

## **Investigation of Under-Age Single Mothers In Reference To Christian Perception Of Family In Thogoto Village, Kiambu County- Kenya**

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**ABSTRACT:** Under-age single motherhood is a family phenomenon that is hardly or inadequately talked about despite its flourishing in the contemporary society. While the in thing is to assume or pretend that it is non-existent, the common practice at best has been to illicitly merge it with single motherhood *en masse* notwithstanding the crucial distinction of categories each with specific source, peculiarities and potentialities. Such a serious lacuna warrants unreserved attention. The paper thus passionately chips in to fill up the gap by investigating this mode of motherhood specifically and in the light of Christian perception of family as a case in Thogoto Village, Kiambu County-Kenya exploring factors like those of the causes, the difficulties such parenthood encounters and the recommended way forward. The work is more theological than sociological or anthropological in intent since it emphasizes Christian perception and reflections on family and parenting as well.

The main objective of the paper was to investigate under-age single mothers in Thogoto Village, Kiambu County as a case study in reference to Christian perception and reflections on family. It was done by focusing on how the aforementioned mothers can be understood adequately, be more appreciated and better supported so as to improve their parenting roles and become good mothers within the realm of the Family of God. It was enhanced by exploring the causes of the phenomenon, investigating the problems such mothers encounter and examining Christian theological reflections on Church as Family of God image in view of helping these kind of single mothers in addressing the parenting and existential difficulties imbued in such mode of motherhood. The major hypothesis was that Christian perception and reflections on family are useful in refraining from merging them into other modes of motherhood but consciously handling and appreciating them in their specificity with regard to their beingness, respective problems they encounter and positive qualities they are gratuitously endowed with by the Creator who made them fecund which can be exploited for their own good and the common good of the Family of God. The assumption was supported by specific hypotheses namely: different factors have led to the rise of under-age single motherhood; under-age single mothers are bogged down with the burden of bringing up and caring for children by themselves due to some hindrances at a tender age; and that theological reflection on family is useful to under-age single mothers in addressing their peculiar parenting difficulties and realizing their potentialities. Having identified the urgency for pastoral concern with regard to the above kind of motherhood which is increasing rapidly, the paper recommends that the under-age single mothers be taken seriously as beneficiaries of God's gratuitous Good News who are entitled to be incorporated into and gain from the Family of God. Another recommendation is that people, especially the ordained priests and pastors, should refrain from grouping this kind of mothers uncritically with the other types like that of widowed single mothers and university students single mothers. It concludes that under-age single mothers, in the light of Christian perception of family, should not be indiscriminately merged into other modes of motherhood but ought to be handled and appreciated in their specificity with regard to their beingness, respective problems they encounter and positive qualities they may be gratuitously endowed with which can be exploited for their own good and the common good of the Family of God.

**KEY WORDS:** Family, Under-age, Single mothers, Feminism, Women oppression and exploitation, Maternal feminism.

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## **I. INTRODUCTORY REFLECTIONS**

Parenting is a way through which children are born, nurtured, cared for and have existential values instilled upon them as they grow normally under the care of respective fathers and mothers. Brisbane (1988: 135) attributes parenting to the total care of children to enable them grow and learn with the assistance of their parents and the community at large. The principal communal unit establishment is the family whereby children are begotten within family set up of fathers and mothers, not among the singles, and are viewed as community gifts hence the communal involvement for their welfare as shown by Gander and Gardiner (1988: 215-260). That is why Wachege asserts that the general attitude towards single mothers in traditional Africa was that they were incomplete and unfulfilled persons in respect to parenting (Wachege, 1994: 72). Single motherhood was thus customarily considered as extra-ordinary mode of parenthood which was painfully tolerated. Today it seems to be the norm of familyhood. Despite such a parenting principle, more and more families are apparently headed by diverse categories of single mothers in the contemporary society (2003: 20ff). These include the neglected under-age single motherhood mode of parenting- an issue the paper opted for. Their children encounter diverse and added problems as compared to those raised by both parents (Bumpass 1990: 130-152), Sandefer (1994) and Kemmerer (1969) confirm that under-age single mothers too are confronted with a pluriformity of existential, relational and communal difficulties that need to be retrieved and focussed on as the paper does in its humble manner. Consequently, an academic investigation on their identity, beingness, what triggers their reality, the problems they face and the theological reflections on the Christian Church as family verifying or falsifying the assumption that such theologizing is the gist of the matter in this study is long overdue.

