



Single Women and the Church
The Experiences of single women in the Methodist Church in
Kenya

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1 Abstract

In Africa, marriage is respected, and nobody should be left out without marrying or being married. This is one reason why singlehood has been perceived to be problematic and not acceptable, not only in society but also in the church. This study seeks to determine the experiences of single women both in the church and how the local community impacts these experiences. The research question addressed in the study is: What are the single women's experiences within the context of the Methodist Church and the local community in Kenya? This question is addressed by answering the following sub-questions. First, how are single women expressing their experiences and treatment in the church? Secondly, how does their local community impact single women experiences?

The study involved four different groups of single women, namely: single women who have never been married, those who are divorced, the widowed, and single women with children out of wedlock. Three theories were used to understand and interpret single women's experiences in the Church and the society: The stigma theory, social learning theory, and the patriarchy theory, where I applied patriarchal practices and social structures.

The study's findings revealed that single women are far more excluded and negatively impacted than their male counterparts. It was clear that cultural beliefs were the main factors leading to the marginalization of single women in the church. The informants expressed how they are negatively treated and perceived as immature and incomplete, hence exclusion from church leadership positions. The same cultural impact led to the exclusion of single women in church activities, name-calling, low self-esteem, among other challenges. In addition to the many challenges faced by single women, they also lacked pastoral care. They were stigmatized; even their children were stigmatized and shamed, for example, during baptism, when the pastor demands to know the child's father.

In society, the patriarchal practices and social structures formulated by men are demeaning, devaluing, and discriminative to single women in many ways. These patriarchal structures and systems elevate men and exclude women, for example, by denying single women property. This aspect of being devalued and side-lined

creates low self-esteem, poverty, and a series of other challenges related to poverty, such as prostitution.

However, there was some good news in this study. Some single women have had the resilience and had overcome the challenges of singleness and embraced the positives of singleness. They pointed out the freedom to own their property and freedom to realize their future without any men's interference.

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3 Chapter One: Introduction

The challenges of single, aged, widowed, and unmarried women in the church are social and spiritual. This view is based on my personal experience and encounters these issues as a pastor in the Methodist church in Kenya. In my observation, these issues are evident in some churches in Kenya. In the African context, marriage is highly upheld as a social practice and institution meant for the satisfaction of some social needs like sexual satisfaction and intimate relationship. In addition, “marriage and childbearing are the focus of life. They are at the very center of human existence, just as man is at the very center of the universe” (Mbiti, 1991, p.106).

In Africa, marriage is respected, and nobody should be left out without marrying or being married. After initiation, young people were and are still in many countries, under a solemn obligation to be married and bear children. It was out of the purpose and meaning of the marriage, as explained above, that polygamous marriage was a way of eliminating singleness from society. In this regard, unmarried women of age were married as second wives (Mbiti, 1991).

For the marriage to take place, the selection of marriage partners came first. Traditionally, in some parts of Africa, it was the parents who chose marriage partners for their girl child, even before they were born. This ensured that every girl would be married, hence giving them every possibility and assurance. However, in contemporary Africa, men ‘mostly’ choose their suitors. Culturally, due to patriarchy, women are not allowed to look for who should marry them. Therefore, not all women who wish to get married have success in this endeavor. In African society, the norm is that every adult should get married. In African communities, there is a common belief that God commanded people to get married and bear children from the very beginning of life. According to John Mbiti, marriage in Africa is, therefore, a sacred duty that every normal person must perform. Failure means terminating the flow of life and diminishing humankind upon the earth (Mbiti, 1991). Therefore, singlehood becomes a difficult choice to make in life due to the culture that views single women as

incomplete. For some, singleness is a choice, while for others, it has become a reality. It is a reality in the sense that one may be looking for a person to marry but end up with no one interested in marrying them.

Singleness is a growing challenge within the Tharaka community and Kenya in general. According to Aune, it is also currently a global challenge, who argues, “given that the proportion of single women in society is rising steadily, singleness is in urgent need of discussion and understanding by the Church. For the society towards which the Church has a mission is acutely touched by the issue of singleness” (Aune, 2002, p. x). She expresses that singleness is becoming an increasingly complex issue in society that should be addressed.

Therefore, I concur with Aune’s opinion that the single women's case is a complex topic, which is my driving factor, and a motivation to carry out this research. It is in this regard that the inspiration and the desire for this research are built.

In Kenya, there are diverse singleness types, which includes the following: singleness due to divorce, the death of the husband, having children before marriage, and lack of someone to marry due to social and cultural beliefs. According to African theologian M.E.Baloyi, unions are getting twisted just for the individuals to avoid being single (Baloyi,2010). However, Baloyi expresses those marriages do not last for long since they lack commitment, which is required for every marriage to survive.

Most aged single Christian women in Kenya are experiencing a socio-spiritual stigma due to cultural and church pressures. Some wish to remain faithful to the church dogmas and teachings on virtue and morality but staying single until married is challenging to their sexual desires. Society does not accept them the way they are expressing Baloyi. Hence, some women struggle to formulate an independent identity in a society that has viewed them as ‘relational’ or dependent on men. According to Baloyi, some singles have multiple sexual relationships, while others practice prostitution to avoid singleness (Baloyi, 2010).

Kari Torjesen Malcolm asserts that the issue of singleness also presents a biblical challenge to the church, where the Bible shows that “God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). Here she seems to point out that God’s image included male and female, but there is no mention of marriage here (Malcolm, 1982, p.140). According to Malcolm, it was not God’s intention to produce a conflict of interest between people (Malcolm, 1982, p.140).

In some ways, the church has failed to make the single aged women feel included, something that Malcolm is against. She holds that we should not make single women feel that they are misfits in the church; by doing so, we fail to accept them as part of God's image. This will indicate failing to respond to God’s first teaching about male and female equality (Malcolm, 1982, p. 141). Being created in God’s image is the unique dignity not only to the human race per se but also for everyone (Hegstad, 2018, p. 100). Hegstad argues that because human beings are created in likeness or preferably in God's image, it is not acceptable to draw a boundary for human dignity.

4 1:1. Motivation

This study's primary motivating factor is my experience as a church pastor with the Methodist church in Kenya for more than fifteen years. After organizing the couple’s seminars in one of the circuits (several Methodist congregations), three single women approached me and expressed their feelings as singles in the church. They shared how they felt neglected by the church, that the church was mostly concerned with the married people. In the church, many activities were scheduled for married women and nothing for the singles. In the villages where they lived, they had a lot of life challenges from society. It was not easy to get somebody to hire for work, especially some physical work which specifically required men. If they hired men, it was perceived or interpreted as a way of hooking men for sexual pleasures. These women were disturbed by a constant reminder that they were still single and wondered when they would get married.

Many other single women experienced stigma attached to them by the church for being single and felt that the church as an institution was mostly interested and sensitized towards families and married people, neglecting or overlooking them as mere singles. Following the sentiments from the single women who had approached me, I started a singles group in Kibirichia Circuit in Kaaga Synod in Meru County in 2009. The church members had different feelings about single women in the church. I realized there was a significant gap between single women adults and other members of the church. Moreover, the number of forced by circumstances to remain single was escalating, and the church was to face this issue.

5 1:2. Socio-cultural norms

Another motivating factor is my experience with Kenya's socio-cultural norms and how society views unmarried women. In the Kenyan context and especially my community (Meru), an unmarried woman is regarded as a curse to the family or a social misfit. As John Mbiti expresses, marriage is considered a sacred duty that every normal person must perform. Any individual failing to get married sounds abnormal or like a social misfit, which is negative. Although the trend of singlehood is still growing, it is not an acceptable norm in Kenyan society.

A Woman Representative in Kiambu County, Gathoni Wamuchomba, stated that men should be allowed to marry many wives to solve the problem of single women in society (Wainaina, 2018, internet retrieved on 02.03.20). In agreement with Gathoni, another Woman Representative from Mombasa, Asha Hussein, supported the idea by urging President Uhuru Kenyatta to marry a second wife. Asha said, “polygamy is the best type of marriage and urged women to embrace it as well than remaining single” (Ngina, 2018, internet retrieved on 02.03.20). The most challenged singles in Kenya are the women with children without a father figure. They are viewed as different or deviant by many in society.

Additionally, there is gender stereotyping, in which single men and single women are not regarded equally. This means that being a single man or unmarried man is acceptable regardless of the age as opposed to single

womanhood. For men, the issue is viewed as unconventional or a matter of choice and not a lack of a suitor. On the other hand, single womanhood is stereotyped as a lack of a suitor. This generates pressure on the woman and her family. In the Meru community, a clan is referred to as '*Ngirani*' whose girls are married only as second wives because of the cultural stereotypes attached to their families. People believe that if they marry a girl from the '*ngirani*' clan as their first wife, the man will automatically die shortly after marriage. With the erosion of polygamy through church teachings and orders, most women from this clan stay without getting married, experiencing social and spiritual stigma. This is a struggle and a challenge being experienced by these women in the margins of society. They are hurting, and most of them carry these wounds and scars throughout their entire lives.

The reason for this study is, therefore, to explore the experiences of single women within the context of the Methodist Church in Kenya and the local communities in Kenya.

6 1:3. Research aim

The aim of this research is to explore what experiences single women are having in the church, how they express these experiences, and the impact of their experiences in their lives. The study further investigates how the experiences of single women are impacted by the society in communities they live in.

7 1:4. Research question

What are the experiences of the single women within the context of the Methodist Church and the local community in Kenya?

This question is addressed by answering the following sub-questions.

1. How are single women expressing their experiences and treatment in the church?
2. How does their local community impact single women experiences?

8 1:5. The main objectives of this study

>To find out how the church deals with single women.

>To investigate how the Church cares for the increasing number of single women.

>To find out what roles single women play in the Methodist Church in Kenya.

9 1:6. Research Outline

Chapter two is the background chapter, discussing single people in Africa, and giving more information about single women in Kenya and the Methodist Church. This chapter provides the background of how Africans were dealing with single people's challenge before the arrival of Europeans and the missionaries. This chapter also discusses how society under this study perceives this issue of women and singleness. Additionally, in this chapter, some input from the Bible and other relevant materials from different authors is given.

Chapter three is the theoretical framework chapter. This chapter defines different types of singles as given by scholars. Furthermore, the chapter presents practical and practice theories.

Chapter four presents the methodology and methods used in this research. Similarly, research design, research strategies, and the research methods used. Limitations and challenging experiences in this study will also be discussed in this chapter.

Chapter five focuses on empirical findings and analysis of interviews with single women.

Chapter six is the discussion chapter, focusing on the findings from the empirical data. It presents a discussion from research questions about the theoretical framework in chapter three and other literature used in the research.

Chapter seven is the conclusion chapter, giving a summary of the study, the researcher's recommendations, and potential research areas.

10 Chapter Two: Background of the study

In Africa, most communities are patriarchal. Kenya is among the countries in Africa where most tribes or rather societies have a patriarchal system. According to Parsitau, Kenya is a heavily patriarchal society where women and girls struggle with many layers of discrimination, marginalization, and stereotypes. Moreover, patriarchal, cultural, and religious ideals and beliefs are strong gendered social norms, which mostly portray single women as inferior to men or rather in the society (Parsitau, 2020, 6 March). The issue of single women was not a big problem in most of the societies in Kenya. This is because, traditionally, most of the families in Kenya were polygamous. In most African communities, if a lady was widowed, she was married by the husband's brother as a second wife to keep alive the deceased's name. After the arrival of the Europeans and Christianity, polygamy was condemned as an imperfect and evil culture. The Europeans advocated for men to marry only one wife; this was the beginning of single women's challenge in African society. The Europeans and the Christian missionaries' interference with the African culture created a challenge for single women in Africa, a challenging issue for the community and the Church to date (Mbiti, 1991, p. 112).

Singleness is a global challenge, which is mostly not addressed but put under the carpet. Singleness is not clearly defined even in the Bible. That is because, during the time of Jesus, most people were married "In the Roman Empire there was a law in place, the Lex Julia, that every female citizen aged between 20 and 50 (except for vestal virgins), and every man between 25 and 60, had to be married, and if widowed, they had two to three years to remarry. One was fined for not marrying" (David Pullinger, internet retrieved, 19.04.18, 6:44 pm). According to Dr. Pullinger, the Romans and the Jewish authorities wanted to ensure that the population was being renewed and the birth rate remained high.

DePaulo, quoting sociologist Linda Waite, stated that marriage is a good institution for everyone. According to Waite, this is a public health issue, and she maintained that people need to know the truth to decide for themselves. Additionally, a year later, Waite told USA Today that marriage improves the

health and longevity of men and women. Waite agrees “that married people are happier, healthier, and better off financially” (Depaulo, 2006, p.28). However, this statement of Waite that married people are happier and healthier may be argued otherwise based on differing contexts. Though the study is not about happiness in marriage, I take note of the statement in relation to the single women and the church. Additionally, this is contrary to Paul, who argues a single woman is happier than a married woman (1 Cor 7: 39-40).

11 2:1. The customs of marriage

In African customs, marriage is the center of human life; it is expected to be respected by all people. Marriage customs in Africa create a relationship not only between the two people who are getting married, but it is a relationship between families. It is an African view that a person does not exist all by himself, but one exists because of the existence of other people. This is according to Mbiti, who said, “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am” (Mbiti, 1991, p.108).

In African societies and particularly Kenya, marriage contains several meanings and significates. These are the following, to mention but a few of them. Firstly, they believe marriage is an obligation to be fulfilled by every normal person to bear children. Moreover, if one fails to get married, he/she is going against the society or rather the traditional practices and beliefs. Therefore, one fails to understand how a woman can stay alone without getting married; people in the community think the woman who stays single is not normal, or maybe she is cursed. Being unmarried is viewed as a disability in the African society; thus, single women are flocking the churches to be prayed for and to pray for a husband (Gisesa, 2010, internet retrieved on 02.03.20).

Secondly, marriage is the uniting channel in the pattern of life to all generations (Mbiti,1991). For example, in the Tharaka community, like many African communities, marriage is not only a norm but an essential requirement in which case when a woman remains single and without a child, she develops some self-hatred; and of course, people around her start questioning her future continuity.

In this view, it is a disgrace to be childless in many African communities (Mbiti, 1991).

Among the Tharaka community of Kenya, any woman who dies without a child is referred to as '*mburatuu*' (meaning fruitless or worthless). In this case, she cannot be buried at home, and her body is buried in the bush as a symbol of a significant loss to the family. According to Mbiti, "usually those who attend the funeral are only close relatives" (Mbiti, 1991, p. 121). Nevertheless, according to a myth in the Tharaka community, in such cases, young people should not let bury or even attend the burial; for fear of becoming barren later in life, since a lack of children was regarded as a form of a curse (This remains as a strong superstition among many Kenyan communities and many African communities too).

The third point is that marriage in Africa is a supreme purpose for all people, which is meant to build a family, extend life, and put up the living torch of human existence. Furthermore, marriage is a way of remembering and honoring parents after death by naming children after them. Additionally, marriage is a way of regaining lost immortality. In such a view, the Tharaka community does not value or regard childless women since, after their death, they leave no children behind, which should be a mark for future continuity.

Through marriage, individuals acquire new social status and respect. In Africa, anyone is recognized as a fully mature adult when they are married and have children. In my research, I will endeavor to gather information from single women regarding the societal (Church and local community's) attitude towards single women. My informants are single women who are Christians.

Looking into Christianity in Africa, the majority of church members in different congregations are women. This is according to Prof. Esther Mombo, who said, "to talk or instead to write about women in African Christianity is to bring to light the church in Africa, because they are the church (Mombo, 2016, p.173). Similarly, the number of single women in the African church and Kenya is high,

posing a pastoral challenge to the growing church in Africa. Pastors preach marriage while forgetting that most of their congregants are single women.

