Church

An additional aspect of commitment to their churches that warranted evaluation, due to its potential impact on the experiences of single mothers in the Christian Church, was the frequency of attending church services. To assess this, respondents were asked to indicate how often they went to church. As illustrated in Table 3, 8 out of the 52 respondents mentioned that they attended church more than once a week. Among the 52 respondents, 12 reported going to church on a weekly basis, while 16 respondents shared that they attended services whenever they were held. Seven respondents stated that they participated in church activities weekly. Further, four respondents went to church once a month, and another four respondents attended church only once a year. It is important to note that one respondent did not provide an answer to this specific question. This data sheds light on the varying degrees of engagement and commitment of single mothers in the Christian Church. Understanding the frequency of their church attendance can

help elucidate how the experiences and perceptions of single mothers within the religious community may be shaped by their level of involvement and connection to the church.

| Frequency of going to church | |
|------------------------------|----|
| More than once a week | 8 |
| Weekly | 12 |
| Whenever there is a service | 16 |
| Occasionally | 7 |
| Once a month | 4 |
| Once a year | 4 |
| Hardly ever | 0 |
| Abs | 1 |
| | 52 |

Table 3. Frequency of Going to Church

4.6.3 Description of Church Membership

The literature review highlighted that church membership plays a significant role in shaping the experiences of single mothers and women in general within the Christian Church. As a result, participants were asked to characterize their level of involvement in their church community. As depicted in Table 4, the majority of respondents, 36 out of the 52 participants, identified themselves as active members of the church, indicating a high level of engagement and participation in church activities. Conversely, 11 respondents considered themselves passive members, suggesting a less active role in the church community. Four respondents expressed uncertainty about their level of involvement, which could imply ambivalence or changing circumstances affecting their participation in church activities. Notably, one respondent abstained from answering this specific question. This information provides valuable insights into the varying degrees of church membership and involvement among single mothers.

Understanding their levels of engagement in the Christian Church can help reveal how their experiences and perceptions within the religious community may be influenced by their participation in church activities and their sense of belonging to the congregation.

| Description of church membership | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| An active member | 36 |
| A Passive member | 11 |
| Not sure | 4 |
| Abs | 1 |
| | 52 |

Table 4. Description of Church Membership

4.6.4 Sacraments

A key indicator of an individual's level of involvement and commitment to a church is their participation in various sacraments. Therefore, participants were asked if they had received the essential sacraments of the Methodist Church to better understand their connection to the religious community. As shown in Table 5, out of the respondents, 26 indicated that they had received the sacrament of Holy Baptism, demonstrating their initiation into the Christian faith. Furthermore, 23 respondents reported having participated in the sacrament of Holy Communion, which signifies their ongoing commitment to the church and their faith. Interestingly, 2 respondents shared that they had received both the Holy Baptism and Holy Communion sacraments, reflecting a deeper level of engagement and spiritual journey within the Methodist Church. It is worth mentioning that one respondent chose not to provide an answer to this particular question in the survey questionnaire. This information offers valuable insights into the extent of single mothers' involvement in religious practices and their commitment to the church community. Understanding their participation in essential sacraments can help shed light on how their experiences and perceptions within the Christian Church may be shaped by their spiritual journey and connection to the religious community.

| Sacraments | |
|----------------------------|----|
| Holy Baptism | 26 |
| Holy Communion | 23 |
| Holy Communion and Baptism | 2 |
| Abs | 1 |
| | 52 |

Table 5. Sacraments

4.6.5 Religious Commitment

As demonstrated in the literature review, a critical factor impacting the experiences of single mothers in the Christian Church is their degree of religious commitment. To assess this, participants were asked to describe their level of dedication to their faith. As presented in Table 6, the responses provided a range of commitment levels among the respondents. Of the respondents, 30 indicated that they were strongly committed to their faith, showcasing a deep connection to their religion and the church. In contrast, 11 respondents identified as being moderately committed, reflecting a somewhat lesser degree of involvement in their religious life. Additionally, 10 respondents described themselves as being averagely committed, suggesting a moderate level of engagement with their faith. It is also important to note that one respondent indicated that they were not committed to their faith, demonstrating a lack of connection or engagement with the church community. This information provides valuable insights into the diverse levels of religious commitment among single mothers, which can help to better understand how their experiences and perceptions within the Christian Church may be influenced by their dedication to their faith.

| Religious Commitment | |
|-------------------------|----|
| Very strongly committed | 30 |
| Strongly committed | 11 |
| Average | 10 |
| Not committed | 1 |
| | 52 |

Table 6. Religious Commitment

4.6.6 Participation in Church Groups and Activities

Additionally, to assess the participants' commitment to the Church, which plays a significant role in shaping the experiences of single mothers within the Christian Church, the respondents were asked about their involvement in any church groups and activities. This inquiry aimed to understand their engagement with the church community and the extent of their participation in various religious events and programs. As shown in Table 7, out of the 52 participants, 31 respondents reported that they were members of a church group, demonstrating active engagement in the religious community. Conversely, 21 participants revealed that they did not belong to or participate in any church groups or activities, indicating a lower level of involvement in the church community.

The respondents who were involved in church groups and activities participated in a diverse range of programs, such as fellowship gatherings, choir, women's guild, prayer groups, young mothers' groups, ushers, praise and worship teams, and church cleaning initiatives. This information offers valuable insights into the varying degrees of single mothers' engagement in the Christian Church, which can help reveal how their experiences and perceptions within the religious community may be influenced by their involvement in church groups and activities.

| Belong to any Group | | |
|---------------------|-----|----|
| | Yes | 31 |
| | No | 21 |
| | | 52 |

Table 7. Belonging to a church group

4.7 Experiences of Single Mothers

This part presents the different aspects of the experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya derived from the data collected.

4.7.1 Personal Experience Post-Pregnancy

The overarching purpose of this study was to evaluate the lived experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church. Asked what their experiences were before and after getting pregnant, the participants provided varying responses, with a majority indicating that the experience was not good. For example, one of the participants, Participant #2, said: “It has not been easy”. Another participant, Participant #4, said: “It has not been easy because now I have responsibility over my baby too”. Participant number #6 said: “I used to have a lot of friends, but now I have none.” Participant #8 said, “life was smooth, I would afford anything I wanted, but after I have bills to pay and a baby to look after.” Participant #19 said: “The experience is different because after my husband passed things have not been the same without my husband thus dealing with children alone is a challenge.” Participant #22 said: “Life became hard. I had to leave my children at home and find employment at Nairobi to cater to their needs.” Participant #18 said: “Before pregnancy, I was able to attend many services but after pregnancy, I was not able to attend services.” Participant #34 said that she was very stressed and confused. These participants capture the majority’s negative experiences after pregnancy. From the interviews, interviewee 1 also reported negative post-pregnancy experiences and observed:

“Obviously, things change. Because maybe, for example, before I became a single mother, I was active and committed in church, but after becoming a single mother, I have to change my commitments and priorities in church; for example, my child will need my attention requiring me to do other things, which requires me to reduce my activities and commitment in church. I would

not say that members have any noticeable issues with me. They do not treat a person any differently. However, at a personal level, you get to notice that things change, and you have to make changes accordingly. There are many differences, but a child comes with many responsibilities. For example, without a child, you can go on trips, and other activities. But for now, for example, in my case, my child is young and requires a lot of attention from me. Therefore, while I would like to participate in different activities, I have to forego the same because I have to care for the child most of the time. However, where I can help, I help in activities that do not take much of my time.”

On the other hand, some of the respondents indicated that they had positive experiences after their pregnancy. For example, Participant #11 said: “My experience is good because I have good children who make me happy but due to difficulties I have gone through, I can’t have any other child out of wedlock.” Similarly, Participant #1 said: “I enjoy being a parent.” Participant #14 said, “The experience I had is positive because I have been blessed with a very wonderful child who has totally changed my life but I vow not to get other children out of wedlock.” Another participant, #20, simply said the experience has been “good”. However, from among the participants, participant #8 said that she did not notice any difference between her before and after getting pregnant experiences. From the data, 18 of the respondents did not provide substantial answers or did not respond to this question of the survey. Broadly though, it is notable that the participants had varying experiences, ranging from positive to negative to similar experiences post-pregnancy.

