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Community Perceptions on Single Parenting: Insights from Dodoma City, Tanzania

Emanuel Amon Kikwale^{1*}, Fausta Senga¹ and Benson Otieno Ndiege²

¹Institute of Rural Development Planning, P. O. Box 138, Dodoma-Tanzania.

²Tanzania Cooperative Development Commission P. O. Box 201, Dodoma-Tanzania.

Corresponding Author E-mail: ekikwale@irdp.ac.tz

Abstract

Single parenting has recently become common worldwide, transcending cultural, social, and economic boundaries. The study was conducted in Dodoma city at the Chang'ombe ward to explore the community's perceptions of single parenting. The study examined the community's attitude and practice of single parenting. The study's sample size was 155 respondents, obtained using a systematic sampling technique. Also, purposive sampling was used to select the ward executive officer, social welfare officer, and children protection committee members as key informants. A survey method through a questionnaire was used to collect data from community members, and interviews using a checklist were used to collect data from the key informants. The quantitative data were analysed using the IBM-SPSS Statistics version 27 computer programme in which descriptive statistics (mean, frequency and percentage) were computed, and content analysis was used for qualitative data. The study found a positive attitude among most respondents, indicated by the mean score ranging from 3.7 to 4.5. The study also revealed that a parent raising a child alone is overwhelmed by parenting responsibilities. In addition, a child raised by a single parent misses the care and love of the other parent, may experience abuse, poor academic performance, get involved in lousy peer groups, moral decay, loneliness, sadness, and lack confidence and self-reliance. Moreover, the study found that the majority of the respondents experienced single parenting, which resulted from searching for employment opportunities, the death of a partner, separation, birth out of wedlock, divorce, and choice. The study recommends that local government, through social welfare officers and the police gender desk in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, should continue providing education on the negative effects of single parenting to children.

Keywords: Attitude, practice, single parenting, children

1. Introduction

Single parenthood has become common all over the world. The proportion of single-parent families has been steadily increasing, with estimates comprising around 20-30% of all families in developed countries (UN, 2019). Globally, single-parent households have become

increasingly common in the United States and the United Kingdom due to economic factors, changes in family structures and cultural shifts. In the United States, approximately 23% of children under 18 live with a single mother, while about 4% live with a single father (Livingston, 2018). However, most single-parent

families suffer from societal negative perceptions of this type of family more than other types of families; children from single-parent families are considered problematic and troublemakers (Diaz-Serrano & Flamand, 2023).

In developing countries, the prevalence of single-parent households is a result of economic difficulties, such as poverty and unemployment, which have led to separations of families and conflict, migration, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and an increase in single-parent families. Single parenting can have a significant impact on both the parent and the child as well. This is because the burden of single parents can lead to limited access to education and healthcare. (Jain & Mahmoodi, 2022).

Tanzania has witnessed a notable increase in single-parent families over the past few decades. Factors such as urbanisation, economic migration, marital breakdowns, and the impact of HIV/AIDS have contributed to the prevalence of single-parent households across the country (UNICEF, 2020). In Tanzania, single-parent families represent a significant portion of households, particularly in city areas such as Dar es Salaam, Dodoma, Arusha, Mbeya, Tanga, and Mwanza. In Dodoma, Tanzania's recently growing city, government shifting from Dar es Salaam and search for job opportunities have led to a rise in single-parent households, with many mothers taking on the role of sole caregivers due to factors such as divorce, out-of-wedlock births, separation or widowhood (Raphael, 2017; Shitindi & Lubawa, 2022). According to URT (2024), 35.4% of households in Dodoma are female-

headed. In Tanzania, single-parent families face unique difficulties. Some of the common challenges include financial strain and emotional stress. These challenges underscore the need for targeted interventions and support programmes to address the unique needs of children in single-parent households at the ward level.

Various studies have revealed different perceptions of single parenting. The study by Newlin (2017) in South Africa has indicated that children raised by single mothers were viewed as troublemakers who had lost value because they had no adult males to shape and discipline them. As a result, society views children raised by single mothers as problematic and a threat to social order. These children are likely to engage in committing delinquencies because of single parents' lessened supervision as they engage in bread-winning activities (Chukwuka, 2018; Watt, 2019; Kroese et al., 2020).