It is evident in the history of Christianity to East Africa that women and children had a big number among the first native Christian population who were baptized in the 1620s by missionaries (Loreen Maseno, 2016, p.109). Likewise, there is an overwhelming presence of women in the churches in Africa, the church in Africa is largely composed of and sustained by married and single women who are fully devoted to the work of God (Mombo,2017, p.383).

12 2:2. Single people in the Biblical context

In the Bible, there are single women playing different roles within their respective contexts. In the Old Testament, Ruth is the epitome of single women. While in the New Testament, we can find several single women who served the Lord, for example, Anna the Prophetess.

Paul wrote one of the longest passages in the Bible about singleness. He stated that singleness is a gift and a good gift in serving God 1 Corinthians 7:6-9. Paul was a single man, but he was responding to some questions from the believers in the Corinthian church. He was expressing his views about the married and unmarried people in the Church. In addressing the unmarried and the widows, he said it was good for them to remain single as he was, but if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry 1Corinthians 7: 7-9. In the book of Luke chapter 8, Luke gives a list of 8 women, among whom some were believed to be single women, “who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases and also traveled with Jesus, paying the bills for the team at inns and eating places” (Malcolm, 1982, p. 142).

In the gospels, Jesus’ message was to liberate all people, especially the disadvantaged. In the Jewish culture, women were given low or rather inferior status, but Jesus’s message through parables and some of his examples illustrate his attitude towards women and what he taught concerning them. Jesus gave the women their true worth and dignity. He treated women and men as equals (Wasike, 1992, p. 73). Thus, in relation to my study, I will explore how the

church following Jesus' teachings is treating single women as equal members of their congregations.

A scholar pointed out that Jesus was a 'single savior' with ambiguous sexuality. He argues that most books about him have simply not raised the question of his sexuality and the place of 'single savior' in salvific history (Dale B. Martin, 2006, p. 91). I may not fully agree with the statement, but it is of interest to me in relation to this study, though I cannot equate Christ's singleness with ours. In her argument on singleness, Malcolm comes up with the following questions asking whether single women are God's stepchildren, or does God has favorite children and less favorite ones? Are there second-class Christians in the family of God? (Malcolm, 1982, p., 138). Malcolm states that Paul presents unmarried woman as devoted to the Lord's affairs more than the married woman whose concern is to the experiences of this world on how she can please her husband (1 Cor 7:34-35). As I had stated earlier, to Paul's judgment, a single woman is happier than a married woman (1 Cor 7: 39-40).

Furthermore, in the bible, we have the story of how Saul was persecuting the church by going house to house, dragging off men and women, and put them in prison. This also included single women in the church at that time. It is recorded that Saul, on the road to Damascus, heard the voice asking, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 8:3; 9:4). I believe likewise today when we discriminate against single women who are created in God's image. God is asking us the same question "why are you persecuting me"? The only perfect man who did not discriminate against single women was Jesus Christ. This is because the Savior was single, "he could understand what single people had to face in a society where the marriage was the norm" (Malcolm, 1982, p.141).

13 2:3. Singleness and the gift of sexuality

It is stated in the bible that God created us in his image, which means our body, our soul, and our spirit are the reflection of our God's image. Therefore, the gift of sexual desire is from God. This is according to Dufaut-Hunter, who argues

that “God desires union with her creation and hence, fourth, plants the erotic in us like a seed.” Moreover, he claims that a desiring God creates desiring humans, and so all appetites including the powerful realm of sexual yearning can be received as arenas for training in the love of the God who longs for our faithfulness” (Dufault-Hunter, 2020, p.219). Therefore, according to Hunter, one can confidently believe that sex is really about God. This issue of sexuality will be discussed more in the discussion chapter basing my argument from the data analysis. Furthermore, I will compare what Paul says in the bible about single people and their gift of sexuality in the service to God.

In responding to the question of singlehood in serving God, Paul said that he wished everyone could know the freedom for ministry that he enjoyed as a single person (1Corinthians 7:7).

Paul expressed that “An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned with the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. However, a married woman is concerned with the things of this world on how she can please her husband (Piper & Gruden, 1991). In the verse mentioned above, Paul presents debatable issues on sexuality and service to God.

14 2:4. Singleness in modern Culture

Even in developed countries like America, where they claim equality for all people, basic civil rights and dignities appeal mostly to married people. If you are single, even your dead body is deemed less valuable (Depaulo, 2006, p.6). DePaulo states that money from social security to cover funeral expenses is not available for single people. She supposes that the reasoning behind it is that since single do not have anyone, their dead bodies can simply be tossed into a ditch by anybody who discovers them (Depaulo, 2006, p.6). This is also what happens in African society when a single person dies; the family is in great shame, for there is no life extension (Mbiti, 1991). Any person who dies single he or she is a very unfortunate person without the continuation of life beyond death (Mbiti,1991). This expression shows that there is no room for staying single.

15 2:5. The use and place of sex in African culture

In African societies, sex is not only used for biological purposes but also for religious and social uses. Sex is “for procreation and pleasure; sex plays an important and obvious role in any normal marriage and in any society of the world. There are African peoples among whom rituals are solemnly opened or concluded with actual or symbolic sexual intercourse between husband and wife or other officiating persons” (Mbiti, 1990, pp.142-143). Similarly, sexual organs are believed to be gates of life. Therefore, single women are seen as people who are not participating in the “drama” because marriage is seen as “a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator” (Mbiti, 1990, p. 130).

The Luo community of Kenya believes in widow inheritance, which is commonly referred to as ‘*tero mon*’ (meaning, ‘to take a woman or wife’). ‘*Tero*’ also means, the center of Luo the following: identity, cultural continuity, and the restoration of socio-moral order in what is regarded as the present era of confusion” (Englund, 2011). This is just one example out of several other communities in Kenya with the same traditional beliefs.

These communities believe that after the death of the husband, the widow should undergo traditional rituals, in which sex is part of those rituals, and after going through all that, the widow is inherited by one of her brothers' in-law. Despite these rituals being challenged by Christianity today, there are those who do not understand the relationship between Christianity and their cultural identity (Englund, 2011). Englund argues that culture is still there even after the coming of Christianity. Therefore one will be identified by the culture of the society a person is living in.

In many cases, singles in the society with such challenges experience difficulties in choosing what they should identify with. Nevertheless, it is hard to separate single women from society since they influence each other (Vincent, 1978).

16 2:6. Single women and property inheritance

In Africa, when it comes to property inheritance, single women are discriminated against. Despite the efforts which have been made in the western world on human rights, there is not a much-recorded achievement in this area. Single women continue to suffer greatly in comparison to their male counterparts due to the patriarchal societies in Africa (Adegbite, 2014, retrieved on 01-04-2020). In Kenya, there is Matrimonial Property Acts 2013, “which reinforces equal rights enshrined in the constitution for both spouses when they own property together and granted some new rights to women landowners” (Mbugua, 2018). Despite the law, experts and rights advocates argue that traditions and lack of awareness are part of many other obstacles, which hinder women from registering their property.

Therefore, single women who are mostly viewed by society as incomplete after the death of their husband face humiliation from brothers-in-laws’ family.

17 2:7. Conclusion

My approach in this chapter has been to formulate the foundation and guidelines in answering the research question. This chapter gives the background information about where this research is conducted and the cultural beliefs in the above-mentioned community. It also gives information from the Bible and scholars’ views about single women. In this chapter, the list of sub-topics is also given, which are used to develop this study and provide guidelines in the discussion chapter and the summary of the entire research paper.

18 Chapter Three: Theoretical framework

In this chapter, I will define different types of singlehood after giving the background information in the previous chapter. Moreover, the theories to be

used in this study will be presented. I will explain how these theories will be used in dealing with the issue of single women in the Methodist Church in Kenya.

19 3:1. Defining types of singlehood

There are different views in explaining who single people are. In my study, I am dealing with single women and their experiences in the church. A single woman is a woman who has not or never been legally married; this is the first group of singlehood. The second group of single women is those who are divorced. The third group of single women is widowed. The fourth group is women who have children out of wedlock or rather before having someone to marry. The fifth group in this study is single women who have always been single, either due to cultural beliefs, or rather are still waiting to get someone to marry. The sixth group of single women is Lesbians; women who choose to relate sexually with other women and do not necessarily wish to be married or to relate with men. However, in this study, the last group will not be dealt with.

Singlehood can be explained or rather mean, a woman who does not have a serious partner (Depaulo, 2006). For those who stay single without any serious partner, their relatives and friends will forever be scratching their heads and wondering what is wrong with them (Depaulo, 2006). However, DePaulo views Singlism as the twenty-first-century challenge without a name. He argues that single people are stereotyped, discriminated against, and treated dismissively (Depaulo, 2006, p. 2). In her argument, she expresses the stigmatizing of single people, whether divorced, widowed, or ever single, is a problem or rather challenge that has no name, but she calls it “singlism” (Depaulo, 2006, p. 2).

This research is carried out in a society where single women are perceived as incomplete. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to gather information from five types of single women. In this research, three theories are used, namely: stigma theory, social learning theory, and patriarchal theory. These theories will be used to analyze the data, which will be used to answer the research question. These three theories have also provided the guideline structure for data collection and analysis (Bailey, 2018).

20 3:2. Stigma theory

I will use the Goffman stigma theory to interpret findings from empirical data. Stigma historically originated from Greeks, who were strong on visual aids. They used bodily signs to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of a person (Goffman, 1968, p: 11). Goffman depicts the signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places.

Goffman argues that stigma is a societal establishment through the means of categorizing people and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories. He claims that for a characteristic to be a stigma, it must be shared among the members of the given group, Goffman quoted by (Stanger, and S. Crandall, 2000, p. 63).

Moreover, Goffman states that people make certain assumptions about what the individual ought to be. This is how people think about single people in society. The character we impute to them might better be viewed as an imputation made in potential retrospect. Goffman depicts it as a characterization, which is virtual social identity, whereas the category and attributes they possess can be called their actual social identity (Goffman, 1968, p 12).

In every society, there are social settings to establish the categories of persons likely to be encountered there. Goffman states that there are demands that are made in effect to characterize an individual. In such a view, the category and attributes he could be proved to possess will be called his actual social identity (Goffman, 1968). An individual is stigmatized due to how people perceive him/her in their minds, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive; sometimes, it is also called a failing, a shortcoming, and handicap. Additionally, presenting a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity. Therefore, in this paper, the term stigma will be used to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting (Goffman, 1968, p.12-13).

Moreover, some scholars view stigmatization as dehumanization, threat, aversion, and sometimes the depersonalization of others into stereotypic caricatures. In addition, stigmatization is personally, interpersonally, and socially costly (Dovidio, Major, and Crocker, 2000, p. 1). Similarly, it is believed that being the target of stereotypes and prejudice may result in distortions of the personality of the stigmatized person- most often in low self-esteem (e.g., Allport, quoted by Dovidio, Major and Croker, 2000, p. 1-2).

However, according to Dovidio, Major, and Crocker, there are some members of the stigmatized group of single women with positive reactions in life. Although the people in their culture stigmatize them or rather in society, mostly, they have high self-esteem. They perform at high levels in academic achievement and other outcomes, are happy, and appear to be quite resilient despite their negative experiences (Dovidio, Major, and Crocker, 2000, p. 2). Furthermore, stigma is mostly a social construction, explained by the broader cultural context (Dovidio, Major, and Crocker, p. 3).

Dovidio, Major, and Crocker describe stigma, not in terms of its key structural elements or functions, but they have proposed a corresponding alternative viewpoint of endeavoring to locate the study of stigma within the bigger context of general social-psychological processes. They have come up with three fundamental dimensions illustration as the following, (1) “perceiver-target,” (2) “personal-group-based identity,” and (3) “affective-cognitive-behavioral response” (Dovidio, Major, and Crocker, 2000, p. 10). These three fundamental dimensions will be discussed in this chapter and the entire paper.

21 3:2.1. Perceiver-target

Dovidio, Major, and Crocker argue that to understand stigma and stigmatization, one should recognize the different perspectives and experiences of those who are stigmatizing others and those who are being stigmatized. They have termed those people who are stigmatizing others as ‘perceivers.’ These people are referred to by other researchers as ‘non-stigmatized’ or as ‘normal.’ Nevertheless, they have

noted that people who are involved in stigmatizing others may also be stigmatized in one way or another (Dovidio, Major and Crocker 2000, p.10).

However, this may occur in a different aspect; hence, “these different perspectives influence the social roles of stigmatizers and stigmatized individuals, on how they adapt to and cope with those roles, which eventually affect the development of personal and group identities at large” (Dovidio, Major and Crocker 2000, p. 11). This means that stigma is a harmful social issue that affects both the stigmatizer and the stigmatized.

22 3:2.2. The personal- group-based identity

Dovidio expresses stigma in three primary dimensions, namely (1) ‘perceiver-target,’ (2) ‘personal- group-based identity,’ and (3) ‘affective-cognitive-behavioral.’ The second primary dimension of the framework involves the distinction between personal and social identity. Additionally, stigma is both an interpersonal and an intergroup phenomenon; to understand we should assimilate or rather requires the following knowledge for both (1) “personal processes, reactions, and identity; and (2) collective processes, action, and identity” (Dovidio, Major and Crocker. 2000, p. 13). The basic idea is “for considering the behaviors of the targets as well as of perceivers. It affects on how people process information and how they interpret the information” (Dovidio, Major and Crocker 2000, P. 13).

23 3:2.3. The affective-cognitive-behavioral dimension

The affective-cognitive-behavioral dimension is composed of three parts or, rather, three views of attitudes in general. These may occur in any order, and their effects are not necessarily individualistic or rather independent (Dovidio, Major and Crocker 2000, p. 15).

All people are human beings and have always been social beings, a single woman is similarly a social human in society, and therefore, this research will attempt to understand how single women are stigmatized in relating with other members in their society. Mostly some scholars of psychology and stigmatization depict that

stigmatized individuals have a feeling that they are constantly “on stage” “in conversation, meaning that they have heightened selfconsciousness and continuously feel the need to create the impression of being normal despite their stigmas” (Hebl, Tickle, and Heatherrton, 2000, p. 289).

24 3:3. Self-esteem

There is an argument that the effects of stigma on the self are negotiated or rather arranged, created, and acted upon in the situation. However, the issue of self-worth, or the lack of it, in stigmatized individuals is not a stable, deep-seated personality characteristic. It emerges in the situation and purpose meaning given to that situation for the self. Sometimes it is shaped by the ideological meanings that a person can bring to the situation (Crocker and Quinn, 2000, p. 159). Moreover, ideologies or rather cultural values are also a type of collective representation that may affect the meaning of situations for stigmatized and non-stigmatized individuals (Crocker and Quinn, 2000, p. 167).

25 3:4. Social learning theory

The social learning theory is a way of explaining and approaching human behavior in terms of a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants (Bandura, 1977, p. vii). Bandura states that people are not equipped with inborn repertoires of behavior; he believes they must learn them. New response patterns can be acquired either by direct experience or by observation (Bandura, 1977, 16).

According to Bandura, people learn not only by observation but also learn by attending to and perceiving accurately “the significant features of the modeled behavior” (Bandura, 1977, p. 24).

Bandura adds that “some forms of modeling are so intrinsically rewarding that they hold the attention of people of all ages for extended periods” (Bandura, 1977, p.24). Another modeled way of learning in humans is done through verbal coding of modeled events (Bandura, 1977). It is through the modeled activities which “have been transformed into images and readily utilizable verbal symbols;

these memory codes serve as guides for performance” (Bandura, 1977, p.26). In this research, I have used the social learning theory, which is an extremely broad theory with applicability across a large range of topics (Bailey, 2018). Social learning theory interacts well with stigma theory in guiding me in data collection from single women who are my participants.