The increase of single motherhood phenomenon has become more pronounced in the contemporary society raising a real concern globally (UNISEF, 1999) with many families headed by single mothers (Murry, Bynnum, et al., 2001: 233). Wachege shows the pathways to single motherhood, with examples of their diversified categories which are on the rise among African families (Wachege, 2003: 72-126). He attributes it to at least 23 causes which, as the author acknowledges, is not exhaustive (Ibid., 130-150). He does well also to show and elaborate how they were traditionally treated and mistreated as inadequate incomplete parents (Ibid., 162-188). The author, moreover, identifies and explicates the challenges traditional perspectives, perception, treatment and mistreatment of single mothers are confronted with in the Third Millennium (Ibid., 190ff). The author, nevertheless, completely ignores under age single mothers category which is a lacuna the study grapples with to complement the above. As such, of interest in the study is this specific category of single motherhood known as under-age single mothers who tends to be habitually merged uncritically within single motherhood as a whole. Of greater concern is the under-age single motherhood which is either neglected or superficially spoken about or, is unrealistically merged into other single motherhood categories. Moreover, the Christian perception on Church as Family of God and the accompanying teaching on parenting do not seem to have a place for under-age single mothers despite the realization of their increase both in numbers and geographical spread. Such factors call for a related scrutiny hence our kind of study.

### **Statement of the Problem and Main Research Questions**

The phenomenon of single motherhood varies due to different factors and circumstances that pertain to each category and accruing respective difficulties. There is a peculiar category of the above which we choose to call “under-age single mothers” that is rapidly growing in the contemporary society which seems to be unrealistically merged with the others types of single motherhood or is virtually neglected as insignificant. The study intends to retrieve this mode of side-lined single motherhood, explore its peculiarities, and establish what triggers this seeming new yet growing mode of single motherhood with its problems and positive aspects as we endeavour to relate the phenomenon to Christian ecclesial image of the Family of God.

There are diverse categories of single mothers that have been commendably identified, spelled out and discussed by Wachege. The author did a profound research whereby he not only explains critically who single mothers are (Wachege, 2003:65-71). He also identifies and explicates thirty one different categories of single mothers (Ibid., 71-128). The author did not stop there either but went on to point out and elaborate what he calls “multi-faceted causes” of single motherhood (Ibid., 130-160). He crowns the reflections with a critical African traditional perception and treatment of single mothers and the mutual difficulties such customary scenario encounters in the Third Millennium (Ibid., 162-222). The author does not, however, include under-age single mothers. This is an area the study endeavours to explore. To the best of our knowledge, no academic work we are aware of identifies, peruses and explicates the subject the study investigates hence the passion to scrutinize and explore it at the level of erudition. It is thus an issue the work seeks to investigate focusing on such undermined kind of single mothers which no doubt merits an academic research. In this connection, let it be appreciated that since the study is not intended to be just sociological or philosophical or even anthropological but mainly theological in intent, an effort will be made to relate it to the Christian ecclesial attribute of the Church as Family of God. With the above in mind, the following main questions guided the study:

1. What triggers under-age single motherhood?
2. What difficulties do under-age single mothers encounter in Thogoto Village and elsewhere?
3. How can Christian theological reflections on the Church as Family of God be useful to under-age single mothers in addressing their reality, potentialities and the peculiar difficulties they encounter?

### **Justification, Scope and Limitation of the Study**

While appreciating that there are authors who have come up with related works, still there is a rationale behind the current paper. To mention but a few: Cheronoh creates awareness that single parenting includes both the single mothers and fathers and is thus not a confine of one gender (Cheronoh, 2014). Nevertheless, she limited her work to the widowed and widower single parents based on one ethnic community while ours is all embracing. Mwangi on his part explored the subject from the point of view of Church engagement in ministering to single mothers *en masse* within an urban setting which is multi-ethnic (Mwangi, 2012) but with not even a mere mention of our opted for type. Awour examined the problems encountered by University students single mothers (Awour, 2012) which is just one of the categories that has nothing to do with the one of the study since university students are all adults while our option is that of under-age ones. Mũthoni investigated former single mothers within the context of post marriage parenting difficulties (Mũthoni, 2008) which, properly perused has to do with adult mothers. As for Ndunga, the focus was on problems single mothers encounter in parenting boy child (Ndunga, 2012) whereby, a close scrutiny shows that the author hardly gives evidence on the reality of under-age single mothers among the Akamba. The list goes on and on such that it would be superfluous to document other related works here. The underlying factor is that none of the above clearly and distinctly interrogates the aforementioned mode of motherhood as if it is a mirage. The bottom-line is that, to the best of our knowledge, no academic work identifies and peruses our aforementioned kind of single motherhood hence the passion to scrutinize it at a scholarly level.

The paper opted for Thogoto Village, Kiambu County being one of the areas where the first missionaries of Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) settled on arrival in Kenya and built Church of the Torch in 1898 which may be said to be the first Christian Church in the region hence one of the contributors of Christian evangelizations and somehow integrated development in the region. One could say that it is the birthplace of the Alliance of Protestant Missions founded in 1898. Yet, even here, according to field work evidence, the ecclesial ministers assume or pretend that under-age single mothers are non-existent. The common practice at best, as observed, is that of ridiculously merging the above with single motherhood *en masse* notwithstanding the crucial distinction of categories each with specific source and peculiarities and also ignoring the cooperation with other professions like psychology and anthropology in this regard. Moreover, propagation of Christianity among the category does not seem to be pragmatic to perform ecclesial duties in collaboration with the Holy Spirit as intended by the Saviour and Redeemer for inclusivity and gradual significant benefit diverse recipients as highlighted by Congar (1983: 166ff). Consequently, the rationale of the current study is valid.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Anthropological and Christian Perception of Family**

In line with the subject of the study, several related works are reviewed here. A selection is made of a considerable number of those which inform the study both from the anthropological and sociological areas as well as those in realm of theology. It is important to note that some of these works are Inculturational while others are liberational in orientation. The works deliberately mixes them since, as Wachege and Nduto explain, the two aspects are necessarily inter-related (Wachege and Nduto, 2018:74-88). As we examine them both the areas of enrichment to the study and gaps the work fills up are provided.

