

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE PHENOMENON OF SINGLE-PARENTHOOD
IN NAIROBI

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any other university.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, the late John Kahindi Ngugi and Theresia Wairimu Kahindi who planted and nurtured good seeds in me.

To my children John and Irene Kahindi, Barbara Wairimu, Bilhah Wairimu, Esther Wakanyi and my grandchildren, Abigail Wakanyi, Isabella Wanjiru and Jasmine Wairimu, the future of the Wakanyi Kahindi lineage.

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OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

Christian response: How Christians react, resonate or respond to topical, moral and ethical issues guided by the doctrine and the social teaching of the church.

Complementarian: A view that men and women have different but complimentary roles and responsibilities in marriage, family life, religious leadership and elsewhere.

Egalitarian: The belief in human equality especially with respect to social, political and economic affairs. Asserting, promoting equality in choice of leadership.

Patriarchal: A social system where males hold primary power and predominate in leadership.

Senatio: The Latin word for Senate refers to the official council which makes decisions relating to rules and norms with a mandate to make amendments. *Senatio* involves the retroactive validation of marriage.

Single-parenthood: The state of one who begets or bears an offspring(s) and he or she alone, is solely responsible for the upbringing of that offspring(s). This study focuses on single-mothers and their role in parenting.

Single-parent: A parent without a marriage partner, widowed, separated, deserted, divorced or never married, who is alone, in charge of his or her household. In this study, a single-parent is basically a single mother.

Socio-cultural Systems: The social values upheld by cultures supporting the institution of the family such as the extended family and social support to widows.

The Church: The authoritative institution that, guided by doctrinal and social teaching aims at keeping her members constantly aware of the need to uphold Christian ideals.

Teenage mothers: Young girls, who become mothers before they reach 20 years, most of them dropped out of school to take up parenthood responsibility while they are still children.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACK:	Anglican Church of Kenya
CCC:	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CMA:	Catholic Men Association
CWA:	Catholic Women Association
FGD:	Focus Group Discussion
FGDs:	Focus Groups Discussion
FLEP:	Family Life Education Programme
FS:	<i>Familiaris Consortio</i> (The Family in the Modern World)
KAMA:	Kenya Anglican Men Association
KNHS:	Kenya National Health Survey
MU:	Mothers Union
NCCK:	National Council of Churches of Kenya
NT:	New Testament
OI:	Oral Interview
OT:	Old Testament
PCEA:	Presbyterian Church of East Africa
SHGs:	Self-Help Groups
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
AFER:	African Ecclesiastical Review

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the Christian response to single-parenthood in selected churches in Nairobi County. Specifically, the study analyzed the causes of single-parenthood and their socio-religious implications. It also evaluated the doctrine and social teaching of the church on inclusivity. The study further examined the role of the church as a potential network of support for Christian single-parents. Finally, it explored the possibilities of Christian single-parents acceptance in the church. The study employed a descriptive research design. Data were collected from seven selected parishes, namely, St. Paul's Catholic Chaplaincy and Parish, PCEA St. Andrew's Parish, All Saints' Cathedral, St. Theresa's in Eastleigh, Embulbul Parish, Madre Teresa in Zimmerman and ACK, St. Gertrude's in Kasarani. Questionnaires, oral interviews (OI), focus group discussion (FGD) and in-depth interviews (IDI) were used to collect the primary data. Secondary data were obtained from library research. In each of the selected congregations, the target population were all single-mothers. In addition, two pastors and ten leaders were interviewed in each congregation. The sample size in each of the selected churches comprised 50 single-mothers, two pastors and ten leaders. The FGD had 13, 12 and 14 participants in the three selected congregations. The IDI were conducted with three participants separately. The total sample size for this study was 476 persons. The study applied simple random and purposive random sampling methods. The data were collected, analyzed, interpreted and discussed in the light of a merged conception framework, informed by Goode (2000), Young (1994) and Waiyaki (1985). The framework underlines that lack of proper social organization, a decline in social norms and values, coupled with lack of adequate guidance among the youth are some of the underlying factors leading to an increase in single-parent families. The findings of this study indicated that separation is the most prevalent cause of single-motherhood. Other causes include death of a spouse, divorce, rape, abandonment, desertion and early pregnancies. It emerged that attitudes towards Christian single-mothers are determined mainly by the cause of their single-motherhood status. Widows are the most tolerated while divorcees and the never-married are the least tolerated. Whereas the doctrine and the social teaching of the Church advocates for inclusiveness and acceptance of everyone, the practice on the ground with regard to single-mothers is far from the ideal. The Church seems to be warming up to gradually acknowledging and embracing single-mothers in Christian congregations. The Church, being the body of Christ, is challenged to be a caring community, giving an all-round care to all her members. A change of attitude towards single-mothers is possible, if the clergy led the sensitization through sermons, interpretation of the doctrine and innovative programmes for Christian single-parents. The Church has the potential to expand her network of support for single-mothers inclining towards gathering. A practical implementation of the doctrine and social teaching of the Church on inclusiveness is yet to be attained fully. Recommendations were made to the Church, Christians and policy-makers to respond to the prevalence of single-parenthood in an effort to reduce the number of single-parent families and assist the affected.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

In most African cultures, marriage has always been the norm, the phase in social transition. Growing up meant that one's life fulfillment would come true and one would be right in step when married. Marriage has often been perceived as the natural order of things; it ensures continuity of life and lineages within the family context. Those who fail to conform to this expectation are perceived as rebels or a threat to the social order. Single-parenthood was always been a rare phenomenon, the unusual rather than the expected. NCKK (2000) indicates that in the past, most African societies had norms that were strictly observed, hence safeguarded against single-parenthood. This ensured that the youth were socialized and smoothly transitioned into adulthood, providing the needed appropriate sex education that was conducted during initiation periods. Furthermore, the norms discouraged the youth from engaging in pre-marital sex. These enhanced and stabilized marriage and family, minimizing cases of separation, divorce or widowhood. Consequently, there has always been little or no room for the unmarried person, and more so, the unmarried parent, to participate in the social system.

In most societies, the concept of couples living and bringing up children together is seen as the ideal and most acceptable state of affairs. Focusing on the Christian perspective of singlehood, the Protestant and the Catholic traditions uphold that God instituted marriage for the welfare and happiness of humankind. However, in the Catholic tradition, singlehood is acceptable for those divinely ordained into special ministries in the church. These include the priests, religious brothers, and nuns who

take celibacy and chastity vows. The rest of the Catholic faithful uphold marriage as a sacrament. Catholics and Protestants believe that marriage serves at least, threefold purposes: companionship, procreation, and demonstration of Christ's relationship with His Church (Nguru, 2007). The African cultural perspective equates marriage with normalcy and fulfillment. The Biblical view on marriage culminates in Christ the liberator, who brings good news and abundant life.

The family can be defined as the society's basic cell. Goode (2000) defines the family as a social unit comprising male and female parents and their children. Goode's definition includes two popular family types, namely, nuclear and extended families. The human family is founded on marriage. In its simplest form, it consists of husband and wife, with or without offspring. The family is the sanctuary of human life. In Africa, today, the family has undergone many changes. Besides the nuclear and extended family types, there are other family situations and patterns that have come into existence due to the current socio-economic realities. Nuclear family refers to a social unit consisting of a man, his wife and their offspring. The extended family includes a man, his wife, their children as well as the man's and woman's relatives such as siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and grandchildren, among other relatives.

A single-parent-family consists of only one parent (father or mother), a child or children. The parent may be separated, widowed or unmarried. Unmarried single-parents are mostly women. This group is on the increase in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa today (Kiura, 1999:10). This is why the present study focused on single-motherhood only. In essence, single-mothers are single-parents. Female-headed households commonly occur after separation and, or divorce. In some cases, however,

husbands are away for long periods due to reasons such as studies, employment, serving some jail term, and exile, among others. In their absence, women head the households. This study takes a wider scope of family defining it as a social unit with at least a parent and, child or children.

Furthermore, from a sociological perspective, single-parent family refers to female-headed households where there is a mother and child or children but no father. The head of household refers to the resident breadwinner who is also the key decision-maker in all matters concerning the household. A woman can become the head of household either by default or by design. A woman may be a *de facto* head of household if and when the husband is traveling or works away from home. She is the head of the household by design when she is the *bonafide* leader of the home. In most African cultures, men presumably head households. However, women often seem to play a bigger role than men do as household heads. Hence, despite the African cultural view that women are not supposed to head households, socially, they do by the very nature of work and the role that they play in the family. This study also attempts to examine some scholarly views on the family in socio-religious and anthropological discourses. Studies by Goode (2000), Nye (1973), Mardsen (1970), and Kayongo-Male (1991), among others, have not captured the emerging types of families. They have seemingly focused on traditional African extended family and the Western nuclear family.

Unions perceived to be conventionally irregular are gradually becoming common. They resemble formal marriages but differ in that they are usually for a shorter duration; nevertheless, they are not institutionalized by any ceremonies or payment of bridewealth. These unions are commonly referred to as cohabitation. Yet another

practice of such union is that of “keeping” wives. This is where a legally married man “keeps” a woman outside his marital home, by paying her house rent and other expenses common in urban areas. The man continues to have marital relations with this woman and may even sire children with her. The legal wife may not know about the “kept” wife (Nguru, 2007).

A large proportion of young women become pregnant out of wedlock every year. According to Gichinga (1996) there is little information about these women. The popular misconceptions and prejudices have contributed to a distorted image with which most people have regarded these women. Such stereotypes thwart genuine efforts into objectively delve into the realities and experiences of such single women. What they are like as people, why they have become unmarried mothers, what their needs and problems are, and how they can be helped are questions that have received little or no scholarly attention. Besides women who get children out of wedlock, there is another group of the adult female population that postpone marriage or never marry at all, opting not to even have children. Gichinga (1996) further notes that there are more women of marriageable age than there are men. Owing to Christian influence in Kenya, polygamy is viewed as either illegal or out of fashion. Gichinga (1996:26) postulated, “We are about to witness an explosion of single-motherhood in Kenya as many well educated and financially independent women opt for parenthood without marriage. Single-motherhood is something to worry about as some women choose to get pregnant without becoming wives”. This trend apparently streams from the changes brought about by modernity, formal education and financial empowerment among women.

One who becomes a single mother purely by “accident” may have conceived at an early age and may have been unable or reluctant to terminate the pregnancy. Such a pregnancy often shatters her education career hopes, dreams, and aspirations. In some cases, this may even get in the way of future marriage prospects. A woman who falls in this category of single-mothers may be perceived as a burden to her parents, extended family, and the society. She faces challenges of shattered dreams, parenthood, and new social responsibilities. The second group is composed of older, more experienced and financially stable women who choose to become single-mothers. This is usually after careful evaluation of the pros and cons of marriage (Radeny, 2003).

Among Christians, single-parenthood can be particularly challenging due to the model of happiness and wholeness portrayed as the ideal. The Church is basically family-centric, hence most single-parents feel disconnected and misplaced. Indeed, many begin as single, probably marry and then may become single again.

Single-mothers are particularly stigmatized, as evidenced in daily interactions with them (Byrne, 2000). Stigmatizing interactions are quite apparent in relation to singleness, marital status, bearing of children and sexuality, indicating the passiveness of heterosexual and family ideologies in society (Byrne 2000). Christian single-parents should feel encouraged to participate actively in the things that interest them in church and require them to utilize their talents. Involving single-parents in church programmes and activities opens up the opportunity for them to interact with others who share similar passions. Furthermore, others get to appreciate their positive side rather than just identify them as unmarried and incomplete. After all, marriage alone does not make a person complete, neither is it a human being’s final destiny.

Changes in the family perspectives especially in contemporary Western societies have been the subject of academic theorizing and social concern. Changing familial forms signals a decline in obligations and commitments and an apparent rise in selfish individualism (Darlock, 2013). Some current cultural stereotypes view remaining single as indicative of individualism. Most single adults are seen as self-centered individuals disconnected from other people.

Single-parents are not homogenous, they represent diverse age groups and experiences: ranging from widowed, divorced, separated to the never-married. All these categories of single-parents have diverse experiences; they are perceived differently by their fellow Christians. This study chose to focus on the perception towards single-mothers by their fellow Christians.

Studies in Christian ministries have further established that every group in a church - the children, the youth, men, women and the couples - has its unique needs and gifts. The concern is that churches have enhanced ministry to these groups inadvertently neglecting single-parents. As such, they tend to believe that they are not expected to be involved in church programmes. The main purpose of ministering to single-parents is to help them realize that they are a significant part of the Church and that they too need to be ministered to. Therefore, the Church needs to be aware of and be involved with their needs and issues. The Church should boldly and creatively reach out to an increasingly “non-conforming community” (Nguru, 2007). When single-parents are active in church services and ministries, the Church benefits and is edified considerably (Makhubele, 2008; Sally-Rush, 2012). Given their mature decision-making abilities, most single-parents portray increased commitment to faithful attendance. Consequently, if ignored and alienated, these single-parents keep away

from the church, starving the Church of useful capacities, gifts, talents, training, and experience.

In the Bible, unmarried persons are required to strictly adhere to sexual abstinence (Swidler, 2007). The Biblical teaching advocates that all people should marry. In the Old Testament, particularly, to remain unmarried was considered a failure in one's obligation to the community and a shameful situation. Unmarried women and widows were expected to remain faithful to a life of virginity or sexual abstinence. Swidler (2007) further observes that the Church does not support the single lifestyle for women, declaring that a woman's clear duty lies in marriage and motherhood.

The Vatican Council II Chapter V states in part:

All faithful whatever their condition or state of life is called by the Lord, each in his or her own way to holiness according to the hidden plan of God. To live a spiritual life is basic for all Christians whether ordained, vowed, married or single; we need to experience intimacy with the Lord.

Single-parents who are baptized Christians often have their children denied infant baptism in their churches. Furthermore, single-mothers-to-be are ostracized after conception; they are denied Holy Communion on grounds of fornication or adultery. The Church seems to have double standards in implementing this policy. This is because other members who may have had pre-marital or extra-marital affairs without getting children, receive Holy Communion after confession.

Single-parenthood is a relatively new phenomenon particularly in the domain of socio-religious study. Though previously not considered as a sociological concept, single-parenthood has become an issue of concern. Available literature has not adequately captured the single-parenthood phenomenon to the extent that it only appears in family literature as a non-conforming category. The current study

attempted to carry out a detailed analysis of single-parenthood, hoping to draw the attention of sociologists of religion to its relevance in the socio-religious inquiry. Considering the existing narrow approach in family studies, the researcher's academic curiosity was aroused to seek a new approach to single-parenthood as an emerging and entrenching type of family. This study attempted to examine the emergence of single-parenthood, how social change has contributed to this phenomenon and how the Church responds to single-parenthood.

The doctrine, scripture and the social teaching of the church advocate for inclusivity of all the faithful as long as one is repentant. This appears to be the practice in the church in the West. However, the church in Africa still holds on to various impediments, thereby locking many out of the church. The disconnect between teachings and the practice aroused our curiosity to carry out this research. It is against this background that this study sought to investigate the Christian response to single-parenthood in selected churches in Nairobi County.

1.2. Statement of the Research Problem

Single-parent families were a rare occurrence in indigenous African communities. This was mainly due to existing socio-cultural support systems. However, in recent times, single-parent families have become an issue of concern in the church and society due to their increase in numbers. Some of these single-parents are Christians who yearn for acceptance into the church.

The doctrine and the social teaching of the church advocates for inclusiveness of everyone, as they are, so long as they are repent and seek to belong to the body of Christ. In spite of this, single-parents often experience stigma in social and religious circles. Hence, they feel curtailed from active participation in church activities. While

the church designs programmes for children, youth and couples, single-parents are often left out. This study sought to investigate why there is a disconnect between the teaching of the church and the practice on the ground. This disconnect shapes the attitudes of Christians towards their fellow Christians who are single-parents.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1. Analyze the causes of single-parenthood and their socio-religious implications.
2. Evaluate the doctrine and social teaching of the Church regarding inclusiveness.
3. Examine the role of the Church as a potential network of supporting single-parents.
4. Explore the possibilities of Christian single-parents being accepted in Church congregations.

1.4. Premises of the Study

1. The cause of one's single-parenthood influences the socio-religious attitudes towards the said single-parent.
2. Despite her doctrine on inclusiveness, the Church remains non-committed and harbours negative attitudes towards Christian single-parents.
3. The church has a major role to play towards the social and religious rehabilitation and acceptance of Christian single-parents.
4. Christian single-parents may be accepted as members in church congregations.

1.5. Research Questions

1. What are the causes of single-parenthood and how do they influence the attitudes towards Christian single-parents?
2. How does the Church implement her doctrine on inclusiveness in the lives of the worshippers?

3. What is the role of the Church as a potential network of support for Christian single-parents?
4. How do Christians respond towards their fellow Christian single-parents?

1.6. Justification and Significance of the Study

This study enables the church, readers, higher learning institutions and policy makers to get a broader view of the family and to accommodate Christian single-parent families. The study challenges the Church to evaluate her existing programmes and re-design the same, inclining more towards moral guidance and spiritual formation of young adults. This study would shed light on the disconnect between Church doctrine and its implementation. Whereas the doctrine underlines inclusiveness for everyone, in whatever state as long as they confess Christ and seek salvation, the Church makes Christian single-parents feel like they do not fully belong to her. This study helps the church to re-design her programmes geared towards being more relevant and attractive to 21st Century Christians. Guiding and counseling young adults would reduce the number of single-parents. Thus, the Church should focus on preventive rather than curative measures in addressing single-parenthood.

In Kenya, there exist scanty data on single-parenthood, especially on appreciating the dynamism and contemporary realities on the phenomenon. This study is, therefore, a significant contribution to knowledge on single-parenthood and Christian response towards them. The findings of this study enhanced a broader understanding of single-parent families by Christians, their immediate families, policymakers, and the public in general who deal with these families. Many Christians become single-parents, whether by design or by default; the existing mechanisms of imparting ethical and moral education may be inadequate. The study points out the shortcomings,

challenging the church to be bolder, more open-minded and re-structure her approach to pre-marital counseling and youth programmes. Research findings from this study will assist pastors to improve the pastoral care given to Christian single-mothers.

1.7. Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study focused on single-mothers in the selected churches in Nairobi County. In particular, the study analyzed the causes of single-parenthood and their implications; the response and attitudes of the Church towards their fellow Christian single-parents. The study focused on diverse categories of single-mothers by default or by choice.

Single-parents include both single-mothers and single fathers. However, owing to the limitations of identifying single fathers and their reluctance to participate in the interviews, this study narrowed down to single-mothers. The study focused on all categories of single-mothers, whether widowed, separated, deserted or never married. In this study, therefore, the term single-parents basically refers to single-mothers.

Single-mothers are categorized as the never-married, the separated, the deserted, the divorced and the widowed (Fagerstrom, 1998). This study focused on all these categories, namely, those who have become single-parents by chance, by default, and or by choice. Our pilot survey and the literature review had confirmed that the different categories of single-mothers were perceived differently in both social and religious circles. Hence, the need to focus on all the categories.

While the study was generally successful, it experienced a few difficulties. Most of these difficulties were anticipated and attempts were made beforehand to deal with them. The first challenge was in the identification of single-parents. The researcher used the church register and a self-administered questionnaire to identify single-mothers. This study narrowed down to single-mothers to avoid a broad a scope.

Widowers declined to participate in the FGD. Two widowers indicated that they would be uncomfortable in an FGD where they were a minority. Yet they could not make up an FGD. The researcher addressed this limitation by holding FGD with single-mothers only, thus leaving out single fathers for another study. This is because single-mothers are, in essence, also single-parents.

This study was based in Nairobi County. The choice of Nairobi was justified by several reasons. First, studies such as United Nations Children's Fund - UNICEF (1999), Kayongo-Male and Onyango (1991), Nguru (2001) and Radeny (2003) clearly indicate that single-parenthood is more prevalent in urban areas than rural areas, hence the choice of Nairobi as a study area. Second, Nairobi's population represents a socially diversified community. Third, the weakening of the extended family system is quite evident in this urban community. The extended family system always provided support in African traditional communities. Its absence is felt even more in an urban set-up where individualism prevails.

Fourth, single-parenthood is a topical issue. Therefore, a contemporary, urban, open community was suitable for the field research. Fifth, a pilot survey conducted among the Christian congregations in Nairobi showed that some churches in Nairobi had acknowledged the fact that single-parents existed and several churches were already establishing special programmes aimed at addressing the specific needs of single-parents. Some churches in Nairobi had initiated the formation of single-parents associations. Such associations eased the task of identifying the single-parents.

Sixth, Nairobi was ideal for this study because most of the young women who conceive while in school take refuge in the city's slum areas where they reside and engage in some low-income occupations. Such include hawking, working as domestic

employees and operating food-stuff kiosks, among others. In an urban community, one is likely to find many low-income male workers who cannot afford to live with their families in the city. These men require cheap and possibly ready-to-eat food and cheap laundry services. Hence the massive attraction of unmarried mothers to the city; they can make a livelihood from these occupations, hence able to raise their children.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

Various scholars have written on the family from sociological, theological and general perspectives. However, literature on single-parent families is rather scanty; it is often found in works under the wider scope of the family. This study reviewed available and related literature on the family in general and single-parent families in particular. Sally-Rush (2012) observes that a search involving the terms ‘single-parents’, ‘lone parents’ or ‘single-mothers’, and ‘the church’ reveals that there is paucity of research relating the two. Yet, in order to see how single-parents’ experiences compare with the wider population, a body of literature examining single-parents as a discrete category in the sociology of religion needs to emerge. Overall, the researcher has acknowledged the general literature on single-parents from which the current study particularizes its research focus.

Cox (2000:52) further argues that Christianity must tell the truth about God and speak to the temporal situation to reflect the changing values of the current epoch. He advises Christians not to confuse the meaning of the term secular with worldliness yet it just means an epoch. His sentiment raises the question whether or not it is possible for the Church to aspire to define herself as a biblical community when part of her constituency is excluded from participating in the most significant aspects of her life such as communion. Christianity does not necessarily have to be concerned entirely “with this world” and “this life”. In any case, the transcendent God is interested in both the contemporary contextual realities as well as the future life. Likewise, Jesus Christ had a faith that underlined the present and future as he did the will of the Father. The Church worldwide should respond to the present plight of single-parents.

Christian traditionalists continue to affirm that the doctrines of Christianity have a given and changeless content. This could imply that the meanings of these doctrines are not subject to historical development; hence they must either be retained or discarded (Cox, 2000). Christianity subscribes to the definition of the term family as a two-parent unit and their children. However, the current dynamism and embodiment of the term persuades inclusion of the single-parent headed family. Indeed, single-parenthood is the changing symbol of the community. Consequently, though the term family in its original form remains with us, we cannot overzealously defend it in the form we inherited it. This is because 'all texts and doctrines are located within a context of historical conditions and cannot be fully understood if this context is overlooked' (Cox, 2000).

The church has an obligation to give a proper and worldly interpretation of the term family for it to remain relevant and address its emerging types and realities. Scriptures teach us that God operates in and through religious and sacred institutions as well as events and phenomenon such as the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian captivity (Cox, 2000). He could do the same through institutions such as the family, which comprise single-parenthood. The current vigorous debate about single-parenthood might be an indication that we have heeded the voice of God as he clears the confusion about the correct definition of a family.

Christian traditionalists insist on the need to teach the truth about God rather than manipulate the word of God to suit the current generation and lifestyle. The assumption is that single-motherhood is a concept of the current generation. God is fully and irretrievably present in the life of humankind, hence a church that does not identify with the world, with the same thorough solidarity that God does, betrays her

own mission (Cox, 2000). The Church, for instance, should be concerned that within the last thirty years, the number of divorces in America has increased by nearly 200% and only about 5% of all marriages are first marriages. There are no indications that the trend will reverse because the percentage of people marrying today is at an all-time low as people are choosing to marry late or not marrying at all (Connors, 1999:10). Similar trends have been observed in Australia where 14 of the households in 2003 showed to be single-parent families (Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2007). Data from the UK is not any different; a general household survey conducted there in 2005 revealed that about 1 out of 4 families with dependent children there were single-parent families with 8 to 11 of them being male-headed single-parent families (Nkyi, 2013).

In Africa, some studies on the single-parent phenomenon show that many children also live in single-parent homes due to desertion, death, and imprisonment (Kinneer, 1999). Apartheid policies in South Africa, for instance, saw the destruction of the African family cohesion, sparking the destructive influences of urbanization and industrialization. This resulted in a high number of single-parent families arising from pregnancy outside marriage and divorce (Bigombe and Khadiagala, 2003). In Kenya, the Kenya National Health Survey - KNHS (2014) revealed that 18% of women between 15 and 19 had begun childbearing. A total of 26% of women within the 20-24 age brackets who participated in the survey had become mothers before turning 18 years. All these single-mothers were turning to the Church for an opportunity to celebrate what God had done to them, optimistic of the future He had promised them!

Wachege (2003), advocates for an objective Christianity (as Jesus was), outward-looking and concerned with the life of the human person as a whole. In doing so,

Christians should not panic because of the prevailing contextual challenges. Such panic would drown them, numbing them in their attempt to give 'non-Christian fellows some special help' they are capable of. God is always in action even throughout the entire 20th century in the social revolutions of exploited peoples. God had stood with such people in their quest for a share in the decision-making processes of their societies, among many other things. The current study about the response of the Church towards single-parents would be a pointer to God's action in having single-mothers attain acceptance even in the 21st Century Church.

The aforementioned scholars presented an overview of single-parenthood and how it is perceived in the Church today. The doctrine of the Catholic Church which is echoed in the papal encyclical (2006) strongly advocates for inclusivity. All faithful would be welcome and accepted in whatever their state on grounds of repentance and willingness to transform. Similar sentiments are echoed in the doctrine, constitutions and traditions of the Anglican and Presbyterian churches. This study focused on the gap between the doctrine and social teaching of the church and the practical application and implementation of the church doctrine on inclusiveness. Whereas the church doctrine advocates that everyone should be welcome and made to feel at home, the reality is different, with obvious segregation between two-parents and single-parent families. This study evaluated the social teaching of the church on inclusiveness and further examined challenges in its implementation. The related literature reviewed was classified under sub-themes, guided by the study objectives.

2.2. Causes of Single-parenthood and Their Socio-Religious Implications.

The debate revolving around the phenomenon of single-parenthood has significantly featured in literature with a sociological and economic perspective in the past

decades. Researchers and development agencies such as (UNICEF 1999) have taken a keen interest in the issue. However, a good proportion of the wider population hardly appreciates the various causes of single-parenthood; the blame often goes to single-parents for most social evils. Yet studies have shown that women become single-mothers out of divorce or separation, unwanted early pregnancies, poverty, death of a spouse, lack of marriageable partners, and rape. Other studies have also shown that women become single-mothers because of labour migration, out of choice, and cultural drawbacks such as the pressure to become a mother before one becomes too old or the pressure from parents who desire to become grandparents.

Divorce is possibly the most maligned cause of single-parenthood among Christians. Yet, the inequality of women taught by many conservative Christian organizations provides a rationale for the abuse of women; this is one of the leading causes of family breakup and violence in most parts of the world (Parker, 2000). Conservative Christians also fail to recognize that the current Western theory which seeks to establish marriage on a basis of romantic love and free choice is a product of Christian civilization; it is premised on the fact that marriage depends on the accident of 'falling in love' and those who are 'crossed in love' or do not love are not required to marry. This individualistic position is only logically defensible if at the same time it is recognized that to fall out of love must end the marriage (Parker, 2000:197-211). Furthermore, the spread of marriage choice makes both boys and girls more selective; the criteria for love relationship may differ a lot from that for a suitable wife; young mothers themselves may not necessarily be happy with the thought of marrying their lovers (Radeny, 2003).

In Kenya, the family has since time immemorial been considered as the basic social unit of a clan and society. In the past, a wide network of relatives made the family stable by participating in the raising of children (Suda, 2002). The author points out that procreation was the main goal of marriage; women took both the responsibility of bearing children and that of rearing them in order to extend the family kin. Henceforth, in some African communities, a marriage was sealed only upon the birth of the first child. In case of infertility, a marriage could even be nullified.

However, it is unclear whether we would regard invalidation of a marriage in an African set-up as a form of rejection or divorce. What is clear is that the Biblical teachings against divorce are found in Malachi 2:15-16 in the Old Testament where God affirms his hatred for divorce and in Matthew chapters 5 and 19 where Jesus reaffirms the Old Testament on God's high view of marriage and hatred of divorce. Swidler further gives a detailed history of the Jewish culture which permitted a male to discard his unwanted wife, by merely giving her a writ of divorce, to allow for the marrying of another wife. The practice, though rare, was quite discriminatory because it did not allow women to divorce their husbands. Swidler (1997:75) further affirms, "A woman is divorced irrespective of her will, man divorces of his own accord."

Divorce and separation are an issue of concern in the Church today due to their alarming prevalence. Connors (1999) observes that from the late 1950s to the present times, divorce rates in USA have changed the demographics of the population. He argues that the introduction of the "pill" and the rise of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s witnessed a corresponding increase in single-parents with more sexual promiscuity (Connors, 1999:12). There are also separated single adults who are legally married but perhaps emotionally divorced. Connors

(1999) estimates that out of the approximately twelve million single-parents in USA, about 20% are single-parents due to separation, with 18.5% of them being women; the widowed single adult comprises over five times as many women as men.

Elsewhere, a study by Nkyi (2013), building on earlier studies, namely, Gage and Njogu (1994), shows that Ghana witnessed a rise in divorce rates from about 40% in the 1970s to over 60% by the late 1980s among ever-married women aged 40-49. She also cites other researchers who have linked higher levels of divorce in sub-Saharan Africa to premarital childbearing, young marriage age, increased levels of women's autonomy and greater participation in the labour market because of modernization and urbanization.

Research also shows that early pregnancy is a cause of single-motherhood in many cultures worldwide. Young girls often anticipate a long-term relationship when they become sexually active. Cox (1967:42) notes,

Since girls feel they must be swept into the sexual experience by something 'bigger than both of us', they often fail to take the precautions against pregnancy they might otherwise. Somehow, it doesn't seem romantic to go out with a boy, having prepared in advance to be swept off one's feet. Consequently, many instances of intercourse are not 'planned' but occur more or less spontaneously at the end of an evening of progressively heavier necking.

This could possibly explain why bonds between unmarried, pregnant, adolescent women and their sexual partners worldwide are typically weak. Such relationships tend to break up at the onset of a stressful situation, for instance, pregnancy, often ending in termination (UNICEF, 1999). The UNICEF 1999 Report adds that young men in all societies tend to dissociate from the relationship on learning that the girlfriend is pregnant; marriages resulting from unplanned pregnancies are often unstable; they are more likely to end up in marital dissolution. The same report found

that 30-50% of first marriages in developed countries and 25% of first marriages in developing countries are dissolved by the time women are 40-49 years old, many of them ending up in either divorce or separation.

In addition, the Nairobi-based Centre for the Study of Adolescence estimates that up to 13,000 Kenyan girls drop out of school every year as a result of pregnancy. These young girls are often treated as outcasts by their families. Many migrate to the cities where they face unemployment, health risks, and malnutrition; they end up not marrying hence remain as single-mothers (Mbugua, 1995:50). Teenage pregnancy is thus not necessarily a social problem because the mothers are unmarried, but because they are young and inexperienced in the ways of the world; they lack the skills necessary to get a job to support their children (Young, 2004).

Gichinga (1996) strongly argues that the stigma associated with single-motherhood is reducing; the social stigma previously associated with pre-marital sexuality and out-of-wedlock births has weakened. This has witnessed increasing pre-marital births in Kenya and other places where young girls face similar circumstances. In addition, research also shows that young girls who do poorly at school derive a lot of satisfaction from early childbearing. Barber (2005) upholds that such women have less to lose, socially or economically, from early childbearing. He adds that having a child gives them a sense of importance and accomplishment that they cannot get from academic pursuits (Barber, 2005; Musick, 1993).

Poverty has also been linked with single-parenthood among the wage-labour societies, (Lenero-Otero, 1977). Early marriage means the early realization of the economic value of a daughter. Parents who are struggling to raise many children may choose to marry off their adolescent daughters earlier than they would have, in different

circumstances (Bigombe and Khadiagala, 2003). In addition, Lenero-Otero (1977) notes that poor economic conditions create in men, economically “inadequate” feelings. Men who face such circumstances tend to shy away from taking wives to start a family. Consequently, young women who face a scarcity of marriageable men are more likely to begin their reproductive careers early in life and raise children with the minimal paternal investment if men cannot be relied upon to provide long-term parental care. Poor women are also more likely to raise children alone because they encounter fewer men in their social circles who are economically qualified to be marriage partners. Researchers have also observed that while many teens having high career aspirations may procure an abortion when they find themselves pregnant, young women with low career aspirations are more inclined to invest their time and energy in raising a child (Barber, 2005; Pittman and Govan, 1986).

Musick (1993) observes that a large number of sexually active single young women have been opportunistically exploited by young men who favor achieving sexual gratification without providing any long-term emotional commitment, or paternal investment in the event of pregnancy. She adds that when poverty makes it difficult for men to support their children, they seek sexual gratification in short-term relationships. Such relationships emphasize mating effort rather than paternal investment. Interestingly, many young women living in an economically depressed environment characterized by an unusually difficult marriage market for women do not view single-motherhood as a mistake. Many young women in such circumstances look forward to becoming pregnant as a way of obtaining someone to love. Furthermore, the birth of a first baby also “constitute a rite of passage that provides entry to the world of adults and the society of other young mothers” (Musick, 1993).

Other studies have also shown that being children of a single mother may increase their risk of becoming, in turn, a single-parent. Olumu and Chege (2001) established that the marital status of a youth's parents might impact the rates of pregnancies as well as abortions among adolescent girls. Furthermore, the weakening of family ties also weakens local communities and society in general. This translates into insecurity, violence, and erosion of social capitals made of trust and collaborative relationships. Radeny (2003) also found out that in most African societies, girls born of single-mothers found it difficult to marry because there was a stereotyped belief that they could not make good wives. The author explores the position of young women in Mali, whenever a girl was proposed to be a wife. The author notes that clan elders would then inquire how her mother had behaved throughout her married life; the elders would even delve into the family roots before the girl could be asked for a hand in marriage (Radeny, 2003:31). Faced with such circumstances, girls born by single-mothers often opted to become single-mothers themselves due to the confidence they gained by seeing their mothers manage to raise families single-handedly without male spouses.

Many people have also become single-parents due to the great need for labour migration of one of the two parents (Lenero-Otero, 1977). The author adds that even when the parents decide to migrate in search of some income, they may not get jobs at the same place. Such migrations are therefore viewed as very important factors in the emergence of temporary single-parent families. Chant (1998) adds another dimension to this kind of single-family household. The author states that female-headed households that owe their origins to male migration are quite different from female-headed households that have occurred through widowhood, conjugal separation or non-marriage. The author observes that although male out-migration may enhance the

economic situation of a household, it can also lead to greater impoverishment, especially where remittances are small and inconsistent. Chant (1998) advances that the benefits of male migration for many mothers and children are illusory. This is because many men who initially leave home to earn wages for the family may loosen their loyalty to the family and constitute new families in the places where they migrate to, without formally breaking the ties with their first families. Such men who start other families in the urban areas often become visiting husbands to their legal wives in the rural areas, a phenomenon that has promoted family break-ups (Makhubele, 2008).

Migrant labour has also added another sophisticated dimension to the concept of separation and marriage. Makhubele (2008) studied young women in Lesotho, showing that the migration of men to South Africa for low-skilled mining jobs had changed the educational profile in favor of females left behind to the extent that women were no longer willing to get married to men in distant employment places.

Makhubele (2008) also underlines that 32% of women in the country believed that women's superior education was responsible for the incessant marriage break-ups. Some 66% agreed that education among women had created a new family pattern of cohabitation. Here, women preferred to live with men who were not their husbands. He adds that while the durability of marriages in traditional structures was strengthened by the control maintained by kinship ties, new migration patterns increased prospects of divorces, separation and the opportunity for multiple partners. These observations have informed the present research to carry out a survey in Kenya to show that running an independent household among women is likely to encourage the emergence of female-headed families, which are a part of one-parent families.

The inequalities of modern marriage and the strength of feminism have also contributed to single-motherhood across the globe. Granted, modernization and the quest for careers by women go hand in hand with Christianity. The problem for women who choose careers over marriage and children is that they often, though not always, never find the balance of working and having a family. Many women, unfortunately, find difficulties marrying after they have put their love lives on hold for their education and career. Some women can part with the idea of having a husband; however, others cannot bear the thought that they may not be mothers (Adamczyk, 2010). And with better education and more job opportunities available, women are concentrating on their careers rather than on a family (Connors, 1999:14). Further, high divorce rates, along with the extended longevity of many senior adults, and increased "sexual freedom" with the introduction of various birth control methods has discouraged people from entering some marriage commitment and encouraged them to live together outside of marriage (Connors, 1999:14).

Similarly, the increased social acceptance of cohabitation before or instead of a legal marriage commitment has also contributed to single-motherhood globally. Barber (2005), Pittman and Govan (1986) and Musick (1993) further assert that in almost half of all marriages in the US, people have lived together with someone outside of marriage; only about 60% of those cohabit with the intention of marrying at some point. Many researchers on single-parenthood are of the opinion that the increase in singleness in America is due to what has been defined as "relationship burnout". Having gone through a number of relationship breakups, many women begin to mistrust the idea of a permanent relationship as their capacity to develop healthy and mature relationships slows down (Connors, 1999:15-6).

Other researchers claim that the most pressing social problem today is that of the male deficit (Dalrock 2013). A wide body of knowledge indicates that the decision to become a single mother is a rational choice for women who want children but do not need the economic security that marriage has traditionally provided (Pollitt, 2004). Social researchers now concur that society should recognize the legitimacy of this choice rather than blame single-mothers for social breakdown. Pollitt (2004) questions the rationale of making the sexes act as if they need each other to survive whereas they do not. He adds that the collapse of the traditional middle-class marriage bargain has left both sexes bewildered. It is a major cause of the much-discussed open hostility between men and women. He blames the proponents of family-values for refusing to grasp that all the sexes need each other for love, yet love is hard to find.

It is also clear that many men fear marrying highly educated or successful business women for fear of domination (Mbugua, 1995:69) yet the society keeps on blaming single women for teaching other women to reject men. Adamezyk (2010) strongly argues in an attempt to comfort women who initially chose their career then decided that they wanted children to know that they are not alone. In his study, Adamezyk (2010:28) found that, “Eighteen percent of women aged forty to forty-four had never had a child” and “women over forty who say they would have liked to have children did not reflect on their past actions or think of new ways of becoming mothers.” He concludes that for women who choose this path, all sacrifices are worth it.

In the foregoing literature, the authors discuss the causes of the single-parenthood some of which are by default and others by choice. However, the authors do not discuss how the causes of one’s single-parenthood status would influence or determine how a single-parent is perceived by his or her fellow Christians. The

present study evaluated the socio-religious implications of the causes of single-parenthood thereby filling that knowledge gap.

2.3. Single-parenthood in the Church Today

The literature on the causative factors of single-parenthood has established that the number of single-mothers in the world is on the rise, meaning that the Church has a big segment of the family that it could not be ministering to. The data from USA, for instance, shows that the population of non-married single adults has been rapidly approaching the number of married adults, with 85% of the single-parents being women. However, 80% of churches report that they have no targeted ministry for single adults (Connors, 1999). Current estimates in Kenya suggest that one in every ten female youth is dropping out of school after becoming a mother KNHS (2014:48). According to the findings of a study by the NCKK (2000), the major category of single-parents is the never-married. Single-mothers who have never married constitute the biggest age; about 50% of them had dropped out of school. These statistics show that there is a ready and responsive mission field that the Church can present the gospel to and fulfill the Great Commission (cf. Matthew, 28:18-20).

In addition, Christian families in Africa are in crisis regarding how to face change. Scholars suggest that Christian mission activities, colonialism, westernization, urbanization and other contemporary factors have destabilized African families and communities almost to destruction. Kyomo and Selvan (2004) wonder whether African families will succumb to modernity or they will re-emerge with stronger alternative family structures. They argue that every crisis presents a challenge as well as an opportunity. The challenge emerges because the old models are no longer

feasible in the changing social environment. It is an opportunity because something better may eventually emerge.