This theory argues that every act of discrimination against women is learned through a modeled behavior in environmental culture and subculture verbal symbols or rather words used in society. This theory explains how married women in the social group command greater attention than single women. An example is the modeled conduct and functional value of the behaviors displayed by the community in this study towards single women. These values and models are highly influential in determining how people will do things or rather view single women even in the twenty-first century. Therefore, due to the lack of pleasing characteristics laid down through models and values, single women are generally ignored or rejected. Moreover, this theory state that there is a representational system in society and in the church, which is not in favor of single women.

26 3:5. Patriarchal theory

Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in making roles in society. In a patriarchal society, men have moral authority, and they have control over social privilege, property, and political systems. According to Karen, “patriarchy is the complex of ideologies and structures that sustains and perpetuates male control over females” (Karen, 1989). The practices and social structures of the patriarchal theory play a great role in this research. In most of the African societies, there exists a gender hierarchy where males are over females, which has been almost believed to be the natural way of life. Single women are part of women groups in the society who are mostly challenged by the patriarchal beliefs and norms. This is evident when dealing with the issue of property, and land title deeds, which are inherited by the male lineage. Patriarchy has provided value for male identity in the public arena, but single women are devalued in all ways. In traditional patriarchal practices, single women are

denied adult autonomy in civil status. They are treated as permanent minors and dependents of fathers and husbands (Ruether, 1989). Additionally, in the patriarchal societal practices, women are devalued into statuses like that of children and slaves, they have no right to acquire their own property, but they are bound under a yoke of obedience and servitude to men. Therefore, this study will focus on the experiences and encounters of single women in the community of the study.

27 3:6. Summary of Theories

Some scholars think it is a capital mistake to theorize before the collection of the data; however, Bailey expresses that research and theory are blended. Despite heated discussions about the significance of theory and field research, it is evident that research should have at least some theoretical grounding (Bailey, 2018, p: 49). Bailey depicts that theories are made of concepts.

Therefore, the researcher should think about them as ‘what we want to study’ (Bailey, p: 50). She further states that theory is an explanation of a phenomenon or occurrence. Theories are made up of concepts, such as power, inequality, leadership style, positive rewards, political subjectivities Casati, 2016 quoted by (Bailey 2018, p.8). Bailey argues that these concepts become the basis for the researcher for describing the data results. Moreover, she states that concepts are typically abstract ideas that do not exist in a tangible form; by giving these examples as follows; incentives, biodiversity, subcultures, resistance, masculinity, humorous interactions, identities, family stress, body image, self-disclosure, and structures of influence (Bailey, 2018, p. 50).

On their part, Mats Alvesson and Dan Karreman argue that theory emerges through intimate contact with empirical materials and the frictions and tension between and within various data sets (Alvesson and Karreman, 2011, p. 2). They both argue that the data collected from case studies will navigate the process and provide a well-grounded and robust theory with strong empirical validity. They claim that theory provides an insight into the complexities and intricacies of empirical reality (Alvesson and Karreman, 2011, p. 3).

After different views and ideas from scholars about theory, a theory is often seen as providing direction and control, but it can also be mobilized as a tool for disclosure. Additionally, theory can come up not only with other theories and their lines of interpretation but also sensitive constructions and interpretations of empirical material (Alvesson and Karreman, 2011, p. 37).

In conclusion, the three noted theories above give different considerations on how single women are seen in the community and the church. The stigma theory states how society establishes the means of categorizing single women as people who are incomplete. Moreover, stigma theory argues that single women in society have low self-esteem; due to arranged and created values that are culturally set up in society. Stigma theory also explains how single women are basically grouped or categorized as people of low identity in the community and viewed as misfits.

The social learning theory incorporates stigma theory by indicating single women are misfits and incomplete in society through the models and functional values that are created.

Patriarchal Theory is used here to show how patriarchal practices and social structures are a primary power and a predominant force in the social system in making roles in society. The patriarchal society is dominated by practices and structures which are in favor of men having control over women. This effect leads to single women to have low self-esteem in the community.

These three theories will guide the research and the researcher's experiences, together with the participants who are the single women in the Methodist Church in Kenya, to gain an understanding of answering the research question.

28 Chapter Four: Methods and Methodology

In this chapter, I explain the methods and methodology used in the collection of data. According to Carol A. Bailey, the methodology includes such things as follows: "sampling, gaining entrée, resolving ethical concerns, and maintaining relationships in the field" (Bailey, 2007, p.63). All of these will be discussed in this chapter.

In doing research, one needs to come up with a way of doing it, and that is why each researcher should come up with a research methodology. " A Methodology is a way of explaining and justifying particular methods that are used in a given study" (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012, p.31). A Methodology is also a way of thinking about how the researcher is studying social phenomena (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Moreover, methods are the techniques and procedures used by the researcher for gathering and analyzing data.

In answering the research question, I will be dealing with single women in the Methodist church in Kenya. I aim to get information from single women and their experiences in the church. In the investigation, a qualitative method was done in which 13 different single women aged between 35-55 years were interviewed. They were in different categories as follows: 5 single, childless, and unmarried, three unmarried singles with children, two divorced women, and three widowed.

I purposefully selected cases for a systematic study (Bailey, 2007, p. 64), in which case, a semistructured interview guide was used for data collection. This method included a list of questions or specific topics to be covered in the research according to Bryman who argues, "but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway on how to reply, questions may not follow on exactly in the way outlined on the schedule" (Bryman, 2012, p.471). This type of interview guide helps the interviewers to ask questions as they pick up on things said by interviewees. In this view, there was a need by the researcher to investigate the experiences of single women through their own stories, particularly within the church. I chose to ask "how?" questions, which are better than "why?" questions—asking 'why'

questions naturally provoke a defensive response (Howard S. Becker, 1998, p. 58).

29 4:1. Research Design

In carrying out this research process, I used some methodology procedures to come up with a research purpose and a research question. Through the purpose and questions, a research design was developed. The field research design was used to research single women in the Methodist

Church in Kenya, who shared their "lives from their perspectives" (Baily, 2018, p.69). A research design is, therefore, the structure that is used in evaluating social research.

Furthermore, in Bryman's view, a research design gives guidance to the whole framework for the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2012). The research design holds all the elements of the study together. In this case, each research design has methodological implications, "which affect most of the other parts of the research hence using the right design is essential" (Bailey, 2018, p.69). Additionally, research design has been thought of as "being more powerful than methodology because while methodology includes the procedures for obtaining data, the research design determines what types of data you need to obtain" (Bailey, 2018, p.69). In conducting this research, I concur with Bailey that all that mattered most was to practice consistency between methodology and research design (Bailey, 2018).

30 4:2. Research strategy

During the field research, the following strategies were used, namely: questioning, observing physical and emotional expressions, together with making use of life experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This strategy of questioning the informants led me to the "discovery of new knowledge" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p.90). The above strategies helped in getting the information from the single women through their expression of words and their response to the questions asked, which included follow-up questions. Exploratory questions as a form of gathering information were also considered. Moreover, while the informants responded to the interview guide questions, the researcher gained

insights from the informants' life experiences for which both the researcher and the informants happened to share a common culture.

31 4:3. Research sampling

In this research, a purposive sampling method was used as a preferred strategy to get participants. Through this method, those sampled were relevant to the research questions. According to Bryman, purposive sampling is used by the researcher "so that sampled members differ from each other in terms of key characteristics relevant to the research question" (Bryman, 2016, p.408). Additionally, purposeful sampling helped to select a subset of single women from different local Churches in the Methodist Church, and in this case, the selected thirteen (13) single women from the larger number of single women who were the informants were selected. This purposeful sampling method, as Bailey argues (Bailey, 2018), was also a way to select cases for the systematic study that are information-rich for this research study. Moreover, the researcher used snowballing to get some informants, who were referrals from the initial informants.

32 4:4. Entering the field

In July 2019, I traveled from Oslo, Norway, to Kenya. The following day I started to communicate with those who accepted to be interviewed. I contacted them to book dates and times for the meeting. It took me two weeks to interview the first seven participants because they were from different local Churches, and I was forced to hire a car to reach them on time.

The first seven participants introduced me to other relevant informants in their local church. It took five weeks to manage the targeted number of thirteen single women. This was due to some of them failing or meeting up for the appointments late than agreed, which led to a waste of time. I conducted interviews with three participants at their places of work, which was a challenge due to interruptions from the customers as they were saleswomen.

In conducting the interviews, a brief introduction about the researcher was made to each informant before conducting the interview. This was done to build some confidence with the informants since also the researcher was familiar with their culture. I concur with Bailey's (Baily, 2018) argument that conducting fieldwork closer to your home requires less preparation but still demands some measure of planning. After all, assurance was given to each informant that the research was confidential and anonymous. I was doing that according to the instructions from the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) permission by giving them the consent letter to read, understand, and then sign before the interview.

In adhering to the instructions of anonymity, the real names of the participants were not given, which in this case remain anonymous. However, coded names for 13 singles women are used. Their names are divided into four groups as follows: the first group, Ncugu, Muthoni, Kagodu, Ciakuthi, and Karuru, these are names of women who are aged from 35 to 55 years. The second group is two divorced women, Kangai and Maria. The third group is single women with children out of wedlock, Gatumi, Mukwanjeru, and Mwendu, and the fourth group is widows,

Joanina, Tabitha, and Martha. These names are, therefore, used for the participants' anonymity. These are the names used to hide the identity of the participants; hence they will be used to analyze the data. During the interview period, rapport was developed with each participant, which, according to Bailey, is achieved when trusting relationships between the researcher and participant in a setting are formed (Bailey, 2018). Building rapport with the participant was particularly important as a researcher to avoid being suspicious of the researcher's presence.

33 4:5. Interviews

It took some time to plan on how to conduct interviews for the field research since it was not easy to work or rather practice. In Bailey's view, for the researcher to undertake this process, one needs "the ability to adapt to changing settings and situations" (Baily, 2018, p.105). During the field study, semi-

structured interviews were used since they have some level of flexibility. In semi-structured interviews, I used "an interview guide with specific questions that are organized by topics, but questions are not necessarily asked in a specified order" (Bailey, 2018, p.107). This type of interview guide gives a room and flow of the interview, which enables the researcher to determine when and how a question is asked. In conducting the research, openended questions were also used "what" and "how" questions. These questions are often easy for the informants to respond to and are frequently useful to evoke detailed responses (Baily, 2018). The open-ended questions, therefore, allowed the participants to elaborate more.

Similarly, as already mentioned, rapport is an important ingredient for carrying out interviews in the field. The researcher's opening remarks are the first steps to prepare the participant to feel comfortable and willing to help (Bailey, 2018). During the interviews, I appreciated all the informants for their willingness to participate in the research process before briefly introducing myself and the purpose of the research. After this, I let the informants read through the consent letter and signed it before seeking permission to record and note all that they said.

34 4:6. Written Sources

This research is done in consultation with various relevant literature, including written materials like books, journals, and internet sources. All the sources used for this study will be listed and attached in the literature review at the end of this study.

35 4:7. Tools for data collection

The following tools were used to collect data: a digital recorder, two cell phones, a notebook, and a pen. I chose to record because it was interesting to see and hear the way they responded to the questions. I, therefore, used a digital recorder and a cell phone due to the challenge of lack of electricity and lack of enough batteries. Furthermore, Bailey argues that it is reasonable for field researchers to

conduct interviews by using a way of communication technology, "such as cell phones, iPad, and computers" (Bailey, 2018, p.116).

Through recording the interviews, the researcher was able to observe people's actions and gestures. Moreover, all recorded interviews are only used by the researcher in the process of data analysis and transcription, and after finishing writing this thesis, all the recorded interviews must be deleted.

36 4:8. Data analysis

After conducting interviews, the researcher started the process of cleaning, transcribing, and modeling data to discover useful information to answer the research question. This process of trying to make sense out of different interviews or rather a massive amount of data is a difficult task but also interesting. I started by engaging in a rigorous process of coding to get portions of the data, which is potentially useful for the research question. Through this process of coding, it is argued that one can identify key events, daily routines, and, more importantly, the implications of the respondent's action and so on (Bailey, 2018). In this stage of analysis, the focus was on concepts and how they are related. Constant comparisons to break down the data into manageable pieces were made (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Then from those pieces, comparisons for similarities and differences were made. After getting the similarities and differences, I grouped them "under the same conceptual heading" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p.7). In doing further analysis and forming categories, themes were developed through analytical techniques to answer the research question.

Through the analysis of data, it was possible to meet the general purpose of the research study, "to understand the culture, behaviors, values, beliefs, norms, social interactions, and organizations" (Bailey, 2018, p.11). Moreover, this process has helped me to understand how these things affect the lives of single women and the meanings they attach to their experiences in society.

37 4:9. Research ethics

In this research, ethics is part of every stage, from data collection to analysis. Additionally, putting participants' interests at the heart of decision-making will be upheld (Jane Ritchie, 2014, p. 78). This was done through the consent letter that each informant in this study signed. The informant must first read the letter and agree to participate in my research project willingly (Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2011, p.63). In carrying out this research, I was aware of the ethical principles involved, which should be of great concern in social research. Those ethical principles are one, whether there is harm to participants, two, if there is a lack of informed consent, three if there is an invasion of privacy, and four, whether deception is involved (Alan Bryman, 2016, p.125). In conducting research, ethical considerations permeate every aspect of my field research process (Bailey, 2018). During my time of field work carrying out interviews with my participant, I was keen to follow the four ethical principles mentioned above. In safeguarding their identity, I encouraged anonymity. I equally gave them room to withdraw from the study voluntarily in adherence to the research ethics. Furthermore, as it was mentioned, each participant was informed of what the study entailed before participation.

38 4:2. Challenges and limitations

In conducting this kind of study, one encounters several challenges as they deal with different individuals who treat their issue with privacy. While some would wish to disclose everything, others may choose to withhold some. In this case, during the interviews, some participants posed overly sensitive and private questions regarding their private lives, which were not part of the research questions. Nevertheless, some of those questions were challenging, although they will not be discussed or mentioned in this study.

39 4:2.1 Punctuality

Keeping time was a major drawback and a limitation during this data collection. This is because some participants arrived for the meeting later than expected; hence, we always started and finished far later than planned, which was time-

wasting. Others ended up not showing up for the appointment, and we had to reschedule the meeting for another day.

40 4:2.2 Long-distance and poor communication

The distance and poor communication were challenges too since most of the participants lived far from the town. There were also problems with the network, while some did not have mobile telephones. Communication, therefore, became almost impossible at times, and I was forced to use extra on the budget for the car hire to reach out to some of the participants.

41 Chapter Five: Analysis of interviews

In this chapter, I will analyze the data from the participants; this is a process of searching for meaning within the data. To undertake this process of data analysis will enable me to come up with the results which will be answering the research question (Carol A. Bailey, 2018, p.159). Moreover, this process of analyzing data helps the researcher to organize and interrogate data, hence allowing the researcher to come up with patterns, identify themes, develop explanations, and discover relationships (Bailey, 2018). The researcher evaluates, interprets, categorizes the data, and develop patterns.

Furthermore, I will manage, organize, and retrieve the voices of the informants as they emerged from the data (Amanda Coffey, Paul Atkinson, 1996, p.26). I will make some comparisons look for relationships, and try to identify patterns by managing the details of data (Juliet Corbin & Anselm Strauss, 2015, p.86). In the process of my analytic strategies, I will make constant comparisons and ask questions: What is being said or done? Who is doing it? Why? (Juliet Corbin & Anselm Strauss, 2015, p.87).

In this chapter, I present the informant's narratives through the data collected from single women. I will present themes as sub-topics, which are further subdivided into semi-themes as they emerged from the empirical data. The sub-topics are arranged per the research questions consecutively; first, how the single women express their experiences and treatment in the church, secondly, how single women's experiences are impacted by their local communities.

The data is from the 13 informants presented in the methodology chapter.

42 5:1. Experiences of single women in the Church.