In his book titled *Third Millennium African Single Mothers and Mother Widows: Ethno-Religio-Philosophical Touch* (Wachege, 2003: 130ff), he not only elaborates who the African Single Mothers are (Ibid., 64-71) but also identifies thirty one different categories as he convincingly explains each one of them (Ibid., 71-126). A lacuna, which our study endeavours to fill up, is that the author nowhere points out under-age single mothers. It is as if they are either non-existent or that they are unrealistically swallowed up by the other modes of single motherhood. To his credit, however, the author goes on to indicate and explicate twenty four major causes of single motherhood each yearning for appropriate social and pastoral concern (Ibid., 130-151). In this regard, the study coincidentally confirmed some of these causes as applicable to our unique type of single motherhood, namely under-age single mothers. Among them are: rape, naive venture into the world of men, irresponsibility of both gender, antisocial behaviour, permissiveness, cheap sex-oriented mass media, modernization, parents' harshness and unreasonableness, exaggerated feminism and distorted gender sensitivity, labour migration, economic pressure and social strain. The author goes on to examine the traditional perspective, treatment and mistreatment of single mothers among some ethnic communities with particular reference to the Tugen, Maragoli, Kipsigis, Akamba, Luo, Abagusii, Sabaot, Luhya, Taita and Agikũyũ together with the underlying philosophy thereby (Ibid., 166-188). Incidentally, practically all these ethnic

communities are found in our study area i.e., Thogoto Village in Kĩambu County who we interviewed accordingly. His profound scrutiny of Third Millennium challenges to traditional perspectives, perception, treatment and mistreatment of single mothers (Ibid., 190-222) is informative too.

Another area that adds value to the work is the author's findings concerning single mothers' advice to the Church to appreciate that single motherhood is an inevitable reality in family affairs that needs commensurate ministry and pastoral option (Ibid., 252-275). Although he is general in this regard, the insights do inspire our work in interrogating the concretization and applicability of Christian perception of family imbued with the Church attribute of Family of God. This has illuminated the study to counsel the Church to be a listening one since single mothers – in our case, under-age single mothers - have so much to tell, discuss and positively participate in searching for solutions to the many challenges the Church is constantly and persistently facing regarding her family apostolate. However, he does not focus and specialize on a particular region or category of single motherhood.

Another book authored by the same author titled *African Women Liberation: A Man's Perspective* (Wachege, 1992) enables us to understand that “women oppression and exploitation is a distorted way of life in which women are dehumanized, marginalized and subjugated by being denied their rights as real persons, being treated and mistreated as inferior beings and deprived of growth into human authenticity” (Ibid., 22). To the author's added credit, he explains how men oppress the other gender in these words: “Men exploit women when they abuse and misuse them as their tools for cheap labour, objects of their sexual gratifications and subsequent hedonism, things for self-aggrandizement and means for the promotion of their ego, self-prestige and assertion of their virility and fecundity” (Ibid., 23). He further explains that men also exploit women when they arrogantly side-line them from vital human activities thereby excluding them from participating in the making of vital decisions. The author further enlightens that men, additionally, exploit women because they are of another sex and another gender taking advantage over them in the state, in society, in life and in the Church manipulating and taking advantage of their physical weakness (Ibid., 23). Our study complements the monograph by concretizing the principles narrowing down to a specific mode of single motherhood with the specificity involved. Such a limitation does not, however, blind us to the fact that the book further assists our study in identifying the main areas in which women are oppressed and exploited – in our case the peculiar category indicated earlier. The author does not only identify but also profoundly explains explicates seven fundamental oppressive and exploitative factors through which women are oppressed and exploited. They are: Traditional; Social; Political; Economic; Sexual; Intellectual; and Ecclesial/Church (Ibid., 45-102). In a commendable way, the author goes an extra mile in showing how to liberate from these characteristics intertwining the effort with a credible way forward (Ibid., 109-140). While the treaty is so beneficial, we chip in narrowing the scope by handling the factors in relation to a particular category mentioned above to be more profound and better rewarding.