Furthermore, there is considerable debate in the Church. On one hand is the wonder on whether to continue insisting that women and men adapt to the churches as they are today; on the other hand, the question is whether instead we should adapt our churches to the lives of the people (Pollitt, 2004). This is particularly pertinent in this epoch whereby the Church wants to attract the resource that comprises single-parents, yet it is not ready to teach the congregations and the wider society that it is no longer possible for everyone to marry. Some scholars have suggested that such a drawback arises due to some disconnection between the preacher and his congregation. Dalrock (2012) wonders lucidly how a pastor or church leader who got married in the early-to-mid-20s can understand the complexities of singleness or how to honor the image of God in single people. Churches world over are family focused and rightly so. It makes many single-mothers wonder whether or not they are valuable to God and to the Church the same way married people are.

Most women who choose the path of single-motherhood are independent and strong-willed enough to transcend antiquated traditions, including the conservative social views that a woman needs a man to raise a child (Adamczyk, 2010). Hence, the church is called upon to give a proper interpretation of the family, which accommodates 'worldly' elements so that it can remain relevant and address this expanding group. Instead of preaching to singles that the ideal life for them is to get married and stay married, the Church should provide single-mothers with the opportunity to celebrate what God has done to them and look forward to the hope that

He has promised them. After all, motherhood is a gift and should be embraced by all able-bodied women who want a child to love and to raise (Adamczyk, 2010).

However, Connors (1999) uses what he calls "law-of-first mention" to put forward a case on the many truths that God teaches about single-parenting. He observes that Hagar is first mentioned in Genesis as the first single mother and Ismael as the first child of a single mother. Right from Genesis, is God's great concern and involvement in the lives of the very first single-parent, Hagar, and the very first child of a single-parent home, Ishmael. Before Hagar was forced to leave the homestead of Abraham, she had come to the realization that she would never displace Sarah and that she would always be a slave, a means of bearing children for Abraham and no more (Connors, 1999:24). The Scriptures tell us that as Hagar finds herself alone and pregnant, the Angel of the Lord "found her". Again, at their most desperate point, the Scriptures also tell us that God Himself heard the cries of Hagar and promised to care for her and the child (Genesis 21:17). Connors adds that today, the single-parents still face similar needs that the first single-parent and child faced because the circumstances have not changed over the millennium. Hence, if God has concern for single-parents and their children, there is an increased need, therefore, for the Church to reach out to this group with the good news that God loves them (Connors, 1999:18).

Connors (1999) further advances his argument about God's concern for the single-family by citing two incidents in the New Testament (John 4) where Jesus forgave the woman at the well of her sins and showed her the way of salvation and the raising from death the son of the woman at Nain – who was her only source of support. He adds that the Church should minister to the single-parent and their children because

God has clarified in Psalm 68:5 that He is, ‘A father to the fatherless and a judge (defender) of the widows.’ He further argues that divorce and separation are the second and third most difficult personal and emotional experiences that a human being can experience, and thus, the Church should respond to these critical issues of life (Connors, 1999:116-7). Considering that the Church is guided by scripture and doctrine, she ought to be more welcoming to single-mothers who wish to belong to the body of Christ.

2.4. Attitudes towards Christian Single-parents

Although there are noticeable changes on how the wider society views single-parents, all unmarried people in the church still feel left out in many instances. This feeling arises from how the Church teaches about the family and the institution of marriage. The three contesting Christian positions about family issues, namely, the Patriarchal, the Complementarian and the Egalitarian all regard a family unit as comprising a husband, a wife, and their offspring. They also emphasize that the family is not a human designed institution. Rather, it was created by God and man has only been accorded the responsibility of stewarding it. The biblical view holds that the husband and wife are responsible for holding it together, the current attitude of our culture notwithstanding (Malachi 2:16). In this respect, “the family is the foundation of society through which various generations come together and help one another to grow wiser and to harmonize personal rights with other requirements of social life,” (O’Brien and Shannon, 2000:38). Again, the words of Genesis 2:24 that a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh recur

throughout the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Further, Jesus spoke of this indissoluble union between a man and a woman (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7), Paul echoing the same sentiments to the Ephesians (Ephesians 5:31-33).

However, the positions of these three viewpoints on matters of the family do not transcend that point. While patriarchy affirms that God manifested Himself as human, by implication, there is only the father in heaven. Consequently, the man should have all authority over the woman in religious and familial matters. Complementarianism affirms that men and women are equal in the image of God, but maintain complementary differences in role and function. As such, men are expected to lovingly lead their wives and family. Women are to intelligently submit to the leadership of their husbands. In the Church, both men and women are to share equally the blessings of salvation, though the teaching and governing roles are to be restricted to men.

Egalitarianism is more liberal of the three positions, holding that all believers must exercise their God-given gifts with equal authority and equal responsibility in the church, home, and world. This equality is premised on the realization that we are all created in God's image. As his redeemed people, we have been adopted as sons of God with all the rights, freedom, and privileges that come with being a son of God. Egalitarians point to Romans 8:29 to state that Jesus is a savior and a role model for both women and men. All Christians' ultimate goal is to conform to his image regardless of gender. Egalitarians also believe that we are all part of the New Creation with its values (2 Corinthians 5:16-17); each person has been gifted by the Holy Spirit, who gives ministry gifts and abilities without apparent regard for gender (Acts 2:17-18). Egalitarians also argue that it is pointless to place restrictions

or disqualifications on women or grant license and privileges to men based on gender alone.

Before we expound on the attitudes of the Christians and the response of the Church towards single-parenthood, there is need to explore various definitions of a family. The *International Encyclopedia* (1968: vol. 5) gives an American definition of the family which includes the elements of a couple co-residing with their children and living apart from their kin. This definition presupposes that a family exists within the framework of some kind of union. In contrast, Goode (2000:9) defines the family as:

At least two adult persons of the opposite sex residing together who engage in any kind of economic and or social exchanges. They share many things in common such as food, sex, residence. The adults have parental relations with their children as their children have filial relations with them, the parents have some authority over their children and both share with one another while also assuming some obligations for protection, cooperation and nurturing. There are sibling relations among the children themselves with a range of obligations to share, protect and help one another.

Goode notes that this list may not be exhaustive but includes most relationships that qualify a family as a social unit. William Tucker (1985) disagrees with those who advocate for other forms of the family by arguing that deviation from a nuclear family is a form of evolutionary retrogression. Accordingly, the nuclear family was neither invented in Europe in the Eighteenth Century nor in Ancient Egypt of the Eighteenth Century B.C. He notes that the first diminutive human-like creatures had already formed the nuclear family when they walked on earth some 3.5 million years back.

The position of what constitutes a family from an African perspective is well articulated by Mbiti (1969), observing that myths about the beginning of human life started with husband and wife and must also continue the same way. African Religion maintains that marriage is the meeting point of the three layers of human life: the

departed, the living and those to be born. According to this view, the departed are the roots on which the living stand, while the living constitute the link between death and life; those to be born are the buds in the loins of the living. Finally, marriage makes it possible for them to germinate and sprout. Hence, the African who deliberately refuses to get married is cutting off the vital link between death and life and consequently destroying the buds which would otherwise sprout and grow on the human tree (Mbiti, 1969).

However, these definitions and observations of the family have tended to focus on marriage as a crucial basis for its identity. The justification for this approach has mainly relied on the supposedly complementary roles of the spouses. The consequences of this approach have been an over-concentration on what ought to be the family and what it is in real practical life situations. However, this study recognizes this shortcoming and seeks to analyze the single-parent families as part of the institution of the family that has hitherto been neglected as a result of the dominance of the normative theoretical orientation. The view is that two-parent families conform to the social norm and that one-parent families deviate from the same.

This study concurs with the views of Kayongo-Male (1991:12) who accepts the term family as defined above, but also acknowledges that single-parent families also exist.

She defines such a family as:

A family with only one parent and one or more children; the children may be the natural children of the parent or fostered or adopted in some way. The parent may be widowed or unmarried. Males who have children out of wedlock and are not living with the mother of the children marry a woman who will agree to take care of these children or take the children to their parents or brothers who will raise the children.

Wood (2001:1-2) also observes and asserts that attitudes towards marriage are changing:

In the past, everything in society has been styled to meet the needs of the family. The family-oriented approach was sufficient until recently but the growing number of single-parents in our midst necessitates our reassessment of terminology and programming in the church and society.

He further observes that in our family-oriented society, it is assumed that anyone who is not married is incomplete, undeveloped and immature or at worst, a failure because he or she is not capable of family life. This study examines the attitudes of the Church towards single-parents and role of the Church in counseling such girls to adjust to motherhood.

Wood (2001) uses the term single adults to describe persons who are single by choice, the never married, single without choice, and the widowed. They are single because of the choice of one or both partners, the divorced, and those who are in the process of becoming single, the separated. This study establishes the basis for churches to develop a broader concept of the family, a supportive attitude towards single-parent families, with a more welcoming inclusive approach rather than alienation.

Perhaps, the attitudes towards single-parents by the Church and the wider society are best illustrated by Wachege (2003:54). The author points out that single-parents are often associated with marital instability, pre-marital sex, illegitimacy, prostitution and other crimes. Such an attitude could be rooted in the indigenous African cultures which considered it honorable for every woman to get married. This could possibly explain why single-parents in Kenya are unfairly perceived as people of dubious moral character (Worth and Tufnell, (2000). But even without the social suspicion that comes with the package, single-parenting is a difficult task. Wachege (2003) further expresses the opinion that single-parents need more sympathy and

understanding from society than condemnation because every single-parent, either by being separated, divorced, widowed, or never married has passed through a crisis to get where they are. She argues that for the unmarried girl who becomes pregnant, the problem remains twofold: not only is she faced with the transition to a changed status but in addition, her new role of motherhood is an unexpected and may be an unwanted one. Worth and Tufnell (1999) fall back on real-life experiences to explore the difficulties encountered by single-parents and suggest ways of finding fulfillment.

Their study tackles the anger, bitterness, guilt, and self-pity that may ensue and how young single-mothers can deal with them. After one's partner leaves or dies, one may be gripped with fear of responsibility and of the future. A person who has been abandoned tends to be extremely wary of the 'untrustworthy' opposite sex. They may resort to anti-social behaviour such isolation or sexual promiscuity, on the mistaken belief that this will boost their poor self-esteem. A close relationship with other people, the authors' advice, can bring wholeness to the lives of single-parents. However, it takes a great deal of courage for one to want to be around other people after having been let down. The fear of rejection may stifle efforts to reach out.

Unfortunately, the way the church congregants perceive single adults is no different from the views of the wider society. The church congregation is mostly composed of two-parent family units; the church programmes are styled to meet their needs (Wood, 2001:1-3). Makhubele (2008) found out that 95 of the congregants in the Full Gospel Church of God in Limpopo complained that the attitude of the church towards single-mothers was traditional, biased and non-accommodating. Single-mothers themselves lamented that the only time they heard single-mothers mentioned was only when they had to account for some unfounded nasty accusations.

Furthermore, it is common to hear a preacher give a sermon of how the Lord forgives all sins (Isaiah 1:15). But the preacher still keeps the single mother from participating in the activities of the church. This prompts him before the end of the sermon to turn to the single mother with a lecture on how she is sinful. It is true that a single woman may have committed a sin when she engaged in sex that led to her pregnancy, but that does not in any way mean that she is committed to sin. Again, Christian leaders have been heard teaching that married people are better candidates for holiness than single people. Mohler (2013:68) cites a priest who remarked about making it to heaven: “In heaven, is the crucible of our saint-making going to have been through our jobs? I don’t think so. The Scripture makes clear that it will be done largely through our marriages.” Mohler admits that he understands such people well because research shows that humans intuitively trust people who share their life experiences, but there is no scriptural proof that marriage is the primary route to holiness.

Ajandi (2011) strongly feels that this tendency has been reinforced by the fact that women and mothers have been defined by their relationship to a partner, or the lack thereof, and never as a person or family unit in their own right. She adds that even the category of single-motherhood needs to be challenged since its very definition suggests single mother as *other*, while the discourse of motherhood alone reinforces the dominant nuclear family norms. However, there can be a no worse form of discrimination which single-mothers could possibly face. Adamczyk (2010:65) further asserts, “Even the term single mother is pejorative since we seldom speak of a married mother”. Makhubele (2008) similarly contends that sensitivity to single-mothers is a problem that should be taken seriously because many single-mothers report that they have stopped attending church due to ridicule from leaders. He urges that married people should be proud for achieving marriage and maintaining it.

However, they should not use marriage as a license to sneer at those who do not have husbands.

Sally-Rush (2012:34) thinks that we should be careful when examining representations of single-mothers and others as victims in order to identify how their ‘victimhood’ is being constructed by the person ascribing them that label. In a study of how the evangelical church in the UK is responding to the needs of the single mother, Sally-Rush (2012:56) quotes a small group pastor. Accordingly, the pastor observed that statements such as, “I go away and think, there is the widow, there is the divorcee, there is the male, there is also what might decide to term as the stereotypical which is the unmarried girl that’s just gone and got pregnant,” are not uncommon. Thus, in holding on to such stereotypes, the congregations are able to distance themselves from single-parents, viewing them as the “other”.

Such attitudes have made single-mothers also develop a fear of attending functions that require the presence of a partner, and if they do, they cry all the way home. They also fear attending weddings because it reminds them of their failed marriages (Makhubele, 2008). Celebrating marriage brings a renewed stigmatization. It makes them scapegoats for social ills of which they are often the most serious victims (Young, 2004). The emerging view is that the average person today (in and out of the church) has very little understanding of the life of the single mother and is lead to believe that the single mother is responsible for the dysfunctional society. Focusing on the American society, Christena (2013) observes that a quick search at Amazon.com reveals that for everyone Christian book on singleness, there are 298 Christian books on marriage. Hence, little knowledge about single-motherhood has made the society accuse a divorced woman as being irresponsible, or slutty or stupid

or selfish, or a horrible wife. Dalrock (2012) further observes that a single mother has also been told not to expect some man to pick up the pieces of her bad choices. The author adds that such talk makes a single mother ashamed of even wanting to remarry for it is automatically assumed that all single-mothers made some terrible choices. He concludes his case by asking the question: Who said that single-mothers are not allowed to make mistakes?

Christians also tend to conclude that single-mothers are basically unhappy, partly undependable and independent. Connors (1999) argues that Christians tend to believe that single-mothers are intellectually stimulating and sexually available; a 'fact' that makes married women not to associate with single-mothers who are believed to be a potential danger to their marriages and the image of the church. Studies by Connors (1999) and Mbugua (1995) reveal that local churches are suspicious of single-mothers because members of the clergy and congregants think that single-mothers cannot be trusted. The majority of married women respondents in Connors study reported that most men take advantage of single-mothers' vulnerability and trick them to adultery. In addition, sixty of the pastors who participated in the study of single-mothers at the Full Gospel Church in Limpopo regarded single-mothers as people with questionable morals. They suggested that there was a high number of pastors involved in indecent relationships with single-mothers, and family breakages was a confirmation to this perception (Makhubele, 2008).

Furthermore, studies have shown that the person entering into single-parenting often experiences rejection, guilt, unworthiness, and despair. Stigma rests on those who have children out of wedlock. Children are stigmatized from birth as the pathological bastards of their mother's presence and their father's absence (Sklar, 2004). African

women who have had children out of wedlock have suffered most because majority cultures here are hostile to women having children without a husband. Such women are seen as a bad example and parents will not allow their daughters to relate with such women. Among the poor single-mothers, the feeling of rejection and unworthiness sometimes makes them keep having babies hoping that the fathers of these children will marry them.

However, journalists and scholars have been accused of making mistakes by not breaking down mother's age, occupation, and other demographic characteristics when citing statistics about the rising rates of out-of-wedlock birth. Although the majority of these births continue to be too young mothers, Young (2004) blames those experts who condemn single-mothers wholesale without considering that a rising proportion of these out-of-wedlock births are to midlife women with steady jobs who choose to have children. Women persist in such choices despite the fact that they are stigmatized and sometimes punished for them (Young, 2004). Connors argues that if this feeling is allowed to fester among poor single-mothers, it can become angry with a desire for revenge. He advises single-mothers that God's act of comforting Hagar demonstrated that He is able to head off the self-destructive cancer of the soul and spirit which is anger and the desire for revenge.

Single-parents are also faced with a spiritual problem. Many of them feel that they are away from God, and away from Christians. Mukhubele (2008:45) states that single-mothers' families have been rendered vulnerable and the Church has found it difficult to accept them as families because they identify them with sin and sinful behaviour. Mbugua (1995:43) accuses married women in the church for fostering an atmosphere that makes single-mothers feel that they are greater sinners who cannot

simply be accepted in the church. This tendency, he adds, has made some single-mothers (especially those who have never married) think that God is quite far from them because the church does not accept them in the same manner as widows and widowers, and yet they neither can fit among the youth nor among the 'standard' parents. Single-mothers, therefore, feel out of place in church and society.

Single-mothers also face a lot of resistance from married mothers on matters pertaining to joining the available fellowship groups within their churches. Mbugua (1995) quoted one church minister who participated in his study. The minister intimated that single-mothers who successfully went through the PCEA discipline were free to join all available groups. He, however regretted that married women were a problem to the suffering women. Similarly, Makhubele (2008) established that 95% of the single-mothers admitted that they were discriminated and marginalized. Some single-mothers attributed the discrimination and marginalization to fear. An overwhelming 90% of the single-mothers in this study indicated that marginalization and discrimination contributed to their loneliness.

This study also established that approximately 95% of pastors' wives did not trust single-mothers. However, one pastor admitted that the stereotype that single-mothers were immoral had contributed to the slow growth of the Full Gospel Church in Limpopo. Some 70% single-mothers in the study lamented that they expected a lot of support from pastors' wives but they were dismayed that the latter were jealous and prevented the pastors from counseling them. The study also established that pastors also experienced difficulties in counseling single-mothers because members of the public and some congregants accused them of falling in love with their clients. In fact, the church minister in Mbugua's study admitted that he did not associate with single-

mothers because he viewed them as a threat to his ministry (Mbugua, 1995:43). Furthermore, some single-mothers felt that they were unwanted by the church and contemplated leaving their preferred churches. Mbugua (1995:37) describes one woman who opted to abandon the church because her church elder, parents and other church elders objected to her children being baptized in the PCEA unless she reconciled with her abusive husband.

Young (2004) attributes such hostilities towards single-mothers to the group of social scientists, politicians, and clergymen who have already concluded that children can only be successfully raised in traditional two-parent families. According to Young (2004), this clique blames single-mothers both, divorced and never married, for a variety of social problems that are beyond their control. Sally-Rush (2012:76) narrates a case of one single mother who had been divorced some years back and was confronted with such remarks as, ‘Stupid woman, why did you get yourself in that state?’ but was accorded heroic status after her children had grown in the church and fully accepted without any difficulty. Young (2004) suggests that since there is little conclusive evidence that single-parent families are harmful, society should stop stigmatizing families headed by single-mothers and give them the necessary support.

2.5. The Church’s Response towards Christian Single-parents

In the previous section, we have seen that members of the clergy who harbor traditional views think that single women who supposedly embrace secular lifestyle are victims of their own actions. Such clergy may even be inimical to ministering among the divorced, sexually unhappy, the pregnant single women, the career-committed wife and other persons whose situations and perspectives may have been influenced by women’s critique of the established social order (Ajandi, 2011).

However, women church members comprise many segments - those in the twenties and thirties, the divorced, the widowed, and the separated - and they all have different needs. Much as the Bible has about friendships and dating, marriage and sexuality, the church has failed to address these issues from a single adult perspective. In most cases, churches have failed to convey this message either from the pulpit or through its members (Sweet, 1988). As such, single women feel unwelcome by the Church because they are never addressed in their status. Many scholars have suggested that the Church needs to re-evaluate her relationship with singles, especially in light of the increasing numbers of unmarried adults. These scholars contend that the Church over-emphasizes on marriage as a solution for all (as exemplified by events such as Mothers' Day when the preacher calls husbands to walk at the dias to pray for their wives). Biblical singleness is also a solution; the Church is therefore obliged to preach and teach both. Overall, single-mothers feel that the clergy has let them down for the failure to meaningfully engage or integrate in the preaching, issues that affect them (Makhubele, 2008:103).

Some single women attending the church today are also uncomfortable with church teachings that dwell on the preservation of virginity, two-parent family, and no-divorce as the ideal for Christian living. Majority of the people who consider themselves Christians face too many challenges in their own lives to afford this kind of "unrealistic" living. Cox (2000) thinks that since young girls will have pre-marital sex no matter how we restrain them, teaching about virginity is simply to de-romanticize sex. The author adds that a good practice would be to urge young people who are going to have pre-marital sex to accept the full responsibility for their behaviour and to take the necessary steps to avoid pregnancies. Whereas this may be a

bitter pill to swallow for a church minister, it is nevertheless a sure way of tackling early pregnancies among young girls (Cox, 2000).

Another family issue that features prominently in the church concerns divorce. Most Christian preachers and commentators are very keen on pointing out how God detests divorce no matter the causes as stated in Malachi 2:16 and how Jesus treats it in Matthew 19. The clergy rarely points out how God is just, as clear in his love for the divorced as seen in His dealing with Hagar and Jesus handling of the woman at the well as told in John 4. Tkach (34) maintains that Jesus upheld the dignity of women by speaking against divorce, as it particularly injured women among the ancient Jews. Moreover, although Jesus taught that in God's plan marriage is meant for life, He did not exclude the fact that every marriage will at times be more of an ordeal than a love affair. The degree of commitment to God's principles and the confrontation of each partner's problems in these difficult times is what ultimately builds or destroys a marriage (Koons and Anthony 1991:133). Jesus' answer to the Pharisees (Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:1-12) and other instances illustrates that Jesus experienced the risks, dilemmas and decisions of a real human being. He lived and grew up in a particular culture with its political and religious situation. His mind was shaped by the tradition he inherited, and his language communicated in the forms that were appropriate and available in that time and place (Williams 2008:141).

It is a paradox that though the Church has not fully received the single mother in the institution as commended by Jesus, Christians typically regard Jesus of Nazareth as the fullest revelation of divine love. Unless he so loved, it is unbelievable that he would be so remembered. Nygren (2008) qualifies this principle when he observes that God's love would not be spontaneous but would instead be evoked by its object if

it were restricted to the righteous. But just by the fact that the love seeks *all* sinners, who do not deserve it, it manifests most clearly its spontaneous and unmotivated nature.

God's spontaneous and unmotivated love is clearly illustrated by Jesus' personal revelation to the woman at the well (John 4) that he was the Messiah. Jesus treated women with dignity and respect, elevating them in a world where they were often mistreated. On this occasion, it did not matter to Jesus that the woman was Samaritan and was on her sixth relation. Tkach (2005:37) quotes Schreiner that Jesus did not perceive women, "primarily in terms of their sex, age or marital status; he seems to have considered them in terms of their relation (or lack of one) to God." Christians emphasize that the Samaritans came to believe in Jesus because of the testimony of the woman at the well but the Patriarchal and Complementarians in their sermons hardly mention that Jesus has some exceptions to divorce and remarriage.

The narrative on Martha, Mary (of Bethany) and their brother Lazarus (Luke 10:38) is another instance where Jesus is open to single women. Many Christian writers have insinuated that since Martha owned a home, she may have been a widow. The point that Jesus made regarding the rights of women to know, however, concerned her sister Mary who, "sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said" (verse 39) while Martha was busy preparing the meal. The position of the rabbis at the time was that women should never be taught the Torah hence, Mary was shirking a typically female role in order to do something that was normally restricted to males. However, Jesus did not, "put her in her place," but rather, he said that she had chosen the right place at the time. In verse 42, Jesus is explicit that only one thing is needed and Mary had chosen what was better, and it would not be taken away from her. Fosdick (1939:149)

alludes, “Better the words of the law should be burned than delivered to women”. He adds that it is, “against the whole philosophy of life in such a saying Jesus was in rebellion and his attitude toward womanhood which was revealed in his treatment of Mary was habitually characteristic of him”. On the same breath, Jesus did not order Martha to stop serving but gently corrected her attitude about Mary.

The Gospels according to Mark, Matthew and John all relate to the story of the grateful woman who anointed Jesus with expensive spikenard, an act that angered some of those present. The woman was upbraided for wasting perfume that could have been sold for 300 denarees that would have helped the poor. Jesus would not leave her shamefaced and humiliated, her costly reverence misunderstood, her devout motive forgotten, her sacrificial gift condemned (Fosdick, 1939:149-50). Luke 7:36 also tells us of the story of a woman of ill repute who entered in a house where Jesus was teaching and using her tears washed Jesus' feet, wiped them with her hair and anointed them. Surely, if Jesus forgave this woman of her sins, how much would he forgive a single mother?

The story of the woman with the expensive oil and another one where Jesus came to the defense of a woman taken in adultery are commonly preached in most of the Christian churches today. Fosdick (1939) correctly observes that the men who would have stoned her were grounded in the old tradition that portrayed the woman as man's temptress, the creature who at the Garden of Eden had led man to sin. Their righteous wrath, backed by Mosaic law, was ready to ruthlessly deal with any adulteress, as if in adultery, man is a mere victim. Jesus' response, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her” confirms the single standard for men and

women in the morality of sex (Fosdick, 1939:150). By failing to condemn her and even forgiving her sins, Jesus' final words opened the door to her transformed life.

The Gospel according to Luke tells us that Mary Magdalene had seven demons cast out of her (Luke 8:2), but she is better remembered as the first to see the empty tomb and the first to carry the good news to the disciples. Biblical scholars are in agreement that Jesus was a historical person who was born at a certain point in time, who had a profound influence on his contemporaries, and who was crucified, died and buried. Nevertheless, if Jesus did not resurrect we would obviously not have the gospels and no Christianity as we know it today. Tkach (2004:41) observes that Mary Magdalene is almost always mentioned first in a list of the female disciples of Jesus Christ. She may have been one of the leaders of that group of women who followed Jesus from the outset of his ministry in Galilee to his death and afterward. The fact that the risen Jesus appeared to her first in a time when women could not be legal witnesses, illustrates how Jesus Christ felt for women in general and particularly in single women.

That Jesus was Egalitarian is even best exemplified by his language that made women in Nazareth find it clear that he was sympathetic and understanding. Fosdick (1949) observes that his housekeeping language throughout the four gospels is quite remarkable. For example, he talked about, "two women grinding together; one will be taken and the other left" when he thought of the world's end and the Messiah's advent. When he told a parable about an unclean spirit returning to the empty house from which he had been exiled, Jesus added as if with a woman insight, "When he comes he finds it swept and put in order" (Luke 11:25). We also read in Luke 15:8-10 that if God's love for a sinner is like a shepherd searching the mountains for a sheep,

it is also like a woman lighting a lamp and sweeping the house until she finds a coin which she has lost.

Despite this evidence, the Church continues to impress on single women that their "calling" is to get married and help the man. Older single women are mostly allocated to work with children such as in the Sunday school department. Some of them may feel uncomfortable with such an allocation. Assumptions are made which often overlook the talent of the individual. Single women come under overt pressure to get married, often by implication that God created a woman for the man, and a single woman is vulnerable without a covering. Unfortunately, a number of leaders' wives are convinced that all women should naturally want to be married and cannot be fulfilled without a husband. Congregants also have the notion that no matter the healing that a single mother undergoes, she will never rid herself of sin and therefore, she should be avoided. This disqualifies her from any leadership in the Church.

On a positive note, however, the church has in certain circumstances viewed the single mother in a favorable light. Given a choice between a single mother who conceives a child out of wedlock and goes ahead to give birth, and another who conceives and opts for abortion to avoid the shame of being pregnant while single, the Church has always preferred the first case. A good example is given by Sally-Rush (2012) about an unmarried mother who brought her child to be dedicated and was joyously celebrated by her church, then accorded "special support" because she had conformed to the anti-abortion stand which her church had taken. This study affirmed that there are some positive attitude and support to Christian single-mothers within the church.

2.6. The Role of the Church as a Potential Network of Support for Single-parents

Mbugua (1995) strongly asserts, "The PCEA Church can still be classified as a conservative institution because she holds in reverence some of the traditions that she inherited from the Church of Scotland." He argues that it is time for the PCEA to rid herself of those traditions which are oppressive to widows, divorced and single-mothers. His remarks are in response to the pain that a single mother undergoes throughout her life bringing up children in an environment that is hostile to her being a single mother. Some of the negative comments that single-mothers hear in their daily lives can be captured from the lamentations of a single mother participant:

Even when your brother comes into the house they [the neighbours] think it is your boyfriend ... Even when you talk to your neighbour's husband it is bad ... you must keep quiet. You can't greet your neighbour. You just ignore him because the wife will make noise at you. So, you just seat lonely. So, we make friends from outside. So, they come to visit you but here it is difficult. When you talk to someone ... it is their husband.

The sentiments of this respondent indicate that married women find it difficult to trust single women and that single-mothers cannot make it on their own. Mbugua (1995:38) lists a few points on how the society views single-mothers. These include the view that single-mothers are to blame for divorcing their husbands and they are also to blame for divorce in other homes. It also occurred that married women did not trust single women although, in reality, women who did not trust their husbands were to blame for this mistrust. The feeling that their husbands could be supporting other women who have no steady men in their lives provokes this mistrust.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 states, "Two are better than one ... for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow." These two verses summarize well the life of the single mother. For the most part, there is no one else to help carry the burdens facing her. Worth and Tufnell

(1999) note that single-parenting is a difficult task, every single-parent, separated, divorced, widowed and/or never-married has passed through a crisis to get where they are. However, the society is sympathetic to the cause of the widows and in developed societies, they enjoy some social support mostly enacted by the government. In East Africa, the Luo have a social mechanism that allows a widow to be inherited by a brother of the deceased so that she can be provided with moral and financial support in all areas of family life (Radeny, 2003:37-38, Kirwen, 1979).

The need to establish a social mechanism to support single-mothers has not been short of controversies. There are scholars who argue that it is difficult to support single-mothers who are in the prime wage-earning years under the excuse that they are needy (Deborah, 2000). This may help explain why churches often do not respond to the financial needs of single-parent households. In her study, Deborah found out that single-parents were hesitant to express their needs to fellow church members. This is because they feared public exposure of their personal issues; they wished to avoid being pitied. This makes the Church respond inadequately because her response is based on persons' expressed needs rather than actual needs. Consequently, 86 of single-mothers in USA placed finances as the greatest concern in their life (Connors, 1999:33-4). Single-parents who rely on the Church as a coping mechanism experience frustration and increased stress because of her response (Harris, 1996).

Worth and Tufnell (1999) explore real-life experiences focusing on difficulties encountered by single-parents, suggesting ways of finding fulfillment. Separation and divorce may lead one to lose money, a home, children or association with relatives and friends. This is more noticeable in Africa for women who become single-mothers out of a divorce; they suffer immensely because part of the bridewealth is returned to

the man's family. This is similar to situations in the Old Testament where the debate revolves around conditions of divorce included the need for a husband being refunded bride-wealth at the time of a divorce. While the legalists might see this as a legitimate field of intellectual gymnastics, the lives, and welfare of real women were at stake because a woman could be divorced at the whim of her husband and find herself desperate.

Connors (1999) postulates that lack of finances has even led American feminists to rethink the liberalization of divorce in that country. Further, feminists of the 1960s fought for the liberalization of divorce laws and won. Consequently, they celebrated the liberation of the woman from the domination of the male species and the burdensome responsibilities of fulfilling their traditional role as wife and mother. However, the feminists of the 1980s and the 1990s came to terms with the fact that easy divorce was responsible for a tremendous imbalance of wealth and social power. This is because, as divorce rates escalated and the majority of women gained custody of the children, men grew in wealth and social stature while women stayed at home with the children (Connors, 1999:34-5).

Research in developing countries has also shown that many low-class single-mothers also face problems in making decisions on where to live immediately they become single. For example, a study by Naidoo (1998) on India revealed that all female-headed families were mostly concerned about having a roof over their heads. Similarly, the study by Connors (1999) in USA found out that 43% of the single-mothers and their children considered housing to be an issue of concern, with 29% ranking it among their top five concerns (Connors, 1999:38). He pointed out that many single-mothers opted to compromise their moral standards and live with a man

in an immoral situation, arrangements that in most cases ended in disaster that left the women in worse conditions.

The plight of the single woman has made ideologically inclined scholars to suggest that single-motherhood causes poverty. Nevertheless, Young (2004) disagrees with this position, arguing that it would make sense if such scholars were to trace some of the conflicts that instigate divorce to the structure or lack of work. He adds that families unprotected by wide networks of supportive institutions and economic resources are bound to suffer.

Ajandi (2011) further suggests that views about single-mothers come from the ideologically conservative and punitive social policies that blame marginalized populations for their dire circumstances. From the results of a study that explored the difficulties and possibilities encountered by 25% single-mothers attending university across Southern Ontario, Canada, Ajandi (2011) opine that single mother households might be more constructive and healthier than some traditional two-parent households. She adds that single mother family structures have positive characteristics of their own that contrast the many negative ones commonly put forth by the dominant discourse. This is a reality that might ultimately legitimize the single mother family status. The author concluded that most women in her study did not apologize, feel ashamed or feel that their families were, “less than” their two-parent counterparts. On the contrary, they thrived, felt grateful for their struggles and joys, and believed that their families were representative of and contributors to the larger social justice goals of equity and inclusion (Ajandi, 2011). Some women felt that indeed, they experienced barriers being single-mothers and student, a full-time commitment; yet,

not having the other partner to take care of, reduced their burden significantly (Ajandi, 2011).

Another area of concern for a single mother involves emotional needs. Sally-Rush (2012:27) further affirms that during times of disruption, religion tends to take on a higher significance in people's lives. In addition, during divorce or separation, people are likely to be asking the types of questions about life that religion can address. As such, single-mothers are particularly prone to "seek" out the religious community. Although the study by Connors (1999) does not tell us of the specific emotional needs that made single-mothers seek religious communities, it nevertheless found out that among 76% of the respondents, emotional needs ranked second among their needs (Connors, 1999:42). Though the cumulative emotions that single-mothers experienced were too numerous to chronicle, Connors (1999) cites shock, anger, bitterness, loneliness, rejection, confusion, guilt, and grief. He adds that a single-parent would generally follow a similar process of grief that a person faces in death or divorce. This is more so if their single-parenting status is brought about by death, separation or divorce. It is unfortunate that the first general reaction for the affected person is to deny the reality of what is happening as a mechanism to protect oneself emotionally (Connors, 1999:42).

Many people who become single quickly realize that they must deal with the issue of loneliness. The study by Connors (1999) reveals that 67% of the respondents (and 90% in Makhubele, 2008), stated that they experienced loneliness in their church lives. Makhubele (2008) adds that pastors were aware that many single-mothers stayed away from formal church meetings because they felt unwanted. A good number of them complained that they felt inferior as they were undermined due to

their marital status (Makhubele, 2008; Sally-Rush, 2012). Connors is of the view that majority of the respondents recognized the causes of their loneliness, but were unable to get the solutions because more often than not, they did not acknowledge the problem (Connors, 1999:48).

Again, although self-esteem is considered a dangerous exaltation in many Christian circles, it remains a significant issue for single-parents to deal with. Connors found out that 43% respondents expressed it as a concern; less than half of them considered it within top five concerns (Connors, 1999:61). A single-parent who has experienced rejection from a former spouse is usually susceptible to low or no self-esteem. Such single-parent may deal with the false notion of personal failure. Some may perhaps have contributed to the failure of their marriages. However, they got even more overwhelmed with low self-esteem due to the feeling of personal failure. Connors (1999) comforts single-parents by reminding them that John 4:9-11 speaks of Christ's satisfaction of God's wrath by His death on the cross for their sins and failures. He adds that single-parents could experience complete cleansing and discard blame of past failures if they confessed and repented.

Single-parents also operate and live a life under the feeling of shame, hopelessness, and inferiority. According to Makhubele (2008), single-mothers are also burdened by the responsibility of taking care of their "fatherless" children. More than 80% of those interviewed concurred on the difficulty in forgiving their spouses after divorce. Though some pastors understood that this burden could be lessened by the church's support, the church was tasked to make followers understand that when one experienced the new birth of salvation and the Holy Spirit of God within them, they

were new creations with new supernatural power to walk with God and find self-worth in the truth of His Word.

Similarly, a single-parent who gets divorced, deserted or becomes single by any means where trust in another party is breached finds it difficult to trust another person on matters of relationships. Almost all such single-parents in most cases develop a great distrust and general skepticism toward all relationships, especially when it comes to engaging in new relationships that may lead to remarriage (Connors, 1999:52). His survey revealed that trust ranked third behind finances and emotional needs. Indeed, 71% respondents pointed at trust as a significant factor in their lives; 80% respondents who listed trust as a need, placed it within their top five concerns. The research demonstrated that children of the separated and divorced had also to deal with the issue of trust (Connors, 1999:52).

Single-mothers have to deal with matters of discrimination and marginalization within and without the church. Makhubele (2008:81-2) states that most respondents (95%) testified that single-mothers experienced discrimination and marginalization within the church. The married mothers who participated in this study further affirmed this assertion. They felt that the discrimination and marginalization arose from undefined fear. They added that married mothers feared that single-mothers had the potential to break their families. The clergy also pointed out that those young pastors had placed their ministries in danger while counseling young single-mothers. The study by Mbugua (1995:7), points out that the discrimination is extended to other spheres such as denying Baptism to the children of single-mothers. He laments that such action by the church had led many children in their adolescent to question the uprightness of their mothers. This is because such church leaders publicly explained to the children

that they had excluded them from baptism because of the 'questionable' morals on the part of their mothers.

Many studies identify sexuality as a matter that disturbs single-parents a great deal. Although one may be separated from one's partner, sexual desires and longings for intimacy with a member of the opposite sex do not necessarily disappear. Koons and Anthony (1991) argues that the overwhelming majority of divorced, single adults got involved in sexual relations on a fairly regular basis following their becoming single again. Almost 82% had had intercourse while single, and 10% of those responding to the survey had had sexual intercourse with more than 20% partners since entering the single status again. Only 18% had remained abstinent following their divorce as compared to 80% of the total group of the singles survey. Koons and Anthony (1991) further estimates that as high as 90% of those previously married had had sexual intercourse since their divorce or widowhood. Only one in 20 men and one in 14 women who had been single for one year were celibate (Connors, 1999:54-5).

Further, Worth and Tufnell (1999:24) observe:

When people feel lonely and their self-image is poor, they can think that having sex with someone will fulfill their needs and make them 'feel good.' But sex is not an end in itself, and it's more than likely they will find any good feeling to be short-lived. If they felt used and rejected in their marriage, they will even feel more used and rejected by having sex with someone who is not committed to them.

These authors state that it is easy for moralists to churn out platitudes and clichés on sexuality, but evading the issue is hardly helpful. They argue that those who contend that sex is only for married couples should realize that once separated, a person may never re-marry, yet sexuality does not end when one becomes single. The authors cite a case of a single woman who was struggling with her status:

I miss the warmth of a close physical relationship but find that it is taboo in the church to even talk about having sexual feelings. I once attended a singles group where we were meant to be discussing our difficulties honestly, and I was struggling with this problem. The reaction was. 'Oh, you need prayer. We don't have feelings like that; I have never found anybody to talk to about it. Nobody admits to the need.

While some people find satisfaction in masturbation, others direct their energy towards activities which are more socially useful or regarded as higher in cultural or moral scale. These include spending time with children playing tennis, jogging or re-decorating the house. Others bury themselves in church or community affairs. The authors devote two chapters to helping children of single-parents to find wholeness and give advice on how to use resources such as time and money effectively. Should one consider marrying (or re-marrying), the book provides a set of questions for guidance.

Furthermore, children of single-parent households tend to have possible issues to deal with in their lives than children of two-parent families: "Children do best when they have the personal involvement and material support of a father and a mother." The educational outcome, mental and physical health, school dropout rates, teen suicides, drug use, non-marital sexual activities, pregnancy, and abortions, delinquent and other self-destructive behaviours are all affected by family structure. Many sociological studies associate such shortcomings with children of single-mothers. However, Pollit (2004) accuses such scholarship of bias, adding that these differences tend to vanish when comparisons are made between middle-class children raised by a single mother and those raised by unhappily married parents.

Children of single-parents also tend to deny that they are living in their parents' single marital status. Connors (1999) revealed that nearly one-quarter of the respondents' children had issues with denial although it did not appear in any of their top concerns.