The report from the data collected through the interview during the field research is expressed from analysis as the following semi-themes, lack of pastoral care, single women and exclusion in the church, ex-communication, limited life partner, remarriage, and freedom of choice. The information from the

participants is presented according to the way they were responding to the question of how the church takes care of single women.

43 5:1.1. Lack of Pastoral Care

The informants' responses to the issue of the way the church offers pastoral care to single women are presented here. Most of the participants raised their concerns asserting that the church offers insufficient or at times does not understand that single women need special care. They complained that a lot of attention is given mostly to married women with families than the singles. This is evident through, for instance, fellowships, prayer meetings, couples' seminars, and conferences, which are organized annually with married women as the target group. In response to this, most informants, therefore, expressed their frustrations and distress. Muthoni narrated her story of how she has been a member of the Church for many years, giving her money to support the church. Despite her commitment to the church, nobody, even the pastor, seems to recognize her effort. She explained that the only concern of her fellow Christians was to ask if there were plans for her to get married, as expressed below. I have been a member of the church for more than ten years, and I have never seen any leader or even the pastor bothering to ask how I am doing. Nevertheless, I am a committed member of the church, as I give my money and time fully in support of God's work. (...), instead, the only concern with my fellow Christians is when I am planning to be married. This question leaves me with a lot of stress because it has always been my prayer all the time, although I have not been lucky to find anybody (Muthoni).

Muthoni, who was in her mid-40s, was expressing a lack of pastoral care and attention as a single woman in the church, though she was a fully committed member by keeping the disciplines of the church. She argues that her position has been relegated to only giving, an experience she opines that being single is stressful. Despite Muthoni dedicating her life and money to serving the church, the leaders from the church did not recognize her sacrificial service. Moreover, Muthoni shared her wide experience of more than ten years in her local church and how she was being excluded due to her status of singlehood.

The questioning of her singleness by fellow Christians has always left her with stress, only trusting God for somebody to marry her in the future. How Muthoni was being treated in her church of ten years of service and dedication is a clear indication of how the effort of single women is not valued despite their great sacrifice in the church. This demining attitude from Christians leaves most of the single women with low self-esteem as single unmarried women. Some end up restraining themselves from taking any leadership roles even if they can do it better than those who are married.

Another participant said from the time when the husband died, the church was only involved in the arrangements of the burial of her husband, and since that time, four years down the line, the church does not know what she encounters in life.

It has been a very painful experience for me. All the way through after the death of my husband, I was left to struggle alone. I have no one to share with, what I pass through in my family, and even in society. "Ntigwa atari na muntu gwakwira thina ciakwa" (I am just a widow without anybody to share my challenges with). It is only God's word from the bible and prayers, which gives me peace in my heart (Martha).

Martha, in the quote above, narrates how she was neglected by the church; she was left to suffer without any pastoral care. Additionally, even the local community did not care about her. Martha was expressing her painful experience after the death of her husband; she was left alone to deal with her difficult memories and moments of loneliness' without any person to support her spiritually or materially. Lack of support from other members and the pastor was a challenging experience for Martha. She went on to say that the respect she had when her husband was alive disappeared after he died. "It hurts to see the way people treat you as if you are less human just because you have lost your husband" (Martha).

According to Martha, she was expressing some of the experiences she passed through after the death of her husband. Moreover, she was not being respected as before when her husband was alive. This shows how single women are disrespected in society, and as a result, they end up with social stigma. The African belief systems are not friendly to single women in society; this is due to a generalized view attributed to single women characterizing them as weak people in the society who do not have equal rights with other people. Her only source of strength and comfort is derived from the Bible, and her communication with God through prayers.

One informant expressed how she feels out of place when the pastor's sermon focuses on the married women and the family issues; nothing is said or taught in the church about single women to encourage them.

I am normally left with a lot of questions in my mind, wondering if the pastor and the leaders in the church have any concern for single women. Although I have been a church member for more than ten years now, I am not aware of any program for pastoral care to single women members who are quite a number in the Church (Karuru).

Karuru was describing her dissatisfaction after being a member for many years in the church. She realized that the pastor and the leaders' main concern was focused on married women. She categorically stated how the Church does not have any programs for single women.

Furthermore, Karuru and Martha raised their concerns regarding the pastor's routines on a visit to the members' homes. They held that the pastor and the church leaders rarely plan or schedule pastoral visits to single women's homes. This could be due to the poverty level with single women, and several of them live in single-room houses. They lamented that the only scheduled home pastoral visits are majored for families and couples, forgetting that the single women also need pastoral care like any other member in the church.

Additionally, informants expressed that the local church and pastors show less concern to the single women compared to the married ones or those with families. Probably, this is related to social stereotypes and wrong perceptions of associating singleness with loose morals. Therefore, according to Karuru and Martha, single women need to be included and respected by the church and community. Instead, what they are receiving is negative attitudes towards them. Also, Karuru expressed her feeling that the church should do more on how to handle single women.

I think the church should be aware of the struggle and temptations we pass through as a group of single women and try to support and encourage us the same way as the married people (Karuru).

Karuru said the church should come up with ways of helping single women through seminars and the word of God to overcome their struggles and challenges in life. Therefore, pastoral care to single women is a ministry that is lacking in the church, according to my participants. Single women need care and love from the church. The church is the institution of the love of God with a mission love to all people who are created in the image of God. According to the participants, they are not experiencing the love of God in the church; instead, they have faced negative attitudes from the fellow members of the church. Jesus depicted a good example in the gospel of John 4:4-26, where we find the story of the Samaritan woman and Jesus talking to her with respect and the love of God though she was a single woman with loose morals in the society.

Likewise, the participants argue they should be treated fairly with love without looking at their status in society. Single women face many difficulties and struggles against the natural rhythms of life. Additionally, they push their way against the customs discrimination in society; with all these challenges, there is no joy in any way. In each of my informants, there was an expression of discouragement and self-pity due to the way people say and treat single women in society.

44 5:1.2. Single women and exclusion from positions in the church

The criteria for electing Church leaders were also highly criticized by the single women claiming that they are not only excluded in the decision making of the church but also considered unfit for Church leadership. The group of single women who were interviewed claimed that the church either excludes them from becoming leaders or are partially given fewer responsibilities like taking care of children, leading choruses, and songs in the Church. In some instances, some argued that such responsibilities are only given to them as a way of testing them, especially single women who cannot give birth to children. One informant said that when some Church responsibilities are given to them as a way of testing them, then they feel so frustrated and mostly are in great distress.

I feel so frustrated in my church because the only responsibility entrusted to me is to take care of the Sunday school children. Handling children is not an easy task for me. It is challenging because married women in the church discuss my inability to give birth, even amidst their children. This makes me feel sad, and in most cases, I feel like giving up (Ciakuthi - single and barren lamented). It is like testing my faith in God because one wonders why the church does not consider giving such responsibilities to the women who have experience in childbirth and child-rearing (Ciakuthi).

Ciakuthi expressed her frustrations and painful challenges in her local church, associated with her barrenness. She construed how the church misunderstood her situation by giving her a role of teaching Sunday School that reminds her of her struggles with childlessness, a situation she has been undergoing in her life. Her pain was emanating from the married women in the church who were discussing Ciakuthi in a negative way, name-calling her “Nthaata” (barren), a woman who is not capable of giving birth or rather unproductive. Therefore, due to those negative sentiments from women in the church, Ciakuthi was feeling the

responsibility of teaching and caring for Sunday school more like testing her faith.

This task, according to her, should be given to those women with children who are knowledgeable in dealing with children. I tried to figure out the pain from her facial expression, as she explained. There is a stigma surrounding women who are infertile because they are blamed for this condition. They feel like a punishment that stands to be an attack on their vision and focus on the future. Barren women in the field of my study have no status in society. They live a life of great sorrow and regrets, feeling that they are missing something important in their lives.

Furthermore, another informant argued that although she feels talented enough to lead God's people, no one considers giving her the responsibility to do so. Many think she should first get married to lead God's people, which she thinks is ridiculous among people who claim to love and know God.

They always ask me to lead songs and choruses as they think I have a talent, but they cannot ask me to lead prayers or become a leader of the women group, which I think is kind of discriminative since I feel I have a calling to be a leader (Ncugu explained).

The informant lamented on how she is always excluded from some leadership roles while she feels that she can do better. She feels discriminated against and excluded due to the marital status of her being single. This poses some questions regarding Church liturgy and understanding of worship. I interpreted her inquiry to be included in Church leadership as a great potentiality and a special gift in the Church, besides just leading choruses and songs in the Church.

From the above informant's views, there is much discrimination towards single women. Single women are excluded from church leadership, and their potential is relegated to either leading chorus or teaching Sunday school. Those who are barren expressed the stigma associated with being made to teach Sunday School

when they do not have children of their own. This may be a liturgical problem that offered fewer alternative roles or has no place for single women in the church. According to Ncugu, single women should be included in all Church activities and leadership without any kind of discrimination. Ncugu said, in most cases, single women are discriminated against in the church, and in society, the Church neglects the biblical view of singleness as a gift from God.

45 5:1.3. Excommunication

The Methodist church in Kenya classifies members as either those under full membership or not full members. Although all Christians are welcome to be church membership, not all become full members at once. Moreover, there are different rules and conditions for membership and full membership. Members under the church discipline are those whose marital and social moral status has been questioned not only by the church but also by society.

For instance, women who are unmarried either by choice or coincidence normally face some challenges in the church by being categorized as not full members and cannot partake in the Holy communion, among other things. Those who have been divorced lose their full membership by virtue of divorcing since the church does not either allow divorce or remarriage. These rules and conditions create boundaries and some division in the church hence creating the dos and don'ts system. It is therefore in such a view that many of the informants who happened to be divorced women argued that the church creates a sharp division between them and other members, as one informant observed.

I was a very active member of the women group and a leader for many years, until the time when I was divorced, and the pastor told me that I am no longer a full member and cannot be elected to be a leader of the women group or partake the holy communion since I am divorced. The pastor also declared before the church gathering that I was under the church discipline as a punishment for divorce (Maria).

Maria stated how the pastor excluded her from the church leadership and partaking of holy communion after being divorced. This was a shameful experience to maria after many years of leadership in the church.

She went on to say that since then, she has no possibility of partaking the eucharist and when the time comes for the communion, she goes out only to join in later after everything has ended, which she explains as a form of discrimination. Furthermore, she wonders how the love of God is portrayed in such a situation where the church defines who is or not a sinner sin (bad and good). Moreover, she expressed how the church should not discriminate against those who are single either through choice or some lack of the right person to marry. Single women are treated as inferior based on their marital status in the church and the local community.

After all, we are all created in the image of God, and God sees us the same way, regardless of our marital status. The participant narrated how the church discriminates against single women, despite Paul in 1corinthians 7:6-9 expressing singlehood as a good gift to serve God. Therefore, the church of the twenty-first century should allow single women to have the freedom to render their service to God like the married women without being discriminated against.

46 5:1.4. Limited marriage partners

Some of my informants expressed how challenging it is to find a good partner. It becomes a challenge or rather impossible to find somebody to marry. Despite devoting their time in prayer and supporting the work of God, they end up without a life partner. Due to this situation, married women feel very insecure about relating to single women. They fear their husbands may be in a sexual relationship with them. This situation is a hopeless place to be in life, and support is needed from the pastor and fellow members of the Church.

I have a lot of questions for God regarding my unmarried situation. I always wonder why I do not get someone to marry me, despite having been serving God for quite a long period of

time? I realized that I must come to terms with real life and the fact that there are more women than men. Most of us single women will not be married because there are far more single women than men. Moreover, the Church does not advocate for polygamous marriages. Anyway, it is hard to accept the challenge, although it sometimes hurts to be single in such a context, though still with hopes of finding a suitor one day. I am now fifty-two years old, and perhaps no one would like to marry a barren woman ("muka utaumba guciara" a woman who cannot give birth). My singlehood status has created some mistrusts among my fellow married women in our Church (Kagodu).

Kagodu expressed her commitment to God and how she has been trusting God for somebody to marry, but nothing happened. She realized at age fifty-two, nobody is willing to marry her because she cannot give birth. Furthermore, Kagodu said not all single women will be married due to their number which is more than men. It has been a challenging experience for Kagodu due to how people think about her. It is common within the local society to associate being single, barren, and widowed as a curse. Some offer sacrifices to break the curse and find a breakthrough. Single women without children are devalued and discredited in society, due to this negative attribute those leads to self-pity. The issue of getting somebody to marry remains to be a challenge to single women who are always expecting to be married in the future. The major challenge faced by single women looking for life partners could perhaps be due to the lack of or few single Christian men in the church. Dating or marrying a non-Christian becomes a dilemma for several informants. This is due to the church discipline teachings that it is not right to get married to non-Christians.

47 5:1.5. Social life and loneliness

The expressions from the participants in this study were that each one of them, in their lives, feel lonely most of the time. As human beings, they need somebody to share their joy and their sorrows, something which is not applicable to single

women. According to their response, the sexual urge is something that cannot be avoided in any way, but sometimes because of many challenges and stress, sexual desire is suppressed. However, the sexual urge is a natural urge to every human being, which is a gift given by God to all humanity. In practicing self-control that does not stop the feeling of sexual urge, the participants expressed that sometimes things go out of control, and they fulfill their sexual urge against the word of God or rather bible teachings and the church doctrines. Sexual desires are one of the natural needs which are programmed into us by nature, which is the most powerful of human desires.

This issue of being single is not my choice. I would like to get married because I feel that I need a man. God created me perfectly, not that I lack anything in my body. But my big question is why God allows this to happen to me. I usually pity myself and have some bitterness due to all that I pass through (Gatumi).

Additionally, the participants expressed their feelings of stress due to the attention directed at them because of their age and single status. They normally feel displaced in some social gatherings and weddings where the focus is more on the married people without considering the single people. One of the participants narrated her story, saying.

In our family, I feel insecure and displaced when parents and siblings make rude comments and jokes. I started feeling a lot of pressure and stress at age 25, and now when I am approaching 40 years, it is even becoming worse (Ciakuthi).

In the African context, no woman should stay single unless if she is not normal. Therefore any single woman in the family members believes that she will be married. In the field of my study the society and the family members, they do not accept that a woman can stay without getting married, though the number of single women is growing.

The older generation does not understand how a woman can stay without getting married. Therefore, as Ciakuthi expressed what she normally faces in her family, single women must face relentless pressure from their parents, forcing them to get married. Moreover, the lack of children is a source of the stress experienced by single women whose clock to have babies is ticking as they as they grow old. Most women do want children, even if they do not want to get married. Aging puts pressure on single women and leads to loneliness, where they start to find a mate as soon as possible or let go of the dream to have kids. When a single woman turns 30 years above, society has different opinions. For instance, some people think she is abnormal, and others think she is cursed.

48 5:2. Experiences from the local context

Most of the African societies are patriarchal oriented or, so to say, they are patriarchal dominant. In this regard, what people view as right and wrong is defined and constructed by the male influence. Men are the custodian of the cultural norms, they determine how societies should treat men and women, and men are more valued than women are. Women are rarely or never consulted when it comes to decision-making, as they are viewed to be less than men and have little or nothing to be consulted. This stereotype is not only evident among many

African communities but also is manifest in Christian groups and Church gatherings. Single women are generally invisible, unimportant, or rather uninteresting social actors. These African societies' systems discriminate, against single women, leading them to have low esteem in the church and community.

In carrying out this study, single women expressed how they mostly face several challenges attached to African beliefs and practices. Most African tribes usually have different views, but some opinions cut across all tribes like myths, rituals, and rites of passage are fundamental in African traditional belief systems. In this case, I have learned that the patriarchal practices and social structures are still

influencing both the church and society. Such issues emanating from patriarchal traditions stigmatize single women who are members of the studied churches.