Similarly, Callaghan *et al.* (2021) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo documented that single mothers face unique psychological challenges which can lead to child health and developmental disadvantages, often impacting life trajectories for both the mother and the child. Also, Chavda and Nisarga (2023) conducted a study in India that found that the absence or loss of one parent affects a child's physical health, overall growth, and future relationships. Moreover, Ramos and Tus (2020) in India found that the number of single mothers has been increasing due to giving birth outside marriage, separation, divorce, death of the partner or simply because some women choose to have a child and stay single. It also

revealed that financial problems (struggling to meet the basic needs of the children) and loneliness are the predominant feelings among single mothers. Furthermore, Hurr (2017) in Britain found that social support from family and friends, practical assistance, and emotional well-being increased positive outcomes with reduced feelings of obligating or burdening family and friends. While various studies have examined single parenting, none have focused on Dodoma, a region with distinct cultural, social, and economic contexts. As Dodoma City continues to grow, this study is crucial because it can help policymakers and social workers develop targeted support systems by understanding the dynamics of single-parent households. Likewise, the findings from this study can inform government policies and programmes aimed at supporting single-parent families, ensuring they have access to necessary resources and services. This study explored community perceptions of single parenting, specifically within the unique environment of Dodoma city. Specifically, the study examined the community's attitude and practice of single parenting.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Area and Research Design

Before the ward's selection, many single parents were a key criterion set. After consultation with the Dodoma City Council, the Chang'ombe ward was selected as the study area. Chang'ombe is an administrative ward in the Dodoma City. The ward covers an area of 3.04 km² (1.17 sq mi) with an average elevation of 1,141 m (3,743 ft). The ward has a population of 39,324 and 11,238

households, with an average household size of 3.5 (URT, 2022). The study employed a cross-sectional research design in which data were collected within a single point in time. The design allowed the study to collect data from many individuals at a single point in time, making it a quick and cost-effective method. It provided a snapshot of the population, helping to examine the community's perception.

2.2. Sampling

The sampling frame of the study was the list of all heads of households at the Chang'ombe ward, whereby the sampling unit was an individual head of household. The study employed probability sampling whereby a systematic sampling technique was used to sample the heads of households. Systematic sampling was employed by visiting every 10th household until the sample size was reached. This enabled the study to get a representation of all households compared to other methods, such as simple random sampling, that could be used. Concerning non-probability sampling, the purposive sampling technique was used to sample key informants, including WEO, SWO, and Ward Police Officer; these were important as they provided key information that could not be obtained by using other methods. The sample size was 155 respondents obtained using Cochran's (1963) formula for unknown population, as shown hereunder:

$$n = \frac{z^2 p(1 - p)}{e^2}$$

Where;

n = Sample size

P = proportional of mechanical

$z_{\frac{\alpha}{2}}$ = Critical value of 95%

$e = \text{Marginal error}$

$q = (1-p)$

Hence;

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5)}{(0.788)^2} = 154.66$$

2.3. Data Collection Methods and Tools

The study employed key informant interviews and survey methods. Key informant interviews were used to collect data from key informants such as the Ward Executive Officer, Social Welfare Officer and police officer; the tool used in data collection was a checklist, which had questions reflecting study objectives. Each key informant had different questions depending on their daily duties and responsibilities. This method allowed flexibility in questioning and enabled researchers to probe deeper into unexpected or emerging themes during the interview. Another technique used was a survey, whereby a questionnaire tool was used to collect data. The questionnaire was divided into four major parts, such as the demographic characteristics of the respondents, community awareness of single parenting, community attitudes towards single parenting, and the practice of single parenting with closed and open-ended questions. The use of questionnaires ensured uniformity in the questions asked, allowing for consistent data collection and easier comparison across different respondents. Likewise, the questionnaire produced quantitative data that were easy to analyse statistically.

2.4. Data Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, a pilot study was conducted to identify and rectify potential issues like editing some

questions and adding and omitting questions, ensuring data accuracy. Also, the study used multiple methods of data collection, including surveys and interviews, for triangulation of data to cross-check data and ensure consistency. To ensure reliability, all research assistants were thoroughly trained in data collection and compliance with research ethics. In addition, the Cronbach Alpha scale was used to test internal consistency, whereby 12 Likert scale statements were included. The result obtained was 0.936, which means the internal consistency was excellent since Cronbach Alpha, greater than or equal to 0.7, is acceptable.

