Dilemmas of Children Raised by Single Parents in the Kingdom of Eswatini

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Abstract: *Children raised by single parents face many challenges that can be social, psychological, cultural or economic, resulting in erratic behavior. This study explored the dilemmas of children raised by single parents in the Kingdom of Eswatini in Lubombo region. The study was undertaken in a transformative research paradigm, and the Participatory Action Learning Action Research (PALAR) design was used. This qualitative study employed in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to get views from single parents and children in single parenting, and the data were analysed through thematic analysis. A sample of six single parents and six children raised by single parents were selected from the Lubombo region using the purposive sampling technique. Informed by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the findings of the study revealed that single parenting led to children feeling abandoned, rejected and unloved by the absent parent, which had social and psychological effects on the children. The study concluded that children raised by single parents face psychological, social, economic and cultural challenges. Most of them are fixated and need counselling. The study suggests, for Eswatini, that the Home Affairs Department, in partnership with relevant non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should make psychological counselling readily available for single parents and their children.*

Keywords: Single parenting, family unit, psychological effect, transformative, PALAR.

1. Introduction

Family is one of the vital aspects of society. According to Smith (2017), most institutions, schools, religious institutions, media and government entities, define the ideal family as one consisting of two married, heterosexual biological parents living with their children. The family is the primary agent for cultivating the desired morals in young children. From Ali and Soomar's (2019) perspective, the family has the most significant and unique duty to bring up and groom the youngsters within societal expectations. However, as a result of single parenting, this no longer happens and directly affects a child's physical, psychological and emotional wellness and overall upbringing (Ali & Soomar, 2019).

Kamerumau & Khan (2011) noted that most families around the world are transitioning from households with two parents to one parent, contributing to a global rise of households with single mothers. Leviton (2010) reported that in the United States of America alone, an estimated twelve million children aged below 18 are currently living with a single parent, with ninety-five per cent of them living in homes headed by females. Akin family patterns in some sub-Saharan African countries have been evident in the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) data on children's living arrangements (Nwachukwu, 2008).

Several studies by Mtemeri (2019), Mabuza et al. (2014), and Deleire and Kalil (2002) submit that single parenting has adverse effects on the child. Harrison-Hale, McLoyd and Smedley (2004) point out that single parents habitually have limited time for universal guidance and everyday supervision of their children. It is also worth noting that children's needs in families headed by single parents are rarely communicated compared to what is observed in traditional two-parent families (Cavanagh & Fomby, 2012; Copeland, 2010; O'Connor & Scott, 2007; Roska & Potter, 2011; Thwala, 2011). Various studies on single-parent families relate the absence of either the mother or a father in a household as one contributing factor in numerous academic, emotional and social problems (Mtemeri,2019; Cavanagh & Fomby, 2012; Davis, 2011; Pharaoh, 2004; Symeon, 2007;

Waldfogel, Craige & Brooks-Gunn,2010). The bond between single parents and their children is liable to shape the psycho-social development of the child (Mtemeri, 2019).

Rising cohabitation, divorce cases and artificial fertility methods, along with a decline in initial marriage and increasing rates of re-marriage have created complexity and diversity in the arrangement of families (Azuka-Obieke, 2013; Cavanagh & Fomby, 2012; Copeland, 2010; Peplau & Beals, 2004; Scott & Lilja, 2010). Such diversity and complexity have implications for the psycho-social wellbeing of children (Azuka-Obieke, 2013; Kelly, 2003; Waldfogel,- Craige & Brooks-Gunn, 2010). Findings of studies by Hemovich and Crano (2009) and Mabuza et al. (2014) found that children raised by single parents had a higher probability of abusing substance, for example, alcohol, than those raised by two biological parents. According to Scott and Lilja (2010), the number of children living in families headed by single parents is increasing, primarily due to the emerging increase in divorce rates. Psychological development of children requires a stable environment that enables them to develop a positive self-image and self-identity (Mabuza et al., 2014).