49 5:2.1. Social stigma and stereotypes

One of my participants, a widowed woman, narrated what she passed through after her husband's death, expressed how things turned out to be significantly worse, she said.

After her husband's death, brothers in law started fighting for her husband's properties, including the desire to inherit her. I was shocked to see one of the brothers in law wanted to take me as his second wife, forcefully. I refused and opted to move out of my marital home when the larger family members and relatives came into the scene pleading with me to follow the rules and their people's customs. The elders advised me to be inherited to extend the family of their departed son. I later decided to approach the church for some advice, although, till today, I never heard anything from them' (...). A few months later, they evicted me from my matrimonial home, and I now live in the slums (Joanina).

In this case of Joanina, there is a clear indication that culture has a more significant influence than the church; hence that explains why the church did not respond to the cry of the voiceless Joanina. Moreover, since the church could not render any assistance to the widowed member, she was thrown out of her marital home to the slum.

The stereotype among single widowed women is also common among single unmarried women. Another woman narrated that if a single unmarried and childless woman dies, she is to be treated as an outcast; hence, she said that such women are buried outside their homesteads as signs of bad omen to the family.

There was an emphasis that single childless women who happen to die are regarded as outcasts hence should be buried away from home to avoid a curse to befall the entire family. Such women are viewed as lost and with no fruits, hence with no continuity. They are never remembered and are therefore counted as 'lost'

and outcasts. The Church, in most cases, also stigmatizes them with the same view. This was and is still a way of discriminating against them from others as they refer to them as the 'other' women.

50 5:2.2. Remarriage

In my view, remarriage is a contentious topic among many African communities today. As much as many women would wish to remarry after either they are divorced or lost their husbands; there are many challenges attached. This poses a dilemma and a challenge that society and the Church are still wrestling with and about. According to the informants, some communities do not clearly state whether women can remarry after divorce or their husbands' death. They argued that because it is not clearly defined, many women suffer because of the traditional and cultural practices like dowry payment attached to the issue of remarrying, as Tabitha states.

The problem comes when they start counting the number of cows and goats that were paid in exchange for the girl as a wedding gift/ dowry (Tabitha).

The informants here express the traditional meaning and place of dowry. Dowry involves giftgiving between families, which cements the relationship before marriage. It can equally be equated to 'buying' though not to such an extent. It is difficult for a woman to leave her matrimonial home once the dowry has been paid, and such could be the dilemma that Tabitha is facing.

Tabitha went on to say that in her community, when a widowed woman has children, she is supposed to remain in the deceased family since she was married at a cost. She claimed that the children born in the family should belong to the deceased family as his 'property' together with the wife. This, therefore, becomes exceedingly difficult for a woman to ever think about remarrying out of the deceased family. According to church dogmas, after the death of her husband, a woman is free to get married again. However, due to traditional African customs, the married woman becomes a permanent member of the husband's family due

to the agreement made through the gifts given to the parents of the woman in the form of dowry. Therefore, it becomes so difficult for single Christian women to remarry after the death of their husbands even though the church allows it. However, this is not the case for men; when the wife dies, the man can remarry again without any challenges from the traditional norms and practices.

51 5:2.3. Low self-esteem in society

Through the interviews, my informants were expressing what they mostly encounter in the local society and even in the church. Some people in the local community think that single women are husband snatchers. This way of name-calling single women emanates from married women. It is from that concept and belief that most of the married women feel insecure among unmarried or single women; the fear that their husbands may be taken away from them. One woman lamented that this assumption is also evident among Christian women; even the pastors' wives hold the assumption. Meaning even the wife of the pastor has the same view as other married women in society.

I was shocked beyond words when a certain close friend who happened to be the pastor's wife started suspecting that I was having an affair with her husband. This was after I had asked the pastor to come and pray with my family following my husband's death (She continued to say). As if this was not enough, I was later put under a Church discipline and prohibited to partake in the Holy Communion following the said rumor. Although it is almost six months since I stopped attending the Church service, nobody bothers to ask my whereabouts (Martha).

In her expression, Martha was full of bitterness because of the way she was mistreated by the church, basing their argument on a rumor without any proven facts on the said issue. Single women face many discouragements from the people due to cultural practices that are demeaning them as incomplete people in society. This inequality to the single women in society has to lead them to develop a heightened character to create the impression to people that they are normal despite what they are going through emotionally and physically.

Another single woman also narrated her story, saying that she had a long-time woman as a friend whom they shared their challenges as singles with, until the time she found a lover and married. She said that since the woman's friend got married, she stopped communicating with her like before.

When I asked her why she does not call me often as before, she cautioned me that she has a man, and she fears to share him with me. She continued saying: this shocked me because this was the least I expected from my close friend whom we shared many problems with (Gatumi).

It is not only people in the society who have a negative attitude towards single women but even those who were single; once they find somebody to marry them, they forget what they were going through during their singlehood period. They stop communicating with their fellow friends, with whom they were facing challenges of singlehood together. This negative attitude to singleness is sometimes a significant hurdle in their life, which is the reason Gatumi was shocked after the response from her former friend.

52 5:2.4. Property inheritance

In many African communities like Kenya, family property is inherited by the boy children who are born in the family. This means that all boy children have the right to their fathers' properties. On the contrary, this does not happen to girls who are expected to marry out of the family. In addition, little or nothing is said about girls who do not get married at all; because it is expected that girls who are mature enough must always get married. If in case someone does not get married soon, organized or arranged marriages are made. One divorced woman complained that after she was divorced by her husband, the only option was to go back to her patriarchal home. I packed all my clothes and left because I was told I could not take with me anything more than my clothes and that everything else belonged to my husband. I obeyed because it was according to our customs. After arriving at my father's home, I was greeted with endless questions. Why I

had brought a huge bag of clothes, how long was I would stay at my father's home, and if I had plans to go back, what plans I had, what made me leave my house if I was going to stay there forever, among many other suspicious questions. All these questions made me sick as I wondered whether this was truly the place I was born and grew up as I was being treated more like an outcast" As if that was not enough, one of my younger brothers cautioned me that all the family land was already divided and given to the sons, and so if I was planning to stay with them, I would have no place to call my own land or to cultivate crops for food (Kangai).

Kangai was expressing her predicament to the family members and her husband, who could not allow her to share their property, which they had acquired together in their marriage. Kangai said according to their culture; women are not allowed to own any property of their own. When a woman is married, all the property belongs to the husband, and even the woman is also perceived to be part of the property. Therefore, women have no right to demand anything after they separate or divorce their husbands. This is according to cultural norms, which are laid down by men. It is only men who are the owners of properties in many African communities, apart from a few families who choose to give property to all children. This, therefore, applied to Kangai's paternal home.

Despite the current existence of the Matrimonial Property Act in Kenya, the laws which protect women's access to their property, it is not easy to reinforce these laws due to many obstacles like patriarchal practices and lack of awareness about their rights, to fight for land ownership and other properties. These, among many different forms of discrimination, have left many single women to suffer in poverty.

53 5:2.5. Poor housing

Low or insufficient income leads single women to poor housing, which was and remained a significant challenge to several informants in this study. Many live in the slums in which they end up sharing a semi-permanent single room, yet

paying rent is also a challenge. Some of them narrated how they are forced by circumstances to engage in illicit sexual behavior as "commercial sex workers" to be able to cope up with the hard life, which includes paying for their house rent.

Although many of us are practicing 'Christians,' we find ourselves engaging sexually to get some cash not by choice, but as the only option for survival (Maria).

According to maria, absolute poverty is one of the causes of loose morals for survival. She explained that it is not easy to maintain good morals when you do not have a job to sustain the family. Furthermore, she lamented that, even when her children get sick, she cannot afford to pay for their medical treatment, expressing how serious things are when one is single.

This issue of poverty stands as a significant challenge to most single women in Kenya due to the traditional customs and even the government system, which does not mind about the poor people in society. Moreover, single women suffer most due to a lack of equity in society and the low education level.

54 5:2.6. Singleness and name-calling

According to the research findings, single women have different experiences. This is according to their group categories in which they encounter different challenges in the church and society. People call them names to stigmatize them; each informant was expressing her difficulties and distress they normally face almost daily. Single women between the age of 35 and 55 years expressed how people call them "*mbura tuu*" (which means fruitless). Additionally, people disrespect them as they think they are either "incomplete" or unfit in society. Some families are labeled by the cultural beliefs as "*Ngirani*" it is believed that any single woman from these families can only be married as the second wife if she is married as the first wife; it is believed the husband will die. One of the informants said:

Some things are beyond my imagination. Like me, I am told I cannot be married as the first wife, and if I do, my husband will die. I do not understand why I should get married as a second wife. I better remain single rather than getting married as the second wife. After all, that is not my wish. I know I am beautiful, and of course, I am educated with a well-paying job. The question I usually ask myself is why cultural beliefs should determine my future? Whenever I find somebody who loves me and we start planning to get married, after they get the information from people that our family is "*ngirani*" (meaning cannot marry a young unmarried man), all the plans become nightmares. This gives me a lot of stress and trauma because it is not my wish to remain single. I need somebody to meet my sexual desire and to have children like other women in the society" (Ciakuthi).

According to Ciakuthi, she could not understand how cultural beliefs can determine her marriage life. Despite her high education level and a well-paying job, she can only be married as a second wife. Furthermore, Ciakuthi expressed her stressed life in a culture that is killing her life partner's dream. She stated she planned to get somebody to meet her sexual urge and have a family to have a good social status. Ciakuthi was leaving a singlehood life not because of her wishes but due to name-calling given to her family by the community (Ngirani). The name "Ngirani" has a significant barrier to the whole family members in the community, and especially women are the culprits, for this does not affect men.

In connection to Ciakuthi's lamentation above, other participants in this study also expressed how single women are being discriminated against men, based on cultural beliefs that were formulated by only men. These cultural beliefs or rather, norms do not provide space for a single woman of any group to express her views. This applies to the church institution too. In the Methodist church in Kenya, there is a women fellowship group that includes all women together:

married women, divorced women, separated women, single women who have never been married, and single women with children. According to this research, the participants experience discomfort within this group, which is dominated by married women.

Married women's issues are dominant in every discussion, and single women feel out of place in the group. Married women tend to think single women are comfortable in their groups, where they usually share issues of their children and sometimes sexual intimacy issues with their husbands. These issues put off single women, and some of them confessed the distress that led them to pull out of the group.

Ciakuthi's problem does not have any forum for discussion because it is taboo to do so; this is according to cultural beliefs. Furthermore, even the church is silent on this issue, despite the church being the voiceless voice like Ciakuthi. Moreover, when the pastors are addressing women groups, they focus only on the matters or instead challenges faced by married women. They do not realize amidst those groups; single women are present. In expressing her discomfort, one of the informants said.

I wonder why there is no forum or group for only single women in the church, where we can share and speak out about our encounters in life. I usually feel that nobody cares about a single woman like me, not in the church, family, or society. When I read the bible, several verses are referring to single women and mostly widows from the old testament to the new testament (*she read the bible referencing her point to Psalm 68:5 and James 1:27*). These two scriptures and several others advocate for the single women and people like me in the church and even in society, but to my surprise, no one among the leaders of the church and even the pastor cares about the single women, not even the orphans are cared for" (Joanina).

Joanna raises a very fundamental question in the way the church puts the issue of single women under the carpet. Whereas in the bible, there are several scriptures speaking about single women and how the church should care for them.

On the contrary, each participant in this study was conveying how they are being discriminated against in the Church and the society, but some were arguing even Jesus was a single person and some disciples were single men, but they were not discriminated against.

I think the story of discrimination against single women is an old story even in the Bible. There is a story about single women who were neglected in the Church even during the times of the early church (Acts 6:1). Therefore, I do not know when single women will ever enjoy the love of God (Mwende).

The church is the family of God, the community of believers where each member should love and be loved, where one is valued regardless of their gender or marital status. In this community, single women expect to be respected and treated with love, yet single women mostly experience neglect and discrimination.

These two participants above were expressing their feelings towards the church's awareness of single women. They expected the church to have a sense of belonging, value, identity, and that single woman should not still be discriminated against. However, they also challenged single women to try and avoid the negative self-image that has come about from the African cultural beliefs, the faulty reasoning that single women are not complete women if we are not married.

55 5:2.7. Single parenting and Children

Children in African culture are crucial that any single woman who does not give birth to a child is always as incomplete, who does not add value to her family and the society where she belongs. Giving birth adds value and respect to the

woman in African culture. However, children born out of wedlock to some of these single women bring many more challenges in their single lives. Most of them find it hard, mostly when their children's father happens to be already legally married to another wife. Such challenges may explain why many single women fear to disclose the fathers of their children born out of wedlock as this creates more trouble for them.

Furthermore, suppose the father of the child neglects and disowns the child during the time of pregnancy and birth. In that case, the mother will most probably divert the tradition and the custom of naming in which children are named after their father's father and instead name the child after her father or mother. Therefore Mukwanjeru, one of the informants, said in an interview:

The way Christians in the church (including some pastors) classify children of single women as 'children of sin' is quite traumatizing. This is during baptism, in which the pastor insists that the mother of the child must and should officially announce who the father of the child is just to shame her. This issue offended me very much during my child's baptism, and out of distress, I gave the name of my biological father as the father of my child although I knew giving the name of my father as the father of my child is taboo, and may be viewed as a disrespect to my father, I had no otherwise. I think people should treat single women with respect, not to shame them publicly in the church, as this I think is ungodly (Mukwanjeru agonized).

Mukwanjeru said the church leaders should stop mistreating single women with the issue of their children by labeling them as children of sin, and it should not be mandatory to reveal the father of the child during baptism. According to mukwanjeru the child's father remains a deep

secret to her. That is why she decided to give the name of her biological father though it is taboo in the church and society.

Additionally, Mukwanjeru stated that what people do not know is some single women have pain in their hearts due to the way they were mistreated by the real fathers of their children when they were pregnant. In some cases, the father of the child may be somebody prominent in the society or a leader in the church with his family; the issue of the father remains a top-secret. “Moreover, some fathers mistreated and abused us when we were expectant and denied being held responsible for the pregnancy in any way. Due to this suffering we pass through during pregnancy, and the upbringing of the child without any support from the father leaves us with a lot of bitterness. To that extent, one would not like the name of the so-called father to appear anywhere,” Mukwenjuri narrated.

Parenting and bringing up children among single women can be challenging, especially for single women with low income. Single women with children stand to represent the father and mother of their family.

Bringing up children in singlehood is not that easy. One must struggle all alone to feed, clothe, and pay the school fees for one or more kids (Tabitha).

Such cases happen due to the child refusing to take responsibility for the child, maybe because he has another family and has poor income. Men, in most cases, run away from duties leaving women to suffer from children.

Single women with children struggle to get food every day, while most of them rely on daily casual labor, which is poorly paying. After working for eight to ten hours, one is paid three hundred Kenya shillings (2.73 dollars), which is not enough to cater for two meals in a day. It is out of this state of poverty that single women toil every day to get food, clothing for their children and get money to educate their children. The absence of a father figure in the family is a big

challenge in parenting the children because the single woman will try to play the role of a father, which is a challenge.

Additionally, several single women suffer due to their illiteracy and lack of information because they do not have forums to empower them. In most cases, single women do not own any land; therefore, they cannot access funding from regular lending agencies due to a lack of documents like a land title deed which is used as security for the loan. Each participant, who is a single woman with children out of wedlock, expressed the inability to cater for maternity costs due to poor income.

56 5:2.8. Freedom of choice amid African customs and traditional beliefs

Another factor that emerged pertains to the freedom of women. Some of the single women felt that they were freer than those who are married. Single women are free to do things, act as they wish, and possess any property without depending on a man's authority. However, they live in a society dominated by patriarchal norms and beliefs that are always in favor of men, especially when it comes to property ownership. Moreover, decision-making is a challenge in a culture with an organized system of shared assumptions, values, and strong beliefs, which govern how people behave in society.

