



Single Parenthood: A Borrowed Culture and a Dilemma for the Karanga People of Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to find out the causes, attitudes, perceptions and impact of single parenthood among Karanga people. The study focuses on how the Karanga community perceives single parenthood. The study is informed by the Cultural Hermeneutics Theory and Functionalist Theory. It uses a qualitative descriptive survey research design. The research purposively selected thirty (30) Karanga participants in Masvingo high density suburbs. A semi-structured questionnaire and face-to-face interviews were used to collect data. Data were analysed using the constant comparative method for thematic coding. Results indicated that single parenting is now a common reality in the study setting. It showed that single parenting mainly affects widows, divorcees, those who fall pregnant and never marry, and the raped ones as well as the ‘small houses’/ mistresses, and those who are in polygamous situations unknown by other family members/relatives. The participants revealed that working mothers are comfortable raising their children alone and showed that they are also able to impart their social norms and values to their off-spring. Participants believed that their situations can change and they proposed to incorporate other cultures in the Zimbabwe Marriage Act so that the causes, attitudes and perceptions of single parenting are appreciated. The study also established the need to re-educate society on the importance of marriage and the need to minimise incidents of separation and divorce. Societies and communities should be enlightened on the issue of single parenting so as to help resolve most challenges faced by single parent, in line with the global changes.

Key Words: Borrowing, Children’s Rights, Culture, Cultural Hermeneutics Theory, Single Parenting.

INTRODUCTION

Parenting is a broad concept that includes tending to the physical well-being of

a child, psychological care, sociological welfare, as well as tending to the food requirements of the child (Artchel, 1985). Parenting or child rearing is the process of



encouraging and supporting the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of a child, from birth to adulthood. It can also be defined as that aspect of raising a child besides the biological relationship (Mwongera, 2024). Sibanda, Chingove and Munyati (2012) state that a single family style is a family with either only the father or mother living with the children. The single parent has the sole responsibility of taking care of all the day-to-day responsibilities of raising the child or children.

In the Shona culture, a normal family comprises a father, a mother and children. Child rearing is, therefore, expected to happen in a family where both father and mother are present, exercising their gender roles with the assistance of the entire community. In contemporary societies in Zimbabwe, just like elsewhere globally, there has been an increase in the phenomenon of single-parent families. This has mainly been the result of globalisation, education, digital humanities, human rights issues, and cross marriages.

Background

Globally, single parenting affects an estimated 40% of couples, amounting to 50 million couples and of these, female single parents account for 70 to 80% of sole parenting cases, which contributes 80% of all cases. Due to lack of, and/or fewer accurate statistics on rates of female sole parenting globally, the figures stated above do not represent all regions of the world and Africa in particular (New York Times, 2004). In Africa, single parenting is viewed as an

abomination. The African communities, especially in Zimbabwe, despise it (Machibaya and Ndamba, 2023). Besides being a growing problem globally and in Africa, it has received very little attention from anthropologists, social scientists, researchers, and demographers in southern Africa. This could be because of the region's high rates of migration. However, in Zimbabwe, single parenting was studied by Machibaya and Ndamba (2023), who carried out a research at a university in Masvingo. They revealed that educated single parents are empowered, are independent and can make quick decisions on their family issues as well as self-actualisation issues.

When the family bond between parents is broken, that family becomes a single-parent family where relations tend to suffer. Sibanda, Chingove and Munyati (2012) state that a single family style is a family with either only the father or mother living with the children. The single parent has the sole responsibility of taking care of all the day-to-day responsibilities of raising the child or children. Tassoni (2002) carried out a research study on the causes of single-parent families in the US. Divorce and death were cited as some of major causes of single-parent families. In recent years, the phenomenon of teen pregnancies has also given rise to single-parent families as both parents would be too immature to make a lasting family. The *New York Times* (2004) carried out studies in southern Africa and found that poverty and teenage pregnancies led to a rise in single-parent families. Teenage pregnancies actually worsen the poverty cycle as the children born may not get good education.