1.1 Statement of the problem

Single parenting has been known to have varying constructive and deleterious effects on children. Studies have revealed that Children from families headed by single parents are less likely to complete their basic schooling compared to children with two parents (Brennan & Swords, 2021). However, Smith (2017) argues that single parents can also raise well-adjusted, successful children with extra care. Although numerous studies have been conducted on single motherhood, there is a glaring shortage of studies that address single parenting in general. This research sought to explore the lived experiences of children raised by single parents: single mothers and single fathers.

1.2 Objectives of the study

Based on the above problem, the following research objectives were raised to guide the study:

- To explore lived experiences of children raised by single parents.
- To identify effects of single parenting on children.
- To identify strategies that can be adopted to improve single parenting.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, expounds on five stages of Psychosexual Development (McLeod, 2017). Kenny (2012) and Freud (1915, 1920) allude that among Freud's unique theoretical insights into the human condition was the historically new idea that humans are primarily animals driven by instincts who undergo growth via universal developmental (psychosexual) stages influenced by family and social life. Kenny also highlighted that Freud (1908) opposed the cherished belief that humanity is logical and primarily ruled by reason, replacing it with the disturbing idea that people are driven by unacceptable and unconsciously blocked aggressive and sexual behaviours constantly in conflict with the cultivated self.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory aimed at supporting the display of affect towards a traumatic memory, a process called catharsis, and bringing the unconsciously blocked trauma into conscious memory, a process termed abreaction (Kenny, 2012). In this context, unconscious refers to the existing thoughts and feelings people are unaware of that inspire their struggling and behaviour. It is what Kenny (2012) proposed as the primary source of the behaviour observed in humans such as wishes, impulses and motives, and is not bound to rationality or limitations due to what the society regard as acceptable behaviour. Freud (1905) believed that personality in children developed through a series of five fixed psychosexual stages, namely the "oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital". According to McLeod (2019), each of these psychosexual stages symbolises the specific erogenous zones of the body where sexual drive or instincts are fixated.

Psychoanalytic theory was fit for the study because it describes human personality development. With respect to the theory, each developmental stage encounters conflicts that either assist or impede development to the next stage, and the progress is determined by the child's ability to resolve conflict (Cherry, 2020). Cherry further proposed that successful completion of the five

psychosexual stages yields a healthy personality. On the contrary, unresolved issues can lead to fixation on the erogenous zone related to that certain stage, later influencing adult behaviour. Until this conflict is resolved, the human either stops progressing to the next stage or transits to the next stage, still exhibiting unresolved issues from the previous stage. For instance, orally fixated individuals may be overly-dependent and constantly desire oral stimulation through smoking, alcoholism, or nail biting (Cherry, 2020).

3. Related Literature

3.1 Parenting and single parenting

Parenting refers to the process of nurturing, supporting and motivating a child or children either by one parent or both parents as they develop from childhood to adulthood (Virasiri, Yunibhand & Chaiyawat, 2011). It comprises the approaches, techniques and other activities that are involved in child-rearing. Kretchmar-Hwndricks (2017) definition of parenting concurs with that of Virasiri et.al. (2011) in that it encourages and champions a child's entire development from childhood to adulthood. Single parenting is a situation where one of the biological parents is responsible for raising up and the child's welfare singlehandedly, without a partner's assistance (Ali & Soomar, 2019). The absence may be a result of divorce, teenage or unintended pregnancy or death of a spouse. Mabuza et al. (2014) concur and further suggest that in addition to these is the degradation in moral standards and that in Eswatini, no law obligates parents to be responsible parents.

3.2 Experiences of children raised by single parents

Studies have shown that anxiety disorders associated with the breakup of their family units are prevalent in children raised by separated parents. Observed reactions to breakup include fear of emotional abandonment, social rejection, and loss of contact and love from the non-custodial parent (Demo & Acock, 1996; Yusuf et al., 2020). Combining all these may cause them to be exceedingly aggressive in peer interactions, leading to rejection by peers. Yusuf et al. (2020) further suggest that those mentioned above interfere with the children's psychological development, causing them to fear for their future marriages, engage in delinquent and problem behaviours, experience academic difficulties and suffer emotional depression.