As with any traumatic situation of severe loss, in an effort to try and change reality, the child will simply refuse to recognize the reality of the change within their family structure and pretend that it simply is not happening (Connors, 1999:85). Most single-mothers complained that their children got frustrated when they did not get what they readily wanted. The goal of having an intact two-parent loving family is blocked and their frustration is turned into anger. Because divorce and separation constitute a "process" and not an "event", children normally do not overcome the frustration hence anger persists. A study on the conditions of street children in Nairobi in 1991 revealed that 70% of the children who expressed their frustrations by moving out of homes to live in the streets, lived with one parent (Odhiambo and Maito, 2013).

However, that notwithstanding, statistics show that the heads of most single-parent homes are women. In USA, nearly 89% of the court custody rights over children were granted to mothers, but most of these women feared to raise sons without a male role model in the home because of its effects on the sexual identity of the sons. The same is true for men raising daughters without a major female role model for them. Growing up in a single mother household has left male children without mentors. Consequently, many men of this generation have lived unsure of how to deal with an indescribable but acute lack in their lives. At primary school, they spent most of the time with female teachers considering that majority of school teachers at this stage are female.

Connors (1999:102-3) believes that apparently, an intact two-parent loving family would be the best environment in which to physically and emotionally raise healthy children. Nevertheless, it is by no means a certainty that a child raised in a single-parent home will grow up with a warped sexual identity.

The Church teaches that a traditional Christian home is made up of a father, mother and their children with the extended family. Several authorities such as Christena (2013) have questioned how pastors and church leaders who got married in their early to mid-twenties could possibly understand the complexities of singleness or how to honor the image of God in single people? Their ignorance has not helped the growing number of homes, with only one parent present, usually the mother, together with her children. Wachege (1994) points out that due to societal prejudices and biases, the lives of single-mothers are characterized by deprivation, exploitation, oppression, violence, fear, discrimination, malicious accusations, isolation and loneliness. Single-mothers also face loneliness, stigma, temptation and spiritual struggles; their children lack discipline and identity.

Williams (1984:134-137) highlights the Biblical perspective of singleness. He notes that the Old Testament has almost nothing to say about celibacy and single life. This is not surprising since marriage and family life were considered normal and desirable among the Hebrews. One's failure to marry or to have a family was almost a mark of divine displeasure. In the New Testament, Jesus approved marriage though he himself, like his forerunner, John the Baptist never married. His single status was evidently necessary for the fulfillment of his unique, saving mission. Paul's teaching on single life is largely confined to 1 Corinthians, Chapter 7. He supported marriage and family life. Only under exceptional circumstances did he prefer the single status. Even then, it was only in the context of the will of God and as a matter of personal choice. Paul did not legislate marriage or celibacy but generally tried to offer guidance to Christians to remain in the situation where they found themselves, seeking there to glorify God (1 Corinthians 7:20).

Williams (1984:80) further asserts that:

There are those who are called to the difficult and honored task of being single-parents. These carry a special burden and should expect the understanding and help of their brothers and sisters in Christ ... These single-parents have the responsibility of filling the role of two parents and that they may sometimes deem impossible. How they face the challenge will determine not only their children's chance to make it in life but also their own wholeness in Christ.

Thus, Williams (1984) acknowledges the possibility of having single-parents who are Christians. He emphasizes on the responsibilities of the community of believers to support those single-parents in their challenging tasks.

Connors (1999:113) believes that many other needs are "obvious" and we, therefore, must devise ministry to meet those needs. He argues that, as God accepted Hagar, though she acted rebelliously toward Sarah and was not guiltless in the situation, and as He reached out to Ishmael, though he might be viewed today as an illegitimate child, we must reach out with an agape, unconditional love, showing forth God's great grace and mercy.

Currently, society seems to appreciate the challenges that confront single-parents. As the network of women's rights gains strength, the presence of single-mothers as a significant group is getting more recognized. Many NGOs worldwide have reported working with mothers as young as 13 years and widows as old as 50 years. Such NGOs have reported that the needs of single-mothers are not quite similar; it takes a network of women's groups to address them. However, as Harris (2002) observed, this does not mean that single-parents need a different spiritual approach from couples

and families; what they need is strong preaching and teaching, and fellowship with other believers.

The Church is, therefore, challenged to connect single adults to one another and to the greater Church body. After all, as Burkett (1991:35) points out, "There are specific responsibilities for the single-parent prior to asking for help, but without outside help, the long-term prospects can get pretty grim ... Ultimately single-parents don't need welfare; they need friends who care". The greatest friend for Christian single-mothers in our case is the Church. She was, therefore, obliged to cut and assert its place in society by embracing new modes of living and seeking converts while offering a guiding moral framework (Aidala, 1985). The author further adds that conversion is one of a range of possible responses to culture crisis. It offers the need to discover or create new frameworks and identities; the Church can offer this new framework and identity by fashioning an attitude and response that does not alienate but rather engages and accommodates single-parents, especially mothers.

Nguru (2007) observes that majority of church congregations in Africa comprise young people. This group of Christians links the present to the future; hence the need to take the church's ministry to single adults seriously. Whereas most churches have ministries for children and young people, those who have graduated from such groups lack adequate attention. She adds that when such people turn 25 years, their chances of fitting in the organized church groups are limited. Such individuals normally feel uncomfortable in the youth group as well as in the men's or women's fellowship which focus on the needs of the married. She notes that largely the church leadership has been hesitant to highlight "singleness" due to the cultural and theological questions raised concerning the single state. In African culture, marriage is equated

with normalcy and a fulfilled life by nearly all communities. Cultural perceptions on singleness include the notions of poverty, captivity, blindness, and oppression. There is an emerging cultural stereotype that remaining single is viewed as a paradigm of individualism, as a lack of connection to others.

Wachege (2003) points out that all human beings experience a variety of challenges in their lives. In the previous section, we have established that single-parents are faced with some unique challenges such as identity, dating, sexuality, finances, relationships, forgiveness, grief, divorce, recovery, healing and dealing with change. It is our collective duty to comfort the single mother so that she may lessen any anger that may arise from poverty, the burden of bringing children alone, deviant teenage children, and taking care of the physical house. We contend that the Church and the single mother ministry form a solution. However, unless a church has an ongoing ministry to single-parents, these issues will never be addressed from a single-parent's perspective.

However, the Church is yet to give maximum attention to the problem. Studies in the past two decades show that single-parents are on the increase. The Church is to blame for failing to help single-mothers form support groups which would help to minister to one another and encourage them not to lose hope (Mbugua, 1995; NCKK, 2000). The FLEP, a research group of the NCKK proposes a pastoral solution, arguing that single-parents are a special group of people who need a special ministry just as much as children, young people, older couples, men, and women. These researchers strongly assert that single-parents with children out of wedlock need to be advised, taught and admonished to stop the practice of immorality. The researchers equate

single-parenthood to a tragedy, that of a mother needing to raise children in a home alone without a husband.

Most single-parents, regardless of their age, long to have quality friendships with others. A ministry to single adults and single-parents provides an atmosphere of acceptance and openness, a forum for sharing experiences, hopes and hurts towards establishing relationships that are nurtured in a Christian context. Due to their common experiences, there is a personalized understanding of the struggles as well as encouragement. Any case group work *in ministries* (emphasis added) enables single-parents to talk about and come to understand their feelings, reduce feelings of depression, hurt and anger. The group would further help them understand that they are not alone in their feelings and experiences. Group work could help them gain a more realistic view of their situations as single-parents and move toward acceptance of themselves and their families as a result of divorce, separation, and loss (Nkyi, 2013).

People who have not experienced single-parenthood may sympathize but cannot empathize with single-parents. Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:4 teaches of a father of all comfort, who comforts us all in our afflictions so that we may be able to comfort others who are afflicted. An open, honest sharing of experiences among single-parents would foster a dynamism that enhances spiritual, emotional and relational growth when single-parents are in a fellowship. Through such ministries, single-parents would be encouraged to use their time, talents and resources to serve the Lord (Theological Advisory Group – TAG 1992).

Mbugua (1995:103) is, however, of the opinion that the Church can only provide a successful response to this challenge if it takes a step in acquiring self-understanding

as to who the single mother is and what are her special needs. Research by Sally-Rush (2012:110) indicates that where congregations have gone through major transformational processes themselves, they are more likely to empathize with aspects of what single-parents experience, in terms of handling loss and change. She adds that such churches are more likely to be welcoming of single-parents. This is because they are not only engaging with para-church groups seeking to defend against the erosion of 'traditional values', but also with NGOs with a range of policies relating to equality and inclusion. Mbugua (1995:117) is aware that those who adhere to Patriarchal and Complementarian styles of leadership are unlikely to embrace single-mothers into leadership positions. This is mainly due to the belief that a woman is not supposed to take leadership roles in the church, let alone single-mothers. For that reason, they may recommend male leadership into single mother's ministry. He urges his fellow men ministers to leave women to sort out their issues and admit that there are certain things they do not understand, as it is not practically possible for any individual to know all things that matter in life.

In this regard, Christena (2013) points out areas where church leaders and congregants should improve. She contends that they should admit that singleness is complex and that they know very little or nothing altogether about it. They also continue to recognize that as a married person, one is privileged. Once married, people get to learn singles, they are likely to reframe policy, values, and expectations so that married people are no longer the gold standard. Further, they affirm that marital status is not correlated with godliness or maturity; they celebrate what God is doing in people's lives, whether it is similar to what God has done in their own lives or not. They should recognize that one needs single people to show what resurrection is really all about. This is because singleness is the clearest institutional expression

that one's future is not guaranteed by the family, but by the church. Finally, they should invest in the single people around them.

The leadership role of single-mothers in women-only ministries is often interfered with by male church leaders. Sally-Rush (2012) gives details of how women-only ministry in evangelical congregations in North East of England has been taken over by wives of male leaders. This has potentially limited the leadership role that otherwise would have been played by single-mothers. She argues that the pattern of this type of leadership and gender role is reminiscent of gender relationships and responsibilities widely institutionalized in the religious expansion of the 1950s (Sally-Rush, 2012:43). Some sources reckon that the patriarchal organizational structure that characterizes congregations dominates women. Church leadership can use women-only groups as spaces of empowerment. The pastors of this generation should replicate the many instances of the single-parent family ministry found in the Bible. Though we were once enemies of God, we have now been reconciled and brought into relationship with Him, and since we are fully accepted by God, we can fully accept ourselves (Colossians 1:21-22).

The Bible has several accounts where the prophets, Jesus, and the New Christian communities ministered to single-parent families. Examples such as 1 Kings 17:10-24; 2 Kings 4:1-7; Luke 7:12-16; Mark 12:38-40, demonstrate how God was not only compassionate to single-parents and their children; He also met their needs. These examples from scripture further indicate that in the Bible, "widows" were not limited to elderly women only rather that the term was inclusive of all women who had lost a spouse. The story about the hungry widow and Elijah, further demonstrates God's unwavering care for widows. That particular single mother suffered many crises

during Elijah's stay, but God worked many miracles through Elijah. He met physical needs, he resurrected life, he restored faith and hope in God. This study interrogated informers on whether or not such a story provides insights to ministering to single-parent in the Church today.

Similarly, the story of Elisha and the widow who feared that her sons would be sold off because she had fallen into debts after the death of her husband (2 Kings 4:1-7) illustrates that single-parent homes are no strangers to debt. Wood (2001) (1977) cites demographic statistics in America indicate that over 55% of single-parent homes have annual incomes way below the poverty line. He further challenges his audience to think about the single-parents they know, and list those that have high paying jobs and those that have to work more than one job. He observes that many single-parents have echoed the cry of the prophet's widow when the creditors knock their doors. Elisha did not reach into his pocket and pull out the cash to pay off the woman's debt, but he did something even better. Woods (1977) further urges Christians to apply this text in planning how churches could help single-parent families deal with financial challenges.

Referring to the young man who was raised from the dead by Jesus, Fruge (2001), strongly asserts that too often, single-parents grieve outside the caring arms of the Church. This is because they feel out of place in the church hence fail to attend. He adds that single-parents feel more comfortable in an environment where being a single-parent is accepted and understood than in a context where they perceive that they are judged and unsupported. Jesus took the initiative when he saw the grief of a woman who had lost both her husband and her son. Fruge further admits that we do not know why he decided to raise her son back to life, beyond the fact of his

compassion. However, it is also clear that people glorified God after this compassionate miracle. He adds that today's single-parents are well acquainted with grief that may arise from the death of their spouse, a divorce, abandonment, the stress of surviving and making ends meet, a child in distress, or any number of other factors. He challenges the Church to reach beyond her walls to show compassion towards single-parents and walk with them towards healing.

In addition, Fruge (2001), demonstrates how in Mark 12:38-39 Jesus cautioned the showy scribes who only loved salutations in the marketplaces, the front seats in the synagogues and the high seats at feasts that devoured widows' houses. He points out that Jesus gave a stinging rebuke to religious leaders who held widows in contempt; he adds that exploiting them or refusing to minister to them is being spiritually pretentious. He concludes that human need and suffering, from whatever sickness, sin, or situation, touches the heart of God. These two verses teach us that single-parents find a wonderful solace in God who loves them dearly; they also look forward to the Church to be like Jesus who identifies with them.

Mbugua (1995:8) asserts that the Church, which is inherently patriarchal, locks out single-mothers from joining the youth fellowship groups or the women guild. In this regard, he asks the women guild to grapple with the questions: Are single-mothers not women too? Why do they not deserve the love and the fellowship with other women? Why is it not possible to admit them in the guild? Is it not time that single-mothers are rescued from their predicament? Yet some studies show that single-mothers are committed to the faith once they are accorded spiritual support. This is demonstrated by Makhubele (2008) in the context of Limpopo Full Gospel Church. From 80% respondents, it became evident that when single-mothers were accorded support, their

spiritual and financial commitment to the church strengthened more than that of married mothers. There was a change in their hospitality and participation in prayer meetings and conferences.

Regarding the ministry, Mbugua (1995:10) ponders on how the Church can help the pastor become involved in the reconciliation between married and unmarried mothers. He also wonders how the Church can appreciate the needs of the single-mothers with a view of becoming an effective institution. He is worried that many ministers may at the moment not change the situation in the Church as they are not sufficiently trained; they can only follow the regulations of the Church instead of following the scriptures on such a matter. Furthermore, the PCEA is a member of the alliance of reformed churches. It maintains a conservative stand that is inconsistent with Kenyan traditions. Women and men have equal membership status in the church. However, men dominate the leadership. For over 100 years, there have been less than ten ordained women ministers. Compared to their male counterparts, ordained women elders are less influential. The church is very strict on the discipline of its government more than the ministry of the service.

Only where congregations have gone through major transformational processes themselves is there the likelihood to empathize with aspects of what single-parents experience in terms of handling loss and change. In any case, as argued by Rappaport (1975), single-parents who opt to live without marital partners are likely to have different needs from those who reluctantly find themselves in such a situation. The point of emphasis here is that among the single-parents, there are those who choose to enter the situation out of their own volition while there are those who accidentally find themselves entangled in it against their wishes. Mbugua (1995) is well versed

with the teachings of the PCEA in Kenya. He is aware that Christianity has changed the traditional lifestyles of the African peoples. In the process, many have been injured during the change process. He adds that transformed churches are more likely to welcome single-parents. This is because, they not only engage with para-church groups seeking to defend against the erosion of 'traditional values', but also with NGOs that have a range of policies relating to equality and inclusion (Mbugua, 1995:110). Accordingly, the Church must re-examine whether or not she is serving all of God's family as Jesus did. She must tell single-mothers that she cares about their spiritual, social, psychological and economic well-being. Further, she must establish if ordained clergy can teach sound doctrine, interpret the biblical message of righteousness, love, peace and hope to all people.

This is fundamental because there are many items, including the issue of dating and possible remarriage among single-mothers that need proper yet radical interpretation by the Church. True, there are good and godly individuals who take strong stands both for and against remarriage (Connors, 1999:70). We shall also show in later chapters of this study that there are some Christians who take the position that one should never remarry following a divorce no matter the cause. Some Christians support the idea of remarriage following a divorce, regardless of the cause for divorce. Connors (1999:72) states, "83% of men and 75% of women in the contemporary American society who find themselves single at one point of their life may re-marry." The general consensus among therapists is that approximately 80% of those who divorce will remarry. However, there is further evidence that second marriages fail at a 60% higher rate than first marriages (Splinter, 1992:220). A glance at Christian singles and divorced dating life on the internet reveals many sites which tend to support the findings of Splinter (1992). They argue that dating is an issue of concern for

approximately 48% of people who have disengaged or lost their spouses. Splinter (1992) adds that when respondents in his study were asked if they anticipated remarriage, the split was even in three categories: 33.3% anticipating remarriage, another 33.3% not anticipating remarriage, and another 33.3% undecided.

Researchers have expressed mixed feelings about re-marriage. However, some encourage single-parents to remain single and direct their efforts in raising their children. This school of thought is founded on two main issues. First, the children may be better off without the pressures of another relationship, considering the proliferation of AIDS and child molestation. Second, the children will do better with the mother's focused attention rather than when her attention is divided with a new spouse. The children will also divide the attention of the two adults. One of the children may have little or no interest in either or both of them vice versa.

More often, most single-parents and divorced persons wonder when a person should consider the possibility of dating again soon after the breakup of a marriage. Single-parents also wonder for how long they should wait before remarrying – especially at what point they would know if they are ready to begin developing more intimate relationships and how their children would fit into such scenarios. On this issue, Connors (1999) suggests one year of healing for every four years of marriage. Jim Talley (2000), on the other hand, suggests a five-year period of healing for the single-parent.

Connors (1999) observes that there is need for intensive counseling on this subject and encourages pastors and priests in charge of ministries to the singles to acquaint themselves with matters pertaining to single-parenthood and possible remarriages. Connors explains that Gary Richmond believes that time along with correct and

healthy responses from the opposite partner are important indications that one is ready for remarriage. Nevertheless, he also strongly advises that those who are still emotionally attached to former spouses are definitely not ready to enter a new relationship. Regarding the success rates of remarriages, Connors quotes Richmond as advising that second marriages in America have a 24% success rate within five years; third marriages are successful only 13% of the time and fourth marriages only have a 7% chance of succeeding within the first five years (Connors, 1999:76-7).

However, most established churches oppose this kind of counseling. As seen in previous sections, churches only recognize widows as the legitimate single-mothers within the church and the wider society. Churches intimate that the wellbeing of the human person and the Christian community is intimately linked to the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family. The Church further argues that the intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws. Hence, the existence of this sacred bond no longer depends on solely human decisions (O'Brien and Shannon, 1999).

The Church holds the view that Christians should actively promote the values of marriage and the family both by example and by their own lives. She also acknowledges that families of migrant workers, and those obliged to be away for long periods such as members of armed forces, sailors and all kinds of itinerant people, those in prison, refugees and exiles, those with no homes, incomplete or single-parent families, and teenage married couples are in need of special attention and pastoral care (Pope John Paul II, 1981). The pope adds that the Church is, however, opposed to "trial marriages". People who would like to justify these marriages by invoking human reason alone as the cause ought to see that they are unacceptable. This is

because it is unconvincing to carry out an “experiment” with human beings whose dignity demands that they should be always and solely live for a self-giving love without limitations of time or of any other circumstances.

Whereas most of the foregoing studies were centered on single Christian denomination, the current study is centered on two major Christian traditions namely, Protestant and Catholic. This would bring out more profound insights on the role of the Church as a network of support for Christian single-parents. Furthermore, this study challenges the Church in Africa to remain relevant and attractive to the 21st century Christians. Injecting innovation into the current youth programmes would curb the rapid growth of single-parent families.

2.7. Possible Acceptance of Single-parents as Full Members of the Church

Respondents from different Congregations, strongly felt that single-mothers were to blame for their own predicament. Single-mothers had failed to keep their marriages. Subsequently, they had denied their children the right to be raised in a complete family. This view is further supported by Barbaer (2005). The Church also supports the ideal family which begins with a union between a man and a woman, and then children are born as a blessing to the couple. Pope John Paul II (1981) affirms that marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious human values. The Pope, further acknowledges that the family in the modern world has undergone numerous, profound and rapid changes which have affected society and culture. In his outline about the role of the Church at the service of the family, the pontiff adds that most families have faithfully upheld the values that constitute the foundation of the institution of the family. He affirms that the family has four general tasks: forming a community of persons, serving life, participating in the development of society and

sharing in the life and mission of the Church. The Church addresses the young, who are beginning their journey towards marriage and family with an aim of helping them to discover the beauty and grandeur of the vocation to love and the service of life.

Critics of the nuclear family argue that God cares about families and He is more concerned that each person, no matter what her/his family looks like, is a repentant sinner who seeks acceptance. Makhubele (2008:96) also advises the Church to re-examine Deuteronomy 10:18 that assures: “God defends the case of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing.” This concept is further reinforced in Deuteronomy 24: 17-23, “Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge.” Verse 19 reads: “When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow...” The critics further dismiss the model as being intellectual (Rapparport, 1975:89-91) in that it influences thinking in certain directions; more precisely, it impedes people from considering alternative interpretations of the family. Furthermore, the changes that the Church has undergone have only influenced the *practice* of the congregation far more than her *underlying values*. This view is given more credence by Fagerstrom (1988:15-20) in his argument that the Church needs to expand the term “family” moving from the nuclear family definition to one that includes single-parent families towards the family of God. This is because there is a move from the nuclear family, from family values and from people and places where inherent needs for intimacy and spiritual nourishment can be obtained. His argument is based on the fact that marital patterns have changed and created a new singles’ sub-culture with new attitudes, descriptions, myths and often misunderstandings.

Another aspect which emerges from Mbugua's study is that Christian married women blame single-mothers of being responsible for divorce in other homes. Most studies on divorce link infidelity as the main cause of family breakages in modern times. This was well captured by Makhubele (2008:82) on his focus on married mothers, who in his view, expressed fear that single-mothers could break their marriages. Indeed, approximately 60% of the participants indicated that they had problems with single-mothers' morality. One participant put it that, "Most of the single-mothers don't live right. They maintain unhealthy relationships and so break many families" (Makhubele, 2008:56). Other participants went on to argue that single-mothers lived in loneliness and as such married men exploited this situation and tricked them into adultery.

Statistics from socio-economic studies among the poor in urban areas also showed that majority street children hailed from households headed by single-mothers. No wonder married women accused single-mothers of having unplanned children. However, to some socialization theorists, it is the absence of one parent that alters the family's methods of making decisions and weakens parental control over the behaviour of children (McLanahan 2001). He further advances that some other studies have reported, for example, that single-mothers exercise less supervision over their daughters' dating. This, in turn, leads to earlier sexual activity and premarital births. She also explores other studies that suggest that single-mothers are less effective disciplinarians - less authoritative and sure of themselves than are parents in two-parent families.

Corcoran (1997) disputes this notion, despite admitting that more than 67% of divorce in developed countries is initiated by women. She also cites several studies that

indicate that divorce has some positive effects for children. This is because it brings them closer to their mother than when both parents were married. Corcoran (1997), concludes that majority of children born to lone mothers cannot be correctly deemed as “unplanned.” Cocoran observes that many children were planned or actively sought, while many of the young mothers aged fourteen to fifteen years from poor households explicitly or implicitly desired to have a child. Young girls indicated that they wanted someone who was an extension of their beloved; they wanted to love another person deeply, a fact that contrasted with the desires of wealthier women who preferred to put off having children until they got satisfied with their educational and financial needs. What is different about very poor mothers’ desires for children seems to be related to their relationally, financially and educationally impoverished circumstances. Alvaré quotes the authors, arguing that in the girls’ eyes, the advantages of having a baby loomed large: the possession of a person who could be trusted to love them for the long run. Thus, a lone mother may understand premarital sex or cohabitation to be immoral or even fail to put her child’s needs before her own, but she may not contemplate abortion.

Another emerging view from Wachege (2003) is that men tend to treat single-mothers as sexual objects. Single-mothers interviewed in the study of Makhubele (2008:83) admit that most of them had problems coping with life alone. Hence, men treated the women as sex objects, abused them and were repeatedly unfaithful to them. The women went along with it in the beginning, and occasionally thereafter. This was until they finally dismissed the men from their lives either on the grounds of their own safety or sanity, or those of their children. Some pastors in the study even suggested that some men took advantage of single-mothers, most of them with the intention of robbing them of the property left by their husbands.

Mbugua (1995) maintains that the Church as an institution is also hostile to the single mother. Citing the PCEA, he argues that single-mothers cannot have their children baptized before they (single-mothers) undergo a disciplinary session of 6 months to one year to gauge their conduct. He adds that neither the single mother nor her children can be laid to rest through church rites in case they died while on probation (Mbugua, 1995:4). For the Catholic Church, on the other hand, the possible “normalizing” of out of wedlock childbearing raised a concern. This was not only because of the diminished well-being of vulnerable children but also because it called into question the very necessity, the very centrality of the male-female relationship, for the lives of individuals and society (Alvaré, 2009).

Radeny (2003) cites discrimination of the children of the single mother as being equally pronounced in the school system. The author highlights cases where children are either registered by their fathers’ name or their baptismal name. Most children of single-mothers did not know their fathers. As such, they could be denied baptism by the church. Consequently, they were registered in their mothers’ names. This exposed them to ridicule from other children who together with their teachers regarded them as illegitimate children (Radeny, 2003:27). This state of being rejected consequently had a negative social effect on them once they grew up.

Majority of pastors and leaders who were interviewed held the view that God’s best plan for the family was in marriage. Alvaré (2009) states that the belief in the relationship between Christ and the Church was glimpsed in a special way in marriage; human beings understood God’s love in a privileged way as spouses. However, she also questions what it portends if marriage was no longer understood to be the keystone of a good society. Possibly, the Church should emulate Isaiah 56:4-5

where God promised a special covenant blessing to eunuchs who were faithful to Him. Although they were denied sexual expression, there would be other kinds of fulfillment. There are those who chose celibacy as liberating them from the demands of family and home life, to devote themselves wholeheartedly to the concerns of Christ. For that matter, both the single and the married states were gifts from God (1 Corinthians` 7:7), each with its blessings and benefits.

Fagerstrom (1988:15-20) adds that the biggest frustration faced by single-parents was “being left out” or “not being included” in socio-religious and family events. A patriarchal religion in a patriarchal society is at odds with the understanding that modern day single-motherhood by choice is more than singleness by the death of a spouse or by abandonment. The Church has in practice, therefore, kept the single-mothers away from responsible work positions. Instead, she has handed the positions over to the married who are sometimes younger and inexperienced, through the misconception that the unmarried singles are prone to the sin of impurity than the married (Nyoro, 2004).

Fagerstrom (1988) asserts that there seems to be an unspoken rule that unless a person is or has been married, he/she is not capable of participating in the mainstream of social interaction. Sally Rush (2012) reinforces this position postulating that single-parents struggle to be visible in formal church settings. This involves the whole congregation, especially during Sunday services and Mothering Sundays that focus on traditional understandings of parenting. She laments that these models of church structure still reflect a theological and hegemonic outlook that assumes the views of the 1950s about the family as the ideal for a Christian. She discloses that whenever the word ‘family’ is mentioned in such congregations, it either takes a loose and

unspecified form or is related to the Church as a family. Likewise, whenever issues of divorce and remarriage are explored in preaching, the language used reinforces the ‘traditional’ model (Sally-Rush, 2012:114).

In *Familiaris Consortio* (The Family in the Modern World), Pope John Paul II (1981) teaches that God created human beings in his own image and likeness; he called them through love and for love. God is love, a mystery of personal loving communion. In addition, Walter (1996:12) is explicit that “creating humans in his own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility of love and communion.” However, this position is not only contradicted in the Catholic Church but also in practically all churches that believe in male leadership. Yet as pointed out by Sally-Rush (2012:117), single-mothers are not necessarily seeking specific recognition during principal services. They are keen on having their contributions to church life recognized with an understanding that they face specific issues in their lives.

Will single-mothers ever push their agenda in the Church? Participants in the study by Mbugua (1995) pointed out that to give single-mothers the right to become members of the Woman’s Guild was inadequate. This research maintains that the voice of single-mothers shall remain low as long as they are not allowed to occupy significant leadership positions within their congregations. Indeed, Makhubele (2008) showed that only 20% of the congregations supported the idea of single-mothers occupying leadership positions in the church. Makhubele (2008:106) advances that if indeed widows and single-mothers can manage to run their homes as commanded by Paul in 1 Timothy 5: 14, subsequently, their pastors should grant them an opportunity to take leadership positions in the church where necessary.

Sally-Rush (2012) further argues that, through a single-mothers' ministry, this group would be empowered to attain a more positive attitude towards themselves and their situations, specifically their role in upholding Christian values in parenting. When Christian single-mothers find themselves bound and frustrated by customs, the Spirit of God, through the Word would comfort and set them free. In finding their voices to speak freely about the struggles in their lives, single-mothers would demonstrate that the good news has found a place in their lives. Consequently, growth and maturity, power, forgiveness, cleansing, hope, and joy will be manifested for the glory of God (Cox, 2000).

The Church needs to re-define her mission and ministry towards a re-thinking of biblical and theological roots for developing a perspective on single-parenthood in order to adequately minister to single-parents and remain a viable institution (Fagerstrom, 1988:15-20). The Church needs to promote fellowship that would accommodate everyone, including single-mothers. Participants in such meetings could be encouraged to discuss issues such as God's will in their lives and the future (Connors, 1999:109). Ideally, the Church ought to be a place of support and love for all the members (Makhubele, 2008:109). The general Church membership, leaders and pastors, ought to nurture a conducive atmosphere for all Christians to worship freely (Connors, 1999:60). However, such meetings should not be separated from other church activities. Otherwise, single-mothers will appear as a segregated group and the whole effort shall be meaningless. Ideally, such ministry should be conducted in a way to help single-mothers have a sense of belonging to the body of Christ.

Connors (1999) further adds that such a ministry would be a departure from the negative approach that regards two-parents as the only full members of the family of

God. All Christians deserve acceptance in the house of the Lord. The ministry would deal with the real contextual issues affecting the single mother so that she can regain human qualities that have been plucked out by social ostracism.

Moreover, Christians are commanded to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44), because there is a basis and motive for such love in the concrete, positive fact of God's love for humanity (Nygren, 2008:63). Pope John Paul II (1981) continues in *Familiaris Consortio*, ascertaining that love is the fundamental vocation of every human being. Christian revelation recognizes two specific ways of realizing the vocation of the human person in its entirety to love, marriage and virginity or celibacy. Sexuality, the means by which man and woman give themselves to one another through the act that is proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means purely biological but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. The families in difficult circumstances like those of migrant workers, sailors, members of armed forces, prisoners, refugees and exiles, outcasts, or single-parent families (*Familiaris Consortio*, 94) need more generous, intelligent and prudent pastoral care.

Further, the need to minister specifically to single-mothers is more prudent because of the history whereby pastors have found it very difficult to convince congregants and church leadership to accommodate single-mothers into the church programmes (Makhubele, 2008). Connors (1999:45) further suggests that congregations without ministries for single-mothers should seek endorsement and full support of the pastor for the ministry to take root and grow. This is because the pastor is God's authority and leader of the local church. The Church often categorizes widows as the "genuine" single-mothers.

In any case, the Church is yet to come to terms with the reality that the teenage mothers, single-mothers by choice, divorced and separated mothers are all single-mothers, who deserve to serve the Church in any capacity. Time has come for the Christian culture to change the way it views single-motherhood. Christian single-parents should be viewed as whole and complete persons who God can use in the lives of congregations (Wachege 2003:59).

Riss (2002) asserts that such attitudes are based on a misinformed interpretation of the doctrine. In appearing first to Mary Magdalene after His resurrection, Jesus made an important statement to His followers. Matthew 28:10 states that Jesus gave specific instructions, "Go and tell my brethren ...". He sent her on a specific mission defined by the words, "Go and tell." Mary was, therefore, "the sent one" and as such received the first apostolic commission from the risen Lord. By so doing, Jesus affirmed that His death and resurrection had ushered in a new era of freedom for all humanity. He was underlining that in Him, the walls of separation regarding race, gender and marital status had been removed. Jesus showed his approval and respect for all women and their testimony by sending her as the first to bear witness to the most important event in human history (Riss, 2002). Paul echoes this position in his letter to the Galatians (3:28) when he declares that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek ... there is neither male nor female. This freedom embraces the repentant single-mother (Sally-Rush, 2012:110).

After all, the biblical meaning for the family includes all people who have committed their lives to Christ as opposed to blood relationship. Hence, the pastors and the church leadership should stand in the gap and display the compassion of Christ by loving and accepting single-mothers unconditionally (Sally-Rush, 2012:109). Sally-

Rush further suggests that the best place to start is at a local church that genuinely cares for the divorced and single-parents in the community. One of the best ways to discern this is through a Church programme for single-parents. The Church ought to teach that God really is with the single-parent and He has promised never to leave nor forsake the single-parent. The more one practices the presence of Jesus, the more conscious one becomes that He really is there.

Furthermore, if it is her own sin that has resulted in single-motherhood, the Bible teaches that God is gracious and willing to extend help and comfort. Indeed, He offers forgiveness for all sins through Jesus Christ and the eternal comfort of heaven for the single mother who accepts Him and even the estranged husband. In any case, for Mary motherhood and virginity are inseparable a fact well illustrated by many works of literature and art during the Middle Ages (Woods, 1977:45).

Wachege (2003) takes a critical look and analysis to single-motherhood, asserting that it is a more complex issue than popularly portrayed. Single-motherhood is a serious phenomenon that demands a more focused attention and a fundamental pastoral approach. Thus, Wachege (2003:38-48) defines single-mothers as women who voluntarily, or as victims of circumstances live without male partners, raising their own or adopted children. The concept of “single mother” also refers to one-parent families, in which case, that parent is the mother. Wachege’s notion of single-parenthood, surpasses the negative attribute of “husband-less mothers.” Wachege further identifies, elaborates and explicates the diverse multi-faceted types of single-motherhood. Although the categories of single-motherhood are woven, they remain varied and numerous.

Wachege (2003) enumerates widowhood, perennial separation and divorce, naïve venture into the world of men, irresponsibility of men and women, prolonged seclusion and confinement, men's unethical manoeuvres and manipulations, individual choice and permissiveness as the causes of single-motherhood. In addition, career advancement, rape and labour migration also lead to the rampant single-motherhood in African contemporary society.

Wachege (2003:151) points out, "This critical effort in identifying the multi-faceted genesis of single-motherhood is a rational persuasion and earnest caution to accept, appreciate, support, understand, guide and inter-relate with single-mothers in their uniqueness, owing to the causes of their being." He further analyses the traditional perspective and its influence on the perception of single-mothers. The author further cites examples from different Kenyan communities to elaborate the treatment and mistreatment of single-mothers. He concludes by observing that in traditional African society, single-motherhood was highly discouraged. The erosion of moral values, customary laws and the disintegration of the African kinship systems have largely contributed to the high prevalence of single-mothers. Wachege highlights the negative aspects and the positive characteristics of single-motherhood. He notes that single-mothers have been suppressed and ignored by the Church. He challenges the Church to welcome single-mothers to the front line and tap their talents in a more inclusive approach. Wachege (2003:369) concludes by affirming that single-mothers deserve love, respect, support, mutual correction, benevolent dialogue, dignity and pastoral concern. He recommends the inclusion of single-mothers in key roles in church ministry and propagation of the Good News especially to their fellow single-mothers. Single-mothers should be embraced and incorporated, nurtured to be who they ought to be, not what others accuse them of being.

The literature related to the definition of the family tends to address itself to what ought to be the ideal family in conformity with certain socio-cultural traditions. This approach has largely ignored other types of family that are evolving with time. This may explain why single-parent families have remained in the “shadow” in most of the available literature on the family. Therefore, from the foregoing, single-parenthood is a reality that is growing at a very high rate in our society. This reality is often viewed as a threat to marriage, not as an indication of moral decadence. Single-motherhood in particular is perceived negatively as an erosion of the social norms. Perhaps it is the time that single-parent families were viewed as an alternative family type. Those who become single-parents by default, expect sympathy and understanding rather than condemnation.

2.8. Conceptual Framework

This study was informed by three sociological theories, namely, Conflict Theory, Critical Theory and Social Analytical Theory. A combination of the three theories was used to explain the dynamics of power in family life. This further explains why some women may opt to remain single. Others are separated or divorced due to the dynamics of economic power in the family. In addition, a combination of the three theories advocates for the tolerance of Christian single-parents in the Church.

In addition, the conceptual framework which was found suitable to inform this study is a combination of the Idealistic and Materialistic conceptual orientation. The Idealistic orientation by Goode (2000) explains the causes of single-parent families in terms of social organization, social norms and values. According to this conceptual orientation, lack of social organization, contravention of social norms and an erosion of values may lead to the emergence of single-parent families. The Materialistic

conceptual orientation, whose proponent is Lenero-Otero (1977) states that poverty leads to single-parent families in the following ways:

- i. In poor economic conditions, men tend to shy away from taking wives; they prefer visiting-relationships without a financial commitment or responsibility for the likely offspring.
 - ii. Labour migrations may lead to parents living separately for prolonged periods.
- Young (1994) combines the Idealistic and Materialistic conceptual frameworks. Young argues that out-of-wedlock births are more often frequent in socially disorganized communities, particularly where this is combined with poverty. Young's argument is that a decline in social organization coupled with being in an economically disadvantaged situation may lead to the emergence of single-parent families.

Another conceptual framework which informed this study is derived from Waiyaki (1985). Waiyaki's orientation has that as a consequence of a family ideology which comprehends the two-parent family model as the ideal, when the practical life is confronted with the model, society creates mechanisms for correction of what is considered to be deviant behaviour. The deviation is viewed as being pathological. Therefore, instead of accepting the existence of alternative family models, adjustments towards the ideal are sought. The insights that there exists a plurality of family models which go "beyond the two parents" is rooted in the perception of diverse reality of cultures and sub-cultures all over the world.

The conceptual framework which informed this study is derived from a combination of the Idealistic orientation (Goode, 2000), a combination of the Idealistic and Materialistic orientation (Young, 1994) and a focus on beyond the nuclear family

(Waiyaki, 1985). This was merged into one conceptual framework, namely, that lack of proper social organization, a decline in social norms and lack of adequate guidance among the youth may lead to the emergence of single-parent families. The popular perception that single-parent families are deviant from the norm tends to influence the Christian attitudes towards Christian single-parents. In view of the fact that this study was informed by a combination of more than one theoretical orientation, a conceptual framework was the most suitable.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This section presents the research methodology used to arrive at the key findings in order to justify the conclusions and recommendations. The methodology is the scientific procedure that guides the collection and analysis of data from research subjects. It is a description of how the study was conducted: how the data were collected, coded, analyzed and presented. This is very significant in social science research; it assists the researcher in making conclusions based on the research problem, research objectives, and research premises. Methodology helps to justify the validity of the research findings (Radeny, 2003).

This study used both qualitative and quantitative methods in data collection and analysis. This combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was necessary given the nature of the study topic. Studying single-parenthood requires the use of creative methods for one to make a substantial contribution to research. Previous studies on other aspects of single-parents such as Wachege (2003), Radeny (2003), Nguru (2000) and Mbabu (1982) reported that single-mothers were quite uncomfortable with being interviewed. Majority of them are uneasy with interrogations touching on some aspects of their personal lives. However, these feelings are likely to reduce significantly when the respondents are “interviewed” in groups. The respondents tend to more likely open up, speak up and share their experiences with ease more than when interviewed individually. The chapter highlights, explains and justifies the research design, study area, target population, data collection procedures and data analysis.

3.2. Area of Study

This study was based in Nairobi County, targeting selected church congregations. Neimeyer (1989) noted that Nairobi's 12,000 registered churches could fall under four major church traditions, namely, Catholic, Protestant, Indigenous, and Orthodox. The survey further indicates that the two major traditions in terms of attendees are Protestant and Catholic. The present study sampled from these two traditions. However, another school of thought, namely, PCEA Archives, indicates that among the Protestants, there are multiple traditions, such as Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran and Baptist, among others. Seven congregations were selected as follows: St. Paul's Catholic University Chapel, All Saints Cathedral, St. Theresa's Catholic Parish Eastleigh, PCEA St. Andrew's Parish and Embulbul Catholic Parish, Madre Theresa Catholic Church in Zimmerman, and St. Gertrude's ACK in Kasarani.

The choice of Nairobi was justified by several reasons. This is a county whose population represents a social diversity. The weakening and disintegration of the extended family network support is more evident in an urban than a rural context. The extended family set-up provided support in traditional African communities. Single-parenthood is a topical issue, hence a contemporary, urban population was the most suitable for field research.