Single parenting is whereby one parent is present to bring up the children, often without assistance from the other parent. This phenomenon presents some cultural challenges to the parent under whose custody the children are. The single parent faces social challenges such as failure to provide adequately for the children and inability to provide opportunities for socialisation to the children, especially in the rural set-up. The single parent may face problems of acceptability within the society. He or she may also face challenges relating to resource shortages, which may negatively impact how the children are raised. The Karanga people view marriage as a clear window to their family, clan and community growth. Once one is in a marriage union, one cannot even get out, not even by death. For the Karanga, marriage is the in-thing and singleness is not considered virtuous. The elders in the family try all means to keep the marriage intact and working. The elders provide advice and solutions in cases of misunderstandings in marriage, with aunts, uncles and elders providing counselling and advice (Orgar et al., 2018). As such, in the Karanga view, singleness is both a misfortune and a disgrace. Elders within the family tend to be restless whenever they feel other members of the family have remained single for some time. It is against this background that the researcher examines the causes of single parenting, and the moral and ethical implications of single parenting within the Karanga people in the Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe.

Anthony, Glanvile, Naaman, Waander and Shaffer (2005) state that children can learn best if they are given

sufficient learning, development materials and psychosocial support. It then follows that parents are obliged to fend for their children. Tassoni (2002) undertook a study in the US and concluded that single-parent families in the US are mainly due to divorce and death. Mugove's (2017) study on the challenges encountered by single parents in the learning and development of children in Glenview/Mufakose district of Harare, Zimbabwe, revealed that single parents faced challenges in paying school fees for their children because most of them were unemployed, or if they were employed, they were employed in low-paying jobs. The studies cited above are silent on what the Shona society says about single parenting. It is this current research's intention to reveal the impact of the single parenting concept among the Shona people. The study intends to establish the Shona society's views on this concept of single parenting. In this study, single parenting refers to a parent/caregiver with one or more children. A single parent is, therefore, the primary caregiver. These single parents include those whose partners have left the country for greener pastures and have never returned, widows, widowers, divorcees, and those who fall pregnant but are never married, those mothers who have been raped, as well as the 'small houses' (women in polygamous situations but are not known by the family and relatives of the man). Baloyi (2022) also studied the South African indigenous marriages and concluded that marriage and culture should not be taken separately because there are certain negative aspects in indigenous cultures that need to be removed because they treat men and women as unequal even in marriage.

From previous findings as cited above, it is difficult for most single parents to provide for their children's education. This denies the children the opportunity to experience quality learning and development while at home as well as a brighter future. The research, therefore, explores the causes of single parenting, the moral and ethical as well as cultural dilemmas that characterise single parenting in Zimbabwe among the Karanga of the Shona culture in particular. In this, the study is guided by the Cultural Hermeneutics Theory and the Functionalist Theory.

Context Location

The Karanga people of the southern part of Zimbabwe are a large dialect group of the Shona people, whose history goes as far back as the colonial period (Doke, 1931; O'Neil 1935; Chimhundu 2005). The Karanga group is found in Masvingo Province. The Karanga people believe that every member of the society should eventually get married. They make efforts to diagnose the cause of singleness in order to find remedies for the problem. Finding solutions to the problem of singleness is considered a duty for everyone in the family (Orgar et al., 2018). Indeed, marriage is expected to culminate in siring. The Karanga people go to extremes to address the problem where one of them remains unmarried when marriage is expected. For them, no one is expected to stay single forever. As such, they have many ways of getting married, which include *musengabere* (carrying one's loved one), *kutizira* (eloping), *kutizisa* (helping a girl to elope), *kuganha* (to follow a man without an appointment), *chigadzamapfihwa*

(a girl married after the sister's death), *chimutsamapfihwa* (a girl married after the sister failed to have a child), *kugara nhaka* (husband/wife inheritance), *kuzvarira* (child marriage in exchange of something), *kutema ugariri* (working for a wife without lobola).

For the Karanga people, just like for all other Shona people in Zimbabwe, marriage is a union between two families, not just two individuals. Marriage is between families, between clans and between communities. Muyambo (2023) asserts that marriage for the Zimbabwean Shona people is a requirement that society looks up to, and is the basis of the community. Both the wife and the husband have a duty to make their marriage work and last. There is also a supporting Shona saying that goes *Musha mukadzi* (a home stands because of a woman). To them, the woman stabilises the home. The Shona expect the woman to endure all hardships and never to leave her marriage.