Fiorrenza's book titled *Wisdom Ways* (Fiorrenza, 2001) is significant in creating awareness of different kinds of feminism (Ibid., 61ff). It also gives the study different types of theoretical perspectives and their effect thereby in view of sourcing from the Bible through the lenses of women. Among the limitations, however, is that the book is not elaborate on types of feminism nor their real effect concerning Christian women liberation theology – a shortcoming we fill up by sourcing from aforementioned Wachege's contribution. On the basis of feminism, Fiorrenza propagates an engagement of critically sourcing from the Bible from the point of view of women, since exegesis is virtually subjective, for the realization of a feminist Biblical spirituality through the lenses of feminist theory of justice and feminist movement for change (Fiorrenza, 2001: 6, 56-61). Such a stance is provoked by what Clifford points out as gender exploitation and discrimination revealed not only in the pattern of patriarchal male dominion but also in chauvinistic behaviour that makes the experience of males central in every area of life (Clifford, 2000). She outlines a diversity of approaches to feminism as necessitated by areas of interest in terms of dominion and injustice. Such a challenge to women to do their own exegesis with women as their point of reference, among others, assists the study to put it to the Church Shepherds to empower Single Mothers in sourcing intelligently from the Bible to ease their problems and enhance their worth. The gap here is that the author does not show how to go about it. Such methodological gap is handled by drawing insights from Leonardo Boff and his brother Clodovis Boff.

L. Boff and his brother C. Boff, in their co-authored book titled *Introducing Liberation Theology* (L. Boff and C. Boff, 1987:24-39) provided the study with mediation theory. Among the reasons behind opting for this theory is because of its stress on transforming the unjust situation confronting the society in the light of the Good News- in our case, Church teaching on the Family of God and its requisites. We also found it helpful since it assisted with methodological approach with its threefold aspects which the authors call mediations helping the researcher to be on the ground in Thogoto Village to have first-hand knowledge of under-age single mothers thereby making social analysis, relate the data to the Word of God on what it teaches concerning family of God and how applicable the instructions are on the ground and the come up with transforming way forward. This theory is endowed with corresponding steps namely, Socio-analytical aspect; Hermeneutical aspect; and the

Practical aspect also called pastoral or Praxis (Ibid., 24-39). The Social-analytical one helped the researcher to insert self into the situation in life of under-age single mothers in Thogoto Village, Kiambu County for the primary source so as to find out their identity, their categories, how they relate among themselves and others, the kind of life they live and why, the challenges they go through and the rationale behind their beingness together with the social aspects in their life. The second aspect, which is informed by the above social analysis dealing mainly with the why and how of this mode of parenting, is hermeneutical in nature. It assists in relating the above data to the will of God primarily sourced from the Scriptures. The underlying question at this stage is articulated thus: Is it the will of God to have under-age single mothers and should they be subjected to the kind of socio-cultural-religio and economic conditions they live in. As such, the researcher was helped relate the above social analysis to a theological reference since the study is mainly theological in intent. Such a theological reflection leads to the third mediation which is that of praxis. It is from such reflective action that the study was enabled to enter into the realm of pastoral action thereby coming up with arising recommendations in the light of reflections on Christian perception of family imbued with Family of God characteristics and, indeed, suggested way forward drawn from the work that contributes to the solution to the issue of under-age single mothers.

At this stage, it is important to bear in mind that people who have not attained the age of eighteen years remain regarded as under-age or child as informed in the Resolution on children rights (UNICEF, 332-333). According to Booth and Booth (1989) parenting is elastic and a traversable social process. While Brisbane (Brisbane, 1988) views it as a general welfare of a child being helped to mature and acquire, it is worth noting that parenting hence is doing more than just being identified as a mere father or mother. It involves nurturing a child or children to develop right from infancy to adulthood with considerations on their physical, emotional and social growth. This kind of role becomes challenging considering the parent in charge, where women are the heads to be specific (Kotwar and Prabhaka, 2009:197-204). The lack of both or one parent in one's life comes with many difficulties in child's welfare getting the single parent struggling singly to better their life and that of the young one (Brownhill, 2016). In our case it is even worse where it involves under-age single mothers who the above authors do not take to consideration.

As earlier explained, the study drew inspirations on the phenomenon of single motherhood from Wachege's profound work previously indicated. The study, however, identifies a gap in that the author does not include under-age single motherhood which is a peculiar mode of single parenting that is rapidly growing in the contemporary society the study sought to investigate. The author, furthermore, does not consider a holistic approach to single motherhood in that he does not include the single fathers. The study fills the gap by taking into account Cheronoh's work, which creates awareness that single parenting include both the single fathers and mothers (Cheronoh, 2014). In her exposition, nevertheless, she limited herself to one category of single parents namely, widowed single mothers. Furthermore, her work was based on one ethnic community, the Agikūyū. Mwangi fills the above gap in his work which examined the role of the Church in ministering to African single mothers (Mwangi, 2012) which was not based on a particular ethnic community as it was conducted in an urban setting which is multi-ethnic with pluriformity of family values. The author challenges the Family of God to pay attention to the plight of single mothers. In so doing, however, the author considers African single mothers *en masse* without paying particular attention to a specific category (Ibid., 21-24). As Wachege notes, diverse issues and needs trigger each category (Wachege, 2003: 126-127). Furthermore, Mwangi based his study on a particular Church, the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK), yet the area of research is urban which is not just multi-ethnic but with diversified faith affiliations.