The choice of Nairobi as a study area was also considered viable because most of the young women who conceive while in school or out of wedlock, seek refuge in the city. The city becomes handy for the search of casual jobs and accommodation in the city's informal settlements. Furthermore, this constitutes an urban location that houses many low-income male workers who cannot afford to live with their families in the city. Such men require cheap, ready-to-eat food and laundry services, hence the

massive exodus of single-mothers to the city where they can make a livelihood from engagement in such casual jobs. It is against the foregoing justification that the data was collected in selected Christian congregations in Nairobi County.

3.3. Research Design

A research design refers to the overall strategy which a researcher uses to integrate different components of the study coherently and logically to ensure that the research problem is addressed effectively (De, Vans 2001). A research design essentially guides the collection, measurement and analysis of data. The research problem determines the type of design to be applied.

This study used a descriptive survey. Owen (2002:13) defines the descriptive survey as a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering questionnaires to a sample population. This design was used to collect information from pastors and leaders in selected congregations. These two sub-groups gave their views and perceptions on the attitudes of Christians towards single-parents and the response of the church towards the same. The researcher used both primary and secondary data in an effort to meet the objectives of the study. Oral interviews (OI), in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussion (FGD) were the research methods used to collect primary data from single-parents.

3.4. Data Collection

This study used two data collection techniques to gather information, namely, library and field research. The next section explains the procedure through which data was collected.

3.4.1 Pilot Survey

Prior to the primary and secondary data collection, a pilot survey was carried out in selected Catholic and Protestant churches in Nairobi to establish the existence of single-parents in the congregations. The pilot survey identified the churches which had active single-parents' associations. After the pilot survey, the researcher reviewed the data collection tools, thereby restructuring ambiguous questions and adding questions that could help in obtaining relevant data. Our pilot survey identified some Christian congregations in Nairobi that had not only programmes but also associations for single-parents. Such already existing associations eased the task of identifying single-parents and forming FGD.

3.4.2 Library Research

This was carried out at Kenyatta University Post-Modern Library and libraries at Hekima University, Tangaza University College and the Kenya National Archives. In addition, the researcher also used online sources to supplement secondary data.

3.4.3 Sampling Procedures

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999:143), a sample size is a sub-group obtained from an accessible population. This carefully selected sub-group represents the whole population. Henceforth, each member in the sample is referred to as a subject, a respondent, an respondent or an interviewee, where interview is conducted. Ogula (2005) defines a sampling procedure as a process of choosing a sub-group from a population to participate in a study. Thus, the numbers of individuals selected for a study are a good representation of the large group from which they were drawn.

The four Christian congregations, namely, St. Paul's Catholic Chaplaincy and Parish, PCEA St. Andrew's Parish, Lutheran Church and All Saints Cathedral have a long

history of ecumenism. The four churches have been jointly organizing and hosting the Nairobi ecumenical round table meetings since 1996. This is an annual event which takes place during the week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January or February (AFER 2000). This study used a simple random selection method to pick three out of the four congregations. Hence St. Paul's Catholic Chaplaincy and Parish, PCEA St. Andrew's Parish and All Saints Cathedral were selected for the field research. In addition, at the onset of the field research, five churches had been identified as having existing and active single-parents associations. These were the Holy Family Minor Basilica, St. Gertrude's ACK, Kasarani, Embulbul Catholic Parish, St. Theresa's Eastleigh and Madre Theresa, Zimmerman. Using a purposive sampling method, four churches were selected out of these five. The selected churches were St. Theresa's Eastleigh, Embulbul Catholic Parish, St. Gertrude's ACK, Kasarani and Madre Theresa, Zimmerman.

In each congregation, the target population was all single-mothers. The first fifty single-mothers on the church register were interviewed in each of the selected churches. The pastor in charge of the parish and the one in charge of special programmes were selected for interview. In Addition, the field research also targeted ten leaders (male and female) in each congregation. The leaders were picked from groups and associations such as Parish Council, Kirk Session, Church Council, Woman's Guild, Mother's Union, Catholic Women Association (CWA), Catholic Men Association (CMA), Kenya Anglican Men Association (KAMA), prayer group and choir, among others. In each group, two leaders were selected, male and female where both genders were represented. This made a total of ten leaders for each of the selected congregations.

In addition, three FGD were conducted in three churches Embulbul Catholic Parish, Madre Theresa Catholic Parish, Zimmerman and St. Gertrude's ACK Parish, Kasarani. In each of the selected congregations, the research sampled fifty single-mothers, ten leaders, and two pastors, making a total of 434 in the seven selected congregations. Other units of the population sample included three FGD consisting of thirteen, twelve and fourteen members respectively, making a sample unit total of 39 participants in the FGD. In addition, a simple random sampling method was used to pick three ladies who had been remarried for in-depth interviews. The total sample size in the seven selected congregations was 476 participants consisting of single-mothers, pastors/priests and group/association leaders.

a. Single-mothers

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the first 50 single-mothers from the church registers in the selected congregations. Interviews with single-mothers generated data on circumstances leading to their single-motherhood, the forms of segregation they experienced in the church and their hopes for better treatment from fellow Christians.

b. Pastors and Priests

In each of the selected congregations, two pastors were selected using purposive sampling technique. Preference was given to the overall pastor in charge of the parish and the one in charge of special programmes such as counseling, family life and youth programmes. Pastors provided information about ministry to single-mothers, prospects and challenges. Pastors were also interviewed on the relationship between the social teaching of the church and its practical application.

c. Groups or Association Leaders

Purposive sampling procedure was used to select men and women in leadership positions in Parish Councils, Pastoral Councils, Women's Guilds, Mothers' Unions, CWA, CMA, KAMA, prayer groups and youth groups. The total sample size for this unit in each of the selected congregations was ten leaders. In groups comprising men and women, gender balance was considered. The group leaders gave information about attitudes towards single-mothers in their congregations.

3.4.4 Field Research

Field research was carried out from September 2012 to August 2013. The initial step was to prepare research instruments, identify respondents and design strategies for fieldwork. The next six months focused on data collection and management using questionnaires, OI, IDI and FGD. The researcher then embarked on data coding, analysis and presentation. The researcher engaged two research assistants for effective data collection. These research assistants were Bachelor's degree holders, with the ability to record findings.

3.4.5 Methods of Data Collection

Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used. Quantitative data streamed from questionnaires, while qualitative came from OI, IDI and FGD schedules. A group of 13 single-mothers was invited to participate in the FGD. The researcher collected data with the help of two research assistants who were university graduates. The two research assistants were trained for a week on research methodology, particularly on data collection and recording. Although the research assistants had participated in data collection before, it was essential to train them again to suit the specific research.

3.5. Questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions and Oral Interviews

Three standard questionnaires, one for single-parents, one for pastors and the other one for other Christians were used as the main tools for data collection. The questionnaires contained both open and closed-ended type of questions, which were designed to enable us obtain more detailed responses. This research employed open-ended questions to obtain views of the respondents regarding their attitudes towards Christian single-mothers. In addition, interview guides for oral interviews assisted in probing for further details from the pastors and leaders.

Three FGD comprising 12-14 members drawn from the single-mothers were held in three of the selected congregations. These were, Madre Teresa Catholic Church Zimmerman, Embulbul Catholic Church and ACK St. Gertrude's Kasarani. An FGD guide (Appendix A.6) was used for the discussions which ensured a focused balanced participation. FGD helped the single-mothers to be at ease, to participate without inhibitions and to share their experiences freely. FGD assisted us to obtain information on causes of single-motherhood, the perception of single-mothers by the fellow Christians, aspects of stigma and discrimination experienced by Christian single-mothers and their expectations from the church as a potential network of support.

Three IDI were conducted with single-mothers who had married late in their lives or re-married after being widowed. The purpose was to establish any changes in the way fellow Christians perceived these single-mothers after being married or remarried. The researcher conducted all the IDI. An IDI guide (Appendix A.6) was used for this purpose. During the IDI, one research assistant accompanied the researcher to aid in note-taking.

3.6. Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

In the course of the field work, all interviews and FGD from single-parents and pastors were captured through notes taking. Subsequently, the data was sorted into themes, in line with the study objectives. Responses from the questionnaires were coded according to the research questions. The coding led to the preparation of frequency tables and figures. Using the analytical methods of description, comparison, contrast, percentage and interpretation, both the primary and secondary data were synthesized and classified according to the research objectives. In the long run, this helped the study to draw conclusions and recommendations for the church to be inclusive of all Christians in her roles of spiritual guidance.

3.7. Validity of the Research Instruments

Prior to the completion of the field research, the researcher tried to compare objectives of the study with the data which had been collected. This enabled the researcher to identify any gaps which may have been overlooked. Due to the length of time which may have elapsed between the initial data collection and the actual thesis writing, it was deemed necessary to refresh the data. Reports from the FGD were analyzed and coded according to the themes. Those themes related to the objectives were identified based on the relevance to the research objectives, frequency, differences between respondents, silences and or any glaring contradictions.

After the key themes had been identified, the relationships and differences between the various themes were examined. A computer database was created for ease of storage of thematic materials. The next step was to integrate primary data with secondary data. Subsequently, the resultant data were then categorized according to the objectives of the study. This categorization aided in compiling chapters through

which data was presented qualitatively. At the phase of data presentation, names of respondents were changed to code names to protect the identity of the respondents and keep their confidentiality.

3.8. Conclusion

The exercise of data collection was both exciting and frustrating, due to a number of factors. Sometimes, those targeted were reluctant to fill the questionnaire or participate in FGD. Nairobi being an urban setting; the majority of the people are busy trying to make a living, either in employment or self-employment. The interviews could only be conducted at the respondents' convenience, usually in the evenings and weekends. Consequently, the data collection took longer than expected.

The initial data collection was carried out between February and July 1999. However, the research process stalled due to personal challenges experienced by the researcher. The data collection was re-started in September 2012 to August 2013. Subsequently the research instruments were revised and refreshed for the second phase of data collection. Library research was updated as well.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the field research guided by the four objectives of the study. The field research data were obtained from interviews with single-mothers, pastors and leaders in each of the seven congregations. Findings from the three FGD conducted with single-mothers in three selected congregations are also presented here. This chapter discusses the findings on Christian response to single-parenthood in selected churches in Nairobi County. This discussion is driven by the research findings and supplements as well as secondary data obtained from books and periodicals. All the data are used to argue our case on the need for the Church to embrace and support all categories of single-mothers. The discussion seeks to establish who between the complementarian and the egalitarian Christians have championed the cause of the visibility of single-mothers in the church today.

4.2. Demographic Representation

Data were collected from seven Christian congregations in Nairobi County. These were St. Paul's University Chaplaincy and Parish, PCEA St. Andrew's Parish, St. Theresa's Eastleigh, Madre Teresa Zimmerman, Embulbul Catholic Parish and St. Gertrude's ACK Parish, Kasarani. Primary data were collected through questionnaires, OIs, IDIs and FGD. Respondents included single-mothers, pastors and leaders in the selected congregations. Chart 4.2.1 below shows the age of single-mothers who were interviewed.

4.2.1. Demographic Characteristics

Chart 4.0.1: Age of Respondents

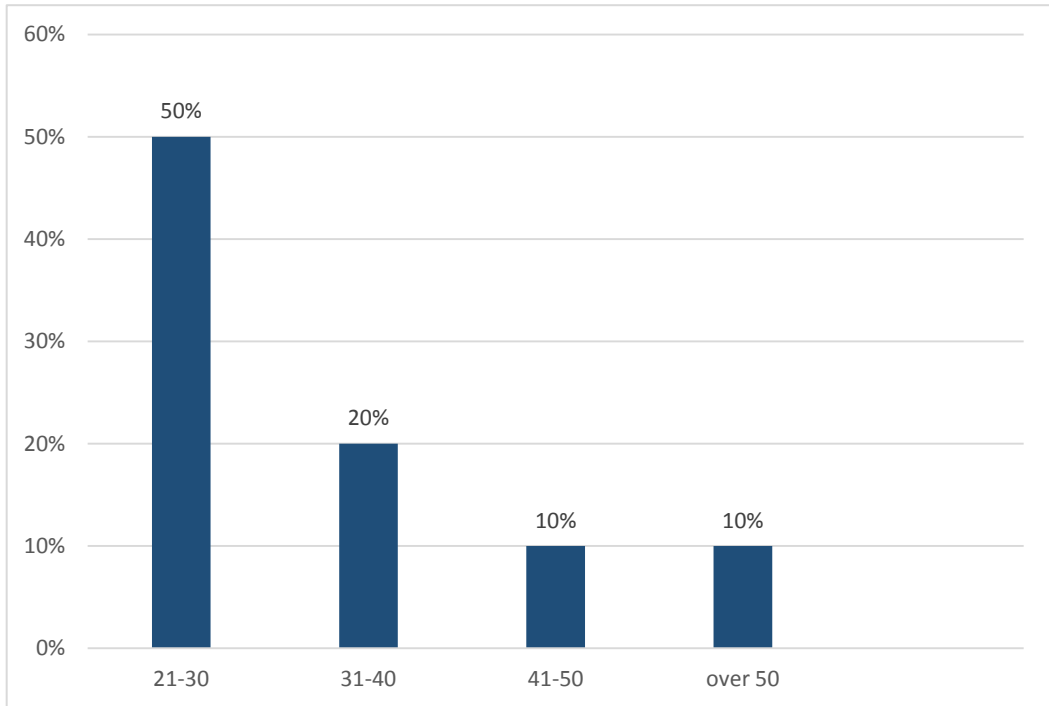
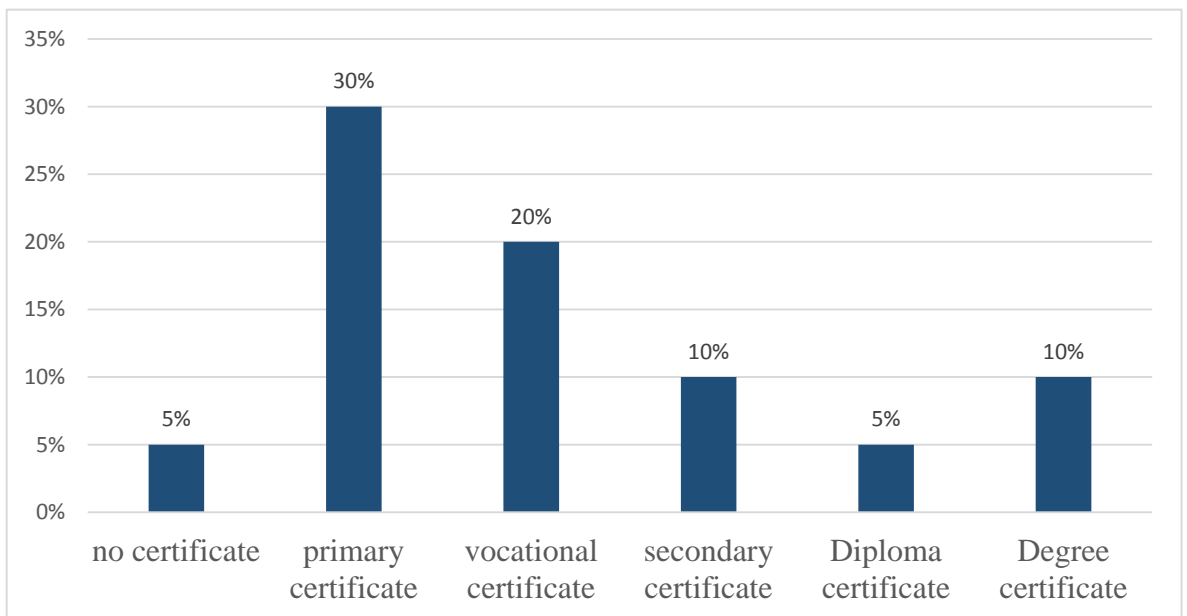


Chart 4.0.2: Level of Education



This figure shows that majority of the respondents did not attain serious formal education.

4.2.2. Employment Status

Sixty percent of the respondents were not in formal employment compared to 40% who were employed. Majority of the unemployed respondents indicated that they earned their living as small-scale traders specializing in cereals, fruits, and vegetables. The others were casual labourers mainly in factories and building or construction sites. Their lack of education and tangible assets or properties meant that they could not access meaningful credit for business start-ups, hence they had to make a living through small-scale trading in order to provide for the needs of their children.

4.2.3. Family Sizes

From the findings, 16% of the single-mothers had one child only, 25% had two, 4% had three children and 5% had five children. In addition to providing for their children, most of them had to provide for siblings, parents, and relatives as well.

4.2.4. Period of Being Single

All respondents had been single for a period between 2 and 21 years.

4.3. Data Analysis

The number of single-parent families has grown enormously over the past decade and was likely to continue growing (Gichinga, 1996). Prior to discussing the prevalence of single families and their presence in Nairobi Christian churches, we need to define what we mean by a single-parent. A single-parent may be defined as a male or female individual without a marriage partner bringing up a child or children alone. This study focused on single-mothers and their role as single-parents.

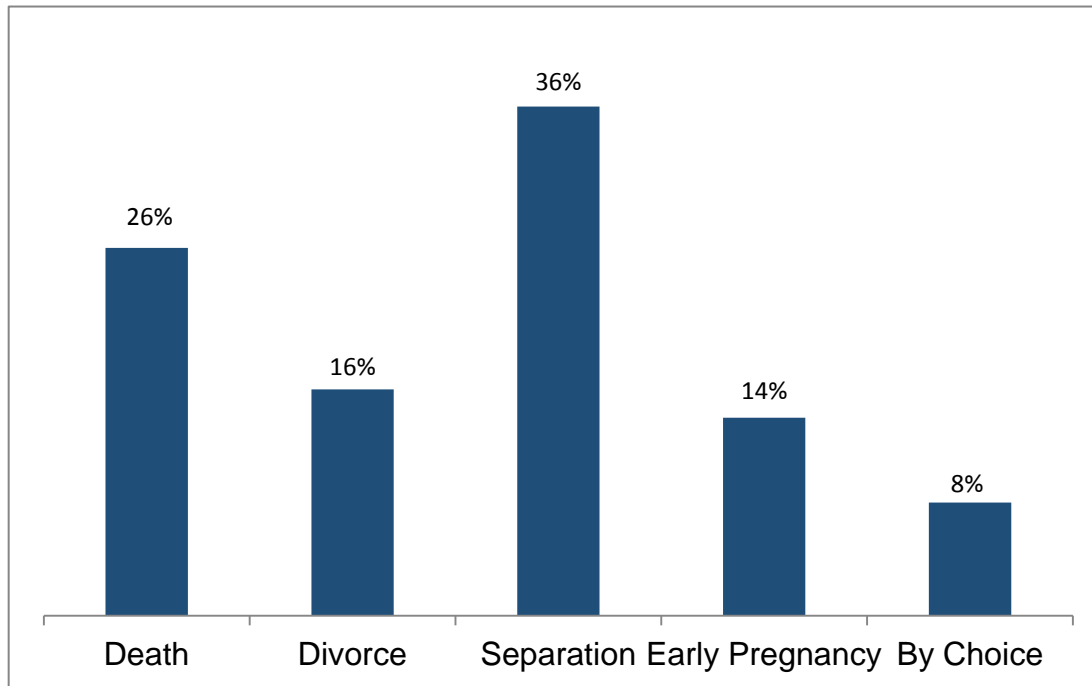
4.3.1. Causes of Single-Parenthood

Single-parenthood as a topic of study has been extensively studied in United States of America. In Chapter 2 of this work, it is pointed out that about 30% of the children growing up today live with single-parents while many others live with one parent who is not their biological parent (Connors, 1999). Other studies in Kenya have pointed that based on the rates of separation and divorce in the country, six out of every ten Kenyan women are likely to become single-mothers by the time they reach 45 years. Although these figures appear exaggerated, a survey conducted by Clark (2013) asserts that Kenyan women have 59.5% chance of becoming single-mothers. The study also established that about 30% of women in Kenya get children out of wedlock as compared to only 18% in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, 5% in Ethiopia and slightly more than 10% in Malawi. The study further established that a Kenyan woman is more likely to become a single mother due to bearing a child out of wedlock than any other more unavoidable causes, like the death of a spouse or divorce or separation.

The research findings from this study show that majority of the respondents (36%) cited separation as the cause for their single-parenthood status. Another 26% cited the death of their spouses, 16% cited divorce, 14% early pregnancy and 8%, “by choice”. This is represented in Chart 4.3.1 (below).

Chart 4.3.1: Causes of Single-parenthood

Causes of single-parenthood



As shown in Chart 4.3.1 above, 92% respondents reported that they became single-parents by chance. This is compared to 8% who pointed out that they became single-parents by choice. Similarly, 8 out of 13 (61.5%) single-mothers had become single through loss of a spouse and 15 out of 18 (83.3%) had been separated.

The literature on causes of single-parenthood tends to concentrate on the decline in morals and poor economic conditions as the causative agents of the phenomenon. This view tends to associate single-parenthood with low-income earners despite that single-parenthood is a social issue which cuts across all socio-economic classes. However, our data in the previous section reveals that some 14% of single-mothers by chance and another 8% by choice among Nairobi Christian single-mothers had never been married at all, totaling 22% of single-mothers who had never been married.

Table 4.3.1 further indicates that 43% became single-mothers due to early pregnancies, after being sexually abused by people very close to them. Some 50% of the respondents held the view that many young girls, especially those living in poor locations, became single-mothers after being sexually abused by people in their neighbourhood and or those close to them. While rape incidents may not be confined in poor backgrounds only, most of the studies such as Nguru (2007), Mbaabu (1982), Radeny (2003) and Njau, (1993) have shown that a young girl in the slum is four times likely to be raped compared to a girl living in affluent sections. Hence, it would be unfair to generalize all single-parents as immoral. One of the respondents who had been a rape victim accused her teacher. Another one victim blamed her own biological father, and another one, a neighbour. These three rape cases did not want to be reminded of the incidents hence could not talk about it. But the one who was raped by her own father confided to the researcher in part:

I have only one child who happens to be a girl. My own biological father raped me when we were living in the shanty 'town' called Kariobangi. It happened one rainy evening my mother had gone for a funeral to South Nyanza, my own father forcefully took chance and raped me, his own daughter. So, it happened that he was strong. He won. He made 'love' to me. When I realized, I was pregnant after weeks later, I ran away from home, I thought of committing suicide or performing an abortion but I wasn't able to, owing to my strong Christian principles. I decided to forgive my father although it was not easy for the memory keeps on coming even up to now. (O.I Achieng, (not her real name) St. Theresa's Eastleigh, 25th November 2012).

Another participant by the name Mary shared of how she shunned marriage after she was raped by a neighbour in the village when she was just 19 years. She conceived and bore a son. The incident traumatized her so much that thereafter, she shunned relationships with men and opted to advance her career in order to achieve economic independence and provide for her son who is now a young adult.

Barber (2000), Boyer and Pine (1992) and Musick (1993) agree that majority of single teenage mothers from poor backgrounds have a history of childhood sexual abuse. This may have hindered the development of social skills that would facilitate financial empowerment. The question then is if the Church would accept such young mothers as part of the congregation without blaming them for engaging in pre-marital sex. An overwhelming 90% of the church leaders interviewed concurred that rape incidents compelled many women to end up in single-parenthood.

Table 4.3.1: Causes of Single-motherhood

Mode	Respondent	Age
Rape	3	7.1
Rejected or Abandoned	4	9.5
Death of Spouse	8	19.1
Separation	15	35.7
Divorce	8	19.1
Single by Choice	4	9.5
Total	42	100

Some participants in this category indicated that they were cheated by their boyfriends that their relationships would lead to marriage, only to be abandoned once they got pregnant. Others were abandoned altogether on getting into “come-we-stay” marriages. Some even got pregnant upon their first sexual encounter with people they could not trace thereafter. One participant in the Embulbul group remembered, “My boyfriend left me after learning I was pregnant and relocated to the USA. He has never even bothered to find out how the child is doing”. Another respondent recalled,

“My partner refused to take responsibility for the child and claimed the child was not his”.

In some cases, family members play a role in frustrating one’s efforts to get married. Jane, a single mother of five narrated how she could not be allowed to marry the father of her children because he was from a “bad” clan. However, she continued having children with him until he got married to another woman, leaving her stranded. Jane had to strive to raise her children single-handedly. The majority (90%) of the respondents conceded that many women became single-parents after being rejected or abandoned by their spouses. They acknowledged that some separations were health-oriented. One could end up being single because of an ill spouse.

Majority of the separated parents who participated in the FGD pointed out that they fell out with their husbands due to drug, alcohol or substance abuse, excessive violence and irresponsibility. A minority regretted having got into early pregnancy and married. Gradually, they realized that they were incompatible with their spouses and ended up in separation. Among the divorced parents, lack of communication, incompatibility and infidelity were the most cited causes of severed and ultimately aborted relationships. For some, it was a personal choice, feeling that their lives would be more stable if they remained single.

Interviews with church leaders revealed that attitudes towards teenage mothers were gradually changing from condemnation to understanding. About 90% of the respondents who participated in this research acknowledged that there were many young girls who had been rendered single-mothers by men who had promised them marriage, only for the men to abandon them when they became pregnant. A young man enters into a relationship with a young woman hoping to get married but once the

child is born, the young man wakes up to the reality that raising a family has financial implications. Consequently, he rejects the young woman for fear of taking up the responsibilities. One respondent from the ACK All Saints Cathedral stated, “When people get engaged in a relationship then get a child, men at times do not want responsibilities and abandon the women resulting in single-parenthood.” Moreover, the young man could just be enjoying sexual intercourse without intending to settle into a marriage. When the action leads to pregnancy, he becomes rude and forsakes the girl. Neither of the two positions auger well with Christianity because the Bible teaches in 1 Timothy 5:8 that a father is to provide for his family and if he does not, he “denies the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” This, however, does not mean that the wife cannot assist in supporting the family. Proverbs 31 demonstrates how a resourceful woman can instrumentally support a family. However, providing for the family is not primarily the woman’s responsibility; traditionally, it is ascribed to a husband. The Church is embracing the reality that pre-marital sex is widespread, and victims of such acts need her for comfort. The church’s role is not to condemn but to show love.

Young women have also fallen victim to the changes brought about by modernity, for example, permissiveness. Many African men have adopted the practice of “pre-testing” women fertility by ensuring that at least one child is born before marriage. In the event that such a couple does not marry, more often than not, the woman keeps the child, and raises the child herself. One respondent at All Saints Cathedral also pointed out that the changing economic relations had reduced a section of African males to the extent that they feared taking up family responsibilities. In the past, procreation involved both bearing and rearing children in order to extend the family kinship (Suda, 2002).

The desire to get out of poverty has also made young women become single-mothers. An respondent intimated that girls from poor families befriended men from well up families. This was in the hope that they would marry into riches, only to realize late in the day that they were being sexually exploited. The respondent further noted that even mature single-mothers fall into this trap, hoping to secure financial upkeep only to add more children to their already strained households. The church has placed the problem at the doorstep of the school system for failing to provide sexual education to young girls. Parents are also blamed for denying love and care to the young girls who become victims of early pregnancies.

Another respondent in this study deplored the idea of society treating sex issues as taboo. The Church blamed the Kenyan media for going overboard in the attempt to fill the void. It emerged from this discussion that lack of guidance and sex education pushed young girls into engaging in sex at tender ages.

Studies have also shown that most young females brought up in slums by single-mothers lacked good parenting and role models other than their abused single-mothers. They, unfortunately, ended up becoming single-mothers themselves once they reached child-bearing age. Close to twelve of the single-mothers interviewed did not have primary school education certificate. They hustled around to earn a living. They lived in communities that were generally insecure, violent and eroded in their social values due to weakened family ties. A study by Olumu and Chege (1994) found out that the marital status of a youth's parents could impact on rates of pregnancy among adolescent girls. Some socialization theories claimed that the absence of one parent could interfere with a child's parental attachment, making it more difficult for the parents to transmit values. The absence of one parent is perceived as having a

negative impact on the family's decision-making methods, weakening proper parental management over children's behavioural patterns. In particular, it has been reported that single-mothers exercise less supervision over their daughters' dating. This, in turn, renders them vulnerable to premarital sex and early pregnancies. Single-mothers are viewed as less effective disciplinarians. Whatever the capabilities of managing children, a couple can corporately assist one another on a teenager, while a single-parent cannot (Olumu and Chege, 1994).

This study further established that some women were either 'forced' or 'willingly' chose to become single-mothers. The first category were women who simply feared marriage. Such fear was often pegged on their past negative experience of living in a household where their mothers were often physically abused by their fathers. Others in this group could have witnessed failed marriages, hence resolved that their marriages could hardly succeed either. One respondent in an FGD said, "Most of my friends, however, say marriage is not easy and are there because of the children, otherwise they would quit; they are just persevering". Some 30% of the respondents in this research indicated that there were women who become single-mothers by choice. This was after seeing their mothers being mistreated by their spouses; they ended up dreading such similar experiences if they got married.

The literature reviewed indicated that young women faced scarcity of marriageable men. They are more likely to begin their reproductive careers early in life and raise their children with the minimal paternal investment if men cannot be relied upon to provide long-term parental investment (Barber, 2000a; Pittman and Govan, 1986). This research established that lack of good potential persons to get married to, also made many women to opt bringing up children on their own. A young African woman

even finds herself in a more complicated situation because her culture obstructs her from approaching a man whom she may consider as a potential partner lest she be branded as 'cheap'. Participants in the FGD and respondents in this research expressed the view that there were many women in many parts of the world who would wish to get married but there were few good enough men to be marriage partners. However, some church ministers took a different stand. They contended that such an argument had been put forth by those who aimed at undermining the marriage institution. The ministers underlined that young girls wishing to get married should look beyond their local circles and communities to get suitable suitors. This advocates for a broader outlook beyond the local community when searching for marriage partners.

In Kenya, like in many other African societies, the family is considered as the basic social unit (Suda, 2002). Much importance is attached to childbearing. There is, therefore, a lot of pressure exerted on a young girl to get married and perpetuate the family tree. Thus, a young woman who may prolong the time to get married because of reasons such as education and career development may not find someone wishing to marry her; she will end up bringing up a child or two on her own. After all, there has been a notion in Kenyan society that well-educated women are "non-marriageable". Not even their educated male colleagues were willing to marry them. Educated women in this research complained that most men were shy from marrying academically or economically successful women as they considered them 'uncontrollable'. Some 30% of the respondents affirmed this position, stating that many young ladies had become single-mothers due to panic that biologically, their chances of getting married were diminishing.

Yet there were other cases where single-motherhood was instigated by parents who obstructed their daughters from marrying partners of their choice. If a child is born out of such a relationship, the girl ends up bringing up the child on her own. This is very common especially when a girl from a well-off family falls in love with a young man from not a well-to-do family. An adage goes that love has no boundaries, but family relationships are guarded. It was confirmed by 30% of the respondents in this study that, many young women have become single-mothers after their families' objection of their choices.

Throughout this research, our terminology regarding irresponsibility has been spoken of as if it only affects men. There are also women who do not like taking responsibility of being a wife. Their tendencies are informed by the position of liberals' view on marriage. This view regarded the marriage institution as an old-fashioned covenant, binding two people in mutual submission. Such ideology held personal autonomy as the highest good. Single-mothers in this category argued that marriage was only good for the man who would be served by the wife. Up to 60% of the respondents supported the view that some women feared to get into a relationship due to its embedded family responsibilities.

Furthermore, changes triggered by education and modernity have provided more freedom and independence. Modern women now have the luxury of choosing to become mothers without necessarily the presence of the fathers of their children. Some of them consider marriage as oppressive. Many of them insisted that though the institution of marriage existed, they preferred to remain single. They did not wish to enter into an institution where they would be subjected to a man's authoritarian control, hence they opted to get children and raise them on their own. This position

was confirmed by 70% of the respondents. The latter regretted that financial stability among women was making them sacrifice the need for family ties for the sake of freedom and independence. However, all respondents reiterated that though the Church encouraged all healthy people to get married and stay in a married life, the ultimate decision to get married remained the choice of an individual.

It also emerged that many 'married' women had lost their 'status' by engaging in a 'come we stay' marriage. It is important to note though that such marriages were usually built on very shaky foundations. A good proportion of marriages in rural African societies would begin in this way. About 3% of the FGD participants in this research became single-parents after being in a 'come-we-stay' marriage which did not work. In most cases, the man would be seeking sexual gratification but the woman, searching for genuine love. The woman may deliberately choose to become pregnant to compel the man into a marriage commitment, with the hope that by so doing, he would love her more. Just as this strategy could work, it could also backfire when the man realizes that raising a family comes with responsibilities. The literature reviewed indicated that men within low-income brackets preferred to maintain "visiting relationships" whereby they would carry "partial" responsibilities. They did not mind getting children in such relationships.

The research also established that alcohol and drug abuse, lack of finances and excessive violence intensified conflicts in many homes, leading to separation. This was confirmed by 36% respondents. They indicated having become single-mothers following separation due to a husband's excessive abuse of alcohol and drugs, on one hand and inclination to violence and failure of their husbands to take up household responsibilities, on the other hand. Respondents totaling 50% noted that majority of

women in the selected churches in Nairobi became single-mothers due to separation. Others separated after finding out that they were not compatible early on in their marriages. Although the respondents acknowledged that the church did not approve of the raising of children by a single-parent, couples facing irreconcilable differences could be separated by the church, especially if the life of one of them was in danger. One respondent remarked, 'we try what we can to keep marriages intact for the sake of children, but when violence is too much at home, separation is good even for the children'.

This research further established that couples may have separated due to interference by parents-in-law. The church equates such actions as being synonymous to forcing the man not to adhere to God's command, that is, 'leave your parents and become one with your wife.' Young women who find themselves in such situations abandon their homesteads to bring up their children on their own. In addition, 30% of respondents confirmed that parental interference contributed to separation among young couples. They also confirmed that many cases where parents were accused of obstructing their children from marrying partners of their choice or even interfering with existing marriages had been brought to the attention of the church.

A good proportion of women in the selected churches in Nairobi had become single-mothers due to broken marriages that led to divorce. This research established that 16% of the respondents became single-mothers after divorce compared to 36% who admitted to being single-mothers due to separation. This disparity may exist because procuring a divorce in Kenyan courts is a very difficult task. Perhaps, the Church tolerates separation in extreme cases. The Bible is interpreted as teaching that God understood people well enough to know their limitations. Human beings are prone to

anger and are likely to abuse alcohol and drugs and become violent. However, the Church has fervently taught that scripture is opposed to divorce and highly upholds marriage. This is stipulated in Malachi 2:15-16 and in Matthew chapters five and nineteen. This has influenced the perception of Christians and members of society regarding divorce. However, the modern generation is not entirely to blame because, despite God's ideal intention for marriage, divorce was common among the first century Christians as it is with us today. The New Testament teaches us that among the Gentiles, both husbands and wives had equal rights to divorce under the Roman law of marriage. After the divorce, the parties of the divorced marriage had equal rights to remarry (Kubai, 2011).

The Church and society have influenced the socialization process, whereby the woman is taught that her primary vocation is being a wife and a mother (Rodgers-Gardner 1990). A woman whose marriage ends up in divorce often feels unworthy and unlovable. It is likely for such a woman to feel that she has totally failed in her vocation. Since Jesus taught that a man can only divorce his wife on account of infidelity, men have in most divorce cases, cited marital unfaithfulness as the reason behind the breakup of the relationship even when other marriage strains such as lack of communication, drunkenness, violence, lack of intimacy, poor expectations, and unwise financial expenditures are at work. Christian couples are incapable of forgiving one another, as well as undergoing counseling. When divorce occurs, the woman is likely to be on the receiving end when the decision to divorce is made based on accusations of marital unfaithfulness.

Kubai (2011) observes that when the husband accuses his wife of marital unfaithfulness, the husband will say it loud enough and ensure that everybody hears

about it. Nevertheless, when the man is accused of marital unfaithfulness, the church minister handles the issue with utmost care, trying to protect the husband from the wife. Kubai (2011) adds that the church minister will move swiftly to reconcile the husband and wife in order to avoid marriage strain. Many Christian families suffer silently out of pretense even when there is a high level of abuse in their homes. Kubai (2011) highlights the pretense of a 'happy marriage' which is often perpetuated by a whole family because they are ashamed to admit all is not well.

Christian single-mothers in this study cited infidelity, irresponsible alcohol drinking, gambling, maltreatment of children, and low-income as reasons that led to their divorce. However, most respondents were concerned that the pursuit of material gains from a relationship made some women enter into marriage with material motives. They added that such marriages became dysfunctional when the men descended financially or when women become sufficiently empowered to make it on their own. The respondents further attributed this situation to lack of respect and understanding among couples. They argued that for people who were in love, a relationship would be stable regardless of which spouse was financially or academically stronger or weaker. Furthermore, advanced education on the part of the woman should be geared towards helping the couple reason together with mutual respect. One respondent cited a controversial Biblical teaching, that the man is the head of the family and couples should, therefore, respect one another regardless of who is more educated or financially endowed. He emphasized that such arrangement would allow more democracy on matters of making decisions for the planning and running of the family.

4.3.2. Single-parenthood - A Challenge to the Church

We have established in the previous section that Christian women in selected churches in Nairobi became single-mothers due to various reasons. We have also seen that the Nairobi Christian churches appreciated why some female congregants were single-mothers. Though we did not establish the exact number of single-mothers in the Nairobi churches, the members of the clergy we spoke to indicated that the population was on the rise. Depending on the location, there were between five and twenty percent of single-mothers in the church. This implies that every church in Nairobi has a special group that requires special ministering.

The research sought to establish the frequency of regular church attendance among the sampled single-mothers. All of them responded affirmatively that everything being constant, they attended all church services every Sunday all the year round. The research further established the level of their commitment to the Christian faith. The researcher did so by asking them whether or not they would describe their religious commitment as very strong, strong, average or poor. Some 50% of the sampled Christian single-mothers described their religious commitment as very strong compared to the other 50% who described it as strong. Table 4.3.2 below shows the representation of the findings.

Table 4.3.2: Respondents' Commitment to the Church

Level of Religious Commitment	No. of Respondents	Age
Very Strongly Committed	25	50
Strongly Committed	25	50
Averagely Committed	0	0
Not Committed	0	0
Total	50	100

The respondents were further asked whether or not they believed God still loved them and if He answered their prayers. All of them answered in the affirmative. The respondents felt that majority of the single-parents in their congregations were very committed to their faith, largely because of the challenges they had undergone in their lives. The single-mothers came to church in search of a safe haven.

The clergy were interviewed on what it meant for the church to have many single-mothers in the congregation yet she was inclined towards the two-parent family model. All the clergy stated that single-mothers needed to understand that God loved them and had a good purpose for them in life. The clergy added that single-mothers needed to accept themselves as they were, be proud of their children, their vocation as parents and turn a deaf ear to stigmatization from the society and move on with life. The clergy further observed that the church had the obligation to encourage and motivate single-mothers. This would encourage the mothers to grow stronger in faith and stop feeling that they were inferior to their counterparts, those in a two-parent family relationship.

The research also set to establish how often the pastors carried messages of encouragement to single-mothers, in their sermons. All the respondents remarked that sermons, centered on family issues were rare. They faulted preachers for underlining the man of the house in relation to family matters at the expense of the woman. This was especially with regard to family prayers. The interviewed clergy expressed the opinion that single-parent families were incomplete and that their children experienced a gap of not growing up in an ideal family.

Indeed, majority of the respondents in this research wished that their preachers would address issues touching on family relationships, parenting, and stigmatization

whenever they gave sermons on the family. Although the respondents noted that sermons related to the family were becoming rare in churches, they still preferred that their ministers would view single-parent families more favorably. Close to 50% of the respondents remarked that the Church needed to revisit the issue of marriage and find out whether or not its teachings were aligned to contemporary life realities. They urged the Church to review her position on the definition of a family and embrace new social dynamics. They further argued that though the Church was obliged to uphold the sanctity of the family institution to be emulated by children and the youth, it also needed to give room for Christian single-parents.

The respondents cautioned against stigmatization of single-parents. Due to the increasing population of the unmarried mothers in the church, church ministers in Nairobi had the responsibility of guiding their congregations to avoid judging single-mothers. Instead, they should pray for the single-mothers to overcome their daily challenges. One key respondent from St. Paul's Church added that single-mothers faced numerous challenges in their lives. They were in the Church seeking for some healing and restoration. The Church would be relevant to the entire congregation by including both the two-parent and the single-parent families in Sunday sermons.