The concept of single parenting has existed in human history, although not much has been done in many societies. A study by Wilmott et al. (2023) revealed that African cultures are conservative about single parenting and also confirm that singlehood is a status that requires keen study to explore the challenges and possible mitigation strategies. In most African societies, marriages ought to be compulsory, and the situation is drastically changing (Dorsey, 2017). In the past, marriage was of great value in the African community. Regardless of their circumstances, all males and females were supposed to get married. According to Gichaga et al. (2009), singlehood was rare,

and the African world set-up was arranged so that even those members who had difficulties in getting a partner on their own were helped because outside marriage, there is no social sense of dignity accorded her (Oduyoye, 1995) and a woman can only escape this social opprobrium if she remarries. Thus, there is loss of identity and dignity in divorce and singlehood. Oduyoye adds that the African mind revolts against a woman who manages her own affairs as it is assumed that she spells disaster, because she is understood to be 'under' a man, who should manage her affairs.

Singlehood states have taken root in African societies, Zimbabwe included, and are steadily increasing, and their challenges cannot be ignored (Dorsey, 2017). The demographic and health surveys conducted in various West African countries provide statistics on single women. For example, in Ghana, there was a consistent increase in the number of single women aged 35 years and above, an increase from 1.3 percent in 1993 to 2.3 percent in 1998, 5.1 in 2003 and 5.7 in 2008. In the Ivory Coast, the number of single women aged 35 years and above increased from 6.1 percent in 1994 to 7.7 percent in 1999 (Nkonke & Maina, 2014). Biri (2016) notes that there are several cases in Zimbabwe where single women were blamed when they reported sexual abuse, hence, they opted to stay single. In other words, a single lady is likely, according to social norm, to be seen as a sexual object by men because she is viewed as a person of loose character. Biri (2016) also notes that in Zimbabwean churches, single women are the talk of the day and are given different names.

The Shona people, and the Karanga in particular, have the idea of according a man the absolute role of headship and leadership in the home and this explains why single women who are successful are viewed with suspicion and taken as people of loose characters. But how does this view stand in postcolonial Zimbabwe, where we have single ladies empowered by academic education and acquiring jobs that place them on a higher societal status? Does their understanding of their situation capture their reality, or does it fully define who they are in relation to the identities they acquire? This situation is also common in the church and working places (Biri, 2016). Commenting on charismatic churches in Kenya, Nkonge and Maina (2014) opine that churches these days have a high number of single women. The situation is not different in Zimbabwe. People are adopting the Christian culture where everyone is equal in front of God (Biri, 2016). The situation today is a reality that needs to be addressed. From the discussions above, the proportion of single women in society is rising steadily, and singleness is an urgent need for discussion and understanding by the church, workplaces and any other culture.

The study is an interrogation of the perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes towards single ladies and the impact of these, which necessitates probing questions to understand the shifting complex dynamics of singlehood.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the causes of single-hood of Karanga women in Masvingo Urban?
2. How do single women perceive and understanding their situation?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is informed by the Cultural Hermeneutics Theory and the Functionalist Theory. The Cultural Hermeneutics Theory can be defined as a theory of interpretation (Kathanya, 2021). In this case, we are talking of cultural analysis or understanding the history of a culture. This is the way we understand the written text of a culture or the understanding and interpretation of a culture with specific reference to the Karanga culture. The Cultural Hermeneutics Theory posits that culture is constituted by the shared meanings that make human interaction possible Mwoenga, (2024). Mwoenga goes further to note that cultural hermeneutics helps in identifying some aspects within a culture that can assist to perpetuate poisonous oppressive issues against humans. This can help us in the process of searching for a globalised view of single-parenting, analysing the Karanga cultural practices which are oppressive to parenthood. The theory argues for a collective reflection which can help in the building of a just society (Baloyi, 2022). In the same sense, Kanyoro (1995) states that the issues of parenthood and oppressiveness in marriage require collective solidarity. According to Baloyi (2022), the theory has the potential to result in better marriages in future.