2.5. Data Processing, Analysis and Presentation

The study analysed qualitative and quantitative data. The collected data were processed prior to analysis. The process involved data editing to detect errors and permission, coding and entering into the Statistical Product and Service Solutions (IBM SPSS) Statistics version 27 computer programme. Then, quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics where means, frequencies, and percentages were computed. On the other hand, qualitative data were analysed using content analysis, which involved thoroughly reading the collected data to get a sense of the content that reflects the study objectives. Data were presented in tables and texts. Additionally, the Likert scale mean score from 1.0 - 2.4 was classified as a negative attitude, 2.5 - 3.4 as a neutral attitude, and 3.5 - 5.0 as a positive attitude.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 shows that most respondents (33.6%) belonged to the 41-50 age group, with very few respondents (5.8%) belonging to the 61+ age group. More than half of the respondents (54.2%) were female, while 45.8% were male. With regard to the level of education, the

majority of the respondents (56.2%) had secondary education, while a few (7.7%) respondents had no formal education. It further shows that 43.2% of the respondents were married, followed by 42.0% of the single respondents. Based on employment status, more than half (56.2%) of the respondents were self-employed, with few (20.6%) employed.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age	21 – 30	39	25.2
	31 – 40	43	27.7
	41 – 50	52	33.6
	51– 60	12	7.7
	Above 60	9	5.8
Sex	Women	84	54.2
	Men	71	45.8
Education level	Primary	23	14.8
	Secondary	87	56.2
	Tertiary education	33	21.3
	No formal education	12	7.7
Marital status	Married	67	43.2
	Single	65	42.0
	Divorced	7	4.5
	Widowed	16	10.3
Employment status	Employed	32	20.6
	Self-employed	87	56.2
	Unemployed	36	23.2

3.3. Community Attitude Towards Single Parenting

Table 2 presents community attitudes toward single parenting. The study found that the mean score for community attitude towards single parenting ranges from 3.7 to 4.5, which indicates that community members had positive attitudes towards single parenting. Respondents revealed that a parent raising a child alone is overwhelmed by

parenting responsibilities. In addition, a child raised by a single parent misses care from another parent, misses the love of the other parent, may experience abuse, may have poor academic performance, may get involved in lousy peer groups, may experience relationship issues, may experience moral decay, experiences loneliness, experiences sadness, lack confidence and self-reliance.

Table 2: Community attitude towards single parenting (n=155)

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean
A parent raising a child alone is overwhelmed by parenting responsibilities.	10 (6.5)	6 (3.9)	5 (3.2)	24 (15.5)	110 (71)	4.4
A child raised by a single parent misses care from another parent.	4 (2.6)	8 (5.2)	3 (1.9)	24 (15.5)	116 (74.8)	4.5
A child raised by a single parent misses the love of the other parent.	7 (4.5)	9 (5.8)	6 (3.9)	29 (18.7)	104 (67.1)	4.3
A child raised by a single parent may experience abuse.	15 (9.7)	19 (12.3)	7 (4.5)	49 (31.6)	65 (41.9)	3.8
A child raised by a single parent may have poor academic performance.	20 (12.9)	24 (15.5)	10 (6.5)	52 (33.5)	49 (31.6)	3.6
A child raised by a single parent may get involved in bad peer groups.	19 (12.3)	13 (8.4)	11 (7.1)	57 (36.8)	55 (35.4)	3.7
A child raised by a single parent may experience relationship issues.	15 (9.7)	9 (5.8)	9 (5.8)	53 (34.2)	69 (44.5)	3.9
A child raised by a single parent may experience moral decay.	10 (6.5)	9 (5.8)	10 (6.5)	54 (34.8)	72 (46.4)	4.1
A child raised by a single parent experiences loneliness.	13 (8.4)	6 (3.9)	7 (4.5)	45 (29)	84 (54.2)	4.2
A child raised by a single parent experiences sadness.	13 (8.4)	7 (4.5)	12 (7.7)	43 (27.7)	80 (51.6)	4.1
A child raised by a single parent lacks confidence.	15 (9.7)	10 (6.5)	9 (5.8)	42 (27.1)	79 (50.9)	4.0
A child raised by a single parent lacks self-reliance.	18 (11.6)	11 (7.1)	15 (9.7)	35 (22.6)	76 (49)	3.9

During the interview, one of the key informants said that:

“Children whom one parent raises are troublesome because they are cared for too much as if they were eggs or live in a life where they miss basic needs. As a result, some

people turn into complicated people with unethical behaviours.” (KII with Social Welfare Officer, July 2024).