Studies have revealed a convolution of feelings experienced by children raised in single-parent families. Mabuza et al. (2014) found that such children felt neglected when parents did not give them enough attention because they were too busy providing for them. According to Mabuza et al. (2014), such neglect led to the children having an early sexual debut, which resulted in teenage pregnancies for the girls. Additionally, studies revealed that children from single-parent households experienced name calling that either led to depression or made them work extra hard to make something of themselves, and prove a point to everybody, including the parent that deserted them. Also, these children would also work tirelessly in order to please the one parent who had worked hard to provide for them.

Nevertheless, Yusuf et al. (2020) stated that some children felt emotionally neglected by the remaining parent. The children felt that the remaining parent neither listened to nor appreciated their grief. This resulted in feelings of anger, especially when they felt that the remaining parent was responsible for the breakup of the family or did not try hard enough to keep the family together. All of these point to the unpredictability of feelings of children brought up in single-parent families.

3.3 The effects of single parenting on children

Studies have revealed that children suffer long-term effects due to being brought up in single-parent households. These long-term effects result from the difficulties single parents face as they raise children. Mtemeri (2019) revealed that parents faced challenges providing the psychological needs of the child or children and meeting the child's social, medical, as well as educational needs. It was revealed that the parents prioritise the educational needs of the children above others, and this could possibly be due to the fact parents assumed that the best gift they could give to them was the gift of education, not taking into cognisance that for education to be successful other vital

needs had to be met. It was revealed, for instance, that a child who lacked parental attention may seek attention from the teacher during lessons, thus jeopardising their chance to learn in the process (Mtemeri, 2019; Ross, 2009).

Mtemeri (2019) also revealed that single-parent mothers regularly relocated to find jobs that pay well and cheaper accommodation. Similarly, previous studies conducted by Mclanahan (2004) and White (2004) revealed that single-parent mothers that came from families of low socioeconomic status often moved regularly. As a result, the frequent movements negatively impact the growing child. Such frequent changes in an environment created confusion for the child as they constantly had to adjust to new environments. Since nurturing children also relies a lot on the environment, the child gets confused about learning and unlearning different environments as they move from place to place.

Other disparate views were presented by Mtemeri (2019), who pointed out that single-parent mothers could afford to create time to spend with their children regardless of the lack of support from their biological fathers, while Walsh (2012) and Mabuza, Thwala and Okeke (2014) argued that because single-parent mothers were enforced to working all the time, leaving them with less time to spend with their children and resorted to moving their children to the rural areas where they will be raised by the relatives of the single-parent mother or non-custodian father (Mabuza et al., 2014). This left children feeling neglected and responsible for whatever led to their parents' separation. Additionally, the absence of the parents from the children's lives created a vacuum quickly filled by influential sources, including friends, relatives, media, siblings, and illegal drugs that went unnoticed by the parents until it was too late.

Furthermore, Mabuza et al. (2014) stated that single parenting was looked down upon in the Swati society leading discrimination. Mabuza et al. also revealed that these parents were subjected to name calling such as *'imitalakanye/imishwedla'* (childbearing before marriage), *'emabuyemendvenia/tecamabhodo'* (divorcees raising children on their own without a partner). This name-calling would hurt children and sometimes cause them to lose respect for their parents.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research paradigm

This study adopted a transformative paradigm. The transformative paradigm is characterised by the active involvement of the stakeholders in facilitating change. Apps (1994) contends that for transformation to be fruitful, people should be strategically convinced about why there is a need to transform the current ways of thinking and doing. Transformation further involves unlearning, which suggests that previous knowledge must be viewed using the lens of contemporary experiences (Gravett, 2004) and discarded if necessary. The main thrust of this study was to affect a shift in the single parents and their children to adopt practices that would emancipate them and give society a chance to reconsider their perceptions.