Mūthoni (2008) on his part enriches the study with post marriage challenges encountered by former single mothers. The author observes that some single mothers change their status by getting married at times at old age. He established that various factors lead them to marriage such as rejection by the society, the need for companionship and a partner to raise children with, security and identity among others (Ibid., 48-53). Of further relevance to the study are the difficulties that such former single mothers encounter in their parenting responsibilities. Among the major challenges identified are sexual abuse of the daughter by their step father, interference by in-laws, father's difficulty of being accepted by the children and physical abuse of the children. Nevertheless, the author does not dig further into the resulting effects of such acts as sexual and physical abuse of children, which virtually leads to under-age single motherhood. The study fill the above gap by examining, among other issues, the causes of this peculiar yet growing mode of single motherhood, which involves young children being forced to take care of own, or others' children at a tender age.

Pope Francis, in his Exhortation, *AmorisLaetitia* (The Joy of Love) (Pope Francis, 2016) emphasizes the significance of the "Joy of Love" upon families. According to him, the joy experienced in a family is a fulfilment to the Church as an institution that is concerned with the well-being of the family (AL, no. 1). For the current area of study, the Church should not discriminate against these under-age single parents but include them in their task of bringing joy into the lives of the people through the God-given gift of love. He encourages

individuals in the society to “value the gifts of marriage and the family, and to persevere in a love strengthened by the virtues of generosity, commitment, fidelity and patience” (AL, no. 5). Despite the problems that are being faced in this kind of family, single mothers should not despair but be strong so that they can strive to continue their lives and those of the ones under their care. A lacuna here is that Pope Francis does not seem to have awareness of under-age single mothers. It would not be farfetched to assert that if the Pontiff had the awareness, he would no doubt have addressed them in a candid manner.

Today’s families, that of under-age single parents included, are encouraged to take the “Holy Family of Nazareth” as a model. Just like other families, the Holy Family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus experienced some difficulties in their time. They could have felt excepted and deserted by the society but Mother Mary was challenged to face her family’s problems with bravery and tranquillity remembering the entire grace God had gifted them with (AL, no.30). Her experience, after the demise of Joseph her husband, as a widowed single mother can be used to inspire other single mothers particularly those that the present study tackles. They should learn to accept their status in the community and work hard in their own honest ways to achieve a fulfilling kind of life and realization of their potencies. Theologians have often involved themselves in understanding families so that they can come up with practical pastoral intuitions to deal with hindrances to a joyous life (AL, no.31).The Pope also explained that Pastors and Priests as shepherds are responsible for guiding family members so that they can grow in love, learn to get over crises, raise their descendants and maintain healthy social relationships so as to co-exist peacefully (AL, no.37).

He goes on to elaborate that children raised by single mothers lack a father figure who is viewed as a source of provision and security. It is even worse among the aforementioned category whereby they are compelled to cater for their families singly. In such an instance, the children lack the warmth of the mother and are occasionally exposed to risks such as physical assaults and sexual abuse by relatives and caregivers (AL, no. 45). The Pope then advocates that: “In such difficult situations of need, the Church must be particularly be concerned to offer understanding, comfort and acceptance, rather than imposing straightaway a set of rules that only lead people to feel judged and abandoned by the very Mother called to show them God’s Mercy” (AL, no.49).The above then calls upon the Church, family and community at large to embrace the virtue of love since “love is ever ready to be of assistance” (AL, no. 93). Furthermore, love enables individuals to be happy in assisting and serving others especially those in need (AL, no.94).

The Pontiff goes on to instruct that loving these single mothers will enable people to accept them as part of the community, establish harmonious relations with them and most importantly, work with together to liberate them from the problems that they encounter in their day-to-day lives. Though few, there are those that are committed to helping the needy in the society and their service to others is seen as service to God who is pleased with a selfless giver 2 Cor. 9:7. People are thus advised to be with the needy in time of difficulty and also join them in celebrating their achievements (AL, no. 110). The shortcoming however, is that the Exhortation generally talks about married, single mothers and family life in general. It has not focused on the category of under-age single mothers which is cropping up at an alarming rate not just in Thogoto Village but in other localities too in today’s society. The study fills the gap by investigating this mode of parenting to understand the reasons behind their status, the problems that they undergo and come up with the way forward

Pope Francis’ Exhortation *EvangeliiGaudium* (the Joy of the Gospel, 2013)stresses on the significance of families in every society. He comes up with diverse problems respective families in the modern society encounter and the need to look into these difficulties that have been overlooked and the accompanying way forward. Some of the problems discussed in the Exhortation include oppressive cultures, greed, segregation and arrogance. The mistreatment of certain groups of people like the single mothers is constant in the community because of the existence and continued application of unjust cultures in dynamic society. The Pope calls upon individuals to be flexible and be ready to accept change but critically. The mentality of mishandling others because that is what has been happening in the society over the years should be eliminated (EG, no.33).By implication then, though not pointed out, oppressing and undermining under-age single mothers because of going against the norms of the traditional society that forbade the birth of children out of wedlock, and worse still, having children with children, should be done away with. Individuals should recognize that the society has changed over time and diverse modes of families ought to be understood and their plight taken with the seriousness they deserve as members of the Family of God.