Also, during the interview, one of the key informants said that:

“Some single parents spend most of their time chasing money to feed their children. As a result, some children get a chance to learn immoral behaviour such as smoking, stealing and taking alcohol because they are less supervised.” (KII with one of the Child Protection Committee Members in July. 2024).

3.4. The Practice of Single Parenting

Table 3 shows that more than half (53%) of the respondents have experienced

single parenting, more than one-third (43%) of the respondents have witnessed it, and very few (4%) have neither experienced nor witnessed single parenting. The findings of the study highlight employment/economic opportunities (35%) as a significant reason for single parenting given by respondents who experienced it, followed by death of partner (20%), separation (18%), having children without marriage (11%), and divorce (9%), and choice (7%).

Table 3: The practice of single parenting

Variable	Response	Frequency	Percent
Experience	Experienced single parenting	82	53
	Witnessed single parenting	67	43
	Neither experienced nor witnessed single parenting	6	4
	Total	155	100
Reasons for single parenting given by respondents who experienced it			
	Childbirth out of wedlock	9	11
	Death of partner/spouse	16	20
	Separation	15	18
	Divorce	7	9
	Employment/economic opportunities	29	35
	Choice	6	7
	Total	82	100

Reasons for Single Parenting as per Witnesses

Table 4 presents the reasons for single parenting provided by 67 respondents who witnessed it. The majority of the respondents mentioned

employment/economic opportunities as the main reason for single parenting, followed by separation (56.7%), death of a partner (44.8%), having children without marriage (34.3%), divorce (22.4%), and choice (20.9%).

Table 4: Reasons for single parenting as per witnesses

Reason	Frequency*	Percent	No. of cases
Having children without marriage	23	13.9	34.3
Death of partner	30	18.1	44.8
Separation	38	22.9	56.7
Divorce	15	9.0	22.4
Employment/economic opportunities	46	27.7	68.7
Choice	14	8.4	20.9

*Multiple responses

During an interview, one of the key informants said that:

“In my jurisdiction, people become single parents because jobs separate husbands and wives. For instance, the wife works and stays with children in Dodoma while her husband works in Dar es Salaam. Also, deaths of one of the parents and some women prefer being single mothers.” (KII with Ward Executive Officer, July. 2024).

Additionally, during the interview, one of the key informants said:

“Currently, the tendency of some young women to have children with married men with the expectation of getting financial support as well as conflicts which lead to separations and divorces, contribute to single parenting.” (KII with Ward Police Officer, July. 2024).

4.0 Discussion

The majority of the respondents were women. This is because traditional gender roles dictate that women are primarily responsible for domestic and caregiving duties, while men are expected to be the breadwinners. This finding concurs with Anyebe et al. (2017) and Hailemariam et al. (2020), who found that women are more likely to be

found at home and available for interviews related to social and community issues because of the gendered division of labour. Most respondents had secondary education; educational background can influence their perceptions and opinions on single parenting, as education often shapes one's views and understanding of social issues (Tesfaye et al., 2021). The majority of the respondents were married. This demographic detail is important because married individuals might have different perspectives on single parenting than single, divorced, or widowed. Their marital status can influence their views on the challenges and societal perceptions of single parenting.

The study's findings on community attitude towards single parenting reveal that a parent raising a child alone is overwhelmed by parenting responsibilities. This finding is consistent with Bhat and Patil (2019) and Chavda and Nisarga (2023), who found that single parents are overwhelmed with the responsibilities of raising children. Thus, there is a need for additional support systems and resources to assist single parents in managing their overwhelming duties. The study further highlights that a child raised by a single parent misses care from another parent, misses the love of the other parent, may experience

relationship issues, loneliness and sadness, and may lack confidence and self-reliance. These findings concur with Adegboyega (2019), who conducted a study in Nigeria and found that single parenting has a negative influence on children as they usually feel abandoned, sad, and lonely, quickly develop feelings of anxiety, have poor interpersonal relationships and have low self-esteem. Also, these findings partly concur with Chavda and Nisarga (2023), who found that the absence or loss of one parent affects a child's physical health, overall growth, and future relationships. Thus, there is a need for additional social support systems and resources to assist single parents in avoiding negative consequences for their children.