4.2 Research approach

Qualitative approach was adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of children brought up by single parents (Bhandari, 2020). In-depth insights into understanding the experiences of children raised by single parents were collected using individual interviews and focus group discussions. Qualitative research is flexible and focused on collecting rich non-numerical data, which helps the researcher to understand how children raised in single-parent households experience their world. Qualitative research makes it possible for the researcher to answer "how" and " why" a particular phenomenon or behaviour that occurs in a specific context. It offered a chance to develop specific insights and turn individual experiences into usable data (Peterson, Vaughan & Carver, 2021). This approach helped the researchers get rich information from single parents and their children.

4.3 Research design

The study employed a transformative paradigm as a framework for promoting preventive action toward social justice for marginalised populations through the lens of a structural and intersectional disadvantage as the problem towards the marginalised group opening up about their lived experiences (Wood, 2019). In this study, it was used to actively gather the experiences of children raised in single-parent families. Participatory Action Learning Action Research (PALAR) research design was followed (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt , 2012). According to Wood & Zuber-Skerritt (2012) and Zuber-Skerritt (2018), PALAR is an effective methodology for solving community-based problems from the inside out. PALAR is a collaborative and emergent form of research that engages the people affected by the problem as a co-researcher and co-creator of knowledge (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). PALAR supports the notion of community of practice through collaborative work between the researcher and participant, and this yields a social change in problems affecting participants in a community (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2012)). Since we are working on experiences of children raised by single parents, the single parents and their children are the main community members in this study (Wood & Zuber-Skerrit, 2012).

4.4 Participant recruitment

We recruited two groups of participants. Firstly, we recruited parents raising children single-handedly. Secondly, we recruited children raised by single parents. For ethical reasons, we avoided very young children and concentrated on those aged seventeen and above. We felt those younger would be represented by their parents who will participate in the study. Small sample size was preferred as it allowed single parents and their children to provide the researcher with their lived experiences through contextually rich narratives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Time and costs also limited our sample to twelve participants (Maree & Pieterson, 2016). We selected twelve participants using purposive sampling (Maree & Pieterson, 2016). Purposive sampling is used when the sampling is done with a specific purpose in mind (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, our target sample was parents raising children single-headed and children raised by single parents. We wanted to get the socioeconomic experiences of these children. Single parents complimented the data we got from the children raised by single parents. Six participants from parents raising children alone were selected. We had two males and four females. With children, we selected three girls and three boys for gender parity.

4.5 Data analysis

Data analysis is an important stage when conducting research. It should be accurately done to enable the researcher to answer the research question(s). The major goal of data analysis is to condense data so that researchers can interact with it meaningfully (Lichtman, 2010). Data analysis involves three steps: organising the data, coming up with themes and interpreting the data. At this stage, the researchers sorts and resort data until meaningful themes emerge. The study employed a qualitative, thematic data analysis approach where the data collected was coded, organised into emerging themes and analysed.

4.6 Ethical consideration

When carrying out research, researchers are expected to adhere to ethical principles. These are moral principles, standards or rules that control people's behaviour and research that involves human beings (Resnik, 2020). The researcher here observed the ethical research principles to protect participants' dignity, rights and safety. As researchers, we were honest about the identity and the purpose. The study's objectives were communicated to participants before data collection. We assured the participants that their identities would remain anonymous. It was also explained to the participants that data and information pertaining to the study would remain confidential. Interview notes and transcripts would exclude personal identifiers. Data were represented by (C) for children participants, (P) for parent participants, and were analysed thematically.