The informants expressed their freedom differently as the following: "being single makes it easier to design my life the way I want" (Ciakuthi). Maria said she was now happier than when she was in a marriage with a lot of stress and violence. "In marriage with violence, you lose your self-direction and motivation, but now I am at peace focusing on my goals in life," added Maria. Furthermore, she stated her brain works day and night, and out of that, she was experiencing good results from thinking and planning for her future without anyone's interference.

Ciakuthi also expressed her joy of being single and freely planning for her better future.

“For me, you don’t need to have a marriage or children to be happy. I believe there are so many other things in life; you can do to find happiness. Despite the systems of a social construct that I expect to finish school, find a job, get married and have a family to make me happy, in my view, that one path does not guarantee a happy life” (Mukwanjeru). She explained her ability to be more active than those who are married, to prove to people that she can achieve great things without a man.

Another participant, Kagodu explained that being single, is new-found freedom liberating despite all challenges and pressure from the family members and society. Kagodu loved the privilege of being single and enjoyed being responsible for her own life and pursuing her future with happiness. She stated there is nothing quite as liberating as deciding every moment of her weekly schedule.

Besides, a participant said single life is okay to her as she feels fulfilled by her business. However, she confessed that there are times when she feels she has missed the opportunity to be married and have someone who could also help her with some household activities like small house repairs and fulfill her sexual urge. “At times, I miss a man to share my emotional and sexual feelings with” (Karuru lamented).

Karuru explained that as human beings, we need each other in one way or another. She proceeded to say that as a single woman, she is more creative due to spending time alone; creative thinking mostly leads her to solutions and project ideas.

According to this participant, attaining the level of freedom is not easy as it is a journey full of pressure, challenges, and name-calling, which sometimes can result in depression and low self-esteem among many single women. These participants Ciakuthi, Maria, Mukwanjeru, Kagodu, and Karuru were some of the single women who decided to rise above the customs and traditional beliefs in society to pursue their goals in life. Karuru and Mukwanjeru said life must continue despite the challenges and stereotypes. They accepted the fact that they

should love themselves anyway because every human being is created in the image of God. Therefore, they concluded that they should enjoy life in fullness despite their unmarried challenge.

57 5:3. Summary

In summary, I have presented the data as emerged from the participants. In undertaking this process, I arranged them into two themes. These are experiences of single women in the Church, and their experiences from the local context. I started the chapter by presenting the experiences of the single women who were the participants in the MCK Church. The experiences are presented under the following sub-topics namely: lack of pastoral care, single women and exclusion from positions in the church, ex-communication, limited life partners and social life, and loneliness. All these sub-topics are under the experiences of single women in the Church.

Furthermore, I presented more information under the following theme: - Experiences from the local context, which are under the following sub-topics:- social stigma and stereotypes, remarriage, low self-esteem or self-worth in society, property inheritance, poor housing, singleness and name-calling, single parenting and children, and lastly, freedom of choice amid African customs and traditional beliefs.

All the information was derived from the different groups of single women in the Church, such as the divorced, the widowed, the singles with children out of wedlock, and the single women who have not been married and they do not have children. Single women suffer from the traditional beliefs and customs which are male-oriented in society. These beliefs include for example that every individual should get married to be a complete person with good status in society. In African traditions, single women are not entitled to own any property of their own. According to the data analysis, single women are discriminated against in society as well as in the Church. However, in the Church, they are sometimes encouraged when they read the word of God, and sometimes by the sermons from the preachers. Single women face all kinds of challenges, to name but a

few: stigmatization, name-calling, disrespect, mockery, and insults, among others.

58 Chapter Six: Discussion

In chapter five, I have analyzed the data from field interviews that were collected from single women in the Methodist Church in Kenya. The analyzed data was presented in two main themes, which are: experiences of single women in the church and experiences from the local context.

In this chapter, I will use three theories to interpret my findings and discuss them at length. I will use the following theories in the discussion, stigma theory, social learning theory, and patriarchal theory. Moreover, as a researcher in this study, I will give my general interpretation of the information from the participants. In the discussion, I will be answering the following sub-questions: how are single women expressing their experiences and treatment in the church? The second sub-question is how single women experiences are impacted by their local community?

After considering the findings that emerged from analyzing the data in chapter five, I came up with two themes that will guide me in this discussion chapter. These themes include the marginalization of single women in the church and the impact of cultural systems and practices on single women. The first theme will help me to answer the first research sub-question, while the second one will help me to respond to the second research sub-question. The two pieces will have sub-themes under them to guide my discussion. Moreover, materials that are relevant to the study from other scholars will be used. Additionally, my informants referred to the Bible in their responses to the interview questions. Therefore, I will refer to the bible in my discussion to explain how single women and women generally were treated in their different cultures. The bible is the main foundation for making rules to govern the church.

59 6:1. The marginalization of single women in the church

The theme of marginalization of single women in the church came out so strongly from the study, through the expressions of the single women about their experiences in the church. Under this theme, I will present several sub-themes,

namely: Lack of pastoral care, unequal treatment of single women, church doctrines and rules affecting single women, and divorce and remarriage.

60 6:1.1. Lack of pastoral care

It is clear from the study that single women felt neglected, discriminated against, and not included in the church in many ways. They felt like a stigmatized group that had been classified as not essential and forgotten. Considering most of the participants' responses to the interview questions, single women felt neglected to start from the annual church programs and activities which only considered the needs of married people such as couples' seminars and workshops. In such workshops, single women felt nothing was discussed relevant to them and their situation or related to the challenges they were facing in life. In the seminars or workshops, discussions were involving issues and challenges about married people, husbands, and wives, sex issues, issues about children, among others.

The social learning theory helps to explain the findings of this study, showing that these acts of discrimination against single women were learned through a modeled behavior in environmental culture and subculture verbal symbols or rather words used in the society. This theory explains how married women in the social group command greater attention than single women. An example is the modeled conduct and functional value of the behaviors displayed by the church members in this study towards single women. These values and models are highly influential in determining how people will do things or rather view single women even in the church. Moreover, this theory states that there is a representational system in society and in the church, which are not in favor of single women.

The same sentiments of discrimination were expressed about Sunday services in church, where single women felt that the pastor's sermon had little or nothing that specifically addressed their challenges. According to them, single women were not visible to the people in the church, including the pastors. Single women felt always left out, and their concerns were not addressed. The neglect and

discrimination they felt caused them to feel unworthy and not included in the church.

Additionally, single women complained that they did not feel comfortable being members of the women fellowship in the church, which included all groups of women but had nothing special for single women. Moreover, the participants also expressed that when the pastors, mostly men, arranged pastoral visits to the church members' homes, single women were not visited. The assumption was that if the pastor visited a single woman in the church, he would be accused of having a love affair with the woman. There was an example of such a case from one of the respondents where she was accused of having a love affair with someone's husband.

The widows were mostly affected as they expressed how they needed pastoral care after losing their husbands but instead, no one seemed to understand, and no one offered any form of help. After losing their husbands, both the widows and the children experience a lot of pain and challenges; some of them may end up losing property that belonged to their husbands. In this process of mourning and pain, the church was expected to be close to offering support both spiritually and in advice; however, the opposite happened. Since the status of the widow had changed to singlehood, there was little or no support because people did not want to associate with a single woman. This situation left the widows feeling unworthy, stigmatized, and isolated, and lonely.

The situation of the widows and other groups of single women being stigmatized in the church is clearly explained in the stigma theory. Goffman explains how stigma works using the example of the Greeks who cut out signs or carved out a sign into a person's body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places. Goffman, therefore, argues that stigma is a societal establishment through the means of categorizing people and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories. He claims that for a characteristic to be a stigma, it must be shared among the members of the given

group, Goffman quoted by (Stanger, and S. Crandall, 2000, p. 63). Looking at the situation of the single women in all the four groups considered in this study, single women in the church are a stigmatized group. Single women are categorized as social misfits, incomplete, and lacking.

Most participants were in shock to see how the church treated them negatively. This was the opposite of what they expected from the church. They expressed their disappointment that while the church should be a place that included all people without discrimination, single women felt they did not fit in. As a researcher who is also a pastor, the disappointments expressed by the participants made me realize that just like in society, the church members are socialized to neglect and discriminate against single women. My opinion is that out of ignorance and lack of criticizing the impact of culture the church, church members were unfortunately blindly continuing the stigmatization of single women. While the church is busy preaching the good news to the people outside the church buildings, the people inside the church buildings are suffering and neglected without any good news. Single women are a special group that should be supported by not only the pastor but by all the members.

61 6:1.2. Unequal treatment of single women

In this study, the participants who were single women were very much stigmatized in the church because of their status. On many occasions, the respondents pointed out that there was an assumption that anyone single was incomplete and, therefore, could not make independent decisions. Single women were generally stigmatized as weak and immature people, which made the church to deny them leadership positions no matter their educational and other abilities. The unequal treatment made the single women have low self-esteem in the church because they felt they were not treated as equals to the rest of the church members.

In the occasions where single women were in leadership positions, they felt that the positions were not appropriate for them to serve, and they were not comfortable. A case example is when a barren woman is chosen to serve as a

Sunday school teacher. Such a position can be problematic to some barren women because of not having children of their own, which can be an inappropriate position for them, as one participant expressed. "I feel so frustrated in my church because the only responsibility entrusted to me is to take care of the Sunday school children. Handling children is not an easy task for me. It is challenging because married women in the church discuss my inability to give birth, even amidst their children. This makes me feel sad, and, in most cases, I feel like giving up (Ciakuthi - single and barren).

Crocker and Quinn in stigma theory argue that the effects of stigma on the self are negotiated or rather arranged, created, and acted upon in the situation. However, the issue of self-worth, or the lack of it, in stigmatized individuals is not a stable, deep-seated personality characteristic. It emerges in the situation and purpose meaning given to that situation for the self. Sometimes it is shaped by the ideological meanings that a person can bring to the situation (Crocker and Quinn, 2000, p. 159). This helps us to understand that low self-esteem is not a personality characteristic in single women. It is something that emerges because of the situations and circumstances single women are subjected to. The discrimination and exclusion from leadership positions, for example, leads to a feeling of not being worthy.

Additionally, single women were stereotyped as being prostitutes. This was an assumption that because they do not have husbands of their own, they had sexual affairs with various or many men. Because of such a stereotype, most married women were not willing to be friends with single women for fear that their husbands would be taken away. This assumption existed not because it was true, but it was a stereotype in society. The stigma theory explains this behavior, where Goffman states that people make certain assumptions about what the individual ought to be. The character we impute to them might better be viewed as an imputation made in potential retrospect. Goffman depicts it as a characterization, which is virtual social identity, whereas the category and attributes they possess can be called their actual social identity (Goffman, 1968, p 12).

Goffman's explanation of the stigma theory helps in understanding how church members and the pastors were not friendly to the single women because they had stereotyped single women to be people of loose morals or prostitutes, weak, immature, incomplete, among other things.

However, all those names were virtual social identities of single women, which were false identities that were created by assumptions, stereotypes, and stigma attached to the person, in this case, single women. The actual identity of single women was unfortunately not easily revealed because of those false identities.

The church is the body of Christ, and every member in it forms part of the body of Christ. Every member has a role to play in the body of Christ; despite their status in society, God needs all his people to be treated with love and care. The Methodist Church believes in the priesthood of all believers; hence all members should be included in the ministry. Single women are members of the priesthood by virtue of being believers in the word of God through Jesus Christ. Single women in the Methodist church are looking forward also to be included in the leadership and in the ministry without being discriminated against.

There is a need for equity in the church for every member who has accepted Jesus as the savior of their soul. The members of the church who stigmatize single women are also stigmatized in one way or another. Due to this stigma, the church should come up with ways of educating the Single women and other members of the church on how to embrace each other in love and unity. The members of the church are the "perceivers," meaning they are also stigmatized; this is according to Davidio. Moreover, this influences the members of the church and the informants, which eventually affects personal and church development at large (Davidio, 2000).

The informants expressed how fellow members in the church stigmatize them by creating stories to diminish and label them as low-status people in the community. Single women are human beings who need to socialize with other social beings in society without being discriminated against. Furthermore, Single women have done a lot in the community because

those who have families educate their children despite the challenges they usually pass through. Those who do not have families, when given opportunity, they become good leaders in the community who are committed to their work. The church is the light of the world and the institution of love, where every human should be treated with equity. The church should be above the patriarchal ways; that is, the system was male-dominated in terms of value and power (Cooley, 1991).

6.2.6.1.3. Church doctrines and rules affecting single women

The church, like any other institution, has rules of how to conduct its business; these rules include the church doctrines and the church constitution that guide the operation of the church. This study found out that there were several doctrines and rules in the form that stigmatized single women and children from single mothers. There were several examples expressed by the participants. For example, during baptism, the mother of the child must mention the name of the father. The requirement of a name which always refers to a male name was very frustrating and torturing to the single mothers because some of them had previously bad experiences with the fathers of their children, and they did not want a reminder of those experiences. Single women that did not have a name for the “real” father of the child opted to use the names of the grandfather of the child, which was a shame in many communities. The name of the father was always insisted because of the patriarchal practices and the social structures; a child always belongs to the father, not the mother. The identity of the child was always associated with the father.

The patriarchal practices and social structures in the community of this study were so visible even in the church. According to Karen, “patriarchy is the complex of ideologies and structures that sustains and perpetuates male control over females” (Karen, 1989). The practices and social structures of the patriarchal theory play a significant role in this research. In most of the African societies, there exists a gender hierarchy where males are over females, which

has been almost believed to be the natural way of life. This explains most of the actions where the father or man is held in high esteem even when they are wrong, and the mother or woman is right. Additionally, in Kenya, there is a common saying that a badly behaved child or a child who is not smart is always referred to in relation to the mother, not the father. Such as “You are so stupid like your mother.”

Another rule in the church concerning single women is that single women who are divorced cannot partake in the Holy communion, and they cannot be leaders in the church because of their status. This is another example where the patriarchal practices are observed.

63 6:1.4. Divorce and remarriage

In African traditions, if a woman is divorced, she lives with social stigma for the rest of her life. She will have low self-esteem in the church and the community. Those who are divorced according to the standing orders of the MCK church are under discipline; they are not allowed to lead or partake in the holy communion. According to patriarchal practices and social structures in Africa, a divorced woman loses her dignity in society, and more so she has no right to property ownership. Hence the divorced woman lives a life of stress, rejection, and poverty, and people blame the woman for failing to sustain her marriage.

The divorced woman lives a wounded life, full of trauma and low esteem. This feeling of rejection and name-calling leads to stigma without any focus in life. This is according to Maria, who expressed her predicament after the divorce. Suppose one is divorced according to the Methodist standing orders (S.O). In that case, it is stated that one shall relinquish any church leadership position with immediate effect, which will take a period of not less than five years (S.O.141.2).

This is an ideological stigma, which mostly affects single women because members in the church may end up blaming the woman of being a failure to keep her marriage. The primary focus of justification is based on using the standing orders of the church, which points the finger of

blame directly to her. These attributions of blame stigmatized her. According to Crandall, mostly, the woman is one who is responsible for her fate; she earned its consequences or rather carried the blame (Crandall, 2000). Attribution of blames and stigmatizations towards single women are part of the reasons amongst many others, which prompted Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza to state that the theology of the church has left women out, the history of the church is not written as women's history, and the clerical-patriarchal structures of church identify it as a men's church (Fiorenza, 1996).

According to the informants, the church is governed by a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of leadership. Ruether asserts that this idea of the church being dominated by males came from the European missionaries through their system of education; they treated Africans as people with a worthless and evil culture that had to be expunged for them to be Christianized and incorporated into the culture of the colonizers (Ruether, 2012, p. 214). In addition, Ruether claims this negative view of African culture was mingled with racism toward the African person. Hence the European cultural colonialism of Africans subjected them to workers in mines and plantations because they believed that higher professions were beyond the Africans' capabilities (Ruether, 2012).