The Functionalist Theory by Emile Durkheim postulates that society is a system which has functional parts which operate for

the survival of the whole system and that the parts affect the effectiveness of the other sub-systems. In principle, where one part fails, the other parts struggle to bring normalcy and survival to the whole system (Mwongera, 2024). This means that a family should constitute not less than two parts (people), which should support each other for the survival of the family. The expected role of the parents is to fend for their children. In other words, we can say that the theory is in line with the Karanga cultural ways in particular. The family is the foundation of functionalism. The family is expected to fulfil vital functions, for instance, instilling cultural values and offering support. According to Odumosu (1997), homes that are headed by one parent still have to care for the needs of the children. Single parenting may affect the child's socialisation process, leaving a great impact on children's behaviour, personality and aspirations. The Karanga culture has some cultural expectations for each partner in a marriage situation which make single parenting dysfunctional. These include males being the heads and sole providers of families, while females do all the household chores, taking care of the family, and have no formal employment.

According to Hickey (1998), cited in Wajim (2020), functionalism encourages marriage and neither recognises nor encourages single-parent families. It is a theory that focuses on family members, rather than ignore them. To functionalists, a single-parent family is an incomplete family which should be given another part for it to be a full institution. Talcott (2008) also explains that in a functionalist family, males

are regarded as more powerful than women. A family, therefore, should have a man so that it can be fit to be a cultural institution, just as in the Karanga cultural norms and beliefs. Functionalism believes that single-parent families do not practice cultural integration, but rely on an ideal culture which people should emulate in accordance with their norms and values.

METHODOLOGY

The research aimed at identifying the causes of single parenting and the perceptions and attitudes of the Karanga people on single parenting. The study combines a theoretical and empirical qualitative phenomenological study. It was based on the indicative research theory that treats reality as subjective. This was attainable mainly through interaction with life-worlds of the selected research community (Creswell, 2003). Beleskey (2010) and Lincoln and Denzin (2005) state that a descriptive research design obtains information concerning the current status of the phenomenon and finds out what exists in respect of variables or conditions in a situation. This provides answers to questions, who, what, when, where and how, with regards to a particular research problem. In the current study, the design was suitable since the study sought to establish the causes of single parenting, and the society's views and perceptions towards this concept of raising a family as a solo parent. It also assesses how single parenting has impacted the Shona culture. This study does not focus on human relationships such as parenting techniques and family issues. The researcher interviewed thirty (30) purposively selected

participants as key informant interviewees in three high density areas in Masvingo urban. Participants of the study were aged twenty years and above. The rationale for purposively selecting single ladies from the town's population was the quest to establish their perceptions, attitudes and impact on single-hood in their culture. In addition, it was necessary to establish how these single ladies understand themselves and respond to the traditional label. Through an insider perspective and available literature on Shona traditional culture and other cultures, the paper interrogates the complex hierarchical and interwoven beliefs and practices that relegate single ladies to the periphery in Shona tradition. The design's most important advantage was that the respondents were the people who had been directly affected as single parents and were in direct contact with the society. They had experienced their singlehood, witnessed that of others and heard the views of the society on single parenting. This also validated the data collected. Since the matter under study was also very personal, the researcher made sure to strictly adhere to ethical conduct. Participants were given verbal explanation before their consent was sought. They were told about the purpose of the study and were assured that the data they provided would be treated with confidentiality. The data collected were thematically analysed.

FINDINGS

The findings of this research are based on the responses from single parent participants concerning the societal perceptions, and attitudes towards single parents. There were more female respondents

than male respondents. The single mothers comprised 92 % (28 participants) and only 8% (only 2 participants) were singles and without children. This could suggest that in Karanga society, men usually do not stay single for long. This means that the rate of remarrying is higher on the men’s side than on the women’s side. Of the 30 participants who were interviewed, 15 were formal workers with degrees, 8 were formal non-degreed parents and 7 were self-employed with very little education. This reveals that the study was well represented in terms of the population at the selected community. The interviewed population ranged in age from 20 to 60 years. The table below gives details of what the participants stated as the causes of their singlehood.

Table 1: Causes for Singlehood

Descriptor/Narration	Positive	%
Partner died	9	30%
Divorced	12	40%
Never married	4	13%
Raped	1	3%
Left (partner went to diaspora)	2	7%
On separation	2	7%

From the table above, of the thirty (30) participants, nine (9) had their partners dead, twelve (12) were divorced, four (4) had never married, one (1) had been raped, two (2) had their partners working outside the country and two (2) were on separation. The data above reflects that most causes were inevitable.