The Exhortation further advocates for a new way of reaching out to a large number of people in the society without discrimination – by implications, even under-age single mothers. He explicates that the messengers of the Gospel should concentrate on the key situations in the life of the people in the present society, which is not static but vigorous. Where the Gospel is concerned with the needs of individuals in the community, then it becomes more acceptable, applicable and thus will easily be embraced by many (EG, no.35).One may rightly here assert that under-age single mothers are among the many to be embraced. Additionally, the Exhortation articulates the need to inculturate the Good News to the people with varied cultures and localities. The Pope recommends a new strategy of evangelization that will guarantee that cultures of the propagators of

the Gospel do not dominate the receivers but so that their cultures are also respected as long they are not harmful to others. The above would thus focus on the emancipation of individuals from oppressive traditions that block them from living a comfortable life in God (EG, no. 69). As such, he rules out implantation method of evangelization which imposes “a dominant culture” and suppresses the recipients’ cultures terming them repugnant to Christianity.

The Pope takes his treatise on Family of God a notch higher. He explains that today, a number of people tend to withdraw from the others and prefer living their life privately and in seclusion. It happens because of factors such as urbanization, pursuit of job opportunities and the current economic hardships that one cannot be in a position to take up the responsibility of caring for others even when they badly need their assistance. That is why one is often left wondering why these children with children single mothers are left to suffer even by their own very close relatives. Individuals are, therefore, encouraged not to lose the value of healthy relationality and communality. The in thing should be that of living together, serving the needy and reconciliation will aid in the quest to bring an end to state of individualism, which often interferes with family life (EG, 88). The concept of embracing a communal living would go a long way in reaching out to the mode of single mothers, indiscriminately, to help them overcome their problems.

Something else the Pontiff affirms is that: “Our world is being torn apart by wars and violence, and wounded by widespread individualism which divides human beings, setting them against one another as they pursue their own well-being” (EG, no. 99). It is important therefore for people to stick together so as to do away with the tendency of isolating especially the less fortunate in the society. The Church and members of the community ought to endeavour to share their possessions with those experiencing difficulties in their state of life. Just as Jesus Christ was passionate to the poor, people should emulate Him so as to reach out to these single mothers. He emphasises that: “We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them” (EG, no. 198).

In addition to the above, the Pope in another Exhortation titled *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad) (Pope Francis, 2018) comes up with further useful reflections on family. He spells out that salvation is not confined to an individual but it mainly has a community perspective. The underlying rationale is that “God draws us to himself, taking into account the complex fabric of interpersonal relationships present in a human community (GE, no.6). According to him, evangelizers to single mothers have to guard themselves from Gnosticism with the monopoly of pastoral solutions. He is emphatic that there is need to remain well disposed to God’s surprises which are many (GE, no. 41) and let single mothers of whatever category teach them too about themselves. On such a base, it would be assuming too much to be of the mentality that single mothers are ungodly. As Pope Francis puts it: “God is mysteriously present in the life of every person, in a way that he himself chooses” (GE, no. 42). Such is an earnest call to refrain from being unduly judgemental or even subject them to undesirable paternalism/maternalism. Instead, one should readily embrace guidance by the Holy Spirit that appreciates something good in every single person that should be nurtured since their wondering helps us to wonder, their questions question us (GE, no.44). Whereas the Exhortation is inspirational to the current study, the researcher opted to focus on a particular category of single mothers to come up with a deeper understanding and outcome. Ours then may be said to be a concretization of the above parental principles and values.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Study was guided by three theories which have a close affinity. These are feminism theory, mediation theory and Erikson’s psychosocial theory.

In his profound monograph titled *Third Millennium African Single Mothers and Mother Widows*, (Wachege, 2003:80ff) he gives light into feminism theory. The author provides important illuminations to the study on the diverse categories of single mothers each with its own challenges. Admittedly, the book assists by providing insights into the understanding, definition and the complex nature of single motherhood helping us appreciate the diverse causes and categories whereby he identifies thirty one categories of single motherhood imbued with twenty four causes of single motherhood (Ibid., 71-124). The author further enriches the study by shedding light to two important theories namely: Theory of different causes of single motherhood resulting in unique types of single motherhood categories each imbued with respective challenges (Ibid., 64), and the theory of diverse modes of feminism bringing about different approaches to Christian women liberation theology (Ibid., 80-83). Fiorenza elaborates this feminism theory by identifying a pluriformity of feminisms each (Fiorenza, 2001: 60-64) in identifying very interesting kinds of feminism each, according to Wachege, results in peculiar modes of women liberation. The following, among others, are the common kinds of diverse and diverging categories of feminism each with respective challenges namely: Complementary Feminism; Maternal feminism; Relationality feminism; and International feminism thanks to the four United Nations Conferences on women that took place in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995) together

with the conference on population in Cairo (1994) that debated issues on women welfare, equality and women liberation among others.