Consent forms expressing the participants' voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time were given to participants in time to read and sign if they agreed to participate in the study. Issues of credibility and validity were addressed through triangulation, where data was

collected from both children and their parents and by method; where the researcher administered individual interviews, and then the focus group discussions validated submissions from the interviews

5. Presentation of Results and Findings

From the data that we collected, themes that emerged from our first research question that sought to explore the experiences of children raised by single parents are:

5.1 Objective 1, theme 1: Feelings of fear of abandonment and rejection

Children that we interviewed felt fear of abandonment by the non-custodial parent. Such feelings led to anxiety, depression and, in the worst situations, to suicide. This is in line with the findings of Demo and Acock (1996) and Yusuf et al. (2020). The findings further revealed that the abandonment by the absent parent and inadequate attention from the present parent produced overly independent children at a very early stage in life. From the FGD, one of the participants remarked:

> *Personally, I feel abandoned and rejected by my father. Sometimes, I feel he is not my biological father that is why he is not visiting me or even calling just to say hi or even asking about my schoolwork. (C4).*

> *I feel neglected sometimes I feel like committing suicide I don't see the purpose of living when I am miserable like this (C6).*

The present parent can't give 100% attention and guidance to children; hence the young ones develop a thick skin and survival skills at an earlier age than peers raised by both parents (FGD).

Lack of parental attention in children raised by single parents may lead to unintended early sexual activity, pregnancies at a young age and the increase in contracting sexually transmitted diseases. It was also evident that a child who is denied parental attention may seek attention from the teacher during lessons jeopardising their chance to learn in the process (Mtemeri, 2019). Anything that restricts holistic development may result in low self-esteem, fear of having failed marriages in the future, delinquency, more conflicts with parents, poor academic performance, and emotional depression (Yusuf et al., 2020). These children may develop negative feelings towards the family of the absent parent since support is mainly derived from the family of the present parent.

5.2 Objective 1, theme 2: Remote parenting

Some children voiced that single parents are absent in their lives since they have to work twofold to provide for their children. They do what one may call 'remote parenting' and constantly communicate with their children through cell phones and other social media forums. The parent concentrates much on financial needs, leaving the other needs in the hands of the grandparents and other family members. Sometimes, the children are abandoned at home. The older one assumes the responsibility of parenting the younger siblings while the mother or father is at work and will only see them once or twice a month. Some participants remarked:

> *At the age of 15, I had to play the role of parenting to my 10-year-old brother and 8-year-old sister) since our mother had to go to work in South Africa so that she could buy us food, clothes and pay our school fees (C5).*

The children are neglected in the process of trying too hard to provide for them. In line with Yusuf et al.'s (2020) findings, some children felt rejected by the remaining single parent, who either did not listen or show understanding of the child's grievances. In some instances, you find that the parent too is in grief for the separation or loss of the other parent and assume the child is fine without figuring out what the child is going through because some of these children may brave the situation just to make the parent feel better, especially older children.

5.3 Objective 1, theme 3: Emotional abuse and attention from the hands-on parent

The absence of one parent may lead to feelings of emotional abuse, curiosity as to whether the parent thinks or remembers the child, and worse, feelings of guilt as if the child is responsible for the parents' separation. Same participant remarked:

> *Sometimes, I feel anxious and even wonder if that man is my father because he keeps forgetting my birthday. He never asks about my progress at school, nor does he attend any special event like a family fun day at school or ask me to spend Christmas with him (C1).*

This may also result in the child blaming themselves for the parents' separation, thinking they are not lovable nor deserve to be loved and cared for by both parents. Sometimes they even resent the parent they believe is the cause of the divorce or blame the one they live with for not doing enough to stop the separation or even the death of the other parent.

The hands-on single parent ends up over protecting the child leading to shame on the part of the child. Some overfeed them, leading to the children being obese. Some single parents give them excess money encouraging children to abuse drugs. One parent had this to say:

> *My child is now obese because I was overfeeding him so the father could see that I could afford food (P2).*

> *My dad is so controlling to the extent that I cannot initiate things independently (C4).*