The Causes of Being Single Parents

The interviews carried out with single parents revealed that they had gotten into their situation due to different reasons, which were not of their own making. Those with partners who had died felt that it was God who had the prerogative to give and to take, which means they would stay single. Death had separated them from their beloved ones. A female participant said:

No no no, murume akashaika 15 years ago mutsaona yemotokari akafira ipapo. Ndaingotsvaka for the past ten years asi Mr. Right ndakavashaiwa. Ndakatombopiwa chimutsamapfihwa asi vese vaive vana kwandiri. (No no no, my husband died 15 years ago in a car accident and died on the spot. I have been searching for Mr. Right for the past 10 years but could not find one) (Participant 25).

The participant’s words indicate that her husband’s family had even tried to offer her another husband but she could not bring herself to be in another relationship.

Two of those participants who had been divorced had this to say:

He will come back, wait and see. Yes, I will forgive him because he is the father of my children. We are not officially divorced you see. He should give me that certificate.

(Participant 13).

From the look of it, he will come back to his civil servant. His mind is misleading him.

(Participant 26).

Their utterances show that these two single mothers still hoped that with time,



their beloved husbands would realise their mistakes and come back to them begging for forgiveness. The two women also showed that they were willing to accept them back. They thought their ex-husbands had been misled and would soon realise their mistakes. They believed that their husbands would come back in the end and confess their wrongs. These women strongly believed that as long as they remain single, their ex-husbands were traditionally bound to accept them back. They firmly believed in the Karanga saying that goes ‘*Mukadzi wekutanga haarambwi*’ (The first wife should not be divorced).

Another woman divorcee also said that her ex-husband had been a monster who neither loved her, trusted her, cared for, nor even respected her. She said that her husband had felt challenged when the wife got promoted to school head at their local school before she got a lecturer’s post ahead of him. She said that their relationship had worsened when her ex-husband heard that she had been appointed lecturer at a local government teachers’ college. She said that since then, he had never visited her and their three children. Some female parents who were on separation expressed the thinking that their ex-husbands had left them mainly because they could not cope with responsibilities of fatherhood. One said that the man had suddenly changed following the birth of their children and as the responsibilities grew.

Some female participants whose husbands had left the country for greener pastures still expressed hope that they would be united again in the future. Wajim (2020) states that people tend to leave their families

for other countries for economic reasons. One participant expressed fear that her husband who had left for the UK in 2005 as a bank teller, but without proper documentation, would be arrested if he returned and might face challenges in processing travelling documents. She also said she used to receive phone calls, money and SMS messages from her husband, especially in 2006, 2007 and 2008, that is, before the dollarisation of the economy in Zimbabwe. Despite his silence, she still used her husband’s name and still visited their rural home as a daughter-in-law during public holidays. She said that since the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic period, she had never heard any news about him. She did not even know whether he was still alive. She managed her home and all her children who are all in their early twenties and attending tertiary level education by herself.

Another participant single mother said that she had been made pregnant by an NGO worker who had stayed with her for three good years in one high density suburb in the city. She was unaware that he had another wife and family in the same city’s low density area. The husband used to lie that he would be going on work trips yet he would be with his first wife.

There were also responses from single parents who had never married. One had been raped by a brother’s rural friend when she was 19 and her parents reported the case and the man was arrested and served a 9-year jail term. She was left by herself to raise the child. The other one got pregnant while she had been doing teaching practice ten years previously. She could not get married to the father of her child because he

was a politician and already married to two other wives. He told her that the child was *chipo chehondo yeminda* (her gift for new farming or land redistribution).

Reasons Why Participants Remained Single

On why they were still single, the participants gave different statements depending on their status as follows:

I failed to get a suitable suitor after my husband passed on after a short illness. My in-laws arranged for the nhaka issue (wife inheritance) as per tradition's demands. I could not choose from my brothers-in-law who were all in school then. The nephews and cousins could not fit to my status and some were jobless. As a result, my-in-laws sent me away from their home and I had to come to Harare and that is how I started living as a single parent with my children (Participant 15).