Mediation theory, with L. Boff and C. Boff as the exponents has three interrelated aspects (L. Boff and C. Boff, 1987: 24-39): Social-analytical aspect which assisted the researcher to immerse himself into the physical situation and reality of under-age single parents in Thogoto village so as to obtain the primary data on the happenings with regard to the causes and difficulties associated under-age single parents for critical useful social analysis. Hermeneutical aspect revolves around the Biblical interpretations of the primary data gathered from the first mediation. The exercise helped in answering the question whether it is the will of God for things to happen as they are with under-age single mothers. One was compelled to ask questions like: is it the will of God for children's lives to be prematurely burdened as single parents instead of pursuing their life goals? How would Christ respond to such a situation? This mediation helps the study to have a theological reflection therefore differentiating it from other disciplines like psychology. The praxis mediation will help the study to come up with way forward to the problems facing under-age single mother. It forms the practical part in the application of the recommendations with the intention of liberating the under-age single parents within a given setting. Though the mediation theory is important for our study, it does not assist in creating awareness of the stages of growth for the purpose of data collection at required different stages. This gap is filled by our third theory known as Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory (Erik Erikson, 1997: 33-37, 66-82).

Erikson's psychosocial theory discusses the developmental stages whereby it provides the researcher with a background about human development cycle at different stages with relation to characteristics and duties at each level in entire life span bearing in mind the cognitive part of it as it also forms the human being in full right from birth to death. He outlines eight essential stages namely; infancy (birth to 18 months), early childhood (2 to 3 years), pre-school (3 to 5 years), school age (6 to 11 years), adolescence (12 to 18 years), young adulthood (19 to 40 years), middle adulthood (41 to 65 years) and maturity (66 to death). These stages helped the researcher to classify or categorise the under-age single mother accordingly during the entire study period. The theory too provides the cognitive development and the characteristics as per each level, which in turn inversely proportional.

### **III. STUDY FINDINGS**

The goal of the paper was to investigate under-age single mothers from the point of view of Christian notion of family. As previously spelled out, it was meant to be a case study based in Thogotto Village Kiambu County. The following are among the major findings:

#### **1. Diverse Causes of Under-Age Single Mothers**

Based on the insights gained from primary source in Thogoto Village, Kiambu County, the paper was empowered to identify and focus on the factors that bring about under-age single motherhood. They are: baby-sitting for kinfolk members who are young single mothers, enhanced desire for sex, drug and substance abuse and inadequate knowledge of contraceptives. It also identified molestation, courting anger together with collective financial issue as further triggers. The research, moreover, came up with child environment and bereavement as additional causes of the phenomenon.

#### **2. Encounter With Difficulties in Parenting Endeavour**

The field research identified some fundamental problems which the above category of single mothers are confronted with. Among them are: discrimination and contempt, child-care difficulties, mistreatment by relatives. Also retrieved are property inheritance problems, acute loneliness and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) together with HIV and AIDs.

#### **3. Pastors' Vivid Tendency Of Merging Under-Age Single Mothers With Other Categories**

The exploration revealed that more than a few pastors have an inclination towards grouping the above kind of motherhood with others types of single mothers in the ministry. As such, they manifest class ignorance on the awareness that there are diverse categories of single motherhood owing to a pluriformity of causes each with peculiar problems and charisms.

#### **Study Implications**

At least three fundamental implications may be drawn from the paper. These are in the realm of catechesis, inter-disciplinary collaboration and pastoral area.

#### **1. Catechetical Implications**

The paper not only motivates but encourages under-age single mothers not to be discouraged by the hard parenting roles which are of their concern or be overwhelmed by the injustices inflicted upon them by the



society and respective churches. With the ubiquitous support of the Holy Spirit and people of good will, they are challenged to mould their young-ones in the best way possible in accordance to God's will. Besides, it is put upon the community that the in thing has been to assume or pretend that under-age single motherhood is non-existent or fall into the common practice of illicitly merging it with single motherhood *en masse* notwithstanding the crucial distinction of categories each with specific source and peculiarities. Such a distortion and serious lacuna warrants unreserved attention through commensurate ongoing catechesis. With such religious instruction then the Church will be build based on the inclusive 'Family of God' where the society shares the spiritual and quantifiable properties.

## **2. Inter-Disciplinary Collaboration Implications**

The other implication emanating from the paper is that of co-operation and dialogue between agents of the Good News concerning family reality, community welfare, problems parenthood encounters and how to positively confront them. The justification, as the study explained, has to do with the complexity family matters and parenting affairs are imbued with which cannot be successfully handled by a single discipline like the ecclesial one. The paper thus pleads with the pastors to boldly invite and honestly encourage other professionals to cooperate in the endeavour for the common good of all. These are professionals like psychologists, historians, philosophers, educators, politicians, anthropologists and even architectural professional.