4.7.2 Treatment by Married Women in Church

As a part of the evaluation of the experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church, the participants were asked if the married women in the church treated them differently, especially when the single mothers interacted with their spouses. The responses to this question of the survey indicated varying experiences of the single mothers, in terms of the treatment by married men. Most of the participants, 38 out of the 52 participants, indicated that married women did not treat them differently when interacting with their husbands. Twenty-seven of the respondents simply responded “No” when asked if married women treated them differently. However, some of the respondents were more elaborate in their responses. For example, Participant #32 observed: “No, but from experience, outside women don't like single mothers associating with

their husbands.” Participant #35 said: “No, they have no problem with that as our intention is not that of taking them away and we interact freely.” Another participant, Participant #39 said: “No. They have no problem with that because we have got no bad intentions. We interact freely.” Participant #40 said:” No. They treat us the same and don’t have a problem with us associating or talking with their husbands.” These participants had no negative experiences with married mothers when interacting with their husbands in church.

On the other hand, other single mothers reported having bad experiences with married women when the participants interacted with their husbands in church. For example, Participant #43 said: “Of course, they treat us as if we are after their husbands.” Another participant, #44, said: “They see us as sinners.” Participant #46 said: “Yes, most of them think that you want their partners.” Echoing the negative sentiments, Participant #47 said: “Yes, they don't want to see me with their husbands.” Participant #49 said: “Yes, they feel so insecure thinking that you can take away their husbands from them.” Similarly, Participant #52 said: “Yes. You see that they are never happy to see you talking to their husband and they treat you differently compared to other married women.” Interviewee 1 echoed these negative experiences and observed:

“They treat us differently. Normally, when they see you talking to their husbands, they will treat you badly because they think that you want to snatch their husbands. They also make you look at yourself differently...you feel bad about yourself.”

Interviewee 2 underscored the negative treatment by married women. She said:

“Generally, we are not treated differently or stigmatized. However, some married women treat us differently or harshly. Other people don’t have issues. We are very okay with each other.”

Three of the survey participants did not respond to this question.

4.7.3 Treatment by Other Christians

To further evaluate the lived experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church, the participants were asked how they felt their fellow Christians treated them. Four of the respondents did not provide responses to this question. The rest of the respondents provided mixed responses to this question of the survey. Fifteen of the participants, when asked this

question, said that other Christians' treatment was "Not bad". Others elaborated on positive treatment. For example, Participant #32 said: "Some Christians are supportive and do not judge single parents." Another respondent, Participant #31, said: "Some are encouraging, but others can make you feel out of place." Another respondent, Participant #17 said: "Good treat and well." Participant #39 observed: "They appreciate us and associate with us well hence we live peacefully with their support." In total, 26 of the 52 participants had positive experiences with their fellow Christians.

On the other hand, some of the participants indicated that they had negative experiences with other Christians. For example, Participant #7 observed, "Attitude bad because of the pressure of children because they want to stay like other children.". Another participant, Participant #14 said, "Discrimination without having a husband they think you are a prostitute." Participant #34 said, "Stigmatization is high because some think you chose to be in the situation you are in." Participant #36 said, "The attitude towards us singles we are not given the respect we deserve." Three others of the participants said that their experience was "bad and discriminating. Similar sentiments were echoed by interviewee 2, who said:

"I would say previously, as a regular churchgoer while I was with my husband, and now, after losing my husband and becoming a single mother, things have changed because they do not look at me as they used to. Today, since I am not a regular churchgoer, they are not concerned about me as they were previously. For example, previously they used to visit me at home but today they do not. Yes, they used to visit me for prayers and to generally check on me. Now they no longer visit. They no longer visit me now, when I need them most and I started wondering if there is a genuine reason for me to go to church."

As such, while some participants had positive experiences, other participants had negative experiences, experiencing discrimination and stigmatisation. In total, twenty-two of the participants had negative experiences with their fellow Christians because of their single motherhood or because of having a child out of wedlock or after their husband passed on.

4.7.4 Treatment by the Church

In line with the overarching purpose of the study, the study's participants were asked how they felt that the Methodist Church treated them. Seven of the participants did not provide any responses to this question. A significant number of the participants, 42 out of the 52 participants, had a positive experience in the Methodist Church as single mothers. For example, Participant #35 said: "The church does not discriminate but tries to find a solution in case of a separation". Another participant, #33 said: "The church always loves us and inspires us. More so, they always pray for us to reunite or get good husbands". Participant #9 said: "Church is encouraging and supporting through feeding us the word and encourages us never to lose hope in the journey of motherhood". These sentiments of positive experiences were echoed by interviewee 1, who said:

"No, the church treats us well, and even accords us opportunities to participate in different activities and events in the church."

On the other hand, some participants had bad experiences because they felt that the church generally discriminates against, stigmatises, and does not support them. For example, Participant #10 said: "Don't talk about single mothers, and if they do, just roughly". Another respondent, Participant #7, said: "Church believes marriage is sacred and therefore a person with a child should be married". Another participant articulated the negative experiences and observed: "They see us as sinners". Therefore, it seems that a majority of the participants had positive experiences with the Church.

4.7.5 Treatment by Relatives

Asked how they felt that their relatives treated them, a majority of the respondents, 33, articulated responses that showed that their relatives treated them well. For example, Participant #1 responded: "They are a bit supportive". Another participant, #38, said: "They have no problem but encourage us to reunite with our husbands". Similarly, participant #42 said: "They support us but wish that we may reunite one day and live happily". Six of the responses did not provide responses to this question. On the other hand, 13 of the participants provided responses that indicated that their relatives did not treat them well. For example, participant #52 said: "Yes, they think abandonment is due to your current behaviours that they assume from you". Participant #48 said: "They treat me badly because I am a single mother and poor". Participant

#41 said: “They see you as a sinner”. Participant #42 said: “They see you as a failure”. Participant #36 articulated stronger sentiments, observing: “They don’t socialise and also don’t want to be named with single mothers”. Therefore, it is evident that a majority of the single mothers surveyed and interviewed reported receiving positive treatment from their relatives. Still, some also reported being treated negatively by their relatives.

4.7.6 Treatment by Parents and Siblings

The participants were also asked how their parents and siblings treated them. A majority of the participants, 36, indicated that they are treated well by their parents and their siblings. For example, Participant #42 said: “They support us, yet they advise us to get re-married and live happily”. Participant #45 reported mixed treatment based on the reason for single parenthood and said: “They understand if single through the death of husband, but if not, they abandon”. Other participants, 5 out of the 52 participants reported having experienced negative treatment from their parents and siblings. For example, Participant #40 said: “They see as you have failed and shamed them to the community”. Similarly, articulating negative treatment from parents and siblings, Participant #38 said: “They become judgemental”. Participant #35 said: “They are not happy about it”. Five of the participants did not provide responses to this question. As such, while most of the participants had positive experiences regarding how they were treated by their parents and siblings, some of the participants were treated negatively by their parents and siblings.

4.8 Treatment of Single-Mothers’ Spouses

To evaluate the experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church, which is the overarching purpose of the study, the participants were asked if their spouses received similar experiences. Four of the participants did not provide any responses to this question of the survey. The other participants provided responses that majorly indicated that the men were not treated differently from the single mothers. All the respondents indicated that the men were not treated differently because they have majorly been absent or did not attend the same church. Twenty-six of the respondents responded “No” to the question of whether the fathers of their children received different treatment. Other respondents provided more elaborate responses. For example, Participant #33 observed: “No, because since separation, we have never met.” Participant #35 observed: “No, have never spoken to him of anything such”. Participant #36 said: “No, he

disappeared have never seen him again.” Another respondent, Participant #43 observed: “No, we do not worship together.” In fact, six other participants indicated that they did not worship together with the baby’s fathers and therefore are not privy to the kind of treatment that they received. None of the participants indicated that their baby’s father received differential treatment from other members of the church or their family members, siblings, or parents, because of having a child out of wedlock.