My husband was educated but very promiscuous. I am not saying he was not supposed to have another wife if he so wished. The problem is that he infected me with different STIs and our family doctor advised me not to get pregnant again because of the risk of these STIs. My health was at stake and I finally moved out with my two children one Sunday afternoon. For the sake of my children and my health, I will stay awake and alive (Participant 10).

I stayed alone for 10 years after the death of my husband because that was the only way I could utilize his benefits as I am the surviving spouse (Participant 2).

Cultural Perceptions and Society's Attitudes Towards Single Parents

Findings indicated that there were negative attitudes exhibited by both men and women in the society regarding single parent status. Some participants were of the opinion that the society was still colonised. The society's attitude and perceptions on single parenting were regarded as a challenge. This was expressed in the following manner:

I remarried my late husband's younger brother who had just come from Cuba, panhaka (wife inheritance) and everyone was happy as we married traditionally. He passed on two years after the birth of our son. My in-laws, my relatives and even some of my friends suspected that I had 'sare' (a belief that such a woman can cause all men who sleep with her to die). They said my misfortune would kill all men whom I would marry and I would only be able to stay with the fifth one. I was heartbroken and vowed never to get married again. But no one trusts me now (Participant 11).

I cannot visit my rural home these days. People in our area think that I am not a stable woman since I am a single parent (Participant 6).

Observations were that the practice of single parenting was not common among the Shona of Zimbabwe and the Karanga culture in particular. According to the Karanga culture, a man/woman should not stay by himself or herself, hence the different sayings such as *Rume risina mukadzi irombe* (an unmarried man is a vagabond). The Karanga have different ways of preventing single

parenting such as different ways of marriage including *kutizira* or the girl just going to the boy's home before bridal price settlement that is done by a woman who falls pregnant before marriage, *chimutsamapfihwa*, whereby a girl is offered to her dead aunt/sister's husband to resuscitate the family, *chigadzamapfihwa* whereby a girl is offered to her sister/aunt's husband because the aunt/sister has failed to get pregnant, and *kugara nhaka*, whereby the wife of husband of the deceased is offered a relative of the deceased in marriage as some form of inheritance. Regrettably, these forms of marriage are no longer popular because of education, urbanisation, Christianity and other religions, human rights, diseases, children's rights, legislations and globalisation. However, society continues to look down upon single parents. This came out in the responses of some participants as follows:

I lost my post in the church because I am now a single woman. Church elders told me I could not advise girls in the church because I had been divorced. Even my old friends no longer associate with me. They say ndinovatorera varume vavo (I might snatch their husbands from them (Participant 9).

My club friend told me that her aunt had told her not to play with a divorced woman again because one day I might encourage her to leave her husband too (Participant 7).

My friend akanzi achirega kutamba nemunhu akazvidyira murume nehama dzake. (My friend was warned not to associate with a person who had killed her

own husband with the assistance of her relatives) (Participant 20).

These statements reflect how society views single parenting, especially that of women.

The patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean Shona society makes its members believe that every single woman is a prostitute and therefore cannot give moral advice to anyone. However, a man can easily marry again and can even suppress the negative pressure and attitudes of society. In some instances, most men would remarry with the intention of avoiding negative comments from the society and pressure from family members who might even cite the Bible, or say that the late wife's spirit was haunting him and punishing him with single parentage. During the interviews, it also came out that the family aunts and uncles could take up the matter with the relevant people asking for their consent to remarrying. Most participants revealed that single parenting is not much of a problem if the society can accept some changes and embrace other cultures from other countries. They indicated that in the case of a single mother, the society should respect her feelings and choices. This would make the Karanga culture dynamic and not static or backward.

Single Parenting as an Alien Practice

The idea of raising one's children by oneself is not common to the Karanga people. Decisions for those who should stay alone are mainly made by elders in order to protect everyone, including the husband, wife and the children. During the interviews with the

participants, the researcher observed that participants were not forthcoming in their responses to questions on the effects of the practice. However, after some probing, some female participants indicated that their culture considered single parenting as taboo. This cultural behaviour can be viewed as another way of oppressing women whose destinies tend to be decided by men and elders. The researcher discovered that senior men and women have other ways of normalising their singlehood. That is why this study did not have male participants. Those with no/little education were not in support of single parenting. Those formally employed single parents tended to emphasise how they managed their families on their own. Yet for their elders, that practice was unthinkable.