5.4 Objective 2, theme 1: Poor socialisation

On another note, the children may be overprotected by the custodian parent and as a result, they are ill-socialised, and barred from visiting the other parent or relatives of the non-participant parent. The child may also be curious about life in general, imagining how it would like to be with the other family. The child always imagines if the other family will accept or deny him/her. If the mother raises the child in the maternal home, it is most likely that females will raise the child (the mother and the grandmother) and never experience having a male figure to influence their lives positively. They tend to clamp up and be very uneasy and uncomfortable around males. This is a result of their socialisation which inhibited holistic socialisation. They struggle to make new relationships and warm up to people as they become afraid that they will leave. Salami and Alawode (2000) also concur that a child growing up in a family where both biological parents are present will be cared for plus highly socialised. Some participant's remarks:

> *Sometimes we are overprotected by the present parent who might not be healthy for us. They do not want us to visit (we only attend funerals) or have any kind of relationship with our relatives from the other family. Therefore, we know little about our identities (FGD).*

> *As a girl-child, I found it absurd talking about sanitary towels with my father. As a result, I had to use my pocket money to buy some and I don't really relate to older females, so I don't look forward to visiting my grandmother's place (C1, C6).*

The custodian parent does not notice that they are usually drained in all aspects since they deal with a lot. This leads to a lack of guidance and discipline, which may lead to unruly behaviour as the children grow older. Some children get sucked into parents' conflicts and, as such, get neglected, having to be raised by grandparents and other relatives. At times, the child will be left to choose which parent they want to stay with and can switch whenever they want to. In the name of co-parenting, where the parents live adjacent to each other, you find that the child does not even know where they live because they are free to be with either the mother or father whenever they feel like. Coming to discipline, the child will never know the difference between right and wrong since both parents will be competing for the attention of the child and being the most preferred parent making it difficult to observe behavioural changes. Ali and Soomar (2019) believe that parental collaboration leaves significant impact on child's behaviour, personality and health. Therefore, a female child needs to be correctly guided by the mother while a boy by the father, teaching them how to be responsible parents in the future.

5.5 Objective 2, theme 2: Lack of basic needs (psychological, economic, and social needs)

Some parents work multiple jobs just to support their children but still do not get enough to meet all their needs. Mtemeri (2019) also concluded that a majority of single parents pointed out as they try to provide for the physiological, social, medical and educational needs of their children, they encounter some challenges. This could be because most single parents tend to focus more on the child's medical and educational needs and less or no time for attending social and psychological ones (Mtemeri, 2019). In general, parents assume that education is the best gift they can give their children, not taking into cognisance that for education to be a success, there are other vital needs to be taken care of. Some participants remarked:

> *After my father's death, not even my mother noticed the emotional burden on me. All she did was take me to the school I always wanted to attend, which drained me even more; I had to adapt to a new environment and teachers and make new friends while still dealing with my loss (P3).*

As a result, parents' prioritise and give their children what they find to be the most important. Even if both parents were employed and are willing to contribute financially towards the child's wellbeing, the fact still stands that one is left with the whole burden of decision-making, and whatever the other party contributes is never adequate to cover all the needs of the children. Again, the custodian parent must deal with much more than just managing finances.

5.6 Objective 2, theme 3: Feeling frustrated

Children get frustrated when the custodian parent moves on to new relationships because they think their parents no longer love them and they tend to compete for their parent's attention with the new partner. Some participants remarked:

> *When my father married my stepmother, I felt bitter, jealous and lost interest in life in general, as if the one person I lived to please chose another over me (C3).*

Just as Yusuf et al. (2020) found out, single parents needed to minimise changes at home after the departure of the other parent. If things like the family set up, school, friends and daily activities are unchanged, the child's chances of feeling secure are increased (Yusuf et al. (2020). Bringing in a stranger or a new member into the family will need a lot of adjusting on the child's part. If the custodian parent is considerate enough, they should first prepare the child to accept the new member. The above is consistent with Yusuf et al.'s (2020) findings that the least a parent can do for their children is to afford them psychological help, if need be, be it soon after separation or when the child begins asking questions about the other parent and possibly display unpleasant character changes, for instance, mood swings, bullying other children, unacceptable language, underachievement in school and many more.