4.9 Single-Parent Association and Membership

In order to evaluate the existence of a support system within the church for single parents, participants were asked about the presence of a single-parent association in their church and whether they were members of such an association if it existed. This inquiry aimed to understand the level of support and resources available to single parents within the religious community. From the response, as shown in Table 9, 25 participants reported the presence of a single-parent association in their church, while 3 respondents did not provide an answer to this question. This suggests that some churches may have established support systems catering specifically to single parents. Further, as displayed in Table 10, out of the 52 participants, 23 confirmed their membership in a single-parent association within their church, reflecting active participation in the support network. However, 10 respondents did not provide a response to the question inquiring about their membership status in the association.

This information offers valuable insights into the availability and utilisation of support systems for single parents within the church community. Understanding the presence of single-parent associations and the extent to which single mothers are engaged with these resources can help to comprehend how their experiences and perceptions within the Christian Church may be influenced by the support available to them.

| Association for single parents | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|----|
| | Yes | 25 |
| | No | 24 |
| | Abs | 3 |
| | | 52 |

Table 8. Association for single parents

| Single Parent Association Membership | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|----|
| | Yes | 23 |
| | No | 19 |
| | abs | 10 |
| | | 52 |

Table 9. Association membership

4.10 Purpose of the Single-Mothers Association

In order to further examine the significance and objectives of support systems for single mothers, participants were asked about the purpose of their single mother's association, if one was present in their church. The responses provided a range of insights into the goals and activities of these associations, emphasizing the value of these support networks for single mothers and their families.

One participant in the survey mentioned that the association's purpose was "to encourage each other," while another stated it was for "healing one another." Another respondent highlighted the association's focus on providing guidance and encouragement for single mothers on how to raise their children well. Yet another participant described the purpose as "to encourage and motivate single mothers." Further, interviewee 2 indicated that the association aimed to understand the everyday challenges faced by single mothers and to provide support in overcoming them. When asked about the topics discussed during the association's meetings, respondents offered diverse answers. One participant shared that the group focused on "helping needy children in society" and encouraging parents to spend quality time with their children. Another mentioned that discussions centred on "how to handle challenges and improve the children's growth." Lastly, a respondent emphasised "encouragement and spiritual support" as key aspects of the meetings.

Additionally, asked what the discussions in the meetings of the association were, respondents provided different answers. One respondent said that in the meeting, the members discussed, "Helping needy children in society, parents to spend quality time with children." Another said the group discussed, "How to handle the challenges and improve the growth of the children."

Finally, another member said, “Encouragement and spiritual support.” These varied responses suggest that, in churches where single mother's associations exist, they offer valuable support not only to their members but also to their families by extension. These support systems address a wide range of needs, providing emotional, practical, and spiritual guidance for single mothers and their children.

4.11 General Comments by Participants

Asked to provide comments or remarks about their experiences, the participants provided mixed responses; in support of the church, criticism, and ambivalent feelings. Four participants did not provide any remarks or comments. Four participants said any assistance is welcomed. For example, Participant #9 said: “As a single parent, I am happy because I have good children, this is because I am happy with them but challenges come because sometimes I am unable to provide fees and financial support to my kids”. Participant #21 said: “I like my church because we single mothers are protected very well”. Participant #28 said: “In as much as they encourage us to bring up our kids in God's ways, they also need to come up with ways of providing basic needs for the kids of single mothers”. Participant #36 said: “Single mothers should not be discriminated against. Church should be very close to single parents teaching them moral behaviours. Praying for single parents in fulfilling their needs”. Participant #40 said: “The church has helped me to be strong and cope with the stress I no longer see myself as a failure or sinner. I understand it is part of life and I have to be strong and cope with my situation.” Articulating the spiritual and religious support received from the church, Participant #52 said: “Yes. Through bible verses and supporting us when we are down”. Interviewee 2 asked to make a comment, said:

“I think the only thing that the community could improve on is to promote the change in attitude among married women. They need to understand that when we talk to the men or their husbands, we are talking about church matters.”

These comments further articulated the mixed experiences of the study's participants from the surveys and the interviews conducted.

4.12 Summary

In this chapter, the research findings were presented, focusing on various thematic areas that align with the study's objectives and the data collection instruments employed to gather information from single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya. These findings offer valuable insights into the experiences of single mothers within the Methodist Church in Kenya. The findings of the research shed light on different factors that shape their experiences and the support systems available to them. The following chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the study's findings, examining the findings within the context of the findings of other studies that focused on the same or near similar topics. This analysis provides a deeper understanding of the results by comparing them to other studies. Comparing the findings of this study to the findings of other studies allows for a more nuanced interpretation of the experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The overarching purpose of this study is to assess the experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya, with a particular focus on how they are treated because of their single-parenthood. A qualitative phenomenological research approach was adopted for the study involving two-stage data collection processes. The first stage involved conducting a survey of 52 participants. In the second stage of the data collection, I conducted semi-structured interviews with three single mothers. This chapter of the research report analyses and discusses the findings of the survey and interviews conducted with single mothers from different Methodist Churches in Kenya.

5.1 Demographics of the Respondents

5.1.1 Age of the Respondents

The study's findings indicated that a majority of the respondents, 62%, fell in the 18 to 35 years age bracket. The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of other studies from other parts of the world and, more specifically, with studies conducted in Kenya. For example, in the United States and Canada, government reports indicated that with the growing prevalence of single motherhood as a family structure, a majority of single mothers were aged below 40 years, with a majority of the single mothers being in their 20s and 30s (Statistics Canada, 2021a; US Census Bureau, 2020). The government reports attributed the prevalence of single motherhood in this demographic group to higher marriage rates and lower out-of-wedlock births among older women and changing societal norms, values, and attitudes toward single mothers. Similar reports in Kenya echo the findings in the United States and Canada. For example, in their study, Kabue and Kabue (2021) concluded that most single mothers were under 35 years old, with a majority of the single mothers reporting being single mothers before 25 years. Similarly, Ndetei and Mokuu (2014) concluded that a majority of single mothers were likely to be younger, unmarried, and living in poverty. In Ghana, Tawiah and Essuman (2019) reported similar conclusions. They observed that single motherhood was most common among women in their 20s and 30s, with a majority of the respondents being below 35 years. They further observed that single parenthood was attributable to economic factors like poverty and unemployment.

5.1.2 Number of Children

The findings of the study indicated that a majority of the participants, 61%, had between 1 and 2 children. Only 10% of the participants had more than 4 children. Twenty-nine percent of the participants had between 2 and 4 children. The study's findings were consistent with those from other parts of the world but inconsistent with those of the studies conducted in Kenya. In the United States, single-mother families were more likely to have 1.8 children on average, while in Canada, single-mother families were more likely to have 1.6 children on average (Livingston, 2018; Statistics Canada, 2021). In Kenya, Kabue and Kabue (2021) ascertained that single-mother families were likely to have 3.6 children, which they concluded is a large family size in Kenya. The different studies attribute the variations in the number of children in single-mother families to changing cultural, economic, and social factors. The differences between the findings of Kabue and Kabue (2021) and this study could be attributed to the differences in the scopes of the two studies and the differences in the purpose and the specific objectives. Kabue and Kabue (2021) broadly focused on the general population with a focus on a support program, but this study took a narrower approach with the objective of evaluating the experiences of single mothers in the MCK.