Which category of the single-mothers would be highlighted in such sermons? Although the Church which was instituted by Jesus Christ remains open to all persons, some congregations remain very cold to divorced and or single-parents in their midst. Traditionally, the Church has attended to the plight of widows. It also has a soft spot for the separated for they are considered legally married. There is still hope that God can reunite them together. The church also has been sympathetic to the never-married because the majority of the congregants and the clergy believe that they

may have ended up in such situations due to mistakes. However, majority of the respondents conceded that the growing number of single-mothers of all categories in the Church calls for the re-assessment of attitudes and programming not only in the church but also the wider society.

Whereas, the Church does not encourage single-parenthood, the clergy observed that favorable attitudes towards single-mothers by the wider society may require her to further revise the terminology about single adults. This is because she has the responsibility to minister to single-parents. She ought to help them live a spiritual life and build self-esteem, among many other challenges. An respondent at the St. Theresa Catholic Church was categorical on this, stating that the Church now referred to every single mother as “Mary Magdalene”, comparing her to the biblical Mary Magdalene who was accepted by Jesus when many others deemed her unworthy of His mercy. The respondent further argued that this approach has yielded fruits as many single-mothers had gathered the courage to come forward and declare their marital status in the church seeking to be part of the congregation. In the past, single-mothers would shy away from the church. This was partly because they feared to come forward, given that other Christians associated them with prostitution, husband-snatching, and instability. Hence, it was difficult to justify mounting a credible response to the physical and spiritual needs of single-mothers.

Admittedly, the family institution is under threat due to social vices such as overt drinking among men and desire for freedom among women. As a result, the Church is gradually relaxing her previous position on single-parenthood; she no longer treats single-parents as a failure. All respondents in the study affirmed that the Church is now urging congregants not to rush and judge single-parents as deviants, people who

engaged in pre-marital sex and prostitution and got pregnant with babies they now struggle to raise. Instead, people should credit single-mothers for raising the children single-handedly without the support available to married mothers. Respondents further stated that single-mothers should view themselves as upright Christians. If God has granted them an opportunity to bring up children on their own, He must have a special purpose for them. Another key respondent Mary (O. I. Embulbul, 10th December 2012) asserts that, “it is true that single-parents have physical, emotional and sexual challenges, but they do not become immoral because they are single-parents”. The respondent added, “There are people who lead immoral lives but since they do not carry the pregnancies and give birth, there is no evidence to brand them as immoral.”

Furthermore, according to one pastor at PCEA St. Andrew’s Parish, Christians ought to know that, “marriage alone is not a sign of success; single-mothers should not be discriminated on such basis; there are people who are married yet they are not happy; their children are not morally upright yet those brought up by single-mothers outdo them.” He argued that the Church ought to concern herself with the quality of life parents are giving their children rather than dwell on whether one is married or not. He observed that some single-mothers have brought up their children in a morally upright manner more than some children raised by married couples. He further argued that though the church should continue teaching young people on the importance of marriage as God planned it. After all, the Word of God does not change, irrespective of the change in society; instead, the church should be flexible enough to allow single-mothers and their children to commune with God.

The Bible demonstrates that the institution of single-motherhood is not a recent development; it could be as old as humankind. The Old Testament, for instance, addresses the question of single-motherhood, especially that of a widow. The word 'widow' in Hebrew literally means 'unable to speak.' In the Old Testament widows are described as being poor and suffering much hardships (2 Kings 4:1-7). The book of second Kings highlights a widow in Israel who had nothing except a jar of oil and the debt left behind by her husband. Her creditors claimed her two sons. Widows are also classified with orphans (Isaiah 1:23; Job 22:9; 24:3), the poor (Isaiah 10:22; Zachariah 7:10) and aliens (Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 10:18; 24:7). Widows were often subjected to injustices (Isaiah 10:2; Ezekiel 22:7; Job 24:3). The rights of widows were often violated. For example their land and property could be taken away from them because they had no right to ownership. The prophets warned against the injustices done to widows (Deuteronomy 24:17; 27:19; Jeremiah 22:3; Zachariah 7:10) and advocated for widows to be treated benevolently.

In the New Testament, Jesus shows concern for women and single-parents. For instance, Jesus raised the widow's son and gave him back to his mother (Luke 7:11-17). Jesus also chose a poor widow to express his opposition towards the temple-centered religion (Mark 12:41-44). The Jewish levirate law subjected widows to remarriage (Matthew 19:1-9; 22:23-33). Jesus used this law to teach about remarriage, explaining the spiritual reality of how the levirate law will be rendered null and void at the end times. Though all these examples are centered on the fate of the widow, the pains of every single mother are similar to the pains of the widow described in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Finally, the clergy was emphatic that God has a purpose for every human being. Those who have chosen to be single should be like Paul and serve God in the same capacity as he did. However, the clergy cautioned the would-be single-mothers that there was always the danger of bringing up children alone, especially when they attained teenage and started asking questions on the whereabouts of their father or their mother and one could not answer. They stated that it was for this and many other reasons that the church could not abandon its cardinal duty of teaching young people about the consequences of single-parenting.

4.3.3. Christian Response towards Single-parents

It was noted that quite often, society generalizes the circumstances that lead to single-parenthood with the tendency to associate them with negativity. Society today is dynamic. Perceptions and views of people towards different things are changing. The study sought to establish how other Christians viewed single-parents in their respective churches with regard to their status. From the respondents' sample, 60% described the attitude of their fellow Christians towards them as positive. The single-parents added that they rhymed well with other Christians. Indeed, they also indicated being involved in diverse church activities without discrimination. This response compares with that of 34% respondents whose stance was that their fellow Christians and the wider society portrayed a negative attitude towards them, rendering them reluctant in attending gatherings that comprised both women and men. Chart 4.3.2 below summarizes the discussion.

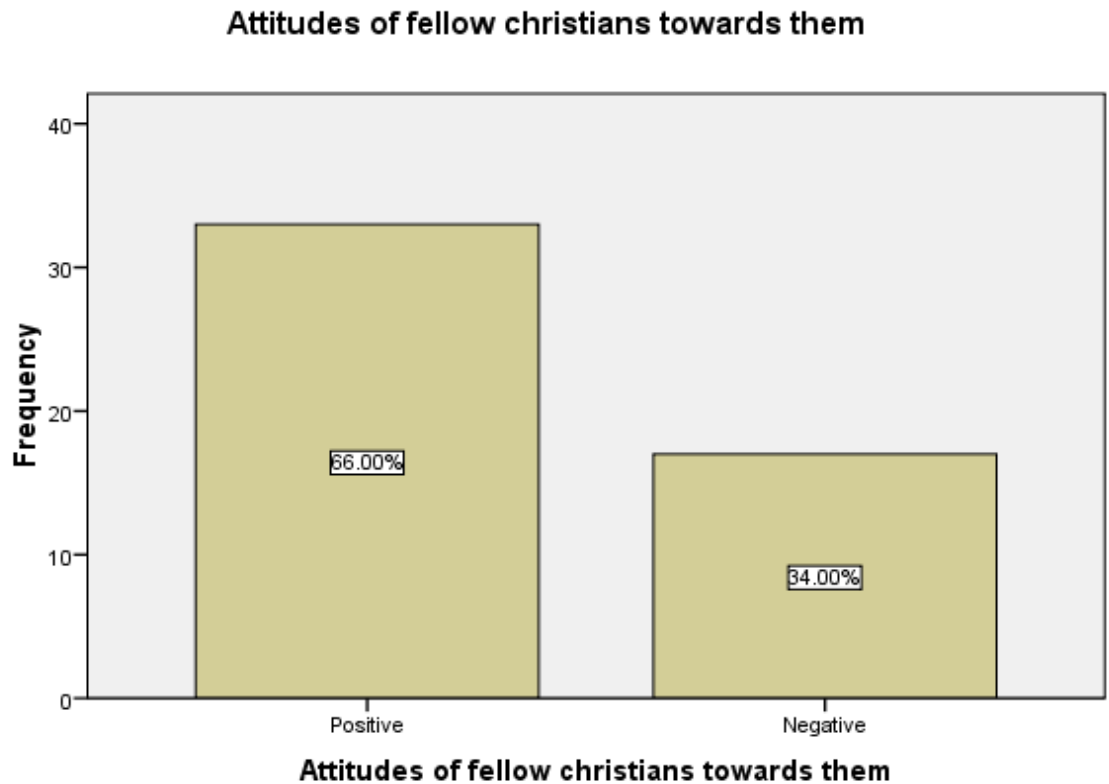
A participant in an FGD (St. Teresa Eastleigh May 2013) observed, "Sometimes married men and women see single-mothers as threats, while it is married men who

approach single-mothers. Due to this, there are certain places and occasions that single-mothers avoid just because they are single-mothers”.

Participants in the FGD unanimously agreed that married women often treated them with suspicion, viewing them as “potential husband snatchers”. Others felt that single-mothers would set bad examples to the youth. The respondents lamented that the society had a perception that women became single-mothers because they did not want to take the responsibility of being wives. However, the reality is that it is men who often failed to take up their responsibilities. In fact, “Some men actually just sit idle in the house while their wives work hard to provide for the family.” (Embulbul Catholic Church).

Single-mothers who were interviewed further affirmed that they experienced diverse forms of discrimination outside the Church. This was confirmed during the FGD where participants disclosed that some land-lords would conduct personalized interviews to ensure that single-mothers would not occupy their premises, lest they set a bad example to the youth or engage in “husband snatching”.

Chart 4.3.2: Attitudes of fellow Christians towards single-parents



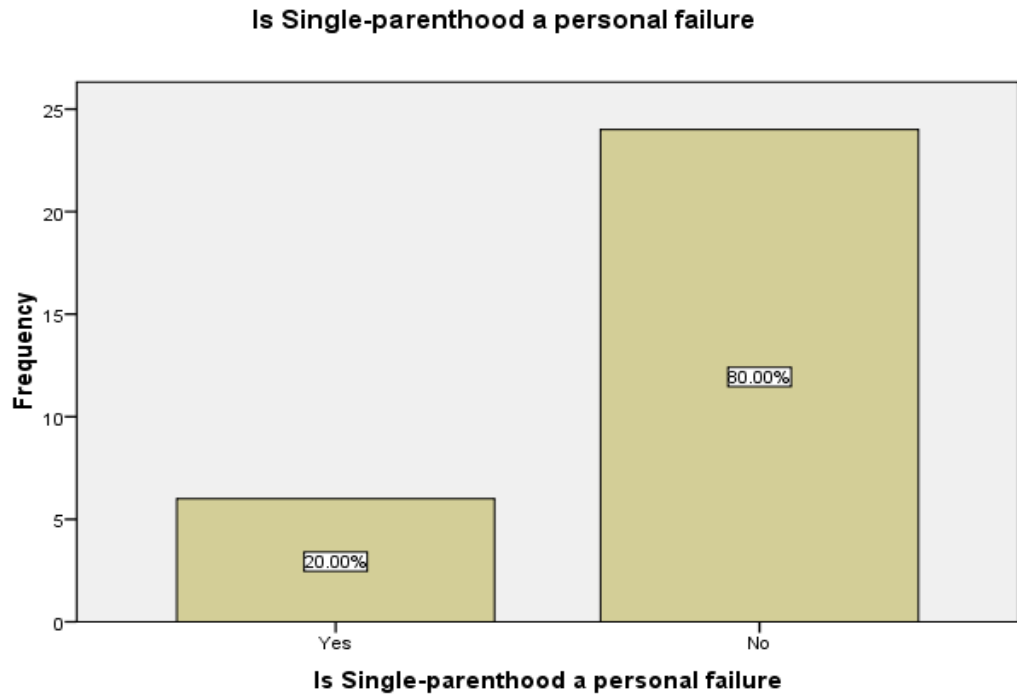
The research also interviewed ten church leaders sampled for this study. The focus was on the attitudes of Christians and the society towards single-parents. In particular, interest was directed on whether or not single-parenthood was perceived as a personal failure, and if so, how they would appropriately respond to it.

Chart 4.3.2 (above) demonstrates that 80% of the clergy did not regard single-parents as a personal failure. This was against 20% respondents who thought otherwise. The former argued that one could become a single mother out of making wrong choices or

due to inevitable circumstances such as the death of a spouse. They acknowledged that some women choose to be single-parents, a choice that could not be rated a failure. One respondent Esther, not her real name (Embulbul 16th June 2012) remarked, “Single-parenthood is not an attribute of personal failure, it could be actually a sign of success for some”. Another respondent, Wakesho - not her real name (Embulbul, 16th June 2012) strongly asserted that, “A single mother may not be interested in a marital relationship with the father of her child; she may not even want him to know that he is the father of her child.”

Respondents who viewed single-mothers as failures held that some factors underlying single-motherhood such as pregnancies out-of-wedlock were avoidable. Furthermore, there were mechanisms to hold such men who evaded taking responsibility for a pregnancy or even rearing a child they had fathered accountable. They insisted that making wrong choices was a failure. Chart 4.3.3 (below) gives an overview of this discussion.

Chart 4.3.3: Views towards Single-parenthood



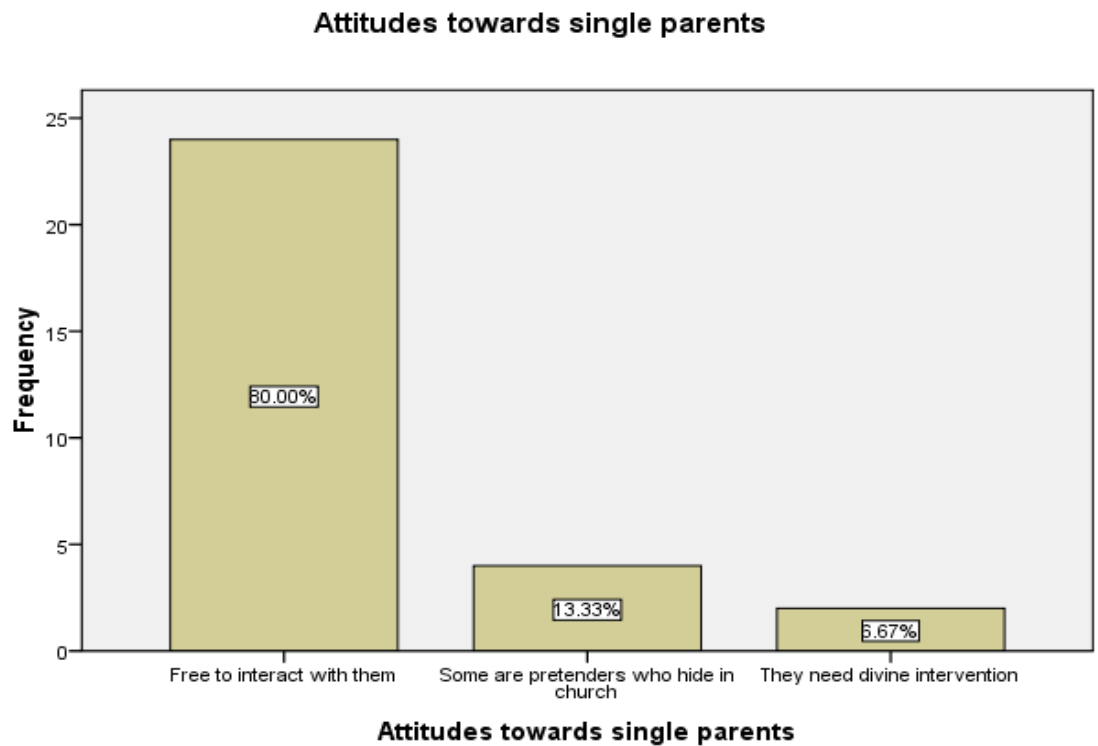
Perceptions towards single-parents vary. Members of the society who regard single-mothers as immoral treat them with suspicion. However, the clergy in most of the selected congregations were convinced that this was not the case among people with a higher level of education. They upheld that for well-educated members of the society, it mattered less whether one was married or not. Accordingly, the well-educated seemed to be more liberal and open-minded in their perception of single-motherhood.

Furthermore, 80% of the clergy stated that they felt free to interact with single-parents whether in church, at work or where they lived (See Chart 4.3.4, below). One respondent (Madre Theresa Catholic Church, Zimmerman), was categorical, “It is unfair to associate single-mothers with pre-marital sex, prostitution, or instability; it is true single-parents face challenges but people are not immoral because they are single-parents, as there are people who are naturally immoral and do not even have children”. One FGD participant (Embulbul Catholic Church) added, “Most single-

mothers are strong in their faith; it would be wrong to associate them with immorality”.

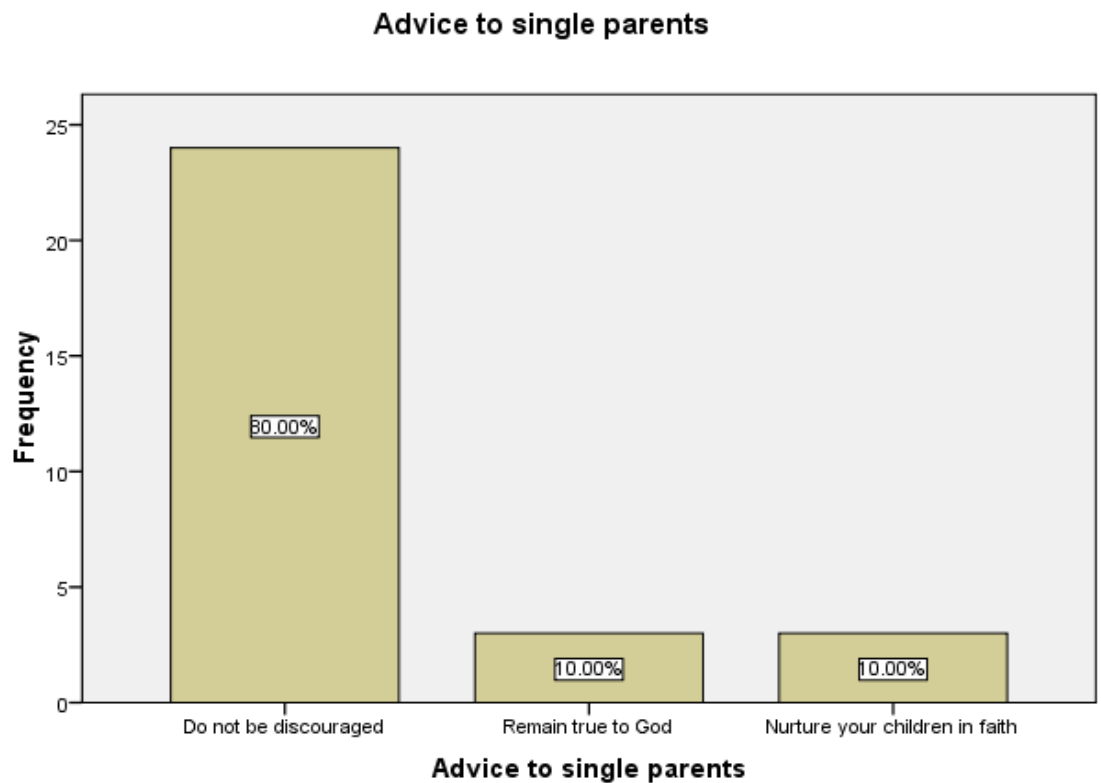
Some members of the clergy, about 13%, felt that single-mothers were pretenders, hiding in the church. Indeed, some female members of the clergy, in particular, added that they were uncomfortable associating with single-mothers, and even more uncomfortable when single-mothers interacted with their spouses. About 7% of the respondents indicated that single-parents needed a divine intervention because only through divine succor, for instance, prayers could such single mother’s lead morally upright lives and bring up their children with good moral character. This is illustrated in Chart 4.3.4 below.

Chart 4.3.4: Attitudes towards Single-parents



Leaders have a role to guide and bring back to line those who have gone astray. During the interviews with church leaders, the researcher sought words of counsel for single-parents in their churches. Most respondents maintained that single-mothers needed not to get discouraged. Rather, they needed to forge ahead and bring up their children the best way they knew. They should persevere no matter how difficult it became. Respondents suggested that single-mothers needed to remain strong in faith and nurture their children in the same faith so that they would grow up to become God-fearing people (See Chart 4.3.5).

Chart 4.3.5: Clergy's Advice to Single-parents



4.3.4. Christians Attitudes towards Single-parents in their congregations

This research sought to establish, from both the Church leaders and single-parents, the truth about the perceptions and attitudes of congregations towards Christian single-parents. The researcher was particularly keen on whether or not the Church considered single-parenthood a personal failure and its perception going forward. Gichinga (1996) was concerned that though the society was in transition and attitudes towards marriage were changing, it was regrettable that a section of the society and the Church still viewed single-parenthood as a failure and unacceptable. Consequently, single-parents felt that they were denied their rights as human beings and as Christians. Respondents were of the view that the population of single-mothers in Nairobi was increasing at a high rate and attitudes towards single-motherhood appeared to be more positive than in the past. However, the respondents still felt that the society viewed single-parenthood negatively. Some still associated single-mothers with pre-marital sex, prostitution, and instability, among a host of other accusations. We discuss accusations leveled against on single-mothers in the following subsections.

4.3.4.1. Premarital sex

During the interviews, we noted that there were people who blamed young women for becoming single-mothers, accusing them having engaged in pre-marital sex. Sociology research on the lives of adolescents has demonstrated that young girls grow up under pressure to get married and raise a family. On the other hand, boys long to mature in order to make friendships with many girl partners before they settle down and become fathers.

Apparently, some young women who fall into the trap of being mistresses are vulnerable to single-motherhood. The Church is aware of these facts but she continues to teach matters of sex before marriage like she did at the inception of Christianity. First, it is important for the Church to teach about the importance of pre-marital sexual abstinence to young people of both genders. However, the Church tends to focus more on young women perhaps because they are the ones who bear the brunt of pregnancy and childbearing. Secondly, the Church appears to have failed in directing young men on how they should conduct themselves regarding pre-marital sex. Thirdly, the Church has failed to guide the young women on how to determine between the true and the cheating men when they start courting. Fourthly, the Church has not sufficiently addressed itself to how the young woman is disadvantaged in matters of sex. This obtains, given that in most cultures, it is the man who takes in a woman. Hardly is there any negotiation when it comes to making decisions on when to start having sex. This is because nearly all the times, it is the young man who determines the appropriate time to have sex, at his convenience.

This notwithstanding, experience shows that early marriages have their own problems. Bishop (1957:221-222) observes that in Rome as in Palestine, marriage was a game played by the older generation, "A boy and girl who were betrothed seldom saw each other. There was no courtship; neither did the word courtship exist". Bishop notes that the Romans tested everything before purchasing, except a bride. Nevertheless, flirtations and affairs by married women were common, and pure women were only those who had not been asked. The women were also cynical; some of them remarked that it was equitable to surrender one's dowry to one's husband and one's body to one's lover (Bishop, 1957:221-222).

The Church and society remain unclear on when to give girls for marriage. While many people would wish that their sons marry at the 'right age', they also wish that their daughters would postpone marriages until after graduation and a stable career. This is very much pronounced when parents and church leaders gather to celebrate the academic success of a young woman who is ready for marriage. In most cases, the message that this group conveys to the young woman is that she should not rush into marriage before attaining a PhD. and get a job that would make her influential in the society. In the event that the young woman waits for very long and fails to get a suitable husband to marry and she decides to raise children on her own, the same people condemn her for failing to live in an ideal family. Hardly do they blame themselves for not guiding the young woman on the kind of man to get serious with and how to ask the Lord for wisdom to discern what that man is really like.

Church leaders are likely to spare the young woman who terminates her pregnancy to avoid shame, but condemn the one who keeps the child for having not remained a virgin until her marriage. This study contends that the church leaders need to be aware that Christian teachings of the medieval times that informed all fornicators will go to hell may not be applicable today unless the approach is changed to appeal to the youth in a language which they would understand and relate to. Jesus Christ taught that He was the way and those who accepted Him would be doing the will of the Father; those who rejected Him would be disconnected from the Father eternally. Young Christian women know this teaching quite well.

4.3.4.2. Perception of Single-mothers as Immoral

The respondents of this study observed that the society perceived single-parents as immoral. However, the most disturbing revelation was that some members of the

congregations also accused single-mothers of prostitution. Society assumes that single women who have attained marriage age and are not in marriage life are promiscuous. The single-mothers we interviewed angrily dismissed people who held such views. They argued that being a single mother did not guarantee one the freedom to have sexual relations with anyone. In essence, single-mothers are overburdened by the tasks of bringing up their children to think about relationships. They further termed offensive, the category of men who harbored the mentality that single-mothers were deprived and in need of sex all the times. One respondent stated that although some women became single-mothers out of careless mistakes, it would be wrong to categorize all single-mothers as immoral. After all, not all causes of single-motherhood signify a decline in morals.

Research findings indicated that it was the men who approached single-mothers in most sexual relationships they had been involved in. Angered, the respondents urged church leaders to stop blaming them for promiscuity but instead counsel the Christian men who approached Christian single-mothers for sex. By seeking sex from single-mothers, the men were not only breaking their marriage vows but also participating in sinful activities that devalued their worth as Christians. However, many Christian men also suffered from the hangover of the Mosaic Law in which adultery was pinned to the woman. The Church has a great example to turn to when addressing this issue. This is because Jesus demonstrated that there was no single standard for men and women in the morality of sex. Jesus confronted the men who were baying for the blood of a woman they accused of adultery. Instead, he dared them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 7:53-8:11).

One respondent, Mary (O. I. ACK St. Gertrudes, Kasarani, 15th May 2013) observed that there were numerous cases where single-mothers got involved in sexual activities with men, hoping to get financial support. All respondents agreed that more often, such relationships failed to materialize because men may just be interested in irresponsible pleasure but not the welfare of the women. Consequently, a woman who may encounter the first, second and third man of this kind could end up building anger against all men, labelling them unreliable. But who is to blame for such a situation? It is the men who cheat her, who aggress her faith, who make her sin to herself, and who makes her sin to all men. The Church is often aware that women engage in such behaviours in the quest for survival, desire for warm relations and proof of self-worth. Unfortunately, the church members tend to condemn the women, hardly condemning men who enter a relationship with women only to fulfill their lustful wishes of having sexual relationships with as many women as their money can afford them.

Nevertheless, such cases do not warrant blanket condemnation of all single-mothers for prostitution. After all, most single-mothers who come to church to seek Christ are very strong in faith and have passed the morality test. The church is to blame for failing to stand up against the lack of democracy in decision-making processes within the society and global inequality whereby nearly all the resources including those of the church are controlled by men. As the Church condemns the young women who conceive and bear children out of wedlock, let her equally remember to condemn the men involved.

4.3.4.3. Single-mothers are seen as a Source of Instability in Marriages

This research further established that married Christian women blamed single-mothers for separation and divorce within their marriages. They also perceived them

as a potential threat to their marriages. This perception is not only restricted to Nairobi churches. Makhubele (2008:83) contends that about 60% of the participants had problems with single-mothers' morality. The pastor in this congregation lamented that there was a single mother who fell in love with a married man, making him withdraw from his legal marriage. The situation was grave because all the three worshiped in the church and met there every Sunday. The abandoned wife may have blamed the single mother for "snatching" her husband, yet she may not have had any quarrel with her adulterous husband.

Similarly, married Christian men blamed single-mothers for their problems when their illicit relations turned sour. A single mother may engage in a relationship with a married man to have company or at most to have him stand in as a father figure to her children. A married man may develop the tendency to overspend on the woman to cover for his limited love and makeup as it were for his frequent absence. This research established that 48% of Christian single-mothers in the selected churches in Nairobi would love to get married.

4.3.4.4. Some Christians Avoid Interacting with Single-mothers

Contrary to the expectation of this research, the majority of the single-mothers interviewed indicated that they interacted well with married Christian women and that the latter assigned them some church duties without any qualms. This position was reinforced by 80% of the respondents who felt that they were comfortable interacting with single-parents whether in church, at work or where they lived. However, respondents in this study also stated that married Christian women discouraged them from freely interacting with their husbands for fear that they would "snatch" them.

The fear of the married Christian women is understandable from a human perspective. It is common for one to be overprotective of their assets. Married Christian women would take it upon themselves to pray and encourage single Christian mothers (especially the young ones) to get married in order to start living in a dual family. After all, the Church has all along encouraged young Christian single-mothers to get married. Therefore, rather than preoccupying themselves with the notion that Christian single-mothers are frequently talking to their husbands, the married Christian women ought to pray for their husbands to understand the true meaning of marriage in the form that God intended it to be. Their prayers would be biblically valid because in Malachi 2:16, it is stated that the family is a divine institution. God created it, and human beings have a divine mandate of stewardship over it. The basic biblical family unit comprises one man, one woman—his spouse—and their offspring or adopted children. No matter the power relations in the home, married Christian mothers would do themselves a favor by emphasizing this point to their husbands rather than trying to ward off Christian single-mothers from talking to their husbands.

Furthermore, the tendency to keep off Christian single-mothers is not confined to married Christian men. Some members of the clergy also refrained from interacting with Christian single-mothers out of unfounded fears. A key respondent from the All Saints Cathedral explained that he did not regard Christian single-mothers to be bad people although he was uneasy to interact with them. This research did not probe him further on this uneasiness, yet he could be a resource person for their spiritual healing. He probably would be among the, “few pastors who fear that they could place their ministries in danger while counseling young single-mothers” (Makhubele, 2008:82).

It was astonishing to learn from the research that the cause of Christian single-mothers was not well supported by the wives of the clergy. Although the wives of the clergy and the church women leaders held that all women made errors in their lives even in having an unplanned pregnancy, being rejected or having a failed marriage were just some of unfortunate challenges facing women. More than 50% of the single-mothers who participated in the FGD pointed out that pastors' wives were jealous; they prevented their husbands from offering counseling services to single-mothers. This research established that the work of the wives of clergymen and the women church leaders was well cut out. This is because the two conceded that single-parent families were incomplete and that their children experienced a gap, not growing up in an ideal family. As such, rather than shunning the Christian single-mothers from their midst, the two should be at the forefront of guiding single-mothers on how to bring up their children in a Christian manner in order to realize healthy marriage relationship and bringing up complete families.

4.3.4.5. Stigma Experienced by Christian Single-mothers

Peck (1998: 225) discussed community formation and bonding, "We must delight in each other, make others' conditions our own, rejoice together, labour and suffer together, always having our eyes on our community as members of the same body." These words would be more meaningful if every member of the body of Jesus Christ practiced love for one another. Such love is not easy; that could be the reason why Jesus gave it as the second most important commandment after our love for God. Peck (1998) strongly expresses the view that human actions can be at times intentionally exclusivist to the extent of discouraging the need to form a community.

This research established that Christian single-mothers at times felt uncomfortable to visit certain places or attend certain occasions due to lack of sensitivity among married Christian and non-Christian women. Hassani (2000) notes that single-mothers shied off from attending functions that required the presence of a partner; if they did, they would cry all the way home. Other studies showed that single-mothers particularly feared attending weddings because it reminded them of their failed marriages (Rodgers-Gardner, 1990). The kind of introductions that married women engaged in such occasions, emphasizing on marital status made single-mothers very uncomfortable. Occasionally, such introductions ended up in ridicule of single-mothers, hence not worth attending. Though marriage is an achievement, married Christian women should not use it as a license to despise those who do not have husbands.

Single-mothers have also been belittled on such days as Mother's Day. A church minister may even officiate such an occasion but in his enthusiasm, forgets that some mothers in his congregation are not married. He may then call upon husbands of the great mothers to line up behind their spouses. Such an arrangement can cause embarrassment to the single-mothers. This also happens in schools when celebrating the children's achievements. Many single-mothers have even complained that their children have been marked wrong to a question, 'who drives you to school?' when they give the answer: "... it is my mom." This is because the class teacher may have been socialized that certain roles belong to a particular gender.

Given such circumstances, the faint-hearted single mother may tend to think that she could indeed be a failure and start regretting about her status even when she has worked very hard to be a successful mother. It is a pity that a married Christian man

or woman may exhibit invulnerability, yet Jesus exemplified vulnerability during his celebrated Sermon on the Mount (Matthew, chapter 5). At times of marriage upheavals, the married Christian woman ought to be sensitive and sympathetic to the plight of the single mother because no single marriage is a hundred per cent perfect. A research done on divorce trends in United States of America at the beginning of 21st century indicated that more Christians than secular people were filing for divorce in courts (Splinter, 1992). Similarly, one participant in an FGD of this research also cautioned married Christian mothers to stop judging single-mothers as immoral and as failures. She recounted how close Christian friends insinuated that she was immoral when she got pregnant with her child. Little did they know that some of their daughters would give birth before marriage and some of their own marriages would end up in divorce. In essence, no one qualifies to condemn or judge the other.

4.3.4.6.A Single Mother Cannot Succeed Without a Man

There are certain myths in every society that are difficult to dispel. The belief that a single mother cannot succeed without the help of a man is one such myth. Indeed, many single-mothers complain of loneliness; they would enjoy companionship. However, the society exaggerates this loneliness by alleging that the successful single woman is dependent on a man somewhere. The Church also makes this loneliness more painful by not accepting her as she is and also by failing to support her.

It is also true that single-mothers are financially strained. About 64% of the respondents in this research attested to this. Alleging that a single mother cannot succeed without a man is sheer ignorance. We live in a world which is dominated by men but we surely cannot deceive ourselves that a single mother cannot make positive decisions by herself. There obviously are many single-mothers who make mistakes in

their business and careers, just like there are many married men and married women who will do so. All wise human beings, including single-mothers, are capable of learning from their mistakes and moving on with life.

Depicting a single mother as one who is incapable of managing her life without the support of a man is not only annoying but also ungodly. A Christian who does so implies that God does not grant a single mother the gift to deal with her problems. The Bible illustrates, for instance, how God assisted Hagar, the mother of Ishmael, as a single mother. It is needless to portray a single mother's life as dependent on a man. This is provocative, prompting her to a warpath against society, an ungodly option. In any case she should not divert her energies, to now spend a lot of her time on proving and stating that she can bring up well-grown and well-mannered children without the support of a man. Instead, she should utilize her time in more fulfilling activities. In fact, most of the times, single-mothers have to contend with the common social perception that they are immoral and incomplete. One FGD participant (Embulbul 20th June 2013) wondered loudly on what could have gone wrong with the current crop of Christians and members of the wider society. She noted that, "When a single mother is successful, others feel bad. They question the basis of her success, make insinuations of it being impossible for such success without being financed ... this is the notion that women cannot make it on their own unless a man's support is involved. Also, when a woman is not married, society generally her as proud and irresponsible and a reject."

4.3.4.7. Single-mothers do not want to Become Responsible Wives

Marriage comes with many responsibilities for both man and woman; whenever any of the spouses absconds some responsibilities, cracks emerge in the marriage. Stating

that single-mothers opt not to marry to avoid marital responsibilities in marriage is deceptive. This research established that not every woman becomes a single mother out of choice. Indeed, single-mothers shoulder the enormous parental responsibilities alone. This research has further established that single-mothers attained their status due to diverse circumstances; some of them have to make very painful choices. As many as 84% of the single Christian mothers in Nairobi from this research expressed their wish to marry or re-marry to either have more children or have the company of a man. They would not desire marriage if they were shy to take up marriage responsibilities.

Respondents for this study emphasized many times that the Church encouraged single-mothers, especially the young ones, to willingly marry and be in a complete union. The Church would hardly take this stance if she was convinced that single-mothers feared taking up family responsibilities. In any case, very few people including single-mothers by choice would loathe having a compatible person in their lives to share their sorrows and joys with. This research advances that Christians would do better if they prayed for single-mothers to be even more responsible instead of condemning them for some negative tendencies that may feature only in a small section of the single-mothers.

Possibly, Christians who hold the view that single-mothers are afraid of taking family responsibilities may have in their minds the educated and well-off single-mothers who remain single by choice. The latter group of women is influenced by contemporary liberal trends, some of them linked to feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s. They regard the marriage institution as coercive and exploitative to women. One of the viewpoints of the liberal feminism is that it is immoral for a person to participate

in an institution in which power relations are against one gender. Accordingly, the marriage institution is seen to be tilted in favor of man, hence the woman should hesitate to desire it.

It is improper to arbitrarily apply the cardinal values held about marriage, hence lock the door of the church against those who are single by choice when they desire salvation. It is not convincing that every woman must naturally want to be married and that she cannot be fulfilled without a husband. Just as not all individuals can qualify membership/identity with every institution that there is in the world, maybe marriage is also not meant for every woman. Indeed, being in married life is not a guarantee that one will make it to heaven as some pastors allude to when bashing singles in the church. In his ministry, Jesus taught that God would judge individuals and not families or nations (Rogers-Gardener, 1990). Single-mothers by choice, therefore, are accountable to God and not to other Christians here on earth. God could either punish or forgive the single-mothers. Their fellow Christians have an obligation to pray for them to repent and follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

4.3.4.8. Single-mothers are Pretenders who prefer to hide in the Church

This research established that 13% of church leaders in Nairobi thought that single-mothers were pretenders, hiding under the cover of the church. Those who held such view alleged that single-mothers were up to no good, that they were in church to cover up their transgressions against fellow human beings and God. Single-mothers were accused of bad motives. Some alleged that they could not be fully trusted by married Christian women and even by pastors' wives. They were accused of being adulterous, drunkards and gossipers. Condemning single-mothers seems to be an exciting activity for some Christians and members of society.

If single-mothers have sinned, it is against God more than against human beings. God has his own divine and just standards, different from those of human beings. They may be condemned by human standards but vindicated by divine justice. The Church needs to focus on helping single-mothers to conquer sin and forgive them just as Jesus forgave the woman caught in the adulterous act. Christians need to promote acts of forgiveness among single-mothers even seven times seventy times (Matthew 18:21-35). The future of the Church rests on forgiveness.

4.3.4.9. Attitudes towards the divorced Christian Single-mothers

We included this exclusive section on the divorced mothers because they are the most discriminated in the religious circle. Busenitz (1986) remarks that when a woman loses her husband due to death, all neighbours rally round and provide meals and any help they can give. They are willing to provide comfort and a shoulder to cry on and are available for the widow; they include her in their activities, feeling sorry for her that she is now so alone. However, when a marriage ends due to infidelity or marital breakdown, the woman is instantaneously transformed from a married woman to a divorcee, a status lower than her previous one. She is generally suspected by all those who are still happily married. Friends tend to withdraw from her. Married women, in particular, fear that their husbands might be attracted to the idea of an "available woman". Accordingly, women who used to be friends, and who would thus be there to give psycho-emotional, spiritual and material support, withdraw and leave her alone in her tears and fears.

The Church considers divorce as the most reckless outcome that could befall a marriage. The Church correctly teaches that people who divorce fail to forgive. Yet, Jesus preached forgiveness; the Church also considers divorce as a stand for pride, yet

Jesus said ‘Blessed are those poor in spirit’ (Matthew 5:3). Those who divorce are incapable of making peace, yet Jesus taught that ‘Blessed are the peacemakers’ (Matthew 5:9). Those who divorce are also preoccupied with searching for invulnerability, yet Jesus exemplified vulnerability.

There are numerous divorces in Nairobi, like elsewhere in the world. These have been in some cases initiated by women who upon climbing up the socio-economic ladder despise their spouses. Respondents in this study cautioned the need to have partners of comparatively equal education and socio-economic status in order to maintain communication at home. They also called for couples to liberalize decision-making in the family so that couples can continuously bond irrespective of the shift in material prosperity for either of them.

Regarding the divorced mother in the church, the synoptic gospels affirm that Jesus preached inclusiveness and tolerance for everyone, that is, his outstretched crucifixion arms signified the coming together of the Jews and the Gentiles into the kingdom of God (Christena, 2013). Discrimination extended to divorced persons in the church is completely uncalled for, especially for those who have repented and accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour. By blocking divorcees from participating in certain aspects of the house of the Lord, the church is proclaiming that she has lost sight of the essence of a community. If Christians take Jesus seriously, the spirit of His resurrection should prevail in the church (Peck, 1988:296).

4.3.4.10. Single-mothers are Deemed Unfit for Leadership in the Church

Possibly, one of the most controversial topics in the Church today is to what extent should single-mothers participate in church leadership. The issue of women leadership in the church has bothered the church for a long time. It has taken a lot of

effort for the mainstream churches to consecrate women pastors and bishops. The Catholic Church is still rigid on this issue, maintaining that God reincarnated in this world as a man. This is taken to imply that it is only a man who can lead a Christian church (Rodgers-Gardener, 1990). Those who oppose the ascendancy of women into positions of leadership in the church adduce such biblical passages as 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in the New Testament that prohibit women to teach or to have authority over men.