The Karanga society of southern Zimbabwe is a male-dominated society (Siwila, 2012). It is the men who make most of the decisions in the family. As a patriarchal society that claims to love and respect women in society, they ensure that their women remain regarded as stabilisers of culture, where men who do not have wives are chided as in the saying *Rume risina mukadzi irombe*, meaning an unmarried man is a vagabond.

On the above view one participant said:

Ini ndinotongokirosa bhodha kunohonda stuff yangu pasina kumbokumbira murume kuti abvume. Nдини baba pano. (I am free to cross for my orders without asking permission from a male person. I am the head of my family)
Participant 24).

In the interviews, female participants indicated that single parenting assured them of the freedom they had gained from education, urbanisation and globalisation, which some of their elders had never had. Thus, this freedom bolstered their choices to remain single. They indicated that they no longer needed men in their lives, unlike women of long back who depended on male breadwinners. Nowadays, education and formal employment for women have enabled single mothers to support their families. Therefore, their jobs, education, state laws, churches, and support organisations strengthen the women in their resolve. They are able to sustain themselves and live a stable life as independent women. They are no longer second class citizens who are expected to stay at home and look after the homes and children because their destinies no longer lie in the hands of men (Siwila, 2012). Said one of the participants:

Kuroorwa zvekare ndinoda asi ndiri kushaiwa anoenderana nezvandiri now. (I am willing to remarry but am failing to get the right partner).

Many widows in this study expressed the desire to remarry but stated that they did not get suitable partners. They distanced themselves from men for fear of being taken advantage of and for being mistaken for promiscuity. As such, they opted to stay single. They indeed confirmed that remarriage is good but if one is empowered it is a waste of time and uncalled. One participant stated that when she visited her rural home, she was asked why she had not yet remarried, despite her being a good person with a stable job. Some people chided,

her saying that she now called herself man of the house. Shona culture teaches that singlehood exposes one to unstable social and economic life. However, the single women interviewed said they were very cautious with their social and economic lives as they had accepted their situations. They knew they had no one to depend on, and any mistake would add more trouble to their lives. One participant argued that one only lived once and as such, she could not make the mistakes twice, those of wasting the little resources she got and being a single parent. Kathenya (2021) states that in Kenya, single women are socially known to better their lives, unlike men and this is like the Zimbabwean single women.

The Tenability of Single-Parenting in 21st Century Zimbabwe

From the cultural point of view, single parenting seems to be the toxic and executioner of the Karanga cultural practice (Mugove, 2017). This is because some of the Karanga cultural practices still remain outdated in this 21st century which is characterised by globalisation, education, inter-marriages, human rights, gender issues, equal rights, HIV and AIDs issues, just to mention a few. The Karanga people still believe in the practice of two parents for a family. This appears to be problematic in the global discourse where human rights are much more respected. As evident in single parenting practices, it is ethical to stay single and raise a family regardless of the causes of one's singlehood (Mugove, 2017). Despite its being also morally right to raise children as a single parent, the problem is that rural Karanga societies find it difficult to accept

women and children without at least a father figure. However, most educated participants stated that it was their right to choose whether to remain a single parent or not. The participants did not find anything wrong with the type of parenthood they had. To them, it was their right to practice a parenting style that suited their circumstances. Participants viewed single parenting as a faster and better type of parenthood where decisions and choices are made faster without any criticism, unlike in a family where both the father and the mother haggle over whose decisions and choices come through (Biti, 2016). Some single parents have higher confidence in themselves and others need to be educated about not needing to rely on anyone. When single parents find that they can provide for themselves and their families on their own, they feel much more confident than before (Mugove, 2017). One of the participants had this to say:

Izvi zvandiri zvinotobva pakuzvidira vamwe hongu vangada Kuroorwa zvekare pachitevedzwa dzimwe tsika dzedu dzechivanhu. (What I am now is through my choice not to remarry. Someone might want to remarry according to some cultural methods we have.) **Participant 17.**

Asked if the practice could be reconstituted in the new era, most participants felt that it should be left open and people should be given the right to choose what they thought was best for their situations so that they would not engage in the blame shift syndrome. They suggested that societies should consider remarrying by choice as a societal norm, rather than allow elders to decide and allocate 'love' between

the two people involved. Marriage without love these days can create serious social problems, especially when a spouse fails to get what pulled him/her into that marriage (Mugove, 2017). Mugove (2017) further states that a partnership should be characterised by mutuality, respect and love. This kind of partnership should defeat any sign of negative cultural ideologies which may denigrate another person.