5.2 Married in Church

The study's findings indicated that a majority of the participants, 85%, were never married in Church. Only 13% of the participants were married in church. These findings are consistent with the findings of other studies conducted in Kenya, which concluded that single mothers are rarely married in the church. For example, Kabue and Kabue (2021) concluded that single mothers face stigma and discrimination in their religious communities and are mostly excluded from church activities and events, which makes it difficult for them to get married to partners within their church communities. Similarly, Mugambi and Murungi (2019) concluded that single mothers are less likely to be married in Church because of legal requirements in the Kenya Marriage Act, which requires that divorced women wait for six months before remarrying, but widowed spouses can remarry immediately. However, it is noteworthy that Kabue and Kabue (2021) focused on unmarried single mothers, and Mugambi and Murungi (2019) focused on widowed and divorced single mothers. While the studies take different approaches and have different

scopes, there is a consensus that single mothers are seldom married in the church, which is consistent with the findings of this study.

5.3 Reasons for Separating with Spouse, Reasons for Single Parenthood, and Presence of Father

The study's findings indicated that the key reasons for separating from the spouse are the death of the spouse, divorce, separation, and abandonment, which were the main responses provided in the survey. A majority of the participants, 56%, were separated from their spouses, 23% had been abandoned, 6% were abandoned, 7% of the participants attributed their single parenthood to the death of a spouse, and 6% attributed their single parenthood to other reasons. Further, a majority of the respondents indicated that they had been intentionally abandoned by the child's father, 19% cited accidental pregnancy, and 14% indicated that they were single by choice. Finally, in terms of the baby's father's presence, a majority of the respondents, 65%, indicated that the baby's father was absent.

These findings are consistent with the findings of other studies conducted in prior years. For example, Amato and Previti (2003) and Kamp Dush and Amato (2005) concluded that economic hardship, unemployment, social isolation, mental health issues, drugs, and substance abuse, lack of trust, and incompatible goals and values lead to abandonment, divorce, or separation. On the other hand, in an evaluation of the reasons for single parenthood, Manning and Brown (2015) observed that unplanned pregnancy, the choice to raise a child alone, or the death of a partner, are key reasons for single parenthood. Finally, other studies concluded that in single-parenthood families, a combination of factors, including geographic mobility, lack of financial resources, incarceration, or incompatibility leads to fathers' absence despite the importance of having a father in a child's life. While the other studies go into greater detail in evaluating these elements, over and above what was the focus of this study, they articulate similar reasons for single parenthood and concur that in single-mother families, the fathers are mostly absent and do not participate in parenting.

5.4 Experiences of Single Mothers in the MCK

Broadly, the findings of this study indicated mixed results in terms of the single mothers' personal experiences, treatment by other church members, treatment by the church, treatment by

relatives, and treatment by family and friends. The study's findings indicated that a majority of the participants had negative experiences after pregnancy. Still, they reported mixed experiences in terms of how they were treated by their family, friends, church members, and the church. For example, when asked how they are treated by other married women in the church when they interact with their husbands, interviewee 1 said: *"Yes. They treat us differently. Normally, when they see you talking to their husbands, they will treat you badly because they think that you want to snatch their husbands"*. Interviewee 2 said: *"No, they have no problem with that as our intention is not that of taking them away and we interact freely."* Similar mixed sentiments are evident in responses to how the single mothers are treated by their family members and relatives, and the church. For example, when asked how the Church treats them, interviewee 1 said: *"The church treats us well, and even accords us opportunities to participate in different activities and events in the church"*. Interviewee 3 said: *"Yes, the pastor is very concerned. Because for example, during service, I am mostly engaged with the young child, and always want to know about the issues I am facing. To a certain extent, also encourages me to join the association and participate in the counselling sessions"*. In the survey, queried about how the church treated them as single mothers, some respondents in the survey simply said that they were not treated well by the church.

This study's findings are consistent with those reported in other studies about the mixed experiences of single mothers in the Christian church. For example, Caldwell (2018) and Durett (2015), in their studies, concluded that single mothers have experienced stigma and discrimination within Christian communities because of their single parenthood. Durett (2015), in a study conducted in Southern Baptist Churches in the United States, concluded that single mothers felt isolated and excluded from church activities, and they perceived negative attitudes from other church members towards their unmarried status. These mothers also reported feeling judged and stigmatised for their single-parenthood, leading to shame and guilt. Caldwell (2018), in a study of African-American single mothers in the Christian church in the United States, concluded that the single mothers felt unsupported and unaccepted by their congregations, which led to a sense of disconnection and disenfranchisement. The mothers reported experiencing discrimination and marginalisation due to their status as single parents, which made it difficult for them to participate in church life fully. However, other studies have found that Christian

churches can also be a source of support and encouragement for single mothers. For example, a study by Finke and Stark (2011) found that single mothers who attend church regularly report higher levels of social support and well-being than those who do not. The study suggests that Christian churches can provide a sense of community and belonging for single mothers, which can help alleviate the isolation and stigma they may experience.

Similar findings were reported in Africa in general, and in Kenya more particularly. Research conducted in Africa has shown that single mothers may experience stigma and discrimination within religious communities, including Christian churches, due to their unmarried status (Mugisha et al., 2015; Uzuegbunam & Menkiti, 2016). In contrast, other studies have found that religious communities can support and encourage single mothers in African contexts. For example, Uzuegbunam and Menkiti (2016) conducted a study in Nigeria that found that single mothers who attended church regularly had higher levels of social support and psychological well-being than those who did not. The study suggested that church attendance provided single mothers with a sense of community and belonging that helped to mitigate the negative effects of stigma and discrimination.

Narrowing down to Kenya, the studies reported similar mixed experiences of women in the Christian church. For example, A study by Kigunda and Kinyanjui (2017) in Kenya found that single mothers experienced discrimination and exclusion from church activities due to their unmarried status. The study also found that some single mothers reported feeling judged and stigmatised by other church members, contributing to shame and guilt. Another study by Ndeti and Mokua (2014) in Kenya found that single mothers experienced high levels of stigma and discrimination within their communities, including Christian churches. The study suggested that the negative attitudes towards single mothers were driven by cultural norms that view single parenthood as a moral failing. The study also found that single mothers often faced economic challenges and lacked access to social support networks. However, some churches in Kenya have developed programs to support single mothers and provide them with resources and services. For example, a study by Kabue and Kabue (2021) found that a church-based support program for single mothers in Kenya helped to improve their economic, social, and emotional well-being. The program provided single mothers with training and resources to start income-generating activities and counselling and support groups to address their emotional needs.

Therefore, overall, consistent with the findings of this study, other studies have demonstrated that the experiences of single mothers in Kenyan Christian churches are complex and shaped by different cultural norms and church practices. While some studies suggest that single mothers may experience stigma and discrimination within these communities, other studies indicate that churches can provide valuable support and resources for these women.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The overarching purpose of this study was to evaluate single mothers' experiences in the Methodist Church in Kenya. To support the realisation of the aim of the study, the research questions specifically sought to elicit responses to determine if unmarried single mothers face any sanctions, stigmatisation, and exclusion in the Methodist Church in Kenya. The study also sought to assess if men receive similar or near similar treatment for engaging in premarital sex and contributing to the single motherhood phenomenon from the perspective of the single mothers. Finally, the study sought to evaluate if there are any church, family, and society-based support programs available for unmarried single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya. The findings, as presented in the presentation and analysis section, demonstrated that single mothers have mixed experiences, men receive differential treatment and are not held accountable, and there are support networks for single women in some Christian communities. From the findings, it is evident that the experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya are shaped by a complex interplay of factors, resulting in different experiences. The interplay of different factors and how they subsequently shape the experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya can be explored and explained using neo-colonialism, feminism, and critical theories. Using these different theoretical perspectives will provide a more holistic and objective evaluation of the experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya.