5.7 Objective 2, theme 4: Striving for the best

Children raised by single parents' experience disadvantages. There is a high probability that they become high school drop-outs and hardly graduate from higher education institutions compared to children brought up by both biological parents (Watt, 2019). However, Cooper & Pugh (2020) suggest that children with both parents involved in their educational needs are likely to obtain better academic performance and have fewer behavioural problems. The above is consistent with findings from this research that children from single-parent homes, where the parent try to provide the best way they can and the child notice that they either study hard to get good results, go through tertiary and when they are employed, they take good care of their parents. In some cases, they resort to helping their parents even as miners. Some would shun childbearing out of wedlock to avoid subjecting their children to the same hardships they had to endure as children. Some participants remarked:

> *In my teen years, I had to adjust to reality, accept that my father was never going to be part of my life and had to learn to be resilient in every situation I faced with my*

> *family. I will always appreciate my mother's advice to keep focused on my school work*
> *and never to give in to temptation (C10).*

The spouse has to understand that throughout their lives, for as long as the parent is in contact with them, they are less likely to do anything that the parent would not have approved of.

5.8 Objective 3, theme 1: Conducting workshops for single parents and their children

Single parenting can be improved through workshops for both the children raised by single parents and their parents. Psychological facilities are made available to both the children and the single parents, and community awareness to help change the stigma brought by our socialisation as Emaswati/Africans. Unemployed single parents may also collaborate in income-generating projects to help provide their children's basic needs. Some participants remarked:

> *Workshop for single parents as well as children where they can meet, and share ideas*
> *and experiences can be helpful (C7).*

There should be support groups for single parents where they can share their experiences and struggles and empower each other on how best to help their children be responsible. It was also suggested that children should have similar support groups so that they get the reassurance that they are not alone as there are also other children being raised by single parents and so they can have a family outside the biological one. The above is in line with (Goldberg and Carlson, 2014) in that family life, relationships, and emotional support are important to children raised by single parents. They need to experience a sense of family even outside the biological setup.

5.9 Objective 3, theme 2: Transparency

After separation, parents should engage their children and ensure they understand that certain situations, be it emotional or financial, will take place. When the children are well-informed of what is happening, they tend to be more understanding and feel involved in the adjustments that need to be made in the family.

> *Soon after my mother left, my father and I had a lengthy discussion on changes that*
> *had to be implemented, like house chores, supervision of homework, financial*
> *instability and a whole lot more (C8).*

The single parent may also create quality time with children and assure them they are loved. The parent should also teach them life skills and the consequences of their actions. The single parent should also strive to model good behaviour so that they can call the children to order when necessary.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Single parents and their children are burdened with numerous challenges in their everyday lives. They struggle with finances and strategies to keep good relationships with their children. Single parents struggle to give their children enough attention, basic childcare, balance up the overall needs of a growing child, and be open enough so that they are on the same page as the children. Single parents are afraid of being labelled by their children and society as failures, so they keep their struggles to themselves. African societies are not doing enough to embrace single parenting; they still treat it as a taboo, yet it has been in existence for a prolonged period. They resort to bullying single parents and their children by calling them names. Based on the above, the following recommendations were made:

- The government of Eswatini, through the Department of Home Affairs, should at least have one trained psychologist in every police station and police post so that it will be easy for single parents to get counselling whenever needed.
- The government of Eswatini and non-governmental organisations should set up reliable social/psycho-social support in the communities and have trained personnel.
- The Eswatini government, alongside the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), should have either a psychology team or a functional guidance and counselling team in every primary and high school, and this facility should be made open to parents too.

- Single parents should come together and form support groups and have a children's unit in which children will also meet, discuss their challenges and share solutions.
- Premarital pregnancies should be discouraged/ avoided to reduce the number of single parents. So teenage pregnancy should strongly be discouraged; maybe introduce grants for all parents living below the poverty line, then attach an age to the amount they will get.
- Separated couples should avoid fighting using children as children are the ones that end up facing the consequences
- Single parents need to learn proper financial management especially investing in their children's tertiary education.
- Children should be allowed to have a relationship with members of both families if interested.

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