Dei (2012) argues that men have promoted harmful cultural practices in the name of preserving African cultures. In so doing, they tend to sacrifice some individuals who become victims in the process (Chitando, 2009). According to Chitando (2009), not all that is instituted in African culture is good, hence the need for a hermeneutic of suspicion, where some African practices should be scrutinised to rid them of harmful and often stigmatised practices (Muyambo, 2023). This current study argues that allocating someone a partner basing on elders' decisions might be a good practice and a noble idea but it should be the choice of the single parent. Elders would then scrutinise it to make it a human choice practice (Die, 2012). Dies also states that we must not disembodify from our tradition by simply embracing cultures of our colonisers. People should work to improve their cultures for human survival. This means that we must strive for humanity and human rights without abusing others. This is what Siwila (2012) calls liberative elements in one's tradition and contexts, which moderate those that oppress the other person. Parents should be granted the freedom to choose how they want to raise their families. The responses given during the interviews

indicated that there was a need to raise awareness among members of the society. One of the participants opined:

Dai zviibvira paitwa dzidziso yedu isu vasina varume nedzizvondo, NGOs kanawo hurumende, kuti tibatsirikane mukurarama sezvinoitwa zvimwe zvirongwa. (If we can have lessons as single mothers in churches, NGOs and even the Government, to assist in our day to day living just as what is happening in other projects) **Participant 15.**

Respondents also believed that women empowerment should be a tool that can change the view by society on single parenting. To them, basic needs, job opportunities, free education and choice of being alone should be given to every woman. The same applies to single parenting, whether by discrimination or by circumstance. The society, including colleges, needs to teach about singlehood and its challenges. This will solve the problem stigma, fear and discrimination of single women. This will empower single women to 'steward their singlehood' and manage their lives. According to Hodges (2020), singlehood is a gift from God, and society ought to encourage those who are singles to be productive in the societal work.

Societies, and Karanga society in particular, must rethink its strategies for dealing with single women. Hardin (2019) laments the wrong impression that being single is a disease that needs to be cured. To him, the attitude that singlehood can be used as a state to develop a community is positive, hence ought to be adopted. Hence, the Karanga community ought to make an effort to empower those who are single. There is

need to train single women on self-awareness in all societies. The singles ought to understand their situations with undivided focus (Hardin 2019). Society should demonstrate steadfast love to all types of families. That is why Hodges encourages a positive self-attitude for single women in societies. Colleges and elders in communities are responsible for teaching, training, and mentoring single women in their areas so they can hold themselves in high esteem and confidence, then help in the development of the community.

CONCLUSION

The research has shown that although single parenting is an alien and borrowed practice to the Karanga culture of Masvingo, it has some positive aspects which are in line with global trends and participants displayed its different causes. The Karanga culture raises a number of issues that need to be scrutinised and modified to make them fit in the 21st century. Single parents understand their situations but do not share their understandings. They believe in cultural growth that liberates and empowers the single parent to be socially independent, free and fit in the global world. Cognisant of the centrality of parenthood, this research suggests that single parenting can also be adopted in the Karanga culture of Masvingo. While single parenting remains anathema to the Shona people and the Karanga culture in particular, it should be adopted and supported by elders in communities. It should, as well, be pursued in other cultural studies.

PROPOSED WAY FORWARD

The challenges of single women require well-structured and organised practical measures. Therefore, the society and researchers needs to rethink its strategies for dealing with them. Singlehood challenges are sensitive issues requiring vast knowledge and skills. The clergy handling single women in communities needs to undertake minimum training on guidance and counselling-related course(s).

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