6.1 Neo-colonialism Theoretical Perspective

The colonialism legacy in Kenya has had a profound impact on the social, cultural, and economic structures of the country. While Kenya gained independence from British colonial rule in 1963, the power structures and cultural values that were established during the colonial era continue to shape the country. Neo-colonialism, as a concept or theory, includes the different ways in which these structures and values continue to exert influence in post-colonial societies (Rodney, 2018). For example, the perpetuation of dominant cultural and societal values from the colonial era is evident in the treatment of different groups of people, including single mothers. During the colonial period, European colonizers imposed their cultural values on the Kenyan population, often to the detriment of local traditions and practices (Mugambi, 2003). For example, the nuclear family structure, which was valued by European colonizers, was emphasized over traditional African kinship systems that were more communal in nature. These

colonial-era values continue to shape the way in which families and individuals are viewed in Kenya today. The ideal of the nuclear family, which consists of a married couple with children, remains highly valued in Kenyan society (Makini, 2020). Single motherhood, which challenges this ideal, may be stigmatised and marginalised as a result.

This stigmatisation and marginalisation of single mothers can be seen within the Methodist Church in Kenya as demonstrated by the data collected in this research study. Some single mothers in the Church may be treated well. Other women may experience discrimination and ostracisation. These differential experiences can be traced back to the neo-colonial legacy of the colonial period, in which certain cultural values were imposed and privileged some members of the society over others. For example, from the survey and the interviews, one of the key facts that emerged is that single mothers are often encouraged to reunite with their estranged spouses or get married to live happily. The implied perception, consistent with the colonialist perspective, is possible that women can only act in line with societal expectations and be happy if they are married, which could explain the discrimination of some single mothers because they may be deemed deviating from societal expectations.

As such, from a neo-colonialism perspective, an interpretation of the study's findings shows that single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya have diverse experiences that can be attributed to various factors, including the historical context, the influence of Western Christianity, and power dynamics within the Christian community. For example, the historical context of Christianity in Kenya, marked by colonialism and the introduction of Western Christianity, has shaped the country's religious landscape and societal norms. This has led to the intersection of traditional cultural beliefs with Christian values, which might explain the contrasting experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya. As demonstrated by the study's findings, some women may encounter supportive church environments that embrace inclusivity and acceptance. In contrast, others might face marginalisation and ostracisation due to the persistence of patriarchal norms and expectations.

Similarly, from a neo-colonial theoretical perspective, the influence of Western Christianity on the Methodist Church in Kenya could also have contributed to the diverse experiences of single mothers. For example, the adoption of progressive values that promote gender equality and

social justice, as an element of Western Christianity inherited from the colonial period, could have led to a more supportive environment for single mothers. Conversely, conservative interpretations of Christian teachings, which is also a product of the colonial period, might perpetuate the stigmatisation of single mothers, exacerbating their feelings of isolation and exclusion as demonstrated in the findings of the study.

Finally, power dynamics within the Christian community, majorly influenced by the colonial period, such as the roles and attitudes of religious leaders, other church members, and family members, may also have shaped single mothers' experiences within the Methodist Church in Kenya. The study's findings revealed that the treatment of single mothers by the church, other church members, parents, siblings, and relatives can vary widely. Some single mothers may receive empathy, understanding, and assistance from their religious and familial networks, resulting in positive experiences. However, others might face judgment, shame, or even estrangement, leading to negative experiences marked by marginalisation and ostracisation. Recognising these factors and their impact on the treatment of single mothers by the church, other church members and their families provides valuable insights for fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment within the religious community focusing on mitigating and addressing the negative impacts of the colonial legacy.

6.2 Feminist Theoretical Perspective

The feminist theoretical perspective presents a very powerful lens through which to evaluate the experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya. Feminism is a theoretical and political movement that seeks to promote gender equality and address issues related to the oppression of women (hooks, 2000). Feminist theory provides a useful framework for understanding how gender shapes social relations and institutions in societies, and as such it is a relevant theoretical framework for the investigation of gendered single parenthood in Kenya. Gender norms in Kenya, as in many other societies, are pervasive and deeply ingrained in cultural, social, and economic structures (Githieya, 2016). These norms can shape the way in which individuals are perceived and treated based on their gender from a feminist theoretical lens perspective.

For example, as Makini (2020) observed, the ideal of the family, and more specifically, the nuclear family, which consists of a married couple with children, is highly valued in Kenya. Single motherhood contravenes this ideal and may be seen as a failure to uphold it. This view is rooted in the patriarchal gender norms that exist in Kenyan society. The patriarchal gender norms privilege men over women and emphasise the importance of women's reproductive and caretaking roles within the family (Githieya, 2016). Therefore, the stigmatisation and marginalisation of single mothers within the Methodist Church in Kenya can be evaluated and understood through a feminist lens. Discrimination and ostracisation of single mothers may be a result of these deeply ingrained gender norms that emphasise the importance of the family and view single motherhood as a deviation from this norm. From this perspective of the feminist theory, the negative experiences of some single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya can be interpreted as being attributable to a patriarchal society, in which women are subordinate to men, and societal norms and values that emphasise the conventional couple and children family structure.

In fact, the different treatment of single mothers' children's fathers can be analysed and understood through the feminist theoretical lens. The study findings highlighted that most of these fathers were absent in their children's lives and did not contribute to raising them. The differences in women's experiences can be attributed to the patriarchal nature of society and the associated practices, beliefs, and values, such as the gender roles assigned to men and women. For example, in a patriarchal context, women are often perceived as the primary caregivers and are held responsible for child-rearing, while men may be absolved from similar responsibilities. This unequal distribution of parenting duties may contribute to the negative experiences of some single mothers who shoulder the entire burden of raising their children. Additionally, this imbalance in expectations and obligations can exacerbate the challenges faced by single mothers in a society that may already marginalise and stigmatise them.

Further, the feminist theory also highlights the need to challenge and transform traditional gender norms in order to create a more equitable and just society. In fact, from this perspective, individuals and institutions that support a more equitable and just society would therefore be partly responsible for the fair treatment and support of single mothers from the individual to the societal levels. Accordingly, leveraging this perspective of the feminist theory, the positive

experiences of some single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya could be attributed to more progressive church leadership, family and friends. Such institutions and individuals likely do not subscribe to the outdated patriarchal values and beliefs that perpetuate the subjugation of women that intentionally or unintentionally end up in single parenthood and are therefore, more likely to treat single mothers more positively.

As such, feminist theory provides a useful lens for understanding how gender shapes social relations and institutions in Kenya. The ideal of the family, which is highly valued in Kenyan society, can lead to the stigmatisation and marginalisation of single mothers within the Methodist Church in Kenya because they are deemed as contravening this ideal. Further, a patriarchal society, such as Kenyan society, may also perpetuate the subjugation of women, which results in negative experiences for some women that are the victims of practices that are consistent with patriarchal beliefs and practices. Finally, a feminist analysis calls attention to the need to challenge and transform these gender norms in order to promote gender equality and address issues related to the oppression of women, such as discrimination against single mothers in Christian Churches. Challenging and transforming gender norms results in more positive experiences for a majority of the single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya.

6.3 Critical Theory Perspective

The critical theoretical perspective provides a lens to objectively evaluate the experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya. Critical theory is a theoretical framework that seeks to understand the ways in which power operates within social structures and how it shapes individual experiences and social relations (Bourdieu, 1986). Within the Methodist Church in Kenya, power dynamics may play a role in the differential treatment of single mothers.

Those who hold positions of power within the Church, such as pastors or leaders, may have biases or prejudices against single mothers, consciously or unconsciously. These biases may be rooted in cultural or societal values that privilege the nuclear family structure over other family structures, such as the increasingly popular single-parent family structure (Makini, 2020). From this perspective, the negative experiences of some single mothers, as established in this study, could be attributed to society, and more specifically, a church's values, beliefs, and practices that promote the conventional nuclear family structure of father, mother, and children as the ideal

family structure. The positive experiences of other women, on the other hand, could be attributed to more liberal and progressive beliefs that accepts other family structures as well as the concepts of forgiveness and accommodations for those that err and do not conform to conventional bigoted beliefs, values and practices.