Additionally, the study found that a child raised by a single parent may experience abuse, may have poor academic performance, may get involved in lousy peer groups, and may experience moral decay. These findings are supported by Chavda and Nisarga (2023), who found that children of single parents have poor academic performance, decreased social interactions, and emotional and behavioural problems. Also, it has been reported that children raised by single parents are likely to have poor academic performance because of single parents' lack of participation in school activities as well as less supervision of their children's academic work. These children are likely to commit delinquencies because of single parents' less supervision (Chukwuka, 2018; Watt, 2019; Kroese et al., 2020). Likewise, single-parent households often have lower incomes, which can limit access to educational resources such as tutoring, extracurricular activities, and even basic

school supplies. Moreover, single parents may have less time to engage in their children's education due to work commitments, leading to less academic support at home. Studies have shown that children from single-parent families have lower academic achievement than those from two-parent families (Li et al., 2024). However, this finding is contrary to a study conducted in Nigeria by (Hiko et al., 2023) Adesokan and Makura (2020) conducted a study in South Africa and found that single parenting does not significantly negatively affect students' academic performance. Their findings reveal that student achievement motivation significantly affects their academic performance.

Moreover, concerning engagement in lousy peer groups and moral decay, these findings are partly supported by Newlin (2017) in South Africa, who has indicated that children raised by single mothers were viewed as troublemakers who had lost values because they had no adult males to shape and discipline them as a result, the society views children raised by single mothers as problematic and a threat to social order. The absence of a second parent can reduce the level of supervision and protection, making children more vulnerable to abuse. Poor parenting practices, such as harsh discipline and lack of monitoring, can lead to moral disengagement in children. This means they may develop a diminished sense of right and wrong, making them more likely to engage in unethical or harmful behaviours (Campaert et al., 2018).

With regard to the practice of single parenting, the study found that employment/economic opportunities

and separation were the main reasons for single parenting in the study area. In contrast, other reasons were the death of a partner, birth out of wedlock, divorce and choice. These findings are partly similar to Khan et al. (2022), who found the growing number of divorces and separations as the reasons for the existence of single mothers (single parents) in Bangladesh. These findings partly concur with Soomar (2019), who found that divorce was a major cause of single parenting in Pakistan. In Nigeria, Anyebe et al. (2017) found that divorce and being widowed/death of spouses were the causes of single parenting. Also, these findings are consistent with Raphael (2017), who conducted a study in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and found that single-parent families were a result of divorce, the death of one partner, abandonment, unplanned pregnancy, and choice.

In addition, many individuals become single parents due to the pursuit of better job prospects or economic stability. In some cases, one parent may move to a different location for a job, leaving the other parent to raise the children alone. Economic pressures can also lead to single parenting, as financial instability might force one parent to take on multiple jobs or longer hours, reducing their ability to co-parent effectively (Clery et al., 2019). Separation or divorce is a common reason for single parenting. One parent typically assumes primary custody of the children when relationships break down. This can be due to various factors, including legal decisions, personal agreements, or the child's best interests. Separation's emotional and logistical challenges can significantly impact both the parent and

child, often leading to a single-parent household (Maldonado & Nieuwenhuis, 2019).

Furthermore, losing a spouse or partner is a significant reason for single parenting. When one parent passes away, the surviving parent is left to raise the children alone. This situation can be particularly challenging due to the emotional and financial strain it places on the family. Also, some individuals choose to have children without getting married. This decision can influence personal beliefs, societal changes, or the desire for independence. In such cases, the parent is responsible for raising the child alone from the outset. Likewise, divorce is one of the most common reasons for single parenting; when a marriage ends, one parent often becomes the primary caregiver. The legal and emotional complexities of divorce can lead to single-parent households, where the parent must manage both childcare and household responsibilities independently. On the other hand, some individuals consciously choose to become single parents. Glazer (2022) commented that the choice can be driven by a strong desire to have children, even without a partner. Advances in reproductive technology and changing societal norms have made it more feasible for people to pursue single parenthood by choice.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that community members are aware of the negative effects of single parenting, having either witnessed or experienced it themselves. Consequently, they perceive single parenting as detrimental to children. This perception is based on several concerns,

including the belief that children in single-parent households may lack adequate emotional support and guidance and miss the benefits of dual parenting, such as the love and support of both parents. Additionally, these children are seen as being at risk for various negative outcomes, including abuse, poor academic performance, involvement in negative peer groups, relationship issues, moral decline, loneliness, sadness, and a lack of confidence and self-reliance. The study recommends that the local government, through social welfare officers and the police gender desk in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, should continue providing education on the negative effects of single parenting to children. This will encourage informed decisions about co-parenting and living arrangements that prioritise the welfare of children.

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