## **3. Pastoral implications**

There is a close affinity between the above two implications. They both are interdependent in their correlation among themselves and, when correctly handled, they lead to more fruitful pastoral practices among the communities in Thogoto Village, Kiambu County and elsewhere to recheck the core ministry involved in the family welfare that includes under-age single motherhood. In *Familiaris Consortio* instruction by John Paul VI's, the ecclesia and family are to be hospitable; right from the house, to one's heart, also to one another's concerns extended to the environment conservation (FC, no.44).

## **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are some emerging recommendations drawn from the Study findings:

1. There should be an informed awareness that there are diverse categories of single motherhood owing to a pluriformity of causes each with peculiar problems and charisms.
2. Under-age single motherhood must be appreciated as real cutting across ethnic communities thus demanding commensurate attention and pastoral care.
3. The church pastors and priests are strongly reminded to dispose themselves well in collaborating with other professionals like psychologists, historians, philosophers, educators, politicians, anthropologists and even architectural professional to give insights into house plans that do not easily encourage sexual immoralities for a better significant implementation of the inclusive family of God analogy.
4. The small Christian communities should not only emphasize on prayers, pecuniary collections and wellbeing of those who are in good books with the Church. Awareness should be created that they should break down segregating barriers and welcome under-age single mothers as well in their capacity of sinful followers and disciples of Christ who came for sinners. This will assist them to positively face the mothering difficulties previously identified and explicated boldly and realistically.
5. The methodology and approaches applied family catechesis should be transformed to make it more significant and appropriate to different types of believers with their peculiar existential situations in life like the aforementioned category of motherhood in order to achieve the intended goal and meaning of Christian evangelization. The bureaucratic farfetched paternalism and exaggerated pontificating tendency towards the seeming stray community members should be minimized to make the Church the refuge of "hopeless" sinners too thus encouraging them to convert.
6. Christians should also be taught on the need to be hospitable to everyone around. As such it will encourage the Church as a "Family of God" which demands sharing among its members of material and spiritual properties. This includes the responsibilities and commitments among the faithful in assisting its members, people and society at large – more so under-age single mothers.
7. Organising of different seminars is also vital for different categories of single motherhood including under-age single parents. Since their single motherhood arises at diverse ages of life and gender also brought about by different causes ranging from drug and substance abuse, environment, molestation among others. Their needs differ considering ones family social organisation.
8. Formal education should be improved and encouraged among the under-age single mothers. Life educational centres for example youth education centres, in the county have to be well and responsibly used to ensure its objectives are achieved to the letter. By so doing talent and other training prospects in other

fields will be promoted like; music, drama, sport among many more. This training will assist in developing an all-round person who not only will grow good morals but alone be independent.

## V. CONCLUSION

The paper which was fundamentally qualitative was guided by three theories which have a close affinity. These are: feminism theory propagated by Wachege and Fiorrenza which provided important illuminations to the study on the diverse categories of single mothers each with its own challenges. It also created awareness that different causes of single motherhood result in unique types of single motherhood categories each imbued with respective problems and that diverse modes of feminism bring about different approaches to women liberation theology. The second one was mediation theory propagated by C. Boff and L. Boff. It equipped the researcher with data assortment, scrutiny and future expectations by applying three guiding aspects namely: social-analytical, hermeneutical and praxis/ practical application. The third one was psychosocial theory by Erickson's which assisted in the realization of different stages of human development cycle. The theory was also helpful in identifying the age bracket where the under-age single mothers are grouped in relation to Kenyan laws and regulations of the country under the children's act of 2016 revised edition whereby the category was qualified as those aged 17 years and below. The paper thus took under-age single mothers as those who are in biological motherhood state at an age of 17 and below.

The work, furthermore, explored, identified and explicated some main causes of under-age single motherhood in Thogoto Village, Kĩambu County namely: kinfolk's members; strong drive for sex; drug and substance abuse; and ignorance of utilization of contraceptives. It also identified and explained molestation, anger resulting from frustrating courting, together with financial deprivation as further springboard into the phenomenon. In addition, more factors were exposed and explained as other triggers to this mode of motherhood like child environment and death of parents leaving the vulnerable descendants as orphans. A considerable number of problems that such mothers are confronted with, to mention just a few we came up with, are: contempt and discernment, childcare difficulties, maltreatment by relatives, rivalry over property inheritance, acute solitude cum loneliness, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) together with the exposure to the dreaded HIV/AIDS.

As per the limitations of the study which focused on the under-age single parents in Thogoto Village, Kĩambu County, a further study can be done on the same topic. An example is that of investigation of under-age single parents in reference to Christian perception of family in another study area/region. A further study on the same issue would be that of investigation of under-age single parents in reference to other religions like Buddhism, Islamic among others, teaching on family. A study can also be done focusing on the married under-age parents both genders in any community in the light of religious theological reflections of preference, exploring the present-day difficulties, with a way forward towards bettering parenting in society in dire need of best parenting ministry.

On the basis of the foregoing, we can validly affirm that the goal and assumptions of the study have been attained. The conviction then is that what has been done is adequate and satisfactory although we are quick to acknowledge that the aforementioned areas for further research will no doubt complement our humble contribution.

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