Additionally, from the critical theoretical perspective, those in positions of power may be influenced by their own experiences and backgrounds, which may shape their views of single motherhood. Further, the institutional structure of the Church may also perpetuate biases against single mothers. For example, the Church may prioritise the needs and experiences of married couples over single mothers, which can lead to exclusion and marginalisation. The institutional structure may also be shaped by broader societal values or biblically-informed views that privilege the family structure. From this perspective, the mixed experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya, as determined from the study, which showed that some women experienced discrimination and ostracisation and others experienced support and fellowship, could be attributed to biases among church leadership, members, family, relatives, and friends informed by biblical and scriptural interpretations as well as other experiences.

A critical analysis of the power dynamics at play within the Methodist Church in Kenya, therefore, highlights the need for the Church to address these biases and work to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for single mothers. This may involve examining the institutional structure of the Church and identifying ways in which it may perpetuate biases against single mothers. It may also involve promoting a culture of inclusivity and equity within the Church, which can challenge the dominant cultural values that privilege the nuclear family structure. As such, critical theory provides a framework for understanding the power dynamics at play within the Methodist Church in Kenya and the ways in which biases and prejudices may influence the treatment of single mothers. A critical analysis highlights the need for the Church to address these power dynamics and work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for all of its members.

6.4 Synthesis

The finding that some single mothers have been treated well while others have experienced discrimination and ostracisation has been interpreted through the lens of neo-colonialism,

feminism, and critical theories. From a neo-colonialism perspective, this differential treatment reflects the perpetuation of colonial-era values and beliefs, that emphasise the ideal of the nuclear family and stigmatise single motherhood. The differences in experiences can also be attributable to the influence of Western Christianity and power dynamics rooted in colonial legacies, which may further exacerbate the negative experiences of some women, or result in positive experiences in more progressive and liberal Christian communities that acknowledge the importance of decolonisation. The feminist analysis highlights the need to challenge and transform patriarchal societies characterized by gender norms and practices that encourage the subjugation of women. Finally, the critical theory calls attention to the power dynamics at play within the Church and the need to address these dynamics to create a more inclusive environment for single mothers. Drawing from this theory, the negative experiences of some single mothers could be attributed to power dynamics that disadvantage women. The positive experiences could be attributed to power dynamics that foster societal inclusivity and equity.

Therefore, a neo-colonial, feminist, and critical analysis of the experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of these experiences. Addressing the issues faced by single mothers requires a commitment to challenging dominant cultural norms, transforming gender roles, and addressing power imbalances within the Church. By doing so, the Church can create a more inclusive and equitable environment for all its members, particularly single mothers, who have varying experiences in the Church. Importantly, the feminist, neo-colonialism, and critical theories also provide the basis for initiating and reinforcing change to address any factors in society, and more specifically, the Methodist Church in Kenya, to promote diversity, inclusion, and equity to address discrimination against some members, such as single mothers.

6.5 Summary

In this chapter, the study's findings were analysed and interpreted through the application of critical, feminist, and neo-colonial theoretical perspectives. These distinct lenses offered a foundation for examining the various factors that intersect to influence the experiences of single mothers within the Methodist Church in Kenya. The following chapter will present the conclusion and recommendations based on the insights gleaned from these analyses.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main purpose of this study was to assess the experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya, with a particular focus on how they are treated because of their single-parenthood. The specific objectives sought to determine how other church members, the church, family and relatives treated the single mothers and assess, from the perspective of the single mothers, how men that abandon women to run single-parent structure families, are treated. This chapter of the study, premised on the findings, draws conclusions in line with the purpose and objectives of the study and makes recommendations to improve the lived experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya.

7.1 Conclusion

7.1.1 Experiences of Single Mothers in the Methodist Church

From the findings of this and other studies, it is evident that the experiences of single mothers in the Christian church, particularly the Methodist Church in Kenya, are varied and complex. While some churches, families, and friends provide supportive and inclusive environments for single mothers, others may stigmatise or exclude them due to the women's status as single parents. In many cases, the church's teachings and expectations around marriage and family may contribute to feelings of shame or inadequacy among single mothers and may lead to a lack of support and resources. Additionally, single mothers may face challenges in accessing childcare and other resources necessary to support themselves and their families.

From a neo-colonial standpoint, it could be adduced that the influence of Western Christianity on the church's teachings and expectations regarding marriage and family plays a significant role in shaping single mothers' experiences in the Methodist Church in Kenya, resulting in differences in experiences. For example, the church may often uphold traditional values that favour the nuclear family, which may inadvertently alienate single mothers, causing them to feel isolated, shamed, or unsupported. Conversely, where the church is more orientated towards a decolonial positionality and perspective, single mothers in such a religious community are likely to have a more positive experience and better treatment.

On the other hand, from a feminist theoretical perspective, patriarchal beliefs and gender roles within society and the church could be adduced as the cause of the exacerbated challenges faced by some single mothers in the Methodist Church, and therefore, the negative experiences and treatment by the Church, family, and friends. The bias and lack of support for single mothers may stem from the expectation that women should be primarily responsible for raising children within the confines of a traditional family structure. Consequently, single mothers may face unequal treatment, social stigma, and limited access to resources compared to their married counterparts, which a patriarchal society could cause, and the associated bigoted beliefs, values, and practices that perpetuate the subordination and subjugation of women in society. The discrimination and ostracisation could be further exacerbated by the intersection of gender, womanhood, and single parenthood because of the intersection of values that lay emphasis on conventional couple family structures and practices that expressly subordinate and subjugate women.

The critical theory emphasises the power dynamics within the church and how they contribute to biases against single mothers. Individuals in positions of power, such as pastors and church leaders, may unconsciously or consciously harbour prejudices against single mothers, which can lead to exclusion and marginalisation. Additionally, the institutional structure of the Methodist Church may prioritise the needs and experiences of married couples over single mothers, perpetuating these biases. Combined, differences in institutional structure and power dynamics in society and within the Methodist Church could be deemed as contributing to the different experiences of single mothers in the church.

As such, some single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya often face discrimination, stigmatisation, and challenges in accessing childcare and other essential resources required for their well-being and that of their families. In response, the Methodist Church in Kenya and other religious institutions must recognise these challenges and work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for single mothers. This could involve reassessing the church's institutional structure, challenging dominant cultural values that privilege the nuclear family, and promoting a culture of inclusivity and equity. Using the neo-colonial, feminist, and critical theoretical lenses, religious institutions can have a deeper understanding of the unique challenges that single mothers face and can, therefore, foster a more inclusive and supportive environment

that better serves the needs of all their members, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable members of their congregation.

7.1.2 Treatment of Men, from the Perspective of the Single Mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya

The study findings suggested the disparity in treatment and expectations placed on men and women in single-parent families, with women often bearing the brunt of responsibility and judgment. In contrast, men remain largely absent and unaccountable, further exacerbating single mothers' negative experiences in the Methodist Church in Kenya. For example, some women cited experienced seclusion and ostracisation after separation from their baby's father or after losing the father through death. To further explore this conclusion, we can examine it through feminist, neo-colonial, and critical theoretical lenses.

From a feminist perspective, the differences in experiences and treatment can be attributed to the deep-rooted patriarchal beliefs and gender roles within society, for example, in societies, such as Kenya, where women are expected to shoulder the primary responsibility of child-rearing. This unequal treatment stems from traditional gender norms that dictate women's roles as caregivers and nurturers, whereas men are seen as breadwinners and protectors. As a result, single mothers are often judged more harshly and held to higher standards than their male counterparts, who may escape the same level of scrutiny and responsibility. The feminist theory posits that challenging and dismantling these patriarchal beliefs is essential to achieving gender equality and a more balanced distribution of parental responsibilities.