Worth and Turfnell (2013:45) counter this argument asserting that sections of this passage disqualify from service not only women but also all men who are single, all men who are married but have no children, all men who are married but who have only one child, all men who are married but who have children too young to profess faith, all men who are married but who have one unbelieving child or children, all men who are married and whose children are believers but not submissive, all men who are married and whose children are believers and submissive but not respectful. The authors further argue that these exceptionally harsh and restrictive requirements are all the more amazing, since the New Testament favours singleness for both men and women as preferred status for Christian ministry (Matthew 19:11-12; 1 Corinthians 7:25-35). This is because the New Testament emphatically requires the total utilization of all available spiritual gifts in the ministries of the church, regardless of the marital status or gender.

All respondents among the clergy informed this research that single-mothers were only allowed to participate in the leadership of a young church; they were supposed to exit the positions as the church progressively grew. This means that single-mothers would only take leadership positions when there is a dire shortage of leaders, just to stand in the gap, as it were. The role of the single mother is restricted to auxiliary

roles in the church, for instance, ushering, serving tea and snacks to Sunday school children. In the Anglican Church, single-mothers would not be admitted to the Mothers Union as full members but only as associate members (Mothers' Union Guidelines, 2001). The church also seems to doubt the capacity of single-mothers to serve in the house of the Lord. A single mother has to undergo a lot of scrutiny and vetting to establish whether or not she is of good behaviour and is committed to serving God before she gets appointed to any leadership position in the church. This also goes to a woman not married in the church. She also must have had a church marriage; those married under African customary laws are still considered "incomplete"; they are not allowed to be leaders.

There is a tendency by church leaders to view a single woman in the same way she may have presented herself the moment she joined a congregation, no matter how much healing and transformation she has undergone. If she confessed that she made a mistake in her youth, or she was once divorced, this label remains and she is permanently looked at as unsuitable for certain ministries or leadership. Mbugua (1995) complains that this is discrimination and the Church will continue to lose a lot of resources if it does not change its position on the issue of leadership to accommodate all women. Some members of the clergy in this research were of the opinion that all congregants should be treated equally regardless of their marital status and allowed to serve the church in any capacity. The Bible underlines the common priesthood of all believers (cf. 1 Peter 2:9). There is no gender restriction. Husbands function as priests when they lead their families in prayer or when they minister the Word of God to them. Wives equally function in this role.

4.3.5. Church Response towards Christian Single-parents

This research points towards the possibility of positive change in attitude towards single-mothers, but resistance is strong (Peck, (1987 1988: 292). Positively, the Church in Nairobi is taking note of the growing number of single-mothers within its congregation: it is calling for tolerance towards them. The sampled clergy in the selected churches were asked what they thought about being a single-parent and especially whether, according to them, it signified personal failure. Majority of the respondents (80%) opined that single-parenthood did not reflect a personal failure compared to 20% who thought otherwise. Again, 50% of the clergy observed that perceptions towards single-mothers improved with the level of education of the observer.

Generally, members of the clergy concurred that it was wrong to condemn single-mothers without understanding what caused their singleness. This is because many of them may just have made wrong choices early in life. The clergy emphasized that single-mothers could have made mistakes during courtship and fell at the hands of dishonest young men. In fact, our research established that 9.5% of single-mothers attending Nairobi churches became single-mothers after being rejected or abandoned by their spouses either soon after they got pregnant or shortly after they moved into their houses. Some may have entered into relationships with young men from rich backgrounds, or with educated young men, or even with others who promised to be potential good husbands but turned out to be ‘wolves’.

Surprisingly, some members of the clergy expressed the view that single-parenthood was not a failure as it could turn out to be a success for some single-mothers (O.I. St. Paul’s, June 2013). It is no secret that whenever two people entered a union, they

experienced some good as well as bad moments in marriage. Just like in a business venture, in marriage, partners who read the signs of troubles well ahead of time pulled out of a venture to try it out on their own in order to safeguard their hard-earned capital. Although the presence of many parties acted as a deterrence to the dissolution of a marriage, those who realized that the union was not 'theirs' well in advance created the opportunities to work out family lives on their own. As pointed out by Adamczyk (2010), single-mothers who have been successful in their careers have exhibited positive traits in their parenting roles. This does not mean that divorce is laudable. To be sure, those who enter into marriage with the intention of quitting the union at a certain stage commit sin. Nevertheless, to live in a marriage that can never work for the sake of Christianity is not being a great Christian. Furthermore, a certain independence from ordinary communal ties and a willingness to 'go it alone' for the sake of God or others is essential to being a Christian (Vacek, 2008:158).

The Church in Nairobi also acknowledges that young women brought up in abusive marriages fear to enter into marriage. These same young women have a choice to become mothers irrespective of the harsh stance of conservative Christianity. The latter has it that every young woman can turn to God to get a good match who would respect her dignity as a wife and the mother of his children. Notwithstanding that this is good teaching, it is equally factual that trauma does not heal quickly. Usually, there is little available time for a young woman to think about a potential man and to have a child. In any case, the desire to have a child is only completely understood by the young woman. Many disciplines have tried to marvel around this question with very little success. Similarly, educationists wonder why poor girls do not stay longer in school to enhance their employability, but the young girls answer that their next day's survival is assured by the work they do at the moment. What do these responses

reveal? They imply that the solution on why young women desire to have children within a particular set time lies elsewhere (Radeny, 2003:109).

Single-motherhood poses other unique challenges to the Church in Africa. Mbiti (1969) explains that marriage among Africans puts premium on procreation; anyone shunning procreation is viewed as demoting the family tree and by extension the societal tree. Hence when an African young woman attains marriage age, she gets conscious of the desire to have a baby as she must 'pay back' and fulfill the expectations of the family and society. She is pressurized by her peers and kinsfolk to get married. When she transcends society's perceived marriage age and having a baby, gossip is rife that she could be barren. At this juncture, the attitudes of married adults towards the young woman can be awkward. One picks such remarks as, "Why is a fine lady like you not married?" or "Get yourself involved in youth activities at the church and you will meet some fine young man there," directed to her regularly. When that 'fine' man is not a solid Christian, he realizes that he has done things in haste and leaves the woman. Consequently, the young woman 'looses' out.

What solution does the Church have when things turn this way? According to respondents, the young single-mothers who have never been married are encouraged to join marriage without coercion. Single-mothers who participated in the FGD of this study confirmed this. They shared out that single-mothers with only one child experience pressure from friends to get married so that they can bear children for the new man not only to secure their new relationship but also to ensure support for the child born out of wedlock. However, very few Christian men are willing to raise children as stepfathers. Likewise, a single mother may be hesitant to get involved with a man who may not love her child. The 20% of the clergy respondents who viewed

single-parenthood as a failure blamed women who got children out of wedlock and argued that she would be equally responsible if she did not get another man who would love her and her child. The clergy further argued that men who impregnated young girls and refused to take responsibility needed to be called and held to account. A critical look at the social institutions, including the family, the school, the church, the government and the society at large, reveals certain imperfections. Their views and approaches to the problem of early pregnancies appear to be incoherent, leaning towards condemnation rather than prevention or rehabilitation.

First, the contemporary family institution has generally failed to teach both boys and girls why early pregnancy is not desirable. Most African mothers, for instance, are very poor at communicating with their daughters on what to do with the onset of menstruation. Instead, they handle it as if it were a subject that needs to be taught in secret. The girls are left in the hands of their peers and their boyfriends (Malusu, 2012). By the time the mother wakes to the reality of communicating with her daughter on how to handle menstruation, she realizes that the girl is already pregnant. Second, parents have failed to teach their daughters on withstanding pressure from other girls and from boys who lure them to premature sex. Third, society has failed to teach young men that impregnating someone else's daughter is a grave offense. Even at these times, when HIV and AIDS is ravaging the population, parents are yet to clarify to their sons that they are not entirely entitled to any good girl out there. Sons should be taught that having many girlfriends is quite irresponsible. Sons have been left to emulate King David and King Solomon of the Bible not in their desire to worship God in the case of the former, or restoring the glory of the Israel's power in the case of the latter, but in having many girlfriends while they are young and having many mistresses when they settle down.

The school is also culpable in matters pertaining to early pregnancies. Many counseling studies (which we shall not cite here because this is a different field of inquiry) have shown the school approach on matters of early pregnancies is wanting. The school system still maintains outdated methods of inculcating sexual knowledge to pupils. Malusu (2012) showed that majority of teachers in high school hardly bother to teach the basics of reproductive health. This is because they consider it the responsibilities of Biology teachers who in most cases, handle the subject academically, like any other subject. While attending these lessons, most girls only become interested that their bodies have matured hence are 'adults' and ready to experience men. Further, instead of teaching girls to take pride in being virgins, the school administrators only warn them of the dire consequences of getting pregnant. Girls who become pregnant while in school experience great rejection. They may be sent out of school without any further consideration. At home, parents may not readily accept them as they are considered a disgrace. In any case, most parents would lament over the loss this implies, having heavily sacrificed economically in terms of tuition for them. Their friends and peers may also reject them, further compounding the emotional and psychological stress.

In the previous section, we mentioned that during courtship, the man has an upper hand on matters of sex, especially when a woman convinces herself that the relationship is headed for marriage. However, relationships that begin in schools are at times very crude. A study by Egueh (2012) in Garissa County showed that older girls dropped out of primary schools in that county for fear of being impregnated by either their teachers or the older boys. Society is non-protective to the young woman from early pregnancy. Sadly, some members of the society derive a lot of pleasure from the misfortunes of others. For instance, a mother of two daughters finds that a

school-going girl, a daughter of a neighbour four gates away is pregnant. Instead of empathizing with the family and the girl, she makes it a good topic for gossip. She may remark, “She is just reckless like her mother”. The woman behind all this reckless talk could be a professed Christian who has chosen not to walk the way of the Lord. She chooses to laugh at her neighbour and her daughter rather than love them. The question is, who between the reckless Christian woman and the Church is to blame? On such an instance, the Church cannot go blameless. When a Christian fails to love her neighbour, it could imply that the teachings of the Church have not truly percolated through its members and it may have remained merely intellectual. Christians must appropriate, draw and apply useful lessons from the teachings they receive. Indeed, Christians typically regard Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, as the fullest revelation of divine love. People who love God are capable of loving their neighbours; those who do not know God cannot love their neighbours.

The Bible teaches that a woman is her husband’s helper (Genesis 2:18-20), to also bear children. The Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 11:9) reinforces that neither was a man created for woman, but woman for man. The Apostle Peter (1 Peter 3:5) restates the same that holy women who hope in God adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands. Accordingly, single women (especially very young ones) are apt to think a good man could solve most of their problems, thus, they tend to give in easily when approached by a man. Women generally give men-present or absent too much responsibility in their lives. No man's heart is big enough to meet all the emotional needs of a woman. A man's shoulders are not broad enough to bear all her burdens.

Members of the clergy in this study who blamed women who become single-mothers because of having children out of wedlock were also convinced that the men who

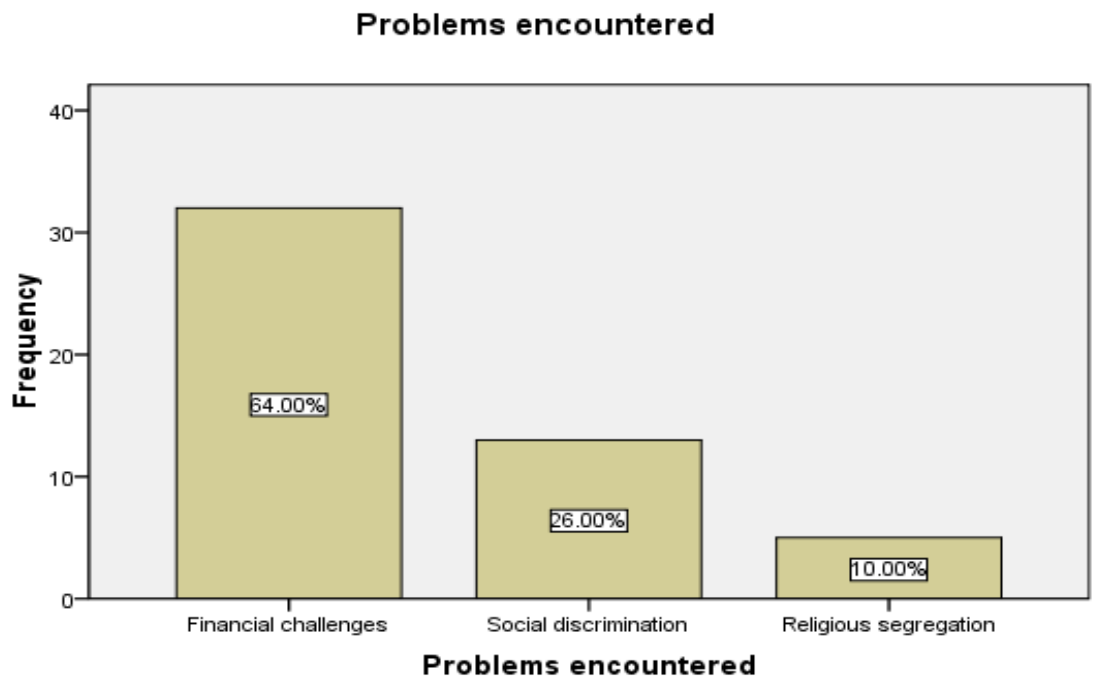
impregnated them early in life must be held to account. This suggestion is not new in Africa, as most local cultures demanded that those responsible for impregnating young girls would either take them as wives or pay some compensation as determined by the community elders. However, the modern economy has made the situation so fluid that it is sometimes difficult to track some culprits who live in different locations from that of the victims. In an attempt to be fair, the Constitution of Kenya (2010) included a clause which purports to protect the abandoned or rejected, separated and divorced women. However, the legislative authority, which is dominated by men who profess to be Christians, has recently created conditions that would promote separation and divorce among married couples. This is by legislating that Kenyan men can take extra wives if the first wife consents. This misplaced legislation saw the light of the day because it was driven by men who probably are yet to account for making young women single-mothers.

Scholars in African cultures tend to blame Christianity for early pregnancy and subsequently single-motherhood among the African people. For instance, Mbugua (1995) argues that Christianizing the African society abolished female circumcision. It also eliminated societal structures for sex education among girls. The Church has responded to this challenge by introducing alternative rites of passage for girls. These are conducted parallel to those of boys within churches, mostly in the urban areas. It is important to enhance such initiatives with a view of continuously making them more relevant and empowering than merely criticizing and imagining that the former rites would be relevant in contemporary times.

4.3.6. Challenges Experienced by Single-mothers

Single-mothers who participated in the FGD informed this study that managing life as a single-parent has many challenges. These include singly handling of a household's financial burden. They also complained of the deeply-entrenched social stigma associated with single-motherhood, and discrimination in the Church.

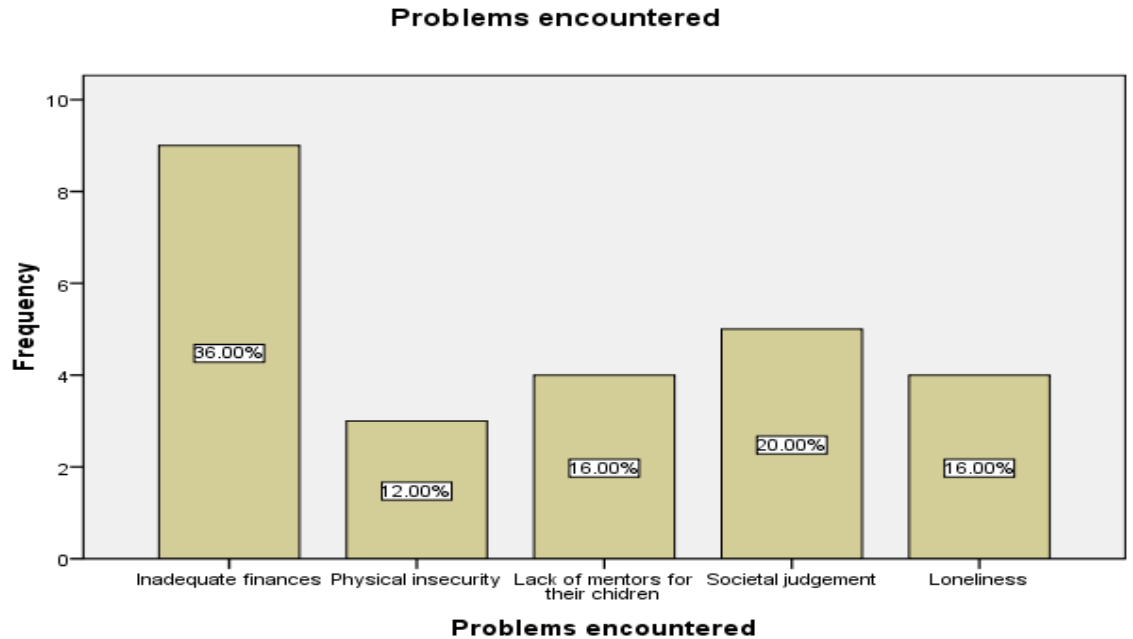
Single-mothers indicated that they faced financial challenges (64%), social discrimination and stigma (26%) and segregation in places of worship (10%). Chart 4.3.6 (below) presents this reality.

Chart 4.3.6: Challenges Experienced by Single-mothers

Participants in the three FGD underlined that they were unable to raise their children according to the standards they would have wished to, for lack of adequate finances. They also accused married women of casting doubts on single-mothers whenever they became successful in life. One respondent (Wachairo, O.I., 27th April 2013) remarked: “How can so and so be so successful, it is impossible; she must be having someone who is financing her ...” This is a common assumption that single-mothers cannot make it on their own without a man supporting them. The data shows that 36% of the respondents agreed that they faced financial difficulties, while 16% suffered from loneliness. These respondents were honest that they could experience sexual desires that could not otherwise be fulfilled in their single state. Another 16% of them expressed lack of mentors for their children due to the absence of a father-figure to fill in the gap. Moreover, 12% indicated that they encountered physical insecurity since

people tended to take advantage of them, for lack of men to defend them. This information is presented in Chart 4.3.7.

Chart 4.3.7: Problems Faced by Christian Single-mothers in Nairobi



It was further noted that all single-mothers who had teenage or older children experienced a teenage identity crisis. Those who were mothers to teenage boys thanked the leaders of their church groups for having taught them one or two things about the boy child. They added that life would have been quite difficult for them if they were to bring up the boys without even the little knowledge they had.

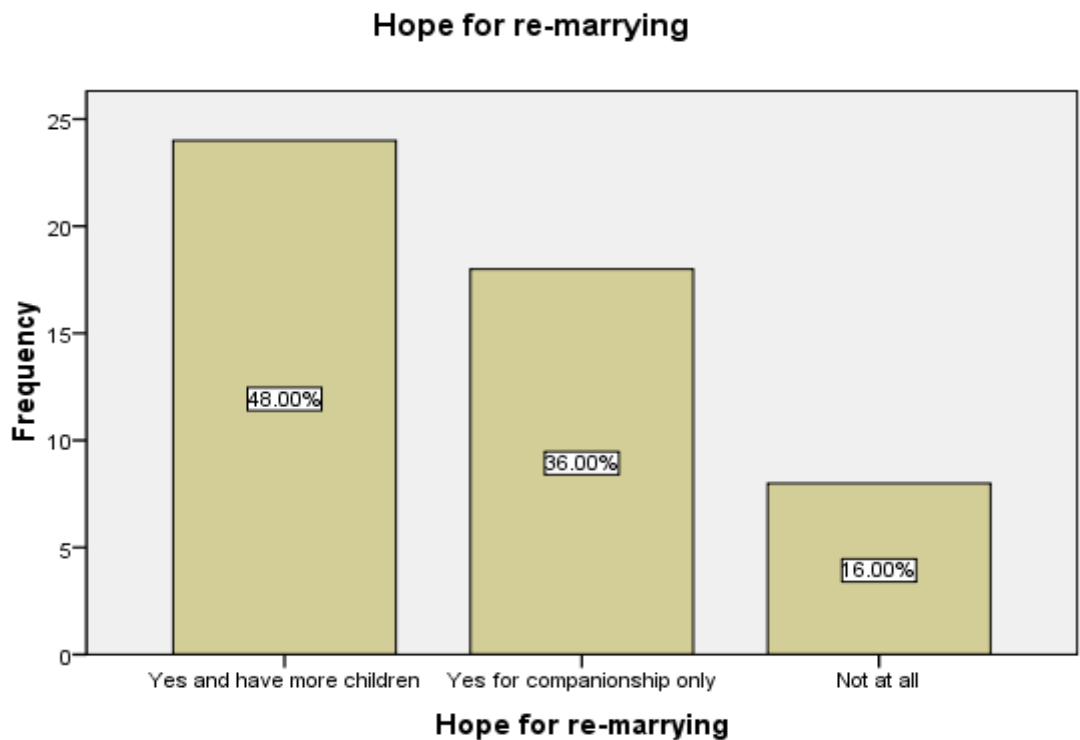
From the findings discussed above, there is no doubt that all families experience problems. However, the Church in Nairobi recognizes that in addition to the “normal” challenges experienced by the two-parent family, single-parents face extra challenges in psycho-emotional, social and religious circles. During this research, we explored the major challenges that single-parents experienced in their daily lives, making them a unique family. All those who had become single-mothers by chance explained that

being a single-parent was painful. More often than not, they experienced unique stresses and strains. Apparently, this emanated more from social stigma as well as religious, socio-economic and emotional responsibility overload. They strongly expressed the view that in a two-parent family, decision-making was a shared responsibility since partners would talk and plan together. This was not the case in a single-parent family where the responsibility for making decisions rested on a single person. They added that a single-parent had to bring in money, handle all jobs, maintain the home and care for all the diverse needs of the children. This could be an enormous, exhausting and relentless feat. All categories of single-mothers in this study complained that such tasks as the repair of the house which, from social construction, was a domain of men, overwhelmed them a great deal.

Financial challenges featured prominently among the participants in this study. This was largely because the majority of them fell within the low-income bracket, residing in slums and struggling every day to make ends meet. Olurounbi (2011:58) intimated that the main problem among families with one parent, especially when that parent is a woman, was poverty. This view has been confirmed by many commentators on the issue. Gary (1995) observed that because single-parents often shouldered the entire financial responsibilities for the family, they perpetually worried about finances. This is in the light of the rising cost of living that far outpaces today's wages, except where one is "born with a silver spoon in the mouth". Single-mothers are thus financially constrained and are at higher risk of poverty than two-parent families (Olurounbi, 2011). We must, however, acknowledge that single-parents are not alike. The family headed by a poor unemployed single-parent is different from the one headed by an affluent single-parent.

Referring to the family headed by the poor unemployed single-parent, Gary (1995) notes that some single-parent families get along well, sometimes better than most dysfunctional marriages. There is, however, a greater fraction of single-parents whose children manifest enormous academic problems, learning difficulties, emotional distress, behavioural problems and poor relationship with peers. Many working single-parents feel overburdened, unable to find time for their personal needs, and are often tired and lonely. Worse still, some are keenly aware of their being single. Further, single-parents must cope alone with their children's emotional needs. Due to the amount of time required to maintain their jobs, their homes and families, very often their own emotional needs and wants go unfulfilled or suffer neglect.

Despite all these odds, many single-parents expressed hopes for re-marrying. Majority of those who were single by chance indicated that they did not prefer their status and wished to live a happy family life. One respondent told this researcher, "I got a child when I was in high school and have chosen to remain that way until God blesses me with a husband." Majority of the respondents (48%) indicated that they looked forward to re-marriage as well as having children with their new spouses. In comparison, though 36% anticipated re-marriage, getting additional children was not a welcome option for them. Their envisaged re-marriage was primarily for companionship and having a father figure for the children they already had. Some 16% of the respondents were categorical that re-marriage was not an option at all. This is illustrated in Chart 4.3.8 below.

Chart 4.3.8: Hope for Re-marrying

It has emerged from this research that in spite of their illustrious efforts to cope with diverse challenges, society is not yet ready to recognize and accept them. However, it remains clear that single-mothers long to be accepted and supported as they aspire to journey with their fellow Christians. The research sought to find out the beliefs and practices of the Church towards single-parenthood and the role she played by the Church as a potential of support system for single-parents.

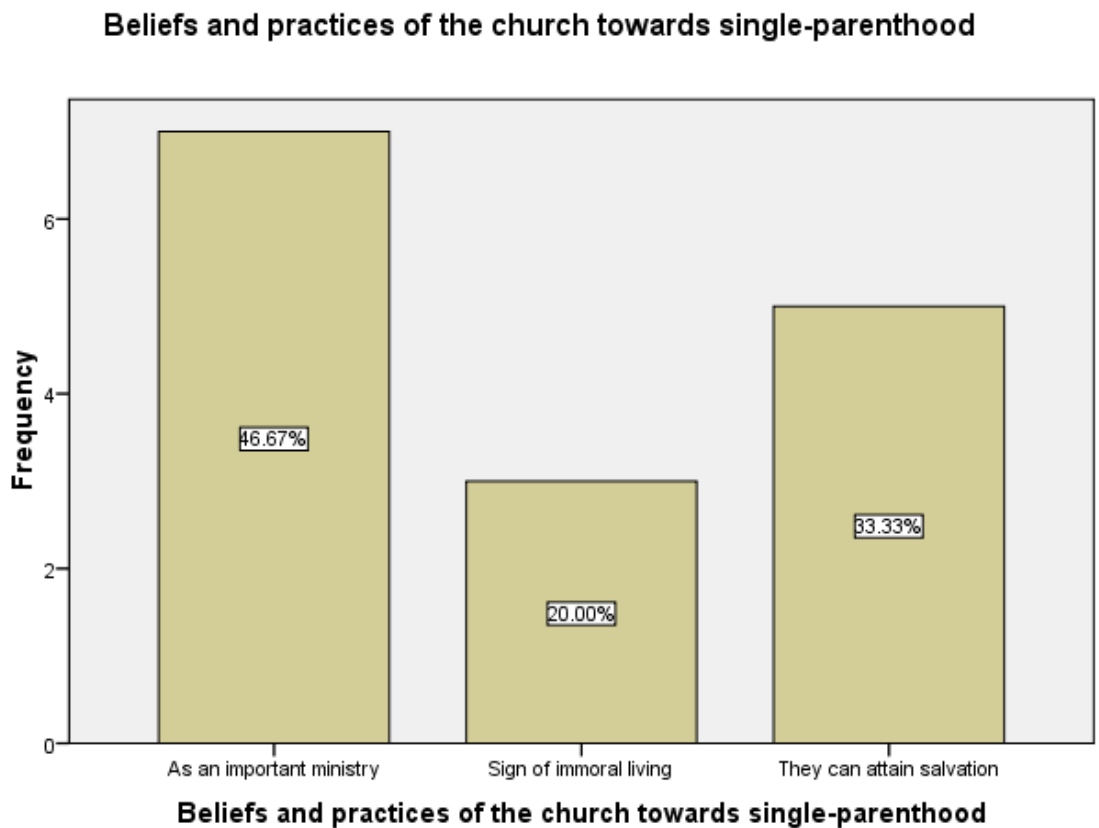
The research demonstrated that the Bible teaches about a complete family life with the example of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph as a nuclear family. The Church in contemporary society appreciates the inevitable reality of single-parent families. She has embarked on re-accepting them to the family of God, unlike in the past when society in general and the Church, in particular, were inimical to their active participation in and contributions to life issues.

Most respondents (46.7%) affirmed that single-parenthood was a normal status, like any other that deserves a special ministry in the Church. They added that single-parents should be treated with love, care, and respect. Another 33.3% pointed out that there was hope for salvation for those who had fallen short of Church teachings. This obtains when they repent and are ready to participate in church activities. However, 20% of the respondents expressed concern that single-mothers attained their status due to immorality. The respondents insisted that such mothers should, therefore, be barred from active participation in church activities. In so doing, these mothers would not become role models to the young generation in the Church. The respondents further remarked that it was better to keep them away, lest they set bad examples and serve as a negative influence upon the youth. This is demonstrated in Chart 4.3.9.

Research findings showed that there was a section in the society that still held a conservative stance, associating single-mother families with immorality, delinquency, and prostitution. At least 20% of the single-mothers who participated in this research had practically contended with such notions and in the process, suffered social discrimination even in church. They complained that congregants isolated them on assumed bases of immorality, treating them suspiciously. However, such notions need interrogation and ratification. This research has already shown that some of them attained single-motherhood following the death of their spouses. Others became single-mothers upon rejection earlier on by their spouses. It is true that single-mothers feel lonely and experience sexual desires which remain unmet in their state. However, this does not give society the right to label them as immoral. The Church teaches against adultery, confining sex to matrimony. There is no need to question the moral stance of single-mothers, just because they are living without partners. It is possible

for Christian single-mothers to lead morally upright lives guided by Christian teaching and sacrificing sexual pleasures.

Chart 4.3.9: Beliefs and Practices of the Church towards single-parenthood

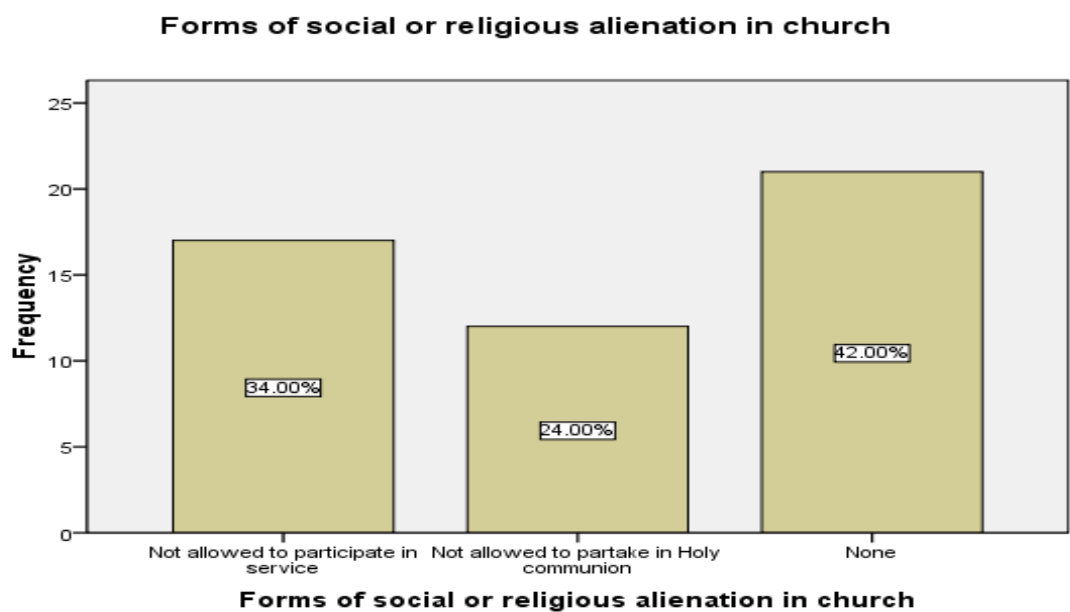


On their part, respondents (in all the study sites) concurred that society negatively perceived single-parents. The married fear engaging in mature and healthy relations with singles, often viewing them as a threat to their marriages. Single-parents are also reluctant to get involved in social gatherings, fearing that they would be labeled failures. The respondents further added that single-parents were uneasy enjoying all church privileges such as receiving the Eucharist and becoming church leaders.

Often, single-parents are denied chances of taking responsibilities in the society as well as in the church. During this research, we sought to identify the forms of

alienation that they encountered in the church contexts. Majority of them (42%) denied facing any form of alienation. In comparison, 34% of them reckoned that they were not allowed to take part in church services or to be in any ministry. Another 24% lamented that although they could take part in the service, they were not allowed to partake in the Holy Communion. Chart 4.3.10 below brings forth these sentiments.

Chart 4.3.10: Forms of Alienation in the Church



The Church is in a dilemma when it comes to the question of sexuality among single-mothers. Majority of the participants in this research expressed the views that the Church has no practical and definite answer to the question. The Church continued to expound dogmas that made a lot of sense during the medieval times though not necessarily readily applicable in the contemporary context. Single-mothers complained that the Church pointed to the direction of marriage and re-marriage for those who are young, yet not every single mother in the marriageable age was likely to get a suitable marriage partner. They also complained that not all non-marriageable single-mothers had outgrown their sexual feelings and desires. They further lamented

that they could not approach men to fulfill their sexual desires. This was not only because the society would condemn the behaviour, but that they would also be guilty of engaging people young enough to be their sons. This research contends that it is the Church and not the single mother that has the duty to reflect and provide pragmatic direction on the matter.

In the Biblical book of Exodus, it is evident that the Jewish Law did not discourage polygamy. Possibly, all women of marriageable age were attached to marriage partners, either in monogamous or polygamous unions. However, our circumstances are completely different. Christianity has extensively abolished polygamy wherever it has been preached. The world is currently populated by sexually active unattached single-mothers who cannot find partners to marry them. Do we condemn them as adulterous when they engage in a relationship that the Church terms illicit? Or, do we take it from the categorical statement of Jesus contained in the Gospels that he did not come to overthrow the law... or should we go by his teachings that "... The law was made for man and should accommodate man" (Sora, 2005:134 cf. Matthew 5:17-20; Mark 2:27-28).

These questions are critical because the Church comprises both the two-parent and single parent family units. Whereas social stigma has been related to divorce, there has been societal pressure related to the never-married single-parent. The ideal life seems to be for one to graduate, get married and have children. Such a person has made it. Our socialization is such that a mother will set the ideal goal for her daughter as being a good wife and a good mother (Rodgers-Gardner, 1990:13). While young men are encouraged to think of achievement outside the home, young women are encouraged to be successful in the home domain. Research findings indicate that in all

the sampled congregations, there is a tendency for older single-mothers, aged sixty and above, to be fully accepted as members of the congregation. It also emerged that the individual single-mothers' moral behaviour, social interaction and dedication to the church influences how fellow Christians perceive her.

Single-mothers who participated in this research also complained that they faced social stigma. Both mother and child or children find it difficult to experience a sense of belonging in the society. Respondents admitted that their teenage children at times demanded to know who their fathers were, alluding that theirs was not a 'normal' family. Tijani and Ogunbanwo (2012) observe that when a mother introduces a man she is dating to her child or children, the action exacerbates adolescent delinquent behaviour. This is because single-mothers may at times find it difficult to maintain moral authority over their children. Wachege (1994:146) posits a case: "Lastly my daughter was impregnated. Like a concerned mother, I summoned her. When I persisted to know the man responsible, I got a rude shock of my life, '... and mum who is my father? The moment I hear you demanding to know whose mine is I will also insist on knowing who is yours and who my father is'." Such cases may incapacitate a mother, leaving her with little or no moral control over her children. This makes the crisis more complex as the single-mothers perceive that they are failing to do their part in the moral education of their children. They have to heal their own wounds before they can face their children.

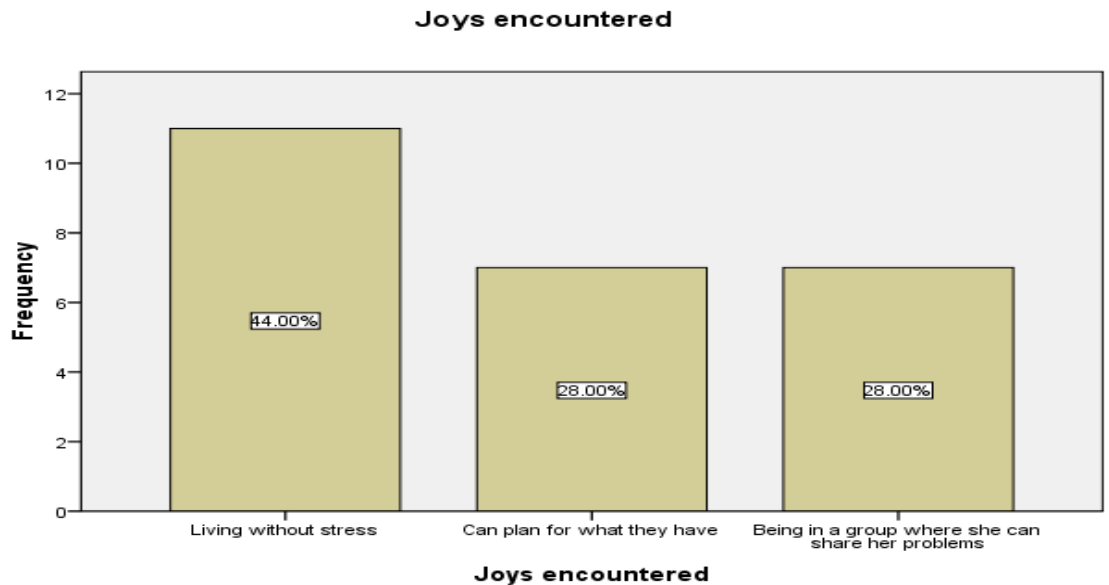
Another critical and thorny issue among the respondents related to discontinuation or exclusion from partaking the Holy Communion among women who have become single-mothers through a divorce. Information gathered from the respondents (FGD, ACK St. Gertrude's Kasarani, April 2012) revealed that a few churches may allow the

divorced to partake in the Holy Communion but only after a long and rigorous scrutiny (ACK, Vicar's Manual 2003).

Furthermore, others asserted that the church discriminated upon other single-mothers when it came to baptizing their children. As discussed in Chapter 2, the failure of the Church to baptize young children is disturbing. It makes the children live questioning the uprightness of their mothers because church leaders do not shy in declaring that they are excluded from baptism on moral grounds. Mbugua (1995:7), teaching on this practice in the PCEA, lamented that most single-mothers ended up not going to church; they felt discriminated against and subsequently traumatized. The practice, the author added, pained and angered the children against the society that they became social misfits. Besides, the Church tradition anticipates that when a child dies having not been baptized, the child is buried without a cross being placed on the grave. It was noted that this is not something that the church was ready to negotiate about. One respondent (Jane, PCEA St. Andrew's Parish, September 2012) supported this and stated that such incidents happened when the character of the parent was questionable.