Therefore, it is out of this negative view of Africans that led the European missionaries to think that the African woman needed to be domesticated: washed, clothed in garments that concealed her body, trained to work in the kitchen, and become a housemaid in the European manner. But the higher education extended to an African male elite

was usually assumed to be beyond an African woman's reach (Ruether, 2012, p. 214).

The ideology of racism and sexism from the European missionaries and the patriarchal systems remains to be the main source of marginalization

to women up to date. The European missionaries did not teach Africans to be liberated, but instead, they enslaved them to be their workers. They were subjecting African women to be domestic workers without education. The European missionaries' ideology and the patriarchal practices social structures are why the church in Africa is still in chains of marginalization of single women.

In my view, the Methodist Church should embrace the teachings of Paul's letter to Galatians where he taught them, saying, "for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3: 27-28). The church should be the voice for the voiceless in society, and it is the task of the church to uplift the weak like the single women and give them hope.

One of the informants said even when I am single, I am still the image of God, and I need to be treated like other people; being married will not make me more important than the way I am now. She stated that marriage is a choice in life; no one should be mistreated when she fails to get married (Karuru). According to social learning theory, divorced women are blamed and looked down upon in the church and in the community due to African cultural beliefs. People have learned statements like "ntiri gitu nkari ta mukwa ntigwa" which means (I have nothing like a woman without a husband). It is a common saying used even by women and people in the community. These words of marginalizing single women are normal words in the community of this study.

6.4.6.2. The impact of the cultural system and practices on single women

The second sub-question of this research was addressing how their local community impacts the experiences of single women. Under this theme, I will address this sub-question by discussing the findings from the empirical study. The sub-themes include; cultural beliefs against single women, single women

and poverty, sexual desire as a taboo for single women, and lastly, advantages of single women.

65 6:2.1. Cultural beliefs against single women

Cultural beliefs were the main factors leading to the marginalization of single women in the church. In my study, single women have been viewed as incomplete in the community. This view influences even the people in the church. Furthermore, a woman who is not married has no status in the traditional African worldview (Nasimiyu, 2006). Therefore, people in the community believe that any normal woman should be married. They believe for a woman to be mature, she has to be married and bear children to attain fulfillment in her life. This view was expressed by the informants who said the reason why they are sidelined from the crucial offices of the church leadership is due to the belief that single women are not mature enough to make church decisions. This stereotype thinking has been instilled in the mind of people in the society, so even single women they have that stigma in their life.

This idea of thinking women will not be mature until they get married very intimidating to single women, and several of them leave a stigmatized life without pursuing their visions. For example, women who want to serve God in leadership positions in the church can be denied the opportunity just because they are single. When they are denied such opportunities, it makes them feel excluded in the church. They also think they are not respected and are neglected even if they are qualified either academically or have other qualities. The fact that single women are denied opportunities because they are single can also affect their self-worth because they feel unwanted. Moreover, the aspect of people depicting single women to low status by labeling them as incomplete leads them to social stigma and, as a result, a life of social isolation.

Therefore, according to social learning theory, single women know very well how people talk about them verbally and the way people look down upon them in some activities in the church. This has led several singles to acquire low profile patterns in the Church. Cultural beliefs affect single women, even if they are

Christians. They know that people think and talk about them that they are not typical. According to informants, this becomes a significant challenge in their lives. They live with low-self-esteem, assuming they have nothing to offer in the church (Muthoni).

Muthoni is a stigmatized member of the church with the feeling that she is frequently "on stage" in conversation by the fellow members in the church. This has caused her to have heightened feelings which has resulted in self-consciousness, and out of that, she continuously creates the impression of being normal to people despite her level of stigma (Hebt, Tickle, and Heatherton, 2000). The Church is a community of believers the place where every individual should be valued regardless of status; whether high or low level, all should be treated with equity. The community of believers is a place of love where each one is loved, but on the contrary single women in the church tend to fall short of this.

Additionally, lack of love and equity to all members was expressed by Ncugu, who said that she is talented in leadership, but due to her status of being single, she could not be elected as a leader of women group in the Church. Maria also stated how she has deprived of the role of leadership, and even she was not allowed to partake in holy communion after she divorced her husband. Therefore, single women are discriminated against in one way or another in church, where they should be embraced with love God. This aspect of the church treating single women as incomplete is a social stigma, which affects both the church and single women.

Those who stigmatize others are too stigmatized in a way, and eventually, this affects the development of the person and the church. This was clear evidence as it was stated by Ncugu, who expressed her ability to lead, but she was not allowed to lead due to her status of singlehood. Furthermore, Ncugu had a spoiled identity, and this was evident in the way she was expressing her feeling of being a discredited person by the church. The person with that level of stigma possesses a sense of reduced dignity in the eyes of society (Oduyoye, 2006).

According to stigma theory, Ciakuthi was one of the informants who was wondering why cultural beliefs should determine where she should be married; Ciakuthi was against those beliefs of being married as a second wife. She argued that it is her right to be matched by the person of her choice as the first wife, and she strongly opposed the social stigma on how people perceive her family as “Ngirani.” Stigma is harmful to the person; that is why Ciakuthi, despite her high education and acquired a well-paying job, was suffering from the effect of social stigmatization.

According to social learning theory, Bandura explains how people socialize and acquire their society's norms of thought and action. These are the societal norms Ciakuthi was fighting against, refusing her life focus to be dictated by culture. However, Bandura argued that our choices are influenced by our beliefs as well as our capabilities (Bandura, 1997). The effort of Ciakuthi opposing the forces of her culture was not bearing fruits due to the influence of people in the community, who were making sure that she will not succeed to get a man of her choice. Hence, it ends up in the stress of marginalization by the cultural norms formulated by men against women.

66 6:2.2. Single women and poverty

Most single women were living in absolute poverty, according to this study. In carrying out this study, the informants expressed their economic status, of not having enough money to meet basic needs, including food, school fees for their children, shelter, and clothing. In their expression, each of them said how it is to go without food in their family, clean water, health, lack of education, and information. Some even their way of dressing was a clear indication of the state of their living. Some said they take only one meal per day due to a lack of well-paying jobs. They live in a single-room house because that is what they can afford, and these single rooms are built with inferior materials. Therefore, during the rainy season, they are rained on, and they cannot sleep well. According to the

informants, poverty can lead one to be a sex worker or prostitute, which is bad behavior, but they do it for survival to sustain their family.

Moreover, single women and their families in Kenya face a lot of challenges due to the poverty level in the country. The government does not have ways of taking care of the poor citizens. That is the reason in most towns in Kenya we have street children; many of these children come from poor families. Single women from a more significant part of the poor families and are mostly affected by poverty, leading to many other challenges like poor health. That is the reason Japheth Ositsi Awiti, in his research article in Kenya said, poverty harms the demand for modern health care services. Other factors are held constant. In other words, poor individuals have a less likelihood of consulting modern health care providers when ill compared to their no-poor counterparts, holding other determinants of health care provider choice constant (Awiti, 2014).

Single women are vulnerable to physical harm, emotional injury, economic and social vulnerability. Generally, Single women are disadvantaged economically, and they are the poorest people in Kenya. In the slums of Kenya, you will find single women are the poorest of the poor. This is evident by a study conducted in parts of slums in Kenya where women in responding to the research widely associated poverty with key social problems, including insecurity, deprived housing conditions, poor nutrition, unsafe abortion, inability to educate one's children, alcoholism, drug use, crime, and delinquency, amongst others (Izugbara & Ngilangwa, 2010).

In this research, the informants generally stated the challenges they pass through economically and socially. They expressed the emotional challenges they normally face from the church due to their status of singlehood. One of the informants explained how people in the church say that the children of single women who are born out of wedlock are children of sin, and during the time of their baptism, the mother is urged to name the father of the child.

This issue offended me very much during my child's baptism, giving out the name of my biological father as the father of my child. I knew giving the name of my father in distress and taboo, but I had no option because I was told I must provide the name of the father to my child (Mukwanjeru).

Referring to Mukwanjeru statement, single women in the church have the feeling of being disrespected by fellow members in the church who should show love to them, without discrimination. Additionally, they should treat children who are born and brought up by single women with dignity. In African traditions, there were no children without a mother or father. All children were always considered a blessing from God in the family, whether born in or out of wedlock. Their aunts and uncles were the ones who were playing the role of the fathers and mothers. However, the children in society today are no longer regarded as a blessing but as a curse (Wasike, 2006).

Today nobody cares about the children of single mothers. They struggle to feed the children as taking them to the hospital when they get sick, and educate them. This was explained by the informants saying,

Bringing up children in a single hood is not that easy. One must struggle all alone to feed, clothe, and pay for the school fees for one or more kids (Tabitha).

Therefore, due to extreme poverty, single women are discriminated against by people in the community and the church, their poor way of dressing they normally have low self-esteem. Poor women live a traumatized life, and due to their low status, they cannot be elected as church leaders. Poverty is a result of several issues and systems globally, also. In the bible, there is no study done by the early Christians analyzing the causes of poverty (Friesen, 2008); even this study will not venture into this area. However, poverty in most developing countries in Africa remains a significant challenge to all people. But those who are most affected are women and children staying in the rural areas, this due to men in the working class mostly live-in town centers, while their families are

working exhaustingly in the rural areas. Sophia Chirongoma explains how women in Zimbabwe face a lot of challenges in a rural area she said,

Although women are responsible for most of the production and processing of food crops, men control the means of production, land, cattle, and reproduction. Hence, although women provide their labour, the financial benefits are enjoyed mainly by men. This situation seriously jeopardizes women's financial security and their ability to pay for health care (Nadar, 2006, p.174).

Furthermore, poverty has an inherently historical dimension, and according to Sobrino, he argues that there is no clear definition of poverty in the gospels. In his expression about the poor during the time of Jesus' ministry, he stated that.

The poor person is the "insignificant" one, the one considered a "non-person," someone whose full rights as a human being are not recognized. People without social or individual substance, who count for little in society and the Church. This is how they are seen, or rather not seen, because they are rendered invisible by their exclusion from the world of our time. There are many reasons for this: economic scarcity is certainly one, but also the color of their skin, being a woman, belonging to a despised culture (Sobrino, 2004, p. 64-65).

This is how things are in the Church of the twenty-first century. Single women are "insignificant." This means due to their poverty; they are unimportant to worth consideration. They do not have either social substance, and more so perceived they count in an extraordinarily little way in the society and the Church.

Single women, according to my informants, are insignificant in the Church. Mwende expressed her views saying there is no real love of God to those who are single in the Church. Instead, they are neglected; nobody cares about them (Mwende). Joanna was of the same view as Mwende; there is no group for single women in the church to discuss their issues as a group to be encouraged. Despite

them being a big group in the church, they are not recognized in any way (Joanina). Therefore, according to stigma theory, Single women are a group that is despised in the church, and they suffer more trauma in the patriarchal society where men have the final say.

In my view, some single women are poor mostly due to the limitations and discriminations created by patriarchal practices and social structures in the society, for instance, lack of access to resources like land and jobs. Social learning theory helps to understand every individual in the society acquires some life patterns either by direct experience or by observation. The aspect of not acquiring land, which is the primary source of income, leaves single women vulnerable to poverty. Moreover, I do agree with Bryant L. Myers, who argues that poverty is a lack of freedom to grow, which is done through a series of restrictions and limitations in four areas of life: mental, physical, social, and spiritual (Myers, 2011, p.131). According to my informants, most of them were poor not because they are lazy or weak, but their poverty was out of the restrictions and limitations placed on them, mentally, physically, socially, and spiritually. Some of the single women are meant to believe that unless they are married, they cannot make it on their own.

Therefore, my view is that the church should take the role of being the voice for the voiceless and preach the gospel of freedom to the people in the church and society who are putting restrictions and limitations on single women. Single women are poor because they live in cultural contexts with cultural practices that do not work for their well-being. Mostly their relationships with other members in the society are often oppressive and disempowering because of no-poor "playing god" in the lives of the poor (Myers, 2011).

Furthermore, single women in the church have high expectations that the church being the institution of God, should treat them in love and respect. This was the feeling at the back of the minds of informants. Single women are the creation of God created in his image; therefore, Bryant L. Myers stated that:

Creator and creation are in a continuing relationship, distinct yet inseparably linked together in a relationship of love. God, therefore, transcends creation, and yet through Christ, is actively involved in sustaining it (Myers, 2011, p. 60-61).

This was confirmed in Jesus' ministry when he was reading the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, which is recorded in the gospel of St Luke, where it is written that: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free (Luke 4:18). Jesus had a clear vision and mission to accomplish here on earth. His ministry was a continuation of God's relationship of love in creation. This mission of God's love through his son Jesus Christ was a spiritual mission that touches the following groups of people: the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed.

According to the findings from the participants, this mission of Jesus remains to be relevant even in the society of the twenty-first century. Single women go to church for divine intervention due to the level of their poverty; they expect to find love of God, which is for all people despite their status in the society. Mwende stated her expectation in the church was to be loved by fellow members without any discrimination, but she realized that was not the case. Similarly, Tabitha and Joanina were expecting to receive care and hope from the church, but instead, nobody was concerned about them. Moreover, maria, due to a lack of a job to earn money for food, clothing, rent, and school fees for her children, decided to do prostitution to cater for her family. All these informants and their children undergo a lot of stigma, oppression, and discrimination due to the patriarchal systems and beliefs which are discriminative and stereotype single women in the society.

Therefore, according to my findings from the data, single women need a message of good news, the transmission of recovery of their sight, which they have been blinded by stigmatization and patriarchal challenges in the church and society. In my view, single women have a lot of challenges from all directions, and they

feel oppressed in life. They need a message of hope and freedom from their oppression. There is a need for somebody like prophet Elisha in the Old Testament with the widow who had "nothing in the house except a jar of oil," and Elisha gave her the message of good news, which was a recovery of sight to the widow's mind. She realized her gift of entrepreneurship using her jar of oil to pay her debt, and the rest amount of the money was for her and her son (2Kings 4:1-7).

67 6:2.3. Sexual desire as taboo for single women

The issue of talking about sexuality and sexual desire remains taboo in this study; however, the informants express how they struggle with their sexual desire in their daily lives. Sex matters are treated as taboo. The message from church leaders about sex is clearly, do not have sex outside marriage. Therefore, the sexual urge felt by single women is either ignored or rather perceived to be wrong. Moreover, little practical advice is given on how to view and handle sexual urges (Aune, 2002, p.71). Sexual desire is a challenge that leads single women to social stigma when one is involved in a sexual relationship with a married man.

Some of the informants explained their desire to have a man for their sexual urge. They stated it is false to think that single women who are Christian do not have a sexual interest. Single women are human beings with body desires as other married women, and many women struggle with sexual urges (Aune, 2002). This issue of sexual appetite is one reason why single women in the church should have their group to discuss and examine the case with other women who are single Christians.

In chapter two, I mentioned the place of sex in African culture. John Mbiti points out that sex is not only used for biological purposes but also for religious and social uses in African societies. Sex is "for procreation and pleasure; sex plays an important and obvious role in any normal marriage and any society of the world. There are African peoples among whom rituals are solemnly opened or concluded with actual or symbolic sexual intercourse between husband and wife

or other officiating persons” (Mbiti, 1990, pp.142-143). Similarly, sexual organs are believed to be gates of life. Therefore, single women are seen as people who are not participating in the “drama” because marriage is seen as “a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator” (Mbiti, 1990, p. 130).