On the other hand, the neo-colonial theory offers insight into how the influence of Western Christianity and its values contributes to the unequal treatment of men and women in single-parent families. Western Christianity has historically reinforced traditional family structures and gender roles, which can perpetuate the notion that women should be the primary caregivers in families, while men should provide financial support. This ideological influence could contribute to societal expectations that single mothers must bear the responsibility for child-rearing, while fathers can remain largely absent without facing the same level of judgment and accountability.

Finally, the critical theory emphasizes the power dynamics and social structures that perpetuate the unequal treatment of men and women in single-parent families. In this context, those who hold positions of power within society, such as religious leaders, policymakers, and community leaders, may consciously or unconsciously enforce traditional gender roles and expectations. This power dynamic may contribute to the normalization of men's absence in single-parent families and the lack of accountability for their role in child-rearing. In contrast, single mothers may face stigmatization and exclusion due to their nonconformity with societal expectations of a nuclear family structure.

Therefore, the unequal treatment of men and women in single-parent families is a multifaceted issue that can be better understood by examining it through feminist, neo-colonial, and critical theoretical lenses. By challenging patriarchal beliefs, reassessing the influence of Western Christianity on family structures, and addressing power dynamics within society, society can work towards a more equitable and inclusive environment that values and supports both men and women in their roles as parents, regardless of their marital status.

7.1.3 Support Systems and Opportunities for Single Mothers in the Methodist Church

Despite the challenges and negative experiences faced by some single mothers, as demonstrated in the findings of this study, there are instances where churches and faith-based organizations have made concerted efforts to support and uplift single mothers within their communities. For instance, findings from the study showed that some Methodist churches in Kenya have established single mothers' associations and similar support systems. These systems serve as important support systems for single mothers and facilitate discourse and activities that foster the well-being of single mothers within those specific congregations. By offering resources and services such as childcare, counselling, and financial assistance, these organisations can effectively address the distinct needs of single mothers, helping them feel valued and supported, which will result in more positive experiences for single mothers. Also, a single mothers' association can function as a vital social support network, enabling single mothers to draw on each other's experiences to improve their lives and their children's lives. In doing so, these associations foster a sense of camaraderie, shared understanding, and collective empowerment among single mothers, helping them overcome the unique challenges they face in their daily lives.

7.2 Recommendations

A complex interplay of individual, social, and religious factors shapes the experiences of single mothers in the Christian church. By understanding the challenges single mothers face in their communities and working to create supportive and inclusive environments, churches and faith-based organisations can help improve the lives of these women and their families

7.2.1 Recommendations for Improved Experiences of Single Mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya

Accordingly, based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to address the varying experiences of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya and to promote a more inclusive and supportive environment for them:

1. Sensitise church leadership and members: Organize workshops, seminars, and training sessions for church leaders, members, and congregations to raise awareness about the unique challenges faced by single mothers and to promote empathy and understanding. Encourage discussions that challenge traditional beliefs and stigmas surrounding single parenthood.
2. Develop and enforce gender-sensitive policies: The Methodist Church in Kenya should establish and implement policies that promote gender equality and discourage discrimination or exclusion based on marital status. This includes holding men accountable for their roles in single-parent families and addressing the unequal treatment of women in these situations.
3. Establish support systems for single mothers: Encourage churches to create single mothers' associations or similar support groups that provide a safe space for single mothers to share their experiences, access resources, and receive emotional and spiritual support. These groups should offer practical assistance such as childcare, counselling, financial aid, and skill development programs. Also, the Methodist Church in Kenya should encourage the formation of peer-support systems, such as single mothers' associations, which single mothers can use to share their experiences, learn from each other, and receive other forms of assistance.
4. Advocate for policy changes at the national level: Work with government and non-governmental organisations to advocate for policy changes that support single mothers

and their families, such as affordable childcare, access to education, and employment opportunities.

5. Foster partnerships with community organisations: Collaborate with local community organisations and NGOs to create comprehensive support systems for single mothers, addressing their needs in areas such as healthcare, housing, education, and employment.
6. Promote inclusive theology and teachings: Encourage church leaders to adopt more inclusive interpretations of religious texts that promote understanding, compassion, and support for single mothers. Address any misinterpretations that contribute to the stigmatisation of single parenthood.
7. Encourage male involvement and accountability: Develop programs and initiatives, such as community education and outreach programs, encourage men to take responsibility for their roles in single-parent families while promoting a culture of shared responsibility and equal partnership in parenting.
8. Monitor and evaluate progress: Regularly assess the effectiveness of implemented policies and programs in addressing the needs of single mothers within the Methodist Church in Kenya. Use the findings to make necessary adjustments and improvements.

By implementing these recommendations, the Methodist Church in Kenya can work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for single mothers, addressing the disparities in their experiences and promoting their well-being and that of their families.

7.2.2 Recommendations for Further Research

This research aimed to examine the diverse experiences of single mothers within the Methodist Church in Kenya. The study revealed that these experiences are multifaceted, varying significantly among individuals and between different churches. Consequently, it is crucial to carry out additional research to better understand the cause-effect relationships between various factors and the experiences of single mothers. Further, it is essential to investigate the perspectives of clergy and religious leaders concerning the potential causes of negative experiences faced by single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya, as well as possible interventions to address these issues. Such research would provide valuable insights into how church leaders perceive the challenges single mothers face and could help in developing strategies to support these women within their faith communities better. Lastly, conducting

systematic literature reviews is critical to understanding the current state of research on the topic and gaining insights into findings about contributing factors and potential interventions from existing literature. By synthesizing information from various sources, researchers can build upon existing knowledge and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex experiences of single mothers within the Methodist Church in Kenya and other religious institutions. This, in turn, will help inform future policies and practices aimed at promoting a more inclusive and supportive environment for single mothers and their families.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Data Collection Instrument and Informed Consent Form

Dear Respondent,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. I am undertaking research in partial fulfilment for the award of a Master's Degree from University of Oslo. The study, titled *The Experience of Unmarried Single Mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya*, seeks to evaluate the experiences of unmarried single mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya with the objective of ascertaining if they experience any form of stigmatisation and exclusion. The survey will take you approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete. The data and information collected within the course of this survey will be used for the intended purpose as explained, in line with the purpose and specific objectives of the study. No personally identifiable information or data will be collected. You will not be exposed to any risks by participating in the study. After completion of the study, the data and information collected will be disposed of in line with the policies of the university. No compensation will be provided for participating in the study. By continuing to complete this survey, it is deemed that you have understood the purpose and objectives of the study and that you have provided informed consent to be included in the study. You may withdraw from the study at any time, without any adverse ramifications on you or any of your family members or friends. If you have any questions, please ask the facilitator at any time.

Demographic Information

1. What is your age?
 - 18-35 years
 - 35-60years
 - More than 60 years
2. How many children do you have?
 - 1-2
 - 2-4
 - More than 4

3. Have you ever been married in church?
- Yes
 - No
4. If ever married, what led you to part with your spouse?
- Death of spouse
 - Divorce
 - Separated
 - Abandonment
 - Other reasons (Please specify)
5. Select the statement that best describes your single-parenthood
- Accidental pregnancy
 - I had no choice
 - I was intentionally abandoned
 - I am a single parent by choice/I wanted a baby but not marriage
6. My baby's father is very present in the baby's life (Select the statement that best describes the situation)
- Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Agree
 - Strongly agree

Church Membership

7. For how long have you been a member of the Methodist church?
- 0-5 years
 - 5-10 years
 - 10-15 years
 - More than 15 years
8. How frequently do you go to church? (Select the statement that best describes the frequency)
- More than once a week

- Weekly
- Whenever there is a service
- Occasionally
- Once a month
- Once a year
- Hardly ever

9. How would you describe your membership in the church?

- An active member
- A passive member
- Not sure

10. Have you received the essential sacraments of the Methodist church?

- Holy Baptism
- Holy Communion

11. How would you describe your religious commitment?

- Very strongly committed
- Strongly committed
- Average
- Not committed

Experiences as a Single Mother

12. Do you belong to any group in the church?

- Yes
- No

If yes, which one? Describe

.....