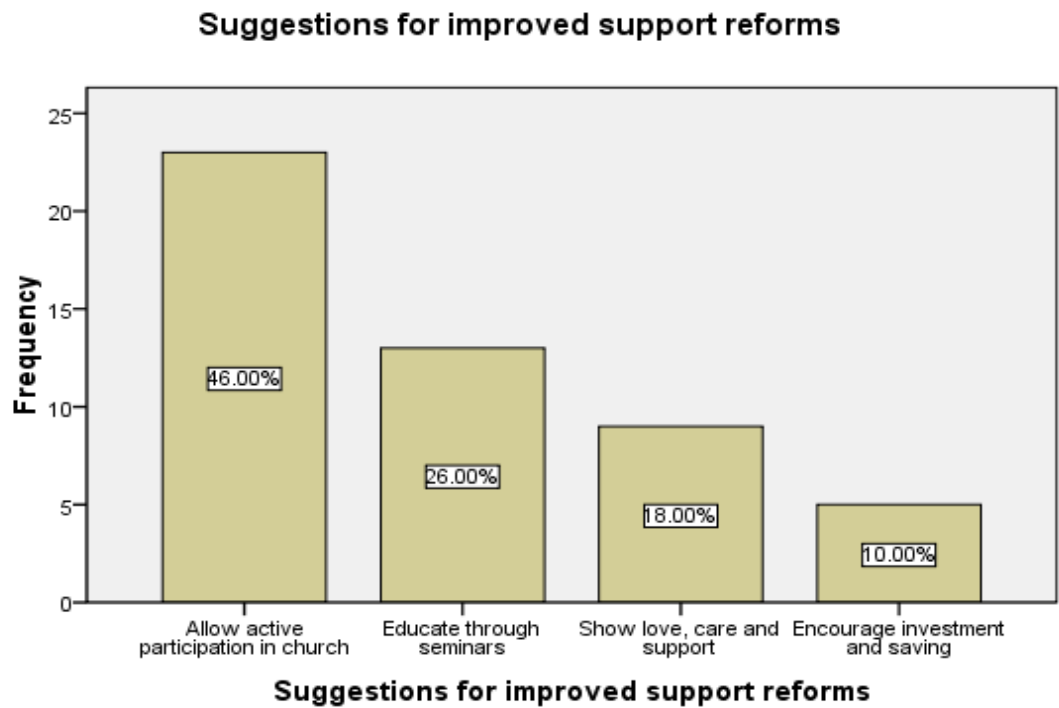
4.3.7. Joys of being a Single-parent

Single-mothers in this research noted that despite all the challenges they faced in life, single-parenthood had its own advantages. Some 44% single-mothers we interviewed stated that being single gave them a break of a pleasing non-appreciative spouse. About 28% of the respondents indicated that they had learned how to plan their present life and save for the future without being dependent on financial assistance from a man who may not be willing to assist. Yet another 28% were pleased to be in church groups where they could share their joys and sorrows with people who understood what it meant to be a single-parent. This is computed in Chart 4.3.11:

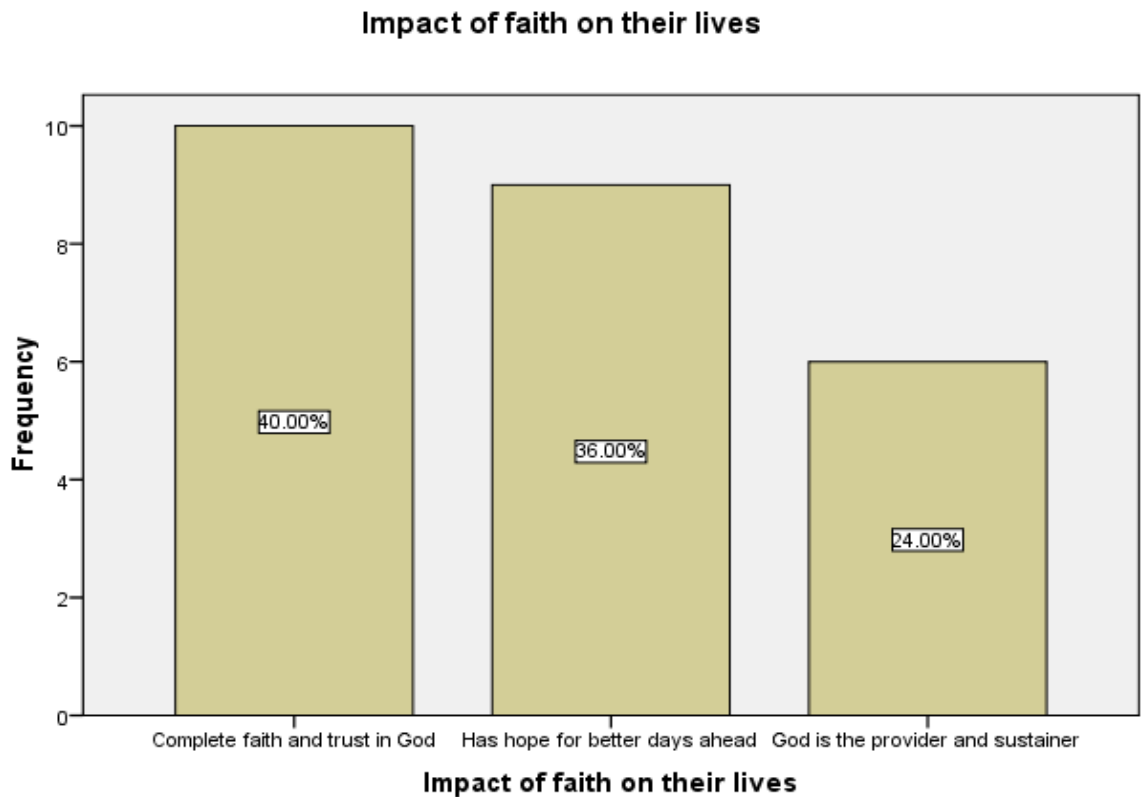
Chart 4.3.11: Joys Encountered

The single-mothers who participated in this research shared that as much as they experienced constraints due to lack of adequate finances, they also derived a lot of pleasure from not being answerable to cruel husbands. Being single, they noted, made them become good planners in whatever they undertook.

The research posed several questions to both the single-parent and clergy respondents on what they thought were the best reforms for the church in support of the single-parents. Most respondents (46%) who were single-mothers indicated that they needed to be allowed to participate in church so as not to feel rejected. Another 26% acknowledged that it was important to carry out education through seminars to help single-parents learn how to deal with the problems that they faced on daily basis. Yet another 18% underlined need for congregants to show single-mothers love, care and support as a way of giving them hope in life. A total of 10% pointed out that single-parents needed advice on how to make financial decisions for the future so as to live without being dependent on others. Chart 4.3.12 illustrates this.

Chart 4.3.12: Suggestions for Improved Support Reforms

Respondents acknowledged that their strong church background and active participation in a group that believed in them helped a great deal in strengthening their faith in God. They commented that in all that they did, it was important to have complete faith and trust in God for provision and sustenance of everything in their lives. Their belief in God helped them look forward to a better future even without support from other sources. The verse, “My help comes from the Lord” was common with all the respondents in each group. Chart 4.3.13 sums this up.

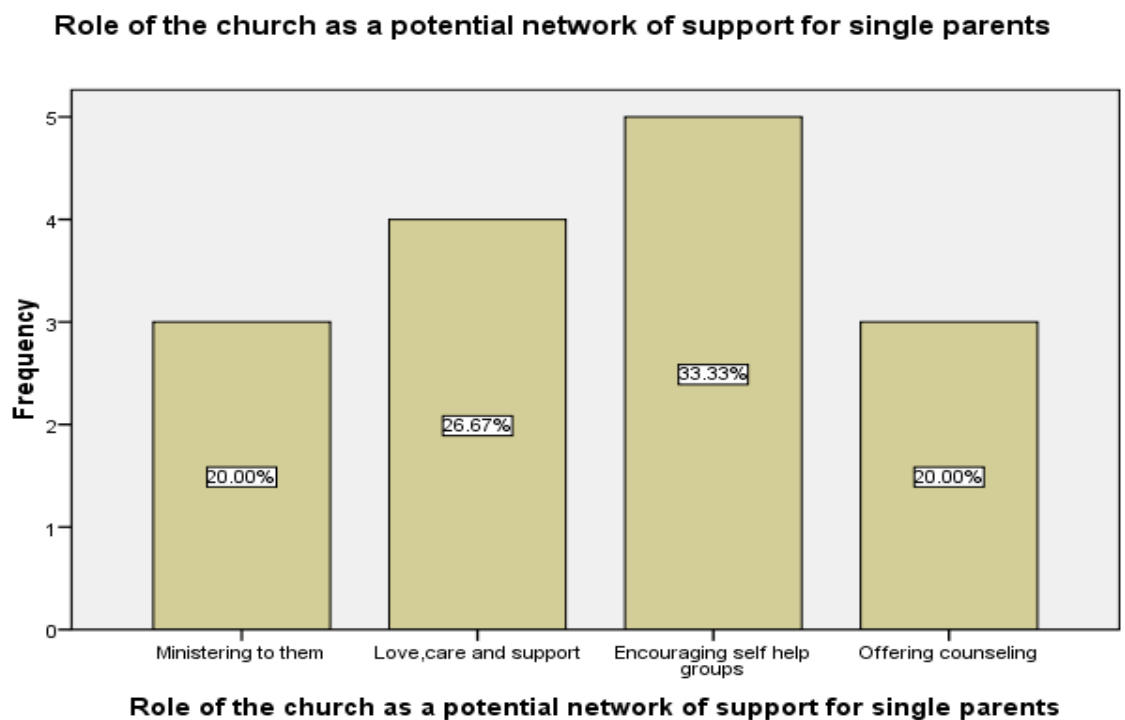
Chart 4.3.13: Impact of Faith in their lives

The Church is instrumental in transforming society. As a family of God, it seeks to show love and support to those who feel social alienation (Pope John Paul II, 1981). This research sought to investigate the role of the Church in providing a network support system for the single-parents. Majority (33.3%) of respondents underscored the importance of the Church facilitating formation of self-help groups (SHG) where single-parents could learn sharing their problems. They could also come together, pool their resources and initiate joint business ventures for sustainability. They argued that this would help many of them, especially, those without jobs to decently earn a living and inculcate a spirit of saving for the future.

Another 26.7% of the respondents asserted that single-parents needed love, care, and support because they were often misjudged as being immoral by people who actually

were ignorant of their situations and experiences. Respondents argued that given love, care and support, single-mothers would easily re-build their self-esteem and stop feeling like social misfits. Finally, 20% of the respondents argued that counseling and ministering to them in a group would give them the most needed support. Single-mothers could open up and share their problems to trusted persons once they bonded in church groups. Chart 4.3.14 gives an overview of this:

Chart 4.3.14: Role of the Church as a Network of Support for Single-parents



In a follow-up to the data represented above, members of the clergy were asked what advice they would give to single-mothers so that they would not continue feeling isolated within the church and the community. Their answer was that single-mothers needed to accept themselves the way they were and move on.

However, many commentators on the issue of single-motherhood have pointed out that single-mothers should possibly learn the act of forgiveness before entering into

acceptance of one's single-parenthood. Makhubele (2008) found out that 95% of the respondents felt that single-mothers, especially those who went through divorce and violent death of spouses, lived in pain and depression. They also related the pain of living with anger and shame after divorce, rejection and painful loss. More than 80% in his study admitted finding it difficult healing from the wounds of painful loss and forgiving their spouses after divorce. According to Connors (1999:46):

The church should encourage victims to be willing to forgive themselves of any genuine wrongs they perpetrated in the relationship. They may have been minuscule in comparison to the former spouse, but even so, there are none of us without sin and thus in need of forgiveness. Similarly, one must come to the point of forgiving the one who has so deeply wounded them, although one's emotions of having forgiven a person may take some time to catch up with the fact of the forgiveness.

The church is an institution that represents the family of God. In it, God's children would find and make a home, welcome single-mothers so that they can find love, care, and equality. However, the Church differs from this ideal. She still portrays a negative attitude towards single-mothers, hatching prejudice against them. As seen above, when single-mothers requested for administration of sacraments such as baptism for their children, some clergy embarrassed and harassed them. When single-parents were chosen as godparents, sponsors for confirmation or witnesses at wedding ceremonies, the clergy may hesitate. As expressed by most respondents in this study, the church often forgets or ignores the fact that single-parenthood is not self-made. Even when it is by choice, there may be underlying circumstances. Pope John Paul II addressed this phenomenon when talking about single-mothers who had experienced rape. He notes: "what great appreciation must be shown to those women who, with a heroic love for the child they have conceived, proceed with a pregnancy resulting from the injustice of rape." Such mothers are met with judgement and lack of forgiveness from society. Joan (O.I. Madre Teresa, Zimmerman, August 2013) notes

that even after they are confessed, they are reconciled with God, and they cease to sin, human beings still consider them as “eternal sinners”.

Positively, this research, however, established that the Church has a way of dealing with every category of single-mothers. Regarding separated persons, the Church engaged the separated couples with the hope that they could reconcile and restore their marriage. O’Brian and Shannon (1999) explain that the cardinal principle among Christians is that the separated or the divorced are still married as long as they are alive, hence are therefore not allowed to remarry. For that matter, the Church does not consider her position as constituting discrimination. The central argument of the Church is that the union of two persons is the will of God hence an eternal truth. One respondent from the Catholic Church felt that it was God’s design that man and woman should live together, complementing each other.

Regarding widows, the Church encourages them to stay in the glory of God. The Church maintains a similar position regarding the young single-mothers who have never been married. Although this was the case, respondents of this study stated that majority of the widowed fear getting into a relationship with men because of the negative societal perceptions. However, traditionally, the Church has not been kind to those who are single-parents by choice. The single-parents by choice have often been reminded of the example of Jesus who was very inclusive in his mission but not without conditions. For instance, Jesus invited one young man for discipleship with him but on condition that the young man would have to get rid of his possessions and take up the cross and follow in his footsteps. Though Jesus was very tolerant of sinners, the single-mothers by choice who wanted to be accommodated in the church were reminded that they needed to forsake their freedom and independence in like

manner of the young man who was told to forego his wealth to be in communion with Jesus. On the other hand, it is not certain whether the church in Nairobi has been influenced by feminism or it is just interested in being inclusive like the liberal Church in the West. Respondents strongly felt that the Church now appreciates the position of the society that single-motherhood by choice is an alternative lifestyle today. They all agreed that the educated, empowered and financially stable woman has chosen to raise her children without the support of a husband. However, in spite of recognizing this reality, the respondents added that the church through seminars is doing its best to encourage the presence of complete families in the Church without necessarily driving out the single-mothers by choice.

The issue of reinstating the separated and divorced parents in all activities of the Church has generated a heated debate for a long time. The Church maintains that for such individuals to be allowed to participate in the Church activities, they are required to undergo a series of classes on positive Christian values. Their behaviour would need to be scrutinized before they join any church group to avoid future conflicts. Respondents to this study further stated that the church had to establish the reasons which led to one becoming a single mother before she could be reinstated into the church. They added that in the Catholic Church, a single mother could be granted *senatio* after divorce or separation. *Senatio*, a Latin word for Senate, refers to the official council which makes decisions relating to rules and norms with a mandate to make amendments. *Senatio* involves the retroactive validation of marriage (Code of Canon Law, canon 1161-1165). After *senatio* has been granted, the single mother would be allowed to receive communion.

This study challenges the Church in Nairobi to wake up to the reality of sex before marriage and the need to take care of these individuals who come to church for salvation. All the respondents interviewed observed that the church in Nairobi was at various stages of implementing the single-mothers' ministry to cater for the needs of single-mothers. The Church in Nairobi appreciates that some single-mothers got into their current state by chance rather than by choice. Unfortunately, the Church is unable to enroll all single-mothers in the single-mothers' ministry because some do not openly want to declare their status, while others are reluctant to join the ministry. In most cases, single-parents by choice hesitate to join because they do not like to be "taught" about the sanctity of the family and why the man is the head of the family. A well-to-do single-mother by choice may consider a man to be only valuable for the company and sexual satisfaction. The not-well-to-do single-mother by choice may avoid joining women groups for various personal reasons.

Nevertheless, some pastors in Nairobi have taken a bold step to endorse these ministries and have also taken it upon themselves to pray for the success of these ministries. This is in recognition that single-mothers require financial advice, family life education (FLE), spiritual guidance, and physical comfort so that they do not feel despised. As pointed out earlier, most Nairobi Christian churches organized single-mothers in groups according to their ages where they would be taught how to grow self-esteem and how to make savings in order to qualify for financial loans to venture into small businesses. All the respondents suggested that when single-mothers were supported, their spiritual and financial commitment to the church became stronger. They would also tend to participate more in prayer meetings and conferences and become more hospitable.

The respondents observed that all offices in the church in Nairobi, including those belonging to deacons, pastors, and “reverends” were open to all Christians including single-mothers seeking spiritual guidance on how to deal with self-confidence, to handle parenting issues and how to experience a financial breakthrough among many other issues. Furthermore, churches organized single-parents’ fellowship meetings during which issues of spiritual growth were addressed. In such gatherings, the church counseled the women and children to overcome the challenge of separation or divorce or underlying causative factors to single-parenthood. The single-parents’ fellowships focused on the issue of good parenting. Here, they were advised to bear in mind that they were role models and mentors to their children. As such, they, therefore, needed to be spiritually strong, hardworking and socially stable. Respondents stated that single-parents’ fellowship had proven to be valuable network support for them.

Contrary to what some authorities believed, respondents in this research demonstrated that even among the spiritual, emotional and financial needs of single-parents varied greatly not only with those of married parents but also among themselves. They added that churches should not lump single-mothers together and primarily encourage them to participate in acts of charity. This would only further isolate the single mother struggling to feed and educate her children. The respondents confirmed that the grouping of single-mothers according to their age groups had paid a lot of dividends. First, when they are categorized according to ages, no single mother feels out of place. Second, the single-mothers would then open up when discussing their problems in groups of similar ages. Third, they overcome their self-pity once they learned that the problems they were experiencing cut across all single-mothers within their age. Through such meetings, single-parents could encourage one another and move on with life.

This approach made many single-mothers enlist and participate in the many groups available in the church. When we asked respondents about their commitment to the church, their responses were either that they were strongly committed or very strongly committed. Majority of them belonged to several groups or associations which they considered relevant. These groups provide guidance on good parenting, communion, liberation and how to live a life with Christ, among a host of other issues. One respondent informed this study that she had completed the New Life Ministry course and she had become an evangelist for the single-parents' group. Other respondents (FGD, ACK St. Gertrudes, Kasarani, October, 2012) were active members of the group albeit without leadership positions. The single-parents who did not involve themselves with any fellowship or ministry for the single-parents in their churches indicated that they were aware of the existence of the ministries.

Respondents confirmed that the gains from the single-mothers' ministry were immense and expressed that were it not for the love of God, they would not have moved any step. During one of the FGD, one single mother narrated how she almost gave up in life after losing one of her twin children during birth, but her strong faith in God which she had developed upon associating with other single-mothers in the church saw her through. She underlined, "I said God has a purpose for my child and for her, I must pull myself together and move on."

The single-parents' ministries also handled the issue of remarriage among its members. Single-mothers wishing to get married expressed the view that the presence of a man in the house came with benefits of security and the comfort of having someone to share their thoughts with. Except single-mothers who were victims of spousal violence, the others told of how they yearned for re-marriage in order to

improve their physical and economic security. We learned that despite dysfunctional inter-gender relationships, the presence of a man in the house was highly desirable. The social desirability linked to the presence of a man in the house often led women to welcome any new partners in their homes in the hope that they would be better than the previous ones. This “serial partnering” often proved to be a problem rather than a solution. The reason for this was that as soon as the woman got pregnant, the man disappeared, leaving her again in the position of being a single mother.

Such problems possibly arise because not many Christian or no-Christian men want to be sincere in such relationships. While addressing the issue of re-marriage, Mbugua (1995) posed the question: “How many Christian men would wish to be foster fathers?” Further, “How many Christian mothers would wish to be foster mothers?” Similarly, Kaberia (2011) asked: “Are children of a divorced mother ready for another father?” Studies have shown that in African societies, mothers of girls were more likely to (re)marry as girls were not entitled to inherit the step-father’s assets. This was more evident in certain African societies where new partners compelled mothers to dismiss their boy children, once they get into the new union to prevent the incoming boys from claiming a share of inheritance once they became adults.

This study interviewed three women who got married after a long time of living as single-mothers to try and understand how the issues as identified above played about in such relationships. For the sake of illustration, the three are identified as Mother X, Mother Y, and Mother Z. Mother X became a single mother at the age of nineteen with a baby boy and after three years she was cheated by another man that he would accept her as a wife the way she was. But one year down the line when she was eight months pregnant with another boy, the man changed his mind and abandoned her and

even sought for new employment in a different locality, 50 kilometers away so that he could be away from her. Mother X was completely infuriated that she had now landed into deeper problems than she had before they came together. She was tasked with raising two children, yet her experience with the first one was really taxing. She turned to Christ and for the next 21 years, she successfully raised the two boys who were now employed after having finished school.

In her 21 years in the church, Mother X became an active choir member and she fellowshiped with various groups. She lamented that during her early years after her second delivery, she was scorned by many congregants and many did not want to associate with her because she was considered reckless. She added that some congregants did not want to befriend her because they thought she would borrow money from them. She took solace from the moral support granted to her by successive pastors of her church although some of the pastors' spouses were not for it. Two years ago, when she attained age 45, a retired widower in their church – a father of two adult sons and a daughter - who lost his wife due to a terminal illness, proposed to marry her. She took the offer because she felt she no longer would become a burden to anyone as her two sons were living in their homesteads and so any company for her would be worthwhile.

All was well at the beginning. The two newly married were congratulated by the congregants and the man's two sons hailed the union. However, a few months later when the husband's sons learned that she is a mother of two adult sons, they turned physical and drove their father together with her out of their residence. Though they were still together and they had no intention of terminating their new relationship, she was disturbed that the frustrations she suffered at the hands of congregants early on in

church were now manifesting again through the actions of her husband's sons. The two were now living in the northernmost part of Nairobi after shifting from their five-acre farm in the southernmost part of the city.

The fact that congregants can be very dishonest with their perceptions about single-mothers is especially exemplified by the second case of Mother Y. She was until three years before, a single mother with one daughter for eleven years. She reported that there was no time when she gave up hope of ever settling down with a husband as she loathed her socially stigmatized single status. She had only been a member of her church for slightly over four years but she complained that all along, married women never trusted her and she was not allowed to mingle with their husbands. She was, however, surprised on how all over a sudden the congregants' perception about single-mothers changed once she got married. She got married for the first time three years before – to a man who lost his wife through accident - and immediately shifted to her husband place of worship some three kilometers away. She was surprised to find out that those who talked ill of her and maligned her were among the first to congratulate her. She wondered whether a married person was more holy in the eyes of God than one who was not married.

However, the church never let down those she considered to be her own. Mother Z had been a single mother for ten years and had been a practicing Christian for seven years. She informed this study that two years before, a church elder who lost his wife through terminal illness spotted her while participating in a choir session and he literally pointed at her and announced to the congregation that she was an ideal candidate for a new life. She was unable to resist the church and gave into a marriage request from the sixty-year-old church elder. Unfortunately, the man was shortly

diagnosed with cancer, which devastated him a lot and he sunk into a depression. Though she received tremendous support from the church and fellow congregants she disclosed that she closed her business in order to take care of her ailing husband. She was, however, happy that some of the people who did not even speak to her while she was single were now her frequent visitors.

The three cases illustrated above may not fully represent the transformation of the congregants towards single-mothers in case of marriage and more so re-marriage. From the beginning, this study hoped to interview single-mothers who had been married once followed by divorce and then a re-marriage. However, such cases were not available in the sampled churches. Rodgers-Gardner (1990:13-20) gives the experiences of several single-mothers who succeeded after re-marriage and even shamed their former husbands who became losers in all aspects. We, however, feel that we have stated our case and we need not reproduce them here.

Research findings indicated that ordinarily, single-mothers seek marriage or re-marriage to cover financial needs, to end loneliness and frustrations, to have someone to share their successes and failures with and to have father figures for their children. This research would have liked to establish whether single fathers also (re)marry to have mother figures for their children. Nonetheless, no single father volunteered to participate in the research. Cheronoh (2014) discusses various categories and experiences of single fathers, albeit with focus on widowed fathers among the Agikuyu. Her findings are quite instructive. The narration provided by mothers X, Y and Z, however, shows that they did not achieve all these desirables. Mother X and her husband became wanderers and were then embroiled in court with two sons of the husband over the administration of his estate. Mother Y was not sure whether the

people who embraced her for her successful marriage were genuinely her friends or not. Mother Z became a nurse. What all the three mothers managed to realize was financial stability, self-esteem and the new image from the congregants as well as the members of the society.

On the other hand, what would the single-mothers by choice say about such arrangements? In all certainty, they would claim that all the three mothers submitted to the will of the man when they entered these unions. Much as the three mothers were lucky to have found spouses they would call husbands, the narrations above would inform the unmarried by choice that it was the men who needed the women to cover up their inadequacies. Hence, according to this reasoning, the three women entered into the respective unions to fill the gaps of the misfortunes of the men. The single-mothers by choice would state that Mother X must be suffering from the trauma of seeing the two of them being ejected from their homesteads. They would also hold her responsible for the tribulations facing her new husband. They would even wonder whether she was not subjecting herself to more dangers by continuing living with her husband. The unmarried by choice would also argue that the friends paying homage to Mother Y were simply congratulating her husband for having acquired another partner so as to overcome loneliness.

However, such arguments were disputed by the church as all respondents affirmed that the Church was neither pro- men, nor anti- women. One Pastor, asserted that the Church aspires to be the ideal body of Christ and be led by the Holy Spirit, hence she needs to be all inclusive. He added that the Church had the responsibility to minister to all congregants, including the single-mothers and those who re-married and help them live a meaningful spiritual life, counseling them so that they would accept

themselves in order to re-build their self-esteem. His sentiments are akin to those of Connors (1999:122) who holds that the issue of marriage, divorce, and re-marriage should be taught in an effort to clarify everyone's understanding and seek to bring everyone to a clear, biblical consensus of its teaching. This has, however, not been the case as the church has often frustrated the single people by trying to fit them into the married adult programme (Wood, 2001:25). The latter author reveals the argument underlying this approach, namely, "the existing approach to ministry works, hence everyone should fit into it or move on to another church." This research considers this view to be rather harsh considering that the church is called to minister to the unique needs of all Christians, including the single-parent families. Many authors are of the opinion that the church can no longer take her long-held and never-questioned traditional approach of "turning her back on these people" and treating them as "second-class" Christians.

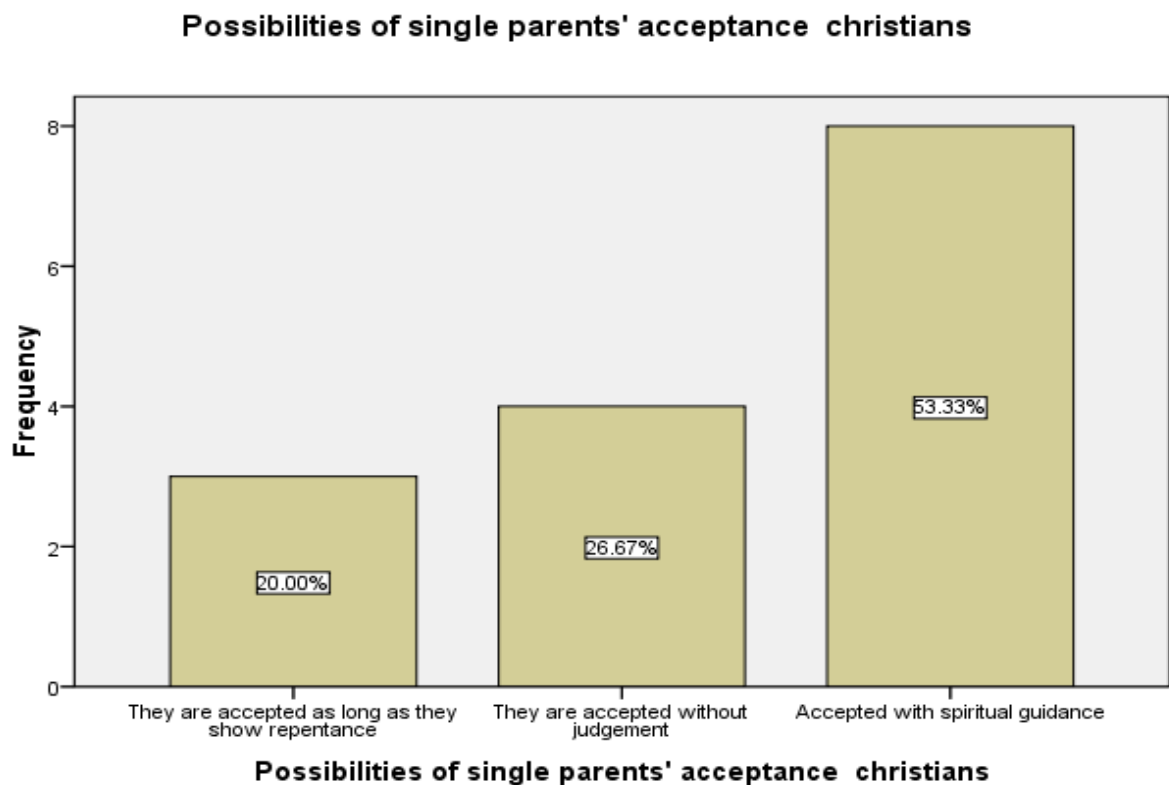
4.3.8. Possibilities of Accepting Single-parents in Church

We interviewed members of the clergy on the possibilities of the church accepting the single-parent families as other Christian members. The research sought to establish the position of the church on the contentious issue of baptizing children of single-parents, the partaking of the Holy Communion by divorced single-parents, and the possibilities of single-mothers taking up leadership positions. Some 20% of the respondents strongly favoured free participation of single-parents in church activities as well as fellowship with other Christians. This was as long as the single-mothers repented and turned to God. Another 26.7% respondents felt that they should be accepted without judging them since, like everyone else, they were not humanly perfect. Respondents recognized that some causative factors that led single-parents to their current status were not on their volition but indeed, beyond their control.

Accordingly, they suggested that single-parents should be given a chance to worship, like other members of the church. One respondent underlined the point by citing some scriptural portions, in part, thus, “We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23 cf. Isaiah 53:6).

Moreover, 53.3% respondents remarked that single-parents should not only be accepted, but also given spiritual guidance. This is because they have gone through emotional trauma in their life and they could be seeking to reach out for possible help. The best place to find this would be in the church because they would find spiritual nourishment as well as get people to share in Christian fellowship. Chart 4.3.15 brings this out.

Chart 4.3.15: Possibilities of Acceptance for Single-parent Families



Since women bear the children and are more directly concerned with the maintenance of the family, there has always been more pressure upon them to conform to the sexual code. Attitudes towards the unmarried mother have varied from one age to the other. Nevertheless, most of the time, the threat of disapproval and punishment has remained constant.

Furthermore, attitudes regarding the single person are not often given a second thought. The term single adult seems to be the most inclusive and the least offensive used to describe persons who are single, either by the death of a partner, who are single due to the choice of one or both partners (divorced) or who are in the process of becoming single (separated). This view tends not only to lower their self-esteem but also provokes them about why the wider society fails to relate to singles as “single adults” but instead places an emphasis on the reasons for their single status.

These two perceptions provoked the researcher to ask the church officialdom about the possibilities of accepting single-mothers in the Church without any conditions attached to their marital status. All respondents stated that single-mothers ought to be treated with respect because being single-parents does not reduce their dignity and character. Notwithstanding some individual views of congregants on single-parents, the Church does not regard them as immoral people. Instead, she recognizes that there are many circumstances that lead to single-parenthood.

Respondents further noted that the Church was responsible for ensuring that single-mothers were ministered to in order to help them live a spiritual life, and understand that they were complete Christians for whom God has a special purpose. One Catholic priest stated, “it accepts them, based on the principle that Jesus accepted us even when we were sinners.” Thus the Church has a responsibility of guiding all Christians

towards salvation. So long as they cannot be sent away from the Church as they too are God's children, the church has no choice but to accommodate them" (O.I., Madre Teresa, May 2013).

The clergy was also emphatic that though God had given parents the responsibility to steward children towards Him, God would judge individuals and not families. Some sections of the clergy also absolved the unmarried by choice, pointing out that some women could have been privy to the stressful experience that married couples underwent hence chose to remain single for fear of living in similar circumstances. In that case, respondents further argued that all congregants should be treated equally regardless of their marital status, given that God created everybody with a purpose. They added that marriage was a vocation: single-parents had been called by God to bring up their children on their own to serve Him in that capacity.

However, the respondents also clarified that it was the business of the Church to promote the marriage of the opposite sexes as envisaged by God during creation. They emphasized that though the Church encouraged the presence of single-parents in the midst of the congregation, the Church should not abandon its mission of preaching about the desirability of a family made up of a man, a woman and their children. They added that the Church was sympathetic to the plight of the single-mothers just like God was sympathetic to Hagar after she was driven from the homestead of Abraham (Genesis 21:8-20). Although the Church was touched by the troubles that confronted the single mother and her children, it ought to continue to teach the youth about the importance of remaining virgins until marriage and the importance of upholding the traditional Christian marriage in accordance with the Holy Scriptures.

The clergy further dismissed the notion that the church discriminated the children of single-mothers on matters of baptism. They stated that although the Church taught against fornication, it did not pretend that sex before marriage was not a reality. The Church was also aware that those who engaged in pre-marital sex could be rejected or abandoned by their male partners once they got pregnant or bore children. There were also those who could become pregnant through rape. Still, there were those that opted not to marry after being raised in abusive families. All these cases required help. Initially, the Catholic Church only used to baptize the first child of the single-mothers and not subsequent ones. This was meant to discourage single-mothers from repeating “the sinful act”, thereby raising only one child unless they got married. The practice was also intended to deter unmarried women from aspiring to become single-mothers. The respondents appreciated that children born to single-mothers were no longer discriminated against or denied baptism.

Another contentious issue in the Church today revolves around single-mothers being allowed to partake of the Holy Communion. Pope John Paul II in *Redemptor Hominis* (Human Redemption, 20) exhorted, "The Eucharist builds the Church." It deepens unity within the Church, more fully assimilating us into Christ (CCC 1396). The Eucharist is believed to spiritually strengthen and nourish an individual Christian. This is because in it is Jesus himself, the Word made flesh, forgiving humanity's venial sins and giving people the strength to resist mortal sin. Nevertheless, the Church had a designed code which prohibited certain categories of people such as single-mothers from partaking in the Holy Communion. Although the respondents in this study recognized all kinds of single-mothers in the church, they still adhered to the rule which allowed the widow to participate in the Holy Communion as she was encouraged to remain in the glory of the Lord as long as she lived. The Church denied

communion to a divorced mother and one who married a divorced person whose partner was still alive.

The development of single-mothers' ministries or ministries for singles has taken root in most Christian churches in Nairobi. This signifies that the pastors are lending sufficient support to the single-mothers. As stated by Nguru (2007:72), the types of singles who attend these fellowships include widows, separated and divorced, the never-married and single young ladies. In these fellowships, participants praise God, encourage one another and train to be social and spiritual leaders. The pastors encourage the single-mothers to participate in these fellowships because they believe that with faith in God, the single-parents have the capacity to participate in all church activities. However, much as the church leadership is increasing the support it renders single-mothers, it is yet to properly communicate these virtues to the congregants. For instance, it is not uncommon for a married woman to introduce one as, "This is Mary Kariuki, you know her husband passed on two years ago," rather than; "I want you to meet one of my friends, Mary Kariuki," an attitude that makes the formerly married to feel out of place in most churches.

Since single-parents who have come forward to declare their status are mainly women, this research would propose that pastors' wives should lead the initiative of communicating these realities to the congregants. Pastors' wives should be at the forefront of educating Christian married women about the daily challenges that single-mothers confront. Pastors' wives should probably deliberately interact more with single-mothers to dispel the notion that they are immoral and social misfits. Pastors' wives should make their husbands more accessible to this group of people rather than become gatekeepers. This is because single-mothers understand that the

pastors are the most qualified people in the church to counsel them on their social life and to guide them in their spiritual growth.

Yet, another issue which emerged in this study is the level of leadership to which a single mother could ascend. Evidently, the general view was that single-mothers are unfit to take leadership positions. Respondents for this study acknowledged that single-parents should be free to hold leadership positions. However, there was an unspoken caveat on the need to investigate the conduct of single-mothers seeking to become leaders and establish what contributed to their single status. However, a key respondent in the Anglican Church expressed some hope that in due course, single-mothers would be admitted to senior positions in the church, noting that the constitution of the church was evolving. This was in consideration that single women (with no children) had recently been ordained into the Church ministry.

Other respondents expressed their personal views and stated that single-parents should be allowed to hold leadership positions in the church. They constituted a group of active members who gave tremendous support to the work of the church. One church elder of the Catholic Church (O.I. St. Paul's, May 2013) expressed his concern thus: "Why deny them leadership yet the church accepts their financial contributions? The church should then just ask them not to attend church if they will be discriminated." Majority of the respondents held the opinion that the character and capabilities of an individual should be the guiding criteria for leadership rather than their marital status. They added that single-parents should be accorded equal leadership opportunities just like the married, and their past conduct should not be the basis for their judgment, every one of us is a sinner in the eyes of God. In any case, "there are many people in a dual relationship who are immoral and incapable of any leadership", added the elder

from a Catholic church. The example of Paul when he urged the church at Philippi to help Euodia and Syntyche who laboured with him in the gospel is quite instructive. The word "labour," which Paul uses here, refers to the exertion and effort which are required in preaching and teaching (Philippians 4:3).

However, the clergy and church leaders may sound convincing that single-parents ought to participate at all levels of church leadership. The challenge is that getting the view accepted beyond the officialdom might prove to be an enormous task. Catholics maintain that the church of Christ should be led by a man because God manifested Himself to the world as a human person in Jesus Christ. Consequently, the head of any church assembly ought to be a man who fits the characteristics contained in the scriptures. Proponents of this view cite several sections of the scriptures including Ephesians 5:21-22 to justify that preaching is a reserve for males only. Kathryn J. Riss (2002:22) expounds on equality counters, pointing out that many translations of Ephesians 5:21-22 insert a sentence break, or even a paragraph break, between these two verses. She adds that the translations also insert a command at the beginning of verse 22 where none exists in the New Testament rendering, "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands . . ." whereas the original Greek combines verses 21 and 22 in a single thought. She argues that a wife's submission to her husband is not a legalistic command. Rather, it suggests the need for all Christians to remain filled with the Holy Spirit, by avoiding conflicts with one another.

Riss (2002) adds that those who promote injustice in the name of Scripture undermine Biblical authority, violating the character and works of God. According to her, this substitutes religious legalism for the freedom of God to be God in the lives of His

people. It is God who chooses for whatever tasks of ministry or gifts people are best suited for according to His divine plan.

Thus, discrimination with regard to leadership in the church may not just be restricted to the single mother. She may not perceive it because the husband and wife teams are preferable in the church with the man in the lead at the pulpit. It is believed that alone, woman alone is vulnerable to temptation. Deborah (1992:257-71) adds an interesting twist to this notion, that men generally dislike listening much. This is because they feel it frames them as subordinate. She argues that from early childhood, boys use speech to protect their independence and negotiate group status. Girls use it to seek confirmation and reinforce intimacy. Carrying these styles into adulthood, men end up lecturing when women nod warmly.

Deborah (1992) postulates that many women do want to listen, but they expect it to be reciprocal. They become frustrated when they do the listening without men reciprocating. The men around the Mediterranean region where St. Paul concentrated his early missionary work spent practically all their time together discussing matters of society. They believed that with the exception of women prostitutes who would be around them, all other women were not persons of wits; they were better off listening to men in matters of religion. Possibly this could explain why Paul then asked the women in Ephesian to remain quiet in the church when the male leader was conducting a sermon.

The Church that keeps a woman at bay regarding matters of leadership is unlikely to be any friendlier to a single mother on such matters. One key respondent from a Presbyterian church intimated that for a single mother to be reinstated into the women's guild, she needs to fill a form indicating how long she has been separated

with her spouse. If divorced, she is also required to attach a marriage dissolution certificate. She is also probed on matters of behaviour and character before she is allowed to join as an associate member. As long as she is active and not of questionable character, she can serve in any docket in the church apart from holding a high leadership position. According to the respondent, this does not constitute to denying single-mothers leadership privileges.

Further, a congregation that has been socialized to believe that preaching is a domain of the male priest or pastor may find it very difficult to accept a woman preacher. The clergy in the selected churches in Nairobi were interviewed on whether it would be possible for single-mothers to be inwardly more Christian than those in the married union, hence qualify to be church ministers. All the respondents did not object to the first part of the proposal. However, they added that though Christian historicism acknowledges that there are circumstantial sociological and historical changes that occur in a society, the underlying eternal principles remain the same as envisaged by God. The clergy also added that though the Church ministry had shown compassion, tolerance, and acceptance to single-mothers, their message to the youth was consistent that the ideal family type was for those who were in a male and female union and living the Christian values.

The respondents further observed that the elite woman who seems to have undermined the idea that man is the head of the family, and possibly the head of the church by extension, may have done so due to a disconnect with the family. All members of the clergy interviewed, were convinced that liberal feminism gained foot due to the prevailing gaps brought about by some men's failure to take up leadership roles.

The clergy regretted that some Christian women had been influenced by these views and wanted to remain single-mothers by choice. The clergy added that such group of women believed in their right to participate in procreation. However, they maintained that children did not require both parents to be raised to become good and productive citizens. The clergy stated that this situation could, however, be avoided if couples agreed to share responsibilities in the family. They added that the family bond could only grow stronger if couples would agree to be democratic in decision-making, including sharing financial plans and responsibilities. The clergy regretted that the “enabling” of the modern woman had undermined the structure of the family, leading to unnecessary break-ups.

Some members of the clergy emphasized on the Biblical teachings that a husband and wife should learn to submit to one another to ensure harmony in marriage (cf., Ephesians 5:21). The clergy also leaned on the popular perception that the man is the head of the family and he ought to be acknowledged as such. They noted that many couples are being challenged by issues such as who was more educated or wealthier than the other. In so doing, they were missing the point and failed to accept the principle that the husband was the head of the household. They added that there were many homes where women were more educated than their husbands. This notwithstanding, the families were quite stable because the women had not engaged in unnecessary competitions with their husbands.

The respondents however, cautioned that people should get married to people of compatible educational and socio-economic levels to minimize unnecessary conflicts in decision-making. The ideal objective of the Church remains focused on gathering

rather than scattering and aspiring to accommodate all. The application of this view manifests differently on the ground. Julia (O.I. Embulbul, January 2013), observed;

If a married couple seeks membership in a congregation, the response of the church would be that of immediate welcome regardless of the background to their marital status. However, when a single person is presented for membership questions are raised. Such would include is he or she divorced? I wonder why he or she is not married.