In this respect, the issue of sex as a taboo for single women can be interpreted. The fact that single women are not participating in the “marriage drama” assumes that they should abstain from sex until they get married. This is the same view held in the church and the community. Moreover, sex before marriage is forbidden in the church and not expected to be discussed among single women. As already observed before, culturally, there is a way to make sure that every woman is married, whether through marrying as the second wife, arranged marriages for singles who have exceptional cases, or wife inheritance in the case of widows. Through such ways, society made sure that all people had a sex partner, and none was lacking; that is why talking sex becomes a taboo to single women.

In this study, it was revealed that most single women are faced with a dilemma because the church does not have a solution for single women, the same way the culture offers a solution to make sure everyone has a sex partner. Therefore, single women in the church are left on their own without any direction or advice on how to deal with their sexual desires, but they are expected to abstain from sex until they get married. In the Bible, Paul discusses sexual desire advising that if possible, one can be single and serve God. He also adds that if one cannot control their sexual desire, it is good for them to get married than to stay single but tortured continually with ungratified desire (1 Corinthians 7:9). However, Paul does address the issue of those who will not find someone to marry them, how will they satisfy their sexual desires? Single women in this study face this challenge, especially those getting old and have no hope of finding a marriage partner.

68 6:2.4. Resilience among single women

In this study, single women experienced a lot of challenges both from the church and the community. There were barriers from all over that made it difficult and almost impossible for single women to flourish in their lives. However, the study discovered that a group of women overcame those barriers and the opposing challenges and saw the positives of being single women.

According to Dovidio, Major, and Crocker, some members of the stigmatized group of single women with positive reactions in life. Although the people in their culture stigmatize them or rather in the society, they continuously have high self-esteem, they perform at high levels in academic achievement and other outcomes, are happy, and appear to be quite resilient despite their negative experiences (Dovidio, Major, and Crocker, 2000, p. 2). Furthermore, stigma is mostly a social construction determined by the broader cultural context (Dovidio, Major, and Crocker, p. 3). This theory helps to understand the informants who expressed the freedom they enjoyed for being single.

These participants were a group of women who had resilience and had overcome all the negatives that the church and the society offered to single women. They boasted of the freedom of not being controlled by any man and how they managed to achieve and own property, like land and business in their name (Ciakuthi & Maria). Ability to be a more active life and achieve more than those who are married (Mukwanjeru). They viewed their singleness as a way of being liberated from the patriarchal power and stigmatization when you realize that God created you with freedom of choice (Kagondou).

69 6:5. Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the analyzed and discussed interviews with single women. This is explained and interpreted in the light of the theories used. More so, my understanding, according to the informant's expressions, is also given. In this discussion, there are two themes, and the first one is the marginalization of single women in the Church, which

addressed the first research sub-question. This marginalization of single women in the church is done through lack of pastoral care, unequal treatment, church doctrines and rules, and divorce and remarriage. In the theme, I discussed the impact of the cultural system and practices on single women. This second theme responded to the second research sub-question. The effect of culture on single women experiences were: cultural beliefs against single women, single women and poverty, sexual desire as a taboo for single women, and lastly, resilience among single women.

70 7:0. Chapter Seven: Summary

In African customs, marriage is the center of human life; it is expected to be respected. However, singlehood is a growing concern in the Kenyan church; this is due to the increasing number of single women in the Church and society. It is no longer possible to ignore the issue of single women in the Church and society. It needs attention for discussion and suggestions on how to incorporate single women without discrimination in all activities. Despite marriage being highly upheld as a social practice in the African context, it is now evident that not all people will get married; hence, the single women's issue remains to be a significant thing to be addressed.

This study focuses on understanding the experiences of single women in the church and the community. The inspiration for doing this research was my experience of more than twenty years as a Methodist Church pastor in Kenya. In the African context, marriage is believed to be sacred and should be respected by all. Nevertheless, the number of Single women is growing hence posing a challenge in many communities in Kenya, such as in the Tharaka community where this study took place.

As explained in the background chapter, the Church plays a significant role in African society. The Methodist Church in Kenya has a considerable influence in the community where this research was carried out. The study included 13 single women of different ages and conditions. The 13 women were divided into four groups: single women who have never been married, those who are divorced, the widowed, and single women with children out of wedlock.

I employed methodology and procedures to come up with a research design and research strategy. The informants were responded to the questions asked from the interview guide questions. The method used to get the informants was purposive sampling; those sampled were relevant to the study. The interview's guide questions were in answering the research question; what are the single women's experiences within the Church and the local community in Kenya? Three types of theories were used to understand and interpret Single women's

experiences in the Church and society, with the stigma theory ascribing stigmatization of single women as a societal establishment through grouping or categorizing people at some level given community.

71 7:1. Findings

The study revealed that single women are discriminated against by men in the community. The stereotyping and prejudicing of single women both in the church and society have distorted their personalities, resulting in low self-esteem. The social learning theory helps explain and approach human behavior to understand how single women are marginalized, discriminated against, and stereotyped. The patriarchal theory explains the practices and social structures in the social system. Men hold primary power and predominate in making roles and structures that men have control over women. Hence, single women face exclusion from the church leadership positions, no pastoral care, social loneliness, social stigma, name-calling, marginalization, and absolute poverty in their families.

In carrying this research, the findings that single women face challenges from the church by being discriminated against in the church activities. Moreover, patriarchal cultural beliefs and systems structured in favor of men to dominate over single women are real. Low economic status resulting in lack of money to meet basic needs like; food, clothing, shelter, and school fees for the children, this absolute poverty leading children of single women in the street and their mothers to be sex workers need to be addressed. The church needs to be voiceless by rising above the church's patriarchal culture and in society because the church is the light of the world.

72 7:2. Response to the research question

Further, the researcher noted that single women's sexuality is not expressed and celebrated biblically. The church is the institution of love to all people, should treat single women with equity by expressing the sexuality of unmarried women within the church community. In this study, the research question was responded to using the following two sub-questions. The first question was, how are single

women expressing their experiences and treatment from the church? The second question was, how does their local community impact the single women experiences? I have summarized the findings in the sub-questions to show how the research question was responded to.

1. How are single women expressing their experiences and treatment from the church? According to my findings in this study, cultural beliefs were the main factors leading to the marginalization of single women in the church. The informants expressed how they are negatively treated and perceived to be immature to make decisions as leaders in the church, hence exclusion from leadership positions. The language of intimidation of single women by stereotyping them as incomplete and misfits in the church leads them to low self-esteem in the believers' community is real—cultural system and cultural structures that are patriarchal influence the church. The informants who were divorced were expressing their mistreatment through disciplinary actions like not being allowed to lead or partake in the church's holy communion. Furthermore, discrimination, rejection, and low self-esteem lead to a series of related problems like poverty, which leads to a lack of basic needs like food, clothing, lack of education, and lack of suitable shelter. This state of absolute poverty leads some of the single women to engage in prostitution, making them have a low church status.

Moreover, the informants expressed how their state of poverty leads to inequality of single women in the church. The church members devalue even children from single women. Namecalling was also one way of stigmatizing single women in the church; those oppressive and disempowering verbal words left single women feeling demotivated and lonely in their lives.

2. How does their local community impact single women experiences? Single women expressed their community challenges because of the patriarchal practices and social structures formulated by men. The patriarchal practices are demeaning, devaluing, and discriminative to single women in all ways. These patriarchal structures and systems elevate men more than single women by demeaning them without recognizing their community contribution. This aspect of being devalued and side-lined in the community was a demotivating

factor to some of the single women and having the feeling of being worthless in the study community.

Lack of equality in the community where single women have no right to inherit family property like land after the death of a husband or unmarried women was a big challenge. The land is generally the primary source of income in this rural area of study. Therefore, single women expressed that their poverty resulted from lack of land; hence, their income was casual labor in the farms of other people in the community.

Despite all the challenges from the cultural beliefs, stigma, being side-lined, and lack of equity in the community, some single women managed to overcome all the challenges and see the positives in singlehood. Some of the informants were positive in their mind, who choose to take is a single woman a positive way of living the life of freedom without being under the control of men. They expressed how they have space and freer than those who were married. They stated their ability to own and possess any property without depending on a man's authority. According to those informants, being a single woman is more comfortable to plan and pursue future goals with happiness.

7.3.3. Research aim

Through this study, the aim of the research was achieved. The researcher interviewed single women who expressed their experiences in the church. They complained about lack of pastoral care, exclusion from the church leadership, ex-communication, lack of committed Christians to marry, social loneliness, social stigma, stereotype, low self-esteem, poverty, and name-calling. The informants expressed their feeling of being marginalized in the church and society. Lack of equity in the community where patriarchy systems and structures against single women are real things in their life. Therefore, this research aimed to explore what experiences single women are having in the church, how they express these experiences and the impact of their experiences in their lives. The study further investigates how society impacts the experiences of single women in the communities they live in. The study's findings showed how single women are side-lined in the church, and how they are treated as low-

class people in society. Moreover, through this study, some single women felt that they were freer than those who are married. The researcher, out of the information from the informants, has achieved the aim of the research.

74 7:4. The main objectives of this study

There were three main objectives in this study; these are: to find out how the church deals with single women, to investigate how the Church cares for the increasing number of single women, and to find out what roles single women play in the Methodist Church in Kenya.

All three objectives of the study were achieved, as seen in the research. The researcher found that the church had fallen short of the single women's expectations, who expected that church would be a place for hope, love, acceptance, and inclusion. However, the opposite was true. Just like single women were neglected in the communities they lived in, the same discrimination, stigmatization, and stereotyping were happening in the church.

It was also evident that the church was not so conscious about the increasing number of single women in the church, hence the dilemma for single women about if the church knows they exist. The issue of pastoral care was pointed out to be missing, for example, among single women. There was no support group for single women or activities like seminars and workshops where single women's challenges. The study also revealed that single women were denied significant roles in the church even if they qualified for their positions. They were single, which made them be given minor roles like teaching in Sunday schools, challenging for most single women, especially those who were barren.

75 7:5. Recommendations to the Methodist church in Kenya

After having done this research, I understand that single women in the church feel neglected by the care ministry, excluded socially, stigmatized as incomplete and excluded in church leadership, and through name-calling as husband snatches, prostitutes. Children from single women are equally disadvantaged because they face almost similar challenges their mothers face, among other

challenges. Single women are mostly poor, demeaned, and degraded by the patriarchal practices and the social structures in the African society, which discriminate against women, especially in ownership of property. These patriarchal practices have been extended in the church, making it too difficult for single women to feel comfortable anywhere, both in society and the church. However, the respondents insisted that the church is the only place they expect to get hope, to be loved, empowered, and have a role to play just as other church members.

Therefore, my recommendations will be the following:

The church should form a group of single women to share their issues for encouragement from God's word.

- The church should be guided by the bible, which provides Christian values and principles of love, compassion, equality, inclusion, care of the poor, widows and orphans, and other marginalized groups. The church pastors and leaders should seriously review their attitudes and practices towards single women. Forums for dialogue should be created to discuss perspectives and the single women's feelings so that the church members can be conscious and sensitive to treat single women with love.
- That the church should seriously consider the ministry of single women, both in church and in society. This can be done by starting fellowship groups for single women, which can also work as support groups for women in the community to join
- That the church programs of the year should ensure to include activities for single women, such as seminars and counseling sessions, which could involve professional counseling sessions for those most affected.
- The church should be an instrument of change of wrong cultural beliefs and practices. For example, the church should question the patriarchal rules and social structures instead of the church conforming to the cultural patterns. Jesus and Paul, for instance, challenged terrible practices; that is what the church should do.

- Single women should be given a voice and role to play within the church, and they should be valued, respected, and treated with honor. The church should let them use their talents to serve God and the church at all levels, without discrimination due to their marital status.
- It is the responsibility of the church to change the attitude towards children from single women. The church needs to find ways to care for these children and not to stigmatize them during baptism.

76 7:3. Further studies suggestion

In the discussion, I talked a bit about the influence of patriarchy in the church and poverty, leading to discrimination and stereotypes of single women; this research focused only on single women. The research suggests further studies should be done in the church. Moreover, another area of interest should be the empowerment of single women, spiritually and economically, to find ways on how the church should treat single women with equity. The area of sex and sexuality of single women, which is a taboo, should be the area of interest of further studies.

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78 Attachments

Are you interested in taking part in the research project?

Singles and the Church?

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to explore, how the Methodist Church in Kenya can integrate single women into the whole life of the Church. This letter informs you about the purpose of the project, and what your participation entails.

78.1 Purpose of the project

The aim of this research is to explore how the Methodist Church in Kenya can integrate single women into the whole life of the Church, and moreover to find out whether the church can appoint leaders to look after the interests and the challenges faced by the single women in the Church.

78.2 Objectives

1. To find out how the Church deals with single people
2. To find out how do the Church care for the single women?
3. To find out how to stop stigmatization of the single people in the church and the society.
4. To recognize the role of the Church to the increasing number of singles
5. To present a solution on how to stop stigma to single people in the church and the society in Kenya.

This data is meant only for my master's thesis paper. This data will not be used for others purposes like teaching or other student project.

Who is responsible for the research project?

Norwegian school of Theology, Religion and Society. This institution is responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

I am randomly selecting single women from the different churches in Tharaka Synod. Interviews are conducted to 13 single women in the synod and your one

(1) amongst the thirteen single people. I picked you because I know you are a single woman and a member of the church. There is nobody else who is aware about it. Your name will not appear neither other identifying personal identification will not appear anywhere.

What does participation involve for you?

Your participation in this study will consist of an interview with an estimated time of up to one hour. You will be asked series of questions about your experience, feelings, care, and challenges you face in the Methodist Church in Kenya. Our discussion will be audio taped if you are willing to help me accurately document your views or rather your insights in your own words.

Your responses will remain confidential but will be used for reference while proceeding with research. However, direct quotes from you will be used in the paper; your name and other identifying information will be anonymous.

78.3 Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

78.4 Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

The persons who will have access to the personal data is myself, Benjamin Mati (student) and my supervisor, associate professor Kristin Graff-Kallevåg. In order to make sure that no other persons are able to access the personal data, I will replace your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data. I will store the data locked away.

Your identification will not appear in anyway in my thesis, because your name, age, email, your position and the name of your congregation will be anonymous.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

All interviews recording will be stored in a secure workspace until August 2020. The tapes will be then destroyed at the end of the project.

78.5 Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to: access the personal data that is being processed about you request that your personal data is deleted request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact: Benjamin Mati (student) at the e-mail address: mati.benjamin@yahoo.com , or by phone +4748634725

Associate Prof. Kristin Graff-Kallevag (supervisor) at email: Kristin.Graff@mf.no or by phone + 47 22590633

Data Protection Officer: **Hillestad, Berit Widerøe** at Berit.W.Hillestad@mf.no or by phone +47 22590595

NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personvertjeestr@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely

Researcher – Benjamin Mati Kathenya

78.6 Consent form

This interview is voluntary; you have the right to withdraw your consent if the project is in progress, and to stop the interview at any time or for any reason. You have the freedom of choice to do so.

I have received and understood information about the project Singles and the Church and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent: To participate in interviews, as specified in the description of the project in this letter.

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. 15-08-2020

----- (Signed by participant, date)

Interview guide questions

1. Could you tell me about your Church?
2. Could you share with me about yourself and your experience in your Church?
3. Could you tell me more about how married women and men think about single women in the Church?
4. Due to your experience, could you tell me how the Church cares for single women and ladies?
5. Could you tell me of any moment when you experienced that it is good to be in the Church as a single woman?
6. Due to your experience, could you tell me the challenges you face in the Church and the cultural difficulties you experience in the immediate community as a single woman?
7. Could you share with me about the role that single women play in the Church and society?
8. Could you tell me if there is any time when you have experienced it is difficult to be a single woman in the Church?
9. Due to your experience, are there other challenges you would say that single women face in the Church than the married women?

10. Do you think there are stereotypes about single women's sexuality both in the Church and a culture where sexual issues for unmarried singles is viewed as a sin and a taboo? If yes, how do you handle them?
11. Do you have something to add?

78.7