.....

.....

13. Do you participate in any activities in the church, such as choir, camps, or fellowship?

If yes, which ones? Describe

.....

.....
.....

14. Considering your experience in church before becoming a single mother, and after becoming a single mother, select the statement that best describes the situation.

- The experience is the same
- The experience is different

If different, select the statements (You can select more than one) that best describes the differences that have manifested

- I do not feel welcome
- I experience exclusion from church activities
- I am stigmatized
- I have been discriminated
- I am not supposed to partake in communion
- Other? Please explain

.....
.....
.....

15. In your own words, how different has your experience been prior to and after pregnancy?
Explain briefly

.....
.....

16. Is there are an association for single parents in the church, as is the case for youth, women, men, and children?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what is the association's name?

.....
.....

17. Are you a member of the single parents' association?

Yes

No

18. What is the purpose of the single parent's association?

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.....
.....

19. What is the subject of most of the discussions of the single parents' association's meetings?

.....
.....
.....

20. Have married women in the church treated you differently when you talk to their husbands?

Explain

.....
.....
.....

21. Has the father of your child, had similar or near similar experiences to you in the church?

Explain

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.....

22. What do you think is the attitude of the following towards single parenthood? Explain

Fellow Christians:

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Church:

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Relatives:

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.....

Parents and siblings:

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.....

23. Has the church provided any religious and spiritual support to you as a single parent? Explain

.....
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.....

24. Do you have any remarks and comments you would like to make about your experience as a single parent in the Methodist Church in Kenya?

.....
.....
.....

.....*The End*.....

Thank You!

Appendix II: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Dear Respondent,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I am undertaking research in partial fulfilment for the award of a Master's Degree from University of Oslo. The study, titled *The Experience of Unmarried Single Mothers in the Methodist Church in Kenya*, seeks to evaluate the experiences of unmarried single mothers in the methods church in Kenya with the objective of ascertaining if they experience any form of stigmatisation and exclusion. The interview will take approximately 1 hour. The data and information collected within the course of this interview will be used for the intended purpose as explained, in line with the purpose and specific objectives of the study. No personally identifiable information or data will be collected. You will not be exposed to any risks by participating in the study. After completion of the study, the data and information collected will be disposed of in line with the policies of the university. No compensation will be provided for participating. By continuing, it is deemed that you have understood the purpose and objectives of the study and that you have provided informed consent to be included in the study. You may withdraw at any time, without any adverse ramifications on you or any of your family members or friends. If you have any questions, please ask the facilitator at any time.

Demographic Information

1. What is your age?
 - 18-35 years
 - 35-60years
 - More than 60 years
2. How many children do you have?
 - 1-2
 - 2-4
 - More than 4
3. Have you ever been married in church?

- Yes
 - No
4. If ever married, what led you to part with your spouse?
- Death of spouse
 - Divorce
 - Separated
 - Abandonment
 - Other reasons (Please specify)
5. Select the statement that best describes your single-parenthood
- Accidental pregnancy
 - I had no choice
 - I was intentionally abandoned
 - I am a single parent by choice/I wanted a baby but not marriage
6. My baby's father is very present in the baby's life (Select the statement that best describes the situation)
- Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Agree
 - Strongly agree

Church Membership

7. For how long have you been a member of the Methodist church?
- 0-5 years
 - 5-10 years
 - 10-15 years
 - More than 15 years
8. How frequently do you go to church? (Select the statement that best describes the frequency)
- More than once a week

- Weekly
 - Whenever there is a service
 - Occasionally
 - Once a month
 - Once a year
 - Hardly ever
9. How would you describe your membership in the church?
- An active member
 - A passive member
 - Not sure
10. Have you received the essential sacraments of the Methodist church?
- Holy Baptism
 - Holy Communion
11. How would you describe your religious commitment?
- Very strongly committed
 - Strongly committed
 - Average
 - Not committed

Experiences as a Single Mother

12. Ask about belonging to church groups and description if belonging to a Church group.
13. Ask about participation in activities in the Church and a description of the church activities, such as choir, camps, or fellowship.
14. Ask about experiences before and after becoming a single mother and a description of the experiences.
15. Ask about a single-mother's association in their Church and their membership of such an organisation and its purpose.
16. Ask about treatment by married women in the church when they talk to the women's husbands.
17. Ask about the treatment of the baby's fathers from their perspective.

18. Ask about treatment by fellow Christians.
 19. Ask about treatment by the church.
 20. Ask about treatment by relatives.
 21. Ask about treatment by parents and siblings.
 22. Ask about any religious and spiritual support provided by the church.
- Ask for additional remarks and comments.

.....*End Interview*.....

Thank You!

Appendix III: NSD Assessment and Approval

NSD's assessment

Project title

THE EXPERIENCE OF UNMARRIED SINGLE MOTHERS IN THE METHODIST CHURCH
IN KENYA

Reference number

604991

Registered

28.10.2021 av Eva Gakii Kubai - evagk@uio.no

Data controller (institution responsible for the project)

Universitetet i Oslo / Det teologiske fakultet

Project leader (academic employee/supervisor or PhD candidate)

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Type of project

Student project, Master's thesis

Contact information, student

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Project period

01.01.2022 - 31.12.2022

Status

02.11.2021 - Assessed

Assessment (1)

02.11.2021 - Assessed

Our assessment is that the processing of personal data in this project will comply with data protection legislation, so long as it is carried out in accordance with what is documented in the Notification Form and attachments, dated 02.11.2021. Everything is in place for the processing to begin.

TYPE OF DATA AND DURATION

The project will process general categories of personal data, special categories of personal data about religion and sexual orientation until 31.12.2022

LEGAL BASIS

The project will gain consent from data subjects to process their personal data. We find that consent will meet the necessary requirements under art. 4 (11) and 7, in that it will be a freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous statement or action, which will be documented and can be withdrawn. The legal basis for processing general categories of personal data is therefore consent given by the data subject, cf. the General Data Protection Regulation art. 6.1 a). The legal basis for processing special categories of personal data is explicit consent given by the data subject, cf. art. 9.2 a), cf. the Personal Data Act § 10, cf. § 9 (2).

PRINCIPLES RELATING TO PROCESSING PERSONAL DATA

NSD finds that the planned processing of personal data will be in accordance with the principles under the General Data Protection Regulation regarding:

- lawfulness, fairness and transparency (art. 5.1 a), in that data subjects will receive sufficient information about the processing and will give their consent
- purpose limitation (art. 5.1 b), in that personal data will be collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes, and will not be processed for new, incompatible purposes
- data minimisation (art. 5.1 c), in that only personal data which are adequate, relevant and necessary for the purpose of the project will be processed
- storage limitation (art. 5.1 e), in that personal data will not be stored for longer than is necessary to fulfil the project's purpose

THE RIGHTS OF DATA SUBJECTS

NSD finds that the information that will be given to data subjects about the processing of their personal data will meet the legal requirements for form and content, cf. art. 12.1 and art. 13. Data subjects will have the following rights in this project: access (art. 15), rectification (art. 16), erasure (art. 17), restriction of processing (art. 18), notification (art. 19) and data portability (art. 20). NB! Any exceptions must be justified and have a legal basis. These rights apply so long as the data subject can be identified in the collected data. We remind you that if a data subject contacts you about their rights, the data controller has a duty to reply within a month.

FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES

NSD presupposes that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data. 'To ensure

that these requirements are met you must follow your institution's internal guidelines and/or consult with your institution (i.e. the institution responsible for the project).

NOTIFY CHANGES If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project it may be necessary to notify NSD. This is done by updating the information registered in the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified. Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes.

FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT

NSD will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded by what is documented. Good luck with the project!

Contact person at NSD: Olav Rosness, advisor.

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