The point is simple, the lack of questions in receiving the married adults and the numerous questions members may have when receiving single-mothers into the church could be dehumanizing. Jesus Christ opened His church to the Jews and Gentiles alike, to the male and female alike, and to the married and unmarried alike. His emphasis up to this day is to heal, restore and transform all individuals who seek salvation through Him.

It is further noted that the numbers of women who are out of the marriage for reasons such as domestic violence, infidelity and alcoholism have also increased tremendously. Subsequently, some women may shun marriage because they view it as sanctioned serfdom, whereby, women are abused and treated as slaves rather than equal partners. Gichinga (1996:45) observes; “As a woman gets older, her maternal instincts heighten. If she does not marry, she may decide to have a child all the same.” The number of women who opt for single-parenthood is alarmingly increasing. This view is further expressed by Wachege (2003). The Church and the society have the responsibilities of de-stigmatizing single-parents and instead offer support, love, and understanding. The socio-religious practices set the bar very high in setting the two-parent family as the ideal. Thus, society tends to see the single-parent family as deserving the hardship it undergoes. Those who do not enter the marriage bracket simply find themselves being stigmatized as social misfits.

4.4. Conclusion

This research gathered primary data from the field. It then synthesised the data with the secondary data guided by the objectives of the study. The responses clearly indicate that most of the single-parents in the society today have become so due to separation from their spouses. The other cause of single-parenthood is the death of one spouse, leaving the other to care for their family. Divorce and early pregnancies were also cited as causes for single-parenthood. It emerged that, single-mothers face financial challenges while raising children alone. Other problems such as loneliness and the need for sexual satisfaction were cited. Yet another challenge comes when the children grow up and begin to confront, quite naturally, their identity crisis. They ask questions, for instance, about their father, indicating the need for a father-figure.

The Church being the body of Christ ought to be all-inclusive without any segregation. The Church has responded by allowing the formation of groups which address the diverse and integral needs of a single-parent. Some of these have grown into fully-fledged ministries. Opinion is divided on how the single-parents can be accommodated like other members of the church. Some 20% of the clergy affirmed that they should be accommodated so long as they show repentance, compared to 26.67% who argued that they should be accepted without any form of judgement. The majority (53.33%) argued that they should be accepted but also guided spiritually.

This study concluded that for the Church in Nairobi to remain relevant, she ought to address the realities of the growing number of single-parents in the congregations. The church appears to be warming up towards acceptance, inclusiveness, tolerance affirmation and diversity. The church is gradually realizing that single-parenthood is a reality in the society and that this group of Christians longed for spiritual nourishment

as well. As highlighted in the previous chapters, most church congregations consisted of two-adult family units. Church programmes were designed almost-exclusively to meet their needs. The pressure on young women to get married was so much that it even adversely affected those who would choose to remain single throughout their life. It is generally taken that when a person reaches a certain age, he or she must get married. Ironically, no marriage education is provided. For example, a young lady may consider marriage as a desired goal by the age of twenty-five. If it does not happen by then, she reschedules matrimony for age twenty-nine because she would like to be married before the age of thirty. At thirty-two, she is still single and she gets a lot of pressure from her family and friends. If she does not yield to this pressure, she will accept her single status at a stage in life, and without setting unrealistic goals, enjoy life. After all, as pointed out by Gichinga (1996), there are more women of marriageable age than there are men. Due to Christian influence, polygyny is either illegal or out of fashion. Most educated and independent women tend to use their socio-economic independence to justify single-parenthood. They may choose to conceive and have children without being wives.

Several well-educated and financially independent women opt to be single-mothers. The church is, therefore, called to upgrade her premarital education considering that there were many causes underlying single-motherhood. We contend that the challenge of youth ministry is to help the single adults become free to honor and respond to God. If marriage is part of that response to God, well and good. But if it is not, there should be no cause for unnecessary anxiety. The role of the church is to provide teachings that will help parents to move on with their lives, accept themselves, get healing for their heartaches and pick up the pieces and move on.

Single-motherhood is of social concern because of its prevalence. Though the Church in Nairobi recognizes that separated persons exist within the church, its counseling program is geared to assist with the problems in the marriage, forgetting that the separated persons also require help since they have specific needs. They undergo changes in their lives once they separate. Their attitudinal levels also shift during their transition. As a result, the Church should maximize and expand its resources of help for such individuals. The Church is called upon to engage the separated persons so that they may feel useful, normal and not misfits.

The attitude of the Church and the society makes a woman whose marriage ends in divorce to feel as if she has failed in her vocation. Rodgers-Gardner (1990) argues that a man usually has a primary vocation by which he defines and values himself. She adds that when he is divorced, he does not feel less worthy or competent at his chosen work in the world. On the contrary, a woman has been socialized by Church and society that her primary vocation is being a wife and mother, whatever job she may choose outside her home. Her grief over the loss of her marriage is compounded because, at some deep level, she also feels unworthy and unlovable. Women tend to blame themselves and experience self-pity when a marriage does not work. The common feeling inclines towards self-blame and surrendering to the opinion that one was less attractive, less persevering, these leading to failure in their marriage.

This study revealed that there were three views regarding divorce among Christians. First, the majority of the respondents viewed divorce as a sin. In that regard, they should not be allowed altogether into active church participation. These respondents further desired to see all divorcees punished. The second felt that divorce could only be allowed on grounds of adultery and desertion by a non-believing spouse. The third

group indicated that any unbearable circumstances could be considered to dissolve unhappy marriages. However, all respondents agreed that the Church should minister to the divorcees. Divorce was a lesser sin in the context of neglect and abuse. What is sinful is the abuse and neglect that takes places within marital relationships.

It was noted that various categories of single-parents were perceived differently in the Church. The widowed were tolerated whereas the 'never-married' were mostly detested. The widow has had a privileged place in the Church throughout history. The first deacons were given the specific task of caring for the widows and the orphans. In contemporary society, the widow is readily accepted. One of our respondent pastors observed, "Recently I was involved as a minister in two funerals. Both deaths occurred suddenly in what seemed to be fairly healthy marriages. Now, in two separate households, two persons have become single without choice." When one becomes single without choice, one needs time to adjust. The significant difference is that one is single in status but not in attitude. In fact, the widower is probably the most reluctant of all single persons to accept singularity as a lifestyle. This attitude is basically because widowed persons had an identity (married) that they enjoyed and a relationship that was probably growing or at least fairly good.

In that context, a widowed person would be treated as any other person rather than as a widow or widower. The general tendency is to introduce married individuals as John and Mary Ochieng. But when it comes to a widow, there is a tendency to add that she is recently bereaved. It is good to relax in the presence of single persons and to know that introductions need only consist of their names without details on their marital status. Lack of equal treatment with regards to divorcees may create social and religious challenges to the church and to society. The Bible is not clear as to what

happens when a man is accused of marital unfaithfulness. One might then ask, “Were men not involved in marital unfaithfulness during the biblical times?” We believe these questions have contributed to the way the Church is handling the whole issue.

The study’s pilot survey showed that single-parents formed a substantial number of church members in any given congregation. We also observed that most singles have similar needs of identity, goals for living, acceptance, Christian growth, finances, vocational guidance, and family. These needs are real, even though the singles come to this point in their lives from various trails. The formerly married have a tendency to blame God for their present marital status. This shifting of responsibility generally grows out of an inaccurate understanding of prayer and God’s will and reluctance to accept responsibility for all that occurs in one’s life. The divorced adult feels guilty because divorce is against the social teaching of the church.

In the Gospel teaching, Jesus sets out to liberate the oppressed such as women, widows, the marginalized, orphans and by extension, single-mothers. In Luke 7:36 onwards, “a woman of ill repute washed Jesus’ feet with her hair and anointed them with oil.” The Pharisees, who were present, saw her as an evil and sinful person, unworthy of coming close to Jesus, let alone touching him. Jesus rebuked them and spoke to the woman in a humane, loving way and declared, “Your sins are forgiven ... your faith has saved you; go in peace.” If Jesus forgave the sins of this woman, how much more would he forgive a repentant single mother?

The Church is thus faced with a similar task: to promote wholeness of the Christians and to perpetuate the physical, psychological, spiritual and moral dimensions of human beings (Mugambi and Nasimiyu-Wasike, 1999). It should be at the forefront in dispelling the myth that the woman should remain vulnerable through an acquired

inferior status and through her nurturing nature. Christ was invariably her champion and encourager during his days on earth. Through His servants, a marked change in attitude and conduct has and is continuing to take place in many cultures. May God haste the day when His Church will fully demonstrate the equality and mutual love of her sons and daughters for the entire world to see.

The study has contributed to the debates on the patterns of change in the family. This is by revealing the dynamics and organization of single-parent families. The study thus analyzed the single-parent family from a broad perspective, compared it with other family types and drew conclusions regarding single-parenthood. Single-parenthood as a challenge to community requires an enlightened public opinion and attention that this study has provided. Finally, the study has academically contributed to family studies and sociology of religion.

Single-mothers often face challenges that may not be addressed adequately by the Church. Consequently, single-mothers feel sidelined, abandoned, or discriminated against in the Church and society at large. This warrants a study to clear the negative sentiments towards single-mothers and to advocate for their acceptance into the body of Christ. Findings emanating from this study affirm single-mothers to feel accepted, enjoying a sense of belonging as members of Christian congregations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter is a summary of the entire study. It presents a summary of the main findings, recommendations arising from the objectives of the study and proposed areas of further research on single-parenthood.

5.2. Summary and conclusions of the study

The study sought to investigate the Christian response to single-parenthood in selected congregations in Nairobi County. The study was guided by four specific objectives: first, to analyze the causes of single-parenthood and their socio-religious implications; second, to evaluate the doctrine and the social teaching of the Church with regard to inclusiveness; third, to examine the role of the Church as a potential network of support for Christian single-parents; and finally, to explore the possibilities of Christian single-parents being accepted as members in church. Data for this study were obtained through questionnaires, FGD, Oral Interviews, Indepth Interviews as well as from secondary sources.

Various scholars including sociologists and theologians have for more than three decades debated the full participation of the single-parent in the Church. This is in recognition that the Church has, through history, referred to herself as the community of believers, the one “Body of Christ”, yet simultaneously acted as if she can do so without bearing any pain. Peck (1988:300) observes that the Church today behaves as, “If it could be the Body without having to be stretched, almost torn apart, as if it could be the ‘Body of Christ’ without having to carry its own cross, without having to hang

on that cross in the agony of conflict.” In thinking that it could be that painlessly, the Church has made a lie out of the expression the “Body of Christ”.

This is most exemplified in the issue of admitting single-parents to the church as they are. Peck (1988) identifies three considerations for church officials and congregations that have a sincere interest in becoming a true community. First, is the struggle with the issue of inclusiveness as the Church sustains her relevance. Second, are the vast majority of Christians who remain uncommitted because they have not found a church worthy of their commitment. Third, is the fact that Jesus was amazingly tolerant of overt sinners. This is clearly illustrated by His assuring the Samaritan woman who was with a sixth husband, that He was the water that would quench her thirst forever.

5.2.1. Causes of Single-parenthood

The first objective investigated the causes of single-parenthood and their socio-religious implications. It focused on how single-parents are perceived by the clergy and their fellow Christian based on whether one is separated, divorced, widowed, or has never been married. The study affirmed the premise that the cause leading to one’s single-parenthood influences the attitudes towards that single-parent.

This research has established that several reasons contribute to single-parenthood among Christians in selected churches in Nairobi County. Respondents cited early pregnancy, rape and abandonment (14%), separation (36%), divorce (16%), death of a spouse (26%) and personal choice (8%). Most of the separated respondents reported that they opted out of their marriages due to their spouses’ continued use of drugs and alcohol, excessive violence and lack of parental responsibility. Among the divorced parents, lack of communication, incompatibility and infidelity were the most cited reasons for terminating marriages. Those who indicated that they were single by

choice, strongly felt that their lives had become more stable by remaining single. The research also established that Church leaders no longer maintained that early pregnancies were a result of fornication or early exposure to sex. Such leaders acknowledged other intervening realities, including false marriage promises, rape, abandonment, influence by anxious parents and lack of suitable partners. In addition, some respondents indicated having just given up hope of ever getting married.

The prevalence of single-parenthood was also triggered by stigma coupled with duty. Men seldom take a woman with a child for a bride. Yet, her motherhood emerges from a relationship with a man. Such social stigma further aggravates single-motherhood. It also emerged that some men view commitment to marriage as an enormous responsibility. They are reluctant to get married for fear of taking up responsibilities and commitments. This is notwithstanding their inclination to continue enjoying a female's companionship.

Despite these odds, most women who became single-parents by chance expressed their wish to get married and enjoy family life. Majority of the respondents (48%) indicated desire for re-marriage and having more children with their new spouses. Comparatively, 36% preferred re-marriage on condition that they would not bear more children. Their purpose for the husband was for companionship and having a father figure for their children. The remaining 16% did not wish to get married at all.

Though this research did not establish the exact population of single-parents attending Nairobi Christian churches, the respondents indicated that, depending on the location, there were between fifty and one hundred single-mothers in each church. Churches have many broken-down families due to poor lifestyles among men and the desire for women to have freedom. This means that there is a big proportion of church-goers

who are single-parents and need to be ministered to in a special way. However, the clergy was frustrated that there were many single-parents who did not register their status with the church, rendering it difficult for the church to justify mounting credible and effective interventions to the integral needs of this category.

Inasmuch as the church does not encourage single-parenthood, the clergy admitted that changing times call for tolerance to the glaring reality of single-mothers. Some clergy likened such mothers to Mary Magdalene who was accepted by Jesus when the society had disregarded her as unworthy of His mercy. Many members of the clergy interviewed preferred that Christian single-mothers be treated with dignity, like other Christians on the same principle that Jesus accepted the sinful humanity. A section of the clergy urged their congregants not to view single-parents as people who engaged in pre-marital or extra-marital sex and prostitution, thereby becoming pregnant. Instead, they needed to credit such women for responsibly raising their children single-handedly. One respondent was emphatic that the Church ought to concern herself with the quality of life which single-parents gave to their children, rather than dwell on their marital status. He observed that there were many single-mothers who brought up their children in a morally upright manner, better than those raised in two-parent families. All the clergy urged that single-mothers should be hopeful and forge ahead in raising their children as God-fearing individuals.

This study concluded that separation is the most prevalent cause of single-parenthood. Other causes are death of a spouse, divorce and early pregnancies. The Church has the ability to guide separated couples through counseling towards reconciliation.

5.2.2. Attitudes towards Christian Single-parents

The second objective evaluated the doctrine of the Church regarding inclusivity. The study established that the doctrine and social teaching of the Church underlined acceptance of all members into the body of Christ as long as they made an initiative to belong. The study affirmed the premise that the Church remains non-committed and harbours negative attitudes towards Christian single-parents despite her doctrine on inclusivity. Regarding the attitudes of fellow Christians towards single-parents, 66% of the respondents described it as positive and felt that they were welcome to participate in various church activities. However, 34% of the respondents stated that their fellow Christians felt quite uneasy and uncomfortable whenever they met in groups that included both sexes. They stated that some married men and women viewed single-parents as a threat to their marriages and not good role models to young people. Further, society condoned the man who refused to take a young girl whom he impregnated to be his wife and instead, blamed the single mother and accused her of being reluctant to become a responsible wife.

The research also established that 80% of the clergy thought that being a single-parent was not necessarily a personal failure. Nearly all respondents linked single-parenthood to making wrong choices or inevitable circumstances beyond human control, for instance, the death of a spouse. Others had made a personal choice to be single-parents themselves and could therefore not be termed as failures. Twenty percent of the respondents felt that single-parenthood was a personal failure, arguing that factors underlying single-parenthood such as out-of-wedlock pregnancies were avoidable. They underlined that making wrong choices was a failure.

The clergy and other Christians concurred that discrimination towards single-mothers was more pronounced among the less educated faithful members. Out of the sampled respondents for this research, 80% felt free to interact with single-parents in whatever location. They did not associate single-parenthood with deviant sexual activities such as pre-marital sex, prostitution or instability. They argued that single-parents experienced many challenges but they were not necessarily immoral because of their single-parenthood. However, the clergy maintained that single-parent families were incomplete and their children experienced a gap growing up without the presence of the other spouse.

Nevertheless, 13% disagreed with this view, arguing that single-parents were hypocrites, using the church as a cover-up to their machinations. Pastors' wives added that they were uncomfortable associating with single-mothers. They even felt insecure letting them interact with their husbands. Some single-mothers stated that they were even unwelcome in some residential places as tenants because of their single status. The remaining 7% commented that single-parents needed prayers to live 'upright and bring up their children with good moral character'.

The study concluded that the doctrine and social teaching of the Church recognized all the worshippers in whatever state. However, the reality on the ground often portrayed a contrary picture.

5.2.3. Church as a Potential Network Support for Single-parents

The third objective set to evaluate the role of the Church as a potential support network for single-parents. The study affirmed the premise that the Church has a major role to play towards the social and religious rehabilitation and acceptance of Christian single-parents.

Single-mothers informed this research that they encountered financial and emotional challenges, loneliness and jealousy from married mothers. They also faced challenges from their teenage children who at times demanded to know who their fathers were. This research found out that 64% of Nairobi Christian single-mothers experienced financial constraints, 26% social stigma and 10%, religious discrimination in their places of worship. Respondents confirmed that some categories of single-mothers, for instance, the divorced could not access certain church privileges such as the Eucharist due to their marital status.

However, the Church seems to be warming up to the realization that society has now acknowledged and embraced the reality of single-parent families. Indeed, the Church has embarked on bringing them into the family of God in order to show them love and support. Majority (46.7%) of the clergy in this research pointed out that the single-parents deserved a special ministry. A good number of the clergy (33.3%) expressed hope for salvation for those who fell short of church teachings while 20% were pessimistic that single-mothers could attain good socio-religious standing due to immorality. Accordingly, they should not be allowed to take part in church activities. However, all participants in the FGD were categorically positive about single-mothers. They upheld that single-parents should not be remorseful or apologetic about their status. In fact, they should all join church ministry and seek guidance on how to raise their children to be great young men and women.

Some 46% of the single-parents remarked that they would feel less isolated if they were granted participation in church activities. Another 26% of them requested that the church to intensify family education with a focus on the realities of single-parenthood. In this way, they would learn how to deal with parental challenges they

faced in life. Some 18% of them thought that congregants needed to show them more love, care, and support as this would boost their hope in life. The remaining 10% desired knowledge on how to save and invest in order to guarantee their children a solid future.

Although nearly all the sampled churches were at different stages of establishing a ministry for single-mothers, 33.3% members of the clergy supported the idea of forming self-help groups (SHG) for single-mothers in the selected churches in Nairobi to assist those without formal employment earn a living. Another 26.7% noted that single-parents needed love, care and support to build their self-esteem. The remaining 20% underlined that it was important to minister and counsel the single-mothers.

The study underscored the need for re-structuring her programmes for the youth to include guidance and counseling on dating and premarital education. In so doing, the church would minimize the numbers of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and consequently single-parent families. This study challenges the church to be more innovative and focus on prevention when responding to the single-parenthood as a phenomenon.

5.2.4. Single-parents Being Accepted as Full Members of the Church

The fourth objective was to explore the possibilities of Christian single-parents being accepted in the church as full members. The study affirmed the premise that it is possible for Christian single-parents to be accepted as members of the congregation.

Members of the clergy and their congregations expressed various views on the possibilities of admitting single-parent families within the mainstream functions of the church. Some 20% of the clergy were hesitant allowing single-parents to participate in all church activities as well as fellowship with other Christians unless they repented and turned to God. Another 26.7% held that since all humanity had sinned and fallen

short of the glory of God, single-parents were no exception. They should be accepted in the church unconditionally. This group observed that single-mothers may have been forced by circumstances beyond their control, into their status hence the need to give them a chance to worship like other faithful. Most respondents (53.3%) maintained that single-mothers should be accepted and given spiritual guidance. This is because most of them experienced emotional trauma in life and sought for possible help. The best place to find such help was in the church.

The study concluded that in the congregations which were sampled, the levels of stigmatization of single-parents seemed to be declining. This was based on their general conduct and interactions with their fellow Christians. It was considered that some become single-mothers by default and they needed to feel at home in the church. It is imperative then that spiritual guidance and nourishment should be given to them fully.

5.3. Summary

The findings of this study established the causes of single-parenthood, with a specific focus on single-motherhood. These include early pregnancies, rape and abandonment (14%), separation (16%), divorce (26%) and personal choice (8%). Out of the single-parents interviewed, 34% held the view that fellow Christians had negative attitudes towards them, accusing them of being immoral and irresponsible. The majority (80%) felt that single-parenthood did not imply personal failure. The clergy and the congregation concurred that Christians with minimal education were less friendly towards single-mothers than those with higher education.

Most of the interviewed clergy (80%) maintained that single-parent families were “incomplete”. They also believed that children raised in single-parent families

experienced a vacuum, being raised by one parent instead of the ideal two parents. Some members of the clergy interviewed (13%) accused single-parents of being pretenders, hiding in the church. The rest of the respondents (7%) held the view that single-parents needed moral guidance and support to carry on with their lives. As such, the Church, ought to provide such support. It also emerged that various categories of the single-parents were perceived differently by their fellow Christians. The divorced and the never-married attracted the harshest stigma, while the widowed had the mildest. The study further established that the general attitude towards single-parents in Christian congregations was changing to a less hostile one.

5.4. Conclusion

Considering that most single-mothers get into this status by default rather than by design, their acceptance as full members of the church would help them feel at home. The social dimension of religion involves interacting with others, feeling accepted, loved and appreciated. The church being the body of Christ should be all-inclusive. It should be a haven, a place where all who seek spiritual nourishment would be accepted.

This study established that death of a spouse is one of the causes of single-parenthood. The reality in life is such that one marriage partner is likely to die before the other hence making the other, a single-parent. Furthermore, the church ought to be a caring community. Care is not limited to the spiritual needs. Rather it ought to extend to all dimensions of human life. In addition, a strong youth ministry with a component of sex education would equip young adults to understand the benefits of abstinence hence avoid rampant pre-marital pregnancies.

There has been considerable debate on single-motherhood, although much of it has not been centered on the response of the Church. Those who have enthusiastically taken up this debate are probably heeding God's voice. This could be an indication that the Church is fully accepting Christian single-parents as members. Therefore, the study on Christian response towards single-parenthood is a continuation of this debate.

5.5. Recommendations of the study

The study made the following recommendations:

5.5.1. The causes of Single-parenthood and their Implications

1. The factors which led to one's single-parenthood status influences the social and religious perception towards the said single-parent. Considering that majority of the single-mothers get into that status by default rather than by design, the Church needs to preach and practice acceptance for this group of Christians.
2. Single-mothers who are living in separation would benefit immensely from a tailor-made guidance and counselling program. This would enhance self-acceptance for the single-mothers and accelerate reconciliation with their spouses.
3. The Churches needs to organize retreats, talks and seminars for single-mothers and empower them to get back on their feet, emotionally and spiritually.

5.5.2. Implementing the Doctrine and Social Teaching of the Church

1. All aspects of inclusivity, acceptance and being welcome need to be accorded to all Christians, regardless of their marital status.

2. The Church in Africa could borrow a leaf from the Church in the West in practicing the doctrine and social teaching of the church, with regard to accepting members as they come.
3. Parish Pastoral Councils and Christians in leadership need to be in the front line in practicing inclusiveness and acceptance of every Christian.

5.5.3. The Church as a Potential Network of Support for Single-parents

1. The Church is challenged to re-design her programmes to target in particular, the young adults who are ready for marriage.
2. Family Life Education Programmes need to target, guide and counsel young adults in pre-marital relationships.
3. The Church needs to focus on the prevention of out-of-wedlock pregnancies by guiding the young adults.

5.5.4. Possibilities of single-parents being accepted in the Church

1. Hostility towards single-parents appears to be reducing in the Church today. There is room for improvement, with regard to acceptance of the never-married single-mothers.
2. The Church needs to lean more towards gathering rather than scattering, being the authoritative social institution.
3. The Church has the capacity to re-design her programmes and remain relevant to the 21st Century Christians. This would make an impact on policy makers who would work towards alleviating the financial burdens of single-mothers. Through introducing alimony, the financial burden of raising children would become lighter for the divorced mothers.

5.6. Recommendations for Further Research

This study recommended that further research could be done on the following:

1. Christian response to single fathers.
2. The children of single-mothers and their participation in church programmes.
3. Comparative study on the mainstream and indigenous church on single-parent families.
4. Church in Kenya and her role on the prevention of out-of-wedlock births.

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<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/27/opinion/sunday/single-mothers-with-family-values.html?pagewanted=all&r=0> retrieved on 11/09/2014

APPENDICES**Appendix A.1: List of Participants in the Focus Groups Discussion****Embulbul Catholic Church: Conducted on 22nd May 2013**

1. Mary Naisenya.
2. Elizabeth Wangari
3. Joan Wambui
4. Maria Nyambura
5. Pauline Nyamagak
6. Nelly Akinyi
7. Jane Anyango
8. Lucy Nanjala
9. Margaret Nafula
10. Esther Wavinya
11. Maria Munini
12. Jane Kwamboka
13. Jane Njeri

Madre Theresa Catholic Church Zimmerman: Conducted on 29th August 2013

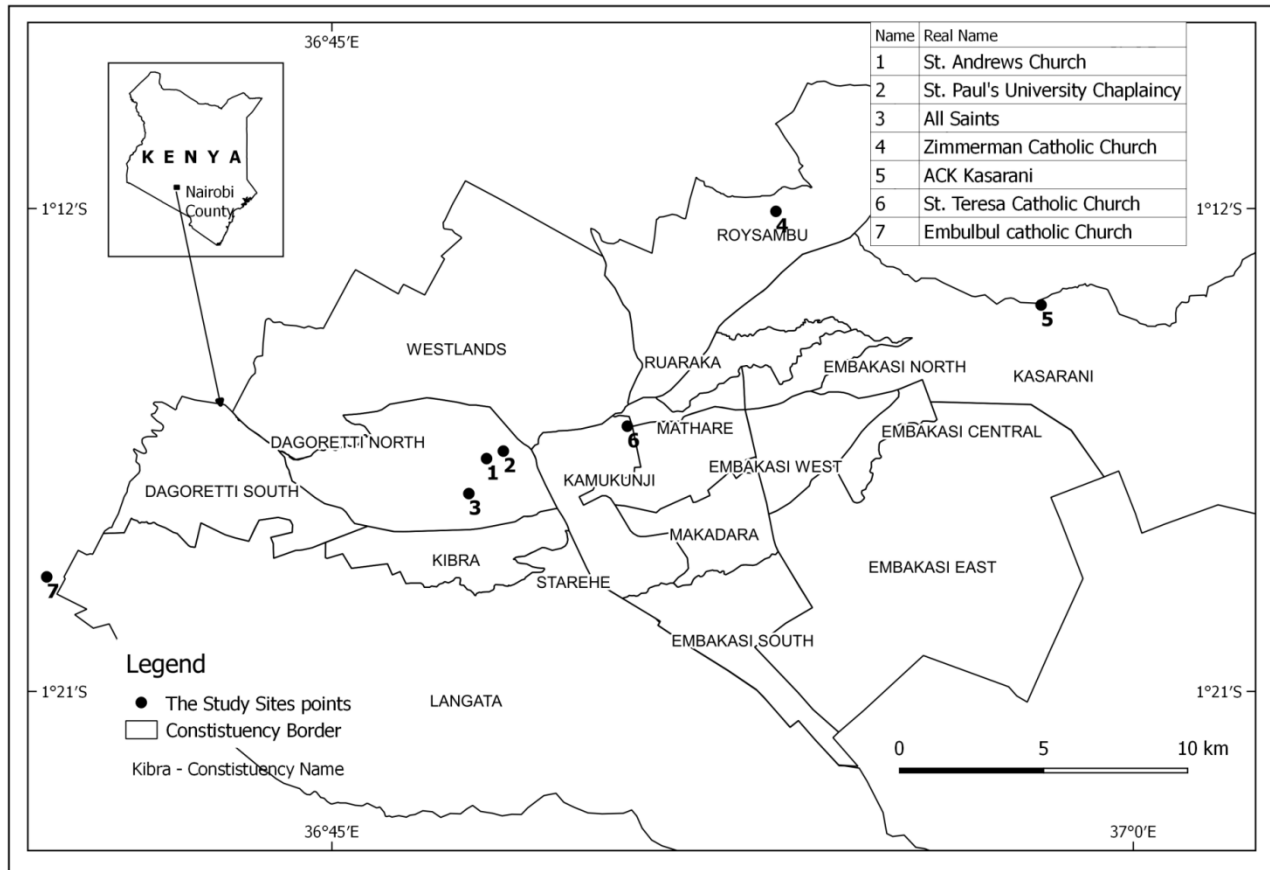
1. Grace Waceke
2. Tabitha Wairimu
3. Rosemary Naliaka
4. Mary Wangechi
5. Esther Auma
6. Phoebe Atieno
7. Celestine Nyamboke

8. Halima Zawadi
9. Magdaline Mwende
10. Roseline Waturi
11. Jackeline Chepchumba
12. Patricia Muthoni

ACK St. Gertrude's, Kasarani: Conducted on 5th April 2013

1. Ruth Awiti
2. Doreen Wanjiku
3. Jemima Karwitha
4. Naomi Micere
5. Hilda Atieno
6. Pauline Nasimiyu
7. Penina Njeri
8. Jane Wairimu
9. Florence Mwongeli
10. Zipporah Auma
11. Diana Achieng
12. Jane Wawira
13. Vivian Kavura
14. Lilian Kyengo

Appendix A.2: Map of Nairobi County Showing the Location of the Study Sites



(Source: Nairobi County Government 2013)

Appendix A.3: Questionnaire for single-parents

Introduction

Kindly take a few minutes to help us fill out this questionnaire. All responses shall be treated with confidentiality, so please answer as objectively as you can.

General Information:

- (i) Marital Status Single
 Divorced
 Separated
- (ii) Sex Female [] Male []
- (iii) Age (years) 27-30 [] 31-35 [] 36-40 []
 41-45 [] 46-50 [] Above 50 []
- (iv) Highest education level
- Primary []
- Secondary []
- College []
- University []
- No formal education []
- Other, specify

- (v) Please state your occupation
- (vi) Religious Affiliation
- Protestant (specify)

- Indigenous (specify)

- Catholic

- Name your church

- Location of your church

1. What is your estimated expenditure per
 - (i) Week Kshs.
 - (ii) Month Kshs.

2. Apart from catering for your own family do you have other financial responsibility? Yes [] No []

3. If Yes, which ones?
.....

4. (a) Comment briefly on your
 - (i) Family
 - (ii) Social
 - (iii) Religious background

- (b) Have you been married before? Yes [] No []

- (c) If Yes, how did you part with your spouse?

Death	[]	
Divorce	[]	
Separated	[]	
Abandoned	[]	
Other (specify)	[]	

- (d) Do you have any children of your own? Yes [] No []

- (e) Do you still hope to get married? Yes [] No []

5. (a) What circumstances led to your single-parenthood?
.....

- (b) Would you say that you became a single-parent by choice or by chance?

Choice? [] Chance? []

Why?

6. (a) How frequently do you attend church services? Is it:

(i) Weekly []

(ii) Whenever there is a service? []

(iii) Now and then? []

(iv) Once a month? []

(v) Once a year? []

(vi) Hardly ever []

- (b) How would you describe your religious commitment?

(i) Very strongly committed []

(ii) Strongly committed []

(iii) Average []

(iv) Not committed []

7. (a) How many Church groups do you belong to?

(i) One [] (ii) Two [] (iii) Three []

- (b) Which ones?

8. How would you describe your membership? Are you

(i) An active member []

(ii) A passive member []

(iii) A leader []

What positions do you hold?

9. (a) Within the church group(s) that you belong to, do you discuss issues related to single-parenthood? (i) Yes [] (ii) No []
- (b) If Yes, which specific issues are discussed?
.....
- (c) If No, why not?
10. (a) Is there a single-parents' association in your church?
- (i) Yes [] (ii) No []
- (b) If Yes, are you a member? (i) Yes [] (ii) No []
- (c) As a member of the single-parent association, are you
- (i) An active member []
- (ii) A passive member []
- (iii) A leader []
- (iv) What position do you hold?
11. What are the objectives of the single-parents' association?
.....
12. (a) Outline some of the major issues discussed during meetings.
.....
- (b) Do you find the meeting useful (worthwhile)? (i) Yes [] (ii) No []
- Why?
13. (a) What is the role of the single-parents association towards assisting single-parents in organizing their lives?
.....

- (b) What are some of the strategies and resources that you have devised for survival as a single-parent?

.....

- 14. (a) As a single-parent, do you experience any form of social stigma:

- (i) Yes [] (ii) No []

Explain your answer

.....

- (b) Do you experience any form of religious segregation due to your marital status?

- (i) Yes (ii) [] No []

Explain your answer

.....

- (c) Would you describe your social interaction as being?

- (i) Easy? [] (ii) Difficult? []

- 15. (a) Have you experienced any discrimination due to your status as a single-parent?

- (i) Yes [] (ii) No []

- (b) If Yes, who discriminated against you?

- (c) Briefly, describe the types of discrimination

.....

.....

- 16. (a) (For ladies) Have you had any problems or suspicions from married women when you talk to their husbands?

- (i) Yes [] (ii) No []

(b) If Yes, describe what happened:

.....

(c) (For men) Have had any problems or suspicions from married men when you talk to their wives? (i) Yes [] (ii) No []

(d) If Yes, describe what happened:

.....

17. (a) Does your church have any ministry for single-parents?

(i) Yes [] (ii) No []

(b) If Yes, describe what happened:

(c) How should the church integrate single-parents more fully?

.....

18. What do you think is the attitude of the following to your single-parenthood status?

(i) Your parents

.....

(ii) Relatives

.....

(iii) Your fellow Christians

.....

19. (a) What is the role of the church as a network of support for single-parents?

.....

(b) Do you feel accepted or rejected as a member of the congregation?

(i) Accepted [] (ii) Rejected []

20. Do you have future hopes concerning:

(a) Marrying (i) Yes [] (ii) No []

Explain your answer and the challenges you envisage
.....

(b) Re-marrying (i) Yes [] (ii) No []

Explain your answer and the challenges you envisage
.....

(c) Having more children (i) Yes [] (ii) No []

Explain your answer and the challenges you envisage
.....

21. What are some of the major challenges in your life as a single-parent?

.....

22. (a) Do you believe that God still loves you and answers your prayers, despite being a single-parent? (i) Yes [] (ii) No []

Explain your answer

.....

23. (a) Do you feel you are whole and complete even as a single-parent?

(i) Yes [] (ii) No []

(b) Explain your answer

.....

24. What topics should pastors/priests to address regarding single-parents?

.....

Appendix A.4: Questionnaire for Pastors/Priests

Introduction:

Kindly take a few minutes to help us fill out this questionnaire. All answers provided will be treated confidentially. Kindly answer as truthfully as you can. Thank you.

Name: (optional)

Title:

Name of church:

Location of the church:

1. How does your church perceive single-parenthood?
2. Which group of single-parents (widows, widowers, never married, divorced, separated) are represented in your church?
3. (a) Do you have a fellowship or a ministry for single-parents?
 (i) Yes [] (ii) No []
 (b) If Yes, how does the church minister to this group?

 If No, explain:

4. For how long have you been serving as a pastor in this church?
5. What is the approximate age of single-parents in your church?
6. What do you consider to be the causes of single-parenthood?
7. How do the single-parents participate in church activities?
8. What are the beliefs and practices of the Christian church towards single-parenthood?

9. What procedure does your church follow when reinstating a single-parent?
10. On separation, divorce or widowhood, should a single-parent seek remarriage?
11. In your opinion do single-parents require special ministry?
12. (a) Do single-parents come to you for spiritual guidance?
- (b) Explain your answer.
- (c) What role does the church play as a network of support for Christian single-parents?
13. (a) What is the response of the church towards the changing social attitudes towards single-parents?
14. (b) What can the church do to address the increasing number of single-parents?
15. What do you think the church should do to address the apparent increasing number of single-parents?
16. In your view, does singlehood reflect a personal failure?
17. (a) What is the attitude of your church towards someone raising a family without a wife or a husband?
- (b) If your church does not accept one raising children outside marriage, how does it treat:
 - (i) Single-parents?
 - (ii) The children of such parents?
18. (a) Apart from the usual Sunday services, are there other extra activities organized by your church for single persons?
- (b) If Yes, what are the activities?
-
-
19. Summarize the social teaching of your church on single-parenthood

Appendix A.5: Questionnaire for Other Christians/Leaders

Introduction:

Kindly take a few minutes to help us fill out this questionnaire. All your answers will be treated with confidentiality, kindly answer as truthfully as you can. Thank you.

Name: (optional)

Title:

Name of church

Location of church.....

Leadership position

1. (a) What are the causes of single-parenthood?
- (b) How is single-parenthood linked to a decline in morals or economic conditions in the society?
- (c) Single-parenthood is sometimes viewed in contemporary thought as a choice or an alternative lifestyle. What is your view?
- (d) In your opinion, is single-parenthood a personal failure?
 - (i) Yes [] (ii) No []

Explain your answer:

2. Do you feel free to interact with single-parents or they ought to be segregated?
3. What are your attitudes towards Christian single-parents?
4. What are some of the social and religious problems attributed to single-parent families?
5. In your opinion, are single-parent families incomplete? Yes [] No []

Explain

6. Are single-parents capable of bringing up morally and socially upright children?
7. What is the role of the church towards addressing the challenging reality of single-parenthood?
8. How can the church nurture single-parents spiritually and support them to stay on course?
9. Single-parents are often associated with pre-marital sex, prostitution, and instability. What are your views?
10. (a) Should single-parents hold leadership positions in the church?
(i) Yes [] (ii) No []
(b) Explain your answer:
11. Explain the beliefs and practices of the church towards single-parents?
12. What advice/encouragement would you give single-parents who are committed Christians?

.....

Appendix A.6: Oral Interview, In-Depth Interview and Focus Group Discussion Guide for Christian single-parents.

Introduction:

Kindly take a few minutes to fill out this brief data sheet before we commence with focus group discussion. The anonymity of each participant is assured and all responses will be treated with confidentiality. Your free active participation in the discussion will be highly appreciated.

Age:

Highest education level:

Position/Title:

Church attended:

Are you involved in any fellowship or ministry for single-parents? If Yes, briefly describe it.....

You a single-parent:

- (i) By choice [] (ii) Due to death of spouse [] (iii) Separation []
 (iv) Divorce [] (v) Abandonment [] (vi) For other reasons, (specify):

1. Would you desire to marry or re-marry? Yes [] No [] Maybe []

2. What was/is your parents' marital status? Married []

Single mother [] separated [] divorced []

3. Among your parents, relatives and close friends, how would you rate the relationship between married couples?

- (a) Very good [] (ii) Good [] (iii) Average [] (iv) Bad [] (v) Very bad []

Opening the Discussion:

4. Name two exciting things happening in your life right now or happened in the recent past as a single parent.

Self-identity or societal view:

5. What is your view towards being a single-parent?
6. What are some of the joys of being a single-parent?
7. What are some of the challenges that you encounter as a single mother or father?
8. How does society perceive single-parents?
9. Have you experienced any discrimination based on your single status? If yes, kindly share your experience.
10. Have you had any problems or suspicions from married men or women when you talk to their wives or husband? If yes, please describe what happened.

Relationships:

11. Do your friends, family and society place any expectations on you as a single-parent with regard to finances, availability to attend functions?
12. What are your views about dating?
13. Is there any pressure from any quarters for you to marry or re-marry? If yes, what is your greatest source of pressure?
14. How have you handled this pressure and what effect has it had on your relationships?
15. What are some of the sexual choices available to you as a single-parent?
16. What is our perception of intimacy?
17. (a) Do you ever experience loneliness?
(b) If Yes, how do you cope with it?
18. Do you consider yourself fulfilled as a single-parent? Why? Why not? Explain.

19. If an opportunity arose, would you consider marriage or re-marriage? Explain your answer.
20. What is your general view about marriage?

Spiritual life:

21. How has your faith in God impacted on your life? Share some highlights on your spiritual walk with Christ.
22. Does your church have ministries for single-parents?
23. Does your church facilitate forums for single adults to interact?
24. What advice or encouragement would you give to other Christian single-parents?