

The Contemporary Psychosocial Factors and Their Influence on Family Dynamics in Kenya

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Abstract

The contemporary psychosocial factors have influenced family dynamics not only in Kenya but all over the world. This situation has been worse during COVID-19 pandemic period. In quite a number of incidences members of a family have been reported to have used violent means to resolve domestic conflicts. Family dynamics are the functioning of a family or the changing nature of family life in both good and bad situation. It includes ways decisions are made, problems are solved, and feelings are shared in a given situation in a family. Thus, it helps individuals to judge and compare themselves to the other families. The purpose of the study was to determine the contemporary psychosocial factors and their influence on family dynamics in Kenya. Contemporary psychosocial factors included changes in family relationships. The specific factors studied included: Discrimination, jealous and competition, addiction, dominance, and violence and conflicts. The indicators of family dynamics included family stability. The family stability factors included: Divorce, grief, absentee caregivers, crisis and chaos, and financial stability. The study objectives were: To examine the influence of psychosocial factors on family stability. The study adopted a descriptive research survey design. The target population was 27,862 households. Simple random sampling techniques were used to select 756 households. Questionnaires were used to collect data from children while an interview schedule was used to collect data from head of "family" for collaboration. The interview was carried out by research assistants after a thorough training. A pilot study involving 76 households was carried out. Using Spearman Brown Prophecy formula by split half technique reliability coefficient of 0.745, and 0.736 were realized for children and head of family tools respectively. The data were analyzed by use of descriptive statistics tools with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for windows. This study found out that family dynamics differs from one family to another but they revolve around family stability. Family structure and culture were the major moderators in family dynamics. Indicators for family stability showed that 49.5% of families were in frequent crises and chaos followed by absentee caregivers at 31%. For toxic changes, dominance as an indicator was rated at 34.2% followed by Addiction 26.8%. The result showed that Contemporary psychosocial factors had a great influence on family dynamics. The results of this study may be useful to the counsellors, psychologists and organisation interested in family matters like churches, schools, GoK department of social work among others.

Key words: Family dynamics; Contemporary psychosocial factors; family stability;

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I. Background Information

Family dynamics is the functioning of a family. Meissner (1978), referred to it as the patterns of interactions among people living in the same house hold. Family members depends on each other for psychosocial support for example emotional, physical, and economic support. Psychosocial support act as the primary sources of security against stress in a family.

Minuchin, (1974a) gave reason for family dynamics. Minuchin, said that family dynamics are brought about by changing nature of the family life. This are changes that occur in a family behaviour pattern. Whichever the pattern or family system, the functioning tends to change with time and so does the approach to contemporary problem. changing nature of the family life can be a healthy change or a toxic change. In a healthy change, slights and misbehaviours are readily addressed, and boundaries are clear and consistent, all of which help avoid disharmony in the longer term. This is common in a healthy or stable family where stable family is infectious. The opposite is true for toxic changes. According to Minuchin, (1974b) toxic changes shown during discrimination, abuse, and manipulation. Minuchin, added that slights and misbehaviours are not readily addressed, and boundaries are not clear and consistent during toxic changes. Disharmony is very

common in toxic family dynamics. Such change result into toxic or unhealthy family. Thus, members of a toxic family commonly show stress and depression or mental illness.

Families in Kenya have experienced a lot of turmoil and indiscipline, over the years, however the rate of this turmoil reached unprecedented level during COVID-19 pandemic period. Initially, family issues were relatively calm and involved such things as peaceful resolution of conflicts by elders. However, the recent cases have been marked by homicides, suicides, physical abuse and destruction of property (GoK, 2001; GoK, 2008). Some studies have been carried out on domestic violence, the extends have not been through enough to reveal the underlying causes. It is for these reasons that the researcher carried out a study on family dynamics and their influence on contemporary problem issues.

Gunn and Eberhardt (2019) argued that family dynamics determines the the functioning of a family in a good and bad situation. It influences the ways of decision-making, problem-solving, or even sharing of feelings. Thus, it helps individuals to judge themselves as well as other families. Besides, it also influences relationships and behaviours of members. Indeed this study revealed that healthier the family relationships the secure the family is in terms of in coping with stress and problem solving. They also boost the communication of individual members. On the other hand, poor family relationship can take a toll on an individual's physical and mental health. For example, when a child experiences depression, the therapist studies family dynamics to get to the root cause of the problem. (Houseman & Semien 2021, Aug 6;

Huecker, Malik, King, Smock 2021, Feb 8).

Despite this, many people may not be aware of how various family psychosocial factors influences family dynamics. Besides, they imagine families like a unit that comprises of mother, father, and children. Therefore, this study mentioned some of the family structures and how they moderate influence of family dynamics on contemporary problem issues.

The purpose of the study was to determine the contemporary psychosocial factors and their influence on family dynamics in Kenya. The results of this study will be useful to the relevant Ministry and organisation intresred in family matters that may include churches, schools, GoK department of social work among others.

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on Bowen family systems theory developed by Murray Bowen (1978) as cited by Titelman, (2008). This is a theory of human behaviour that defines the family unit as a complex social system in which members interact to influence each other's behaviour. Bowen's family systems theory (FST) is a concept of looking at the family as an emotional unit. according to Bowen, a family system is a relationship the family exhibits as the interlocking concepts of familial development and behaviour. The Bowen family systems theory view the family as an emotional unit where family members are intensely emotionally connected. Family members interconnect, making it appropriate to view the system as a whole rather than as individual elements. The guiding principle is that "what happens to one member of the family, affects everyone in the family."

According to Titelman (2008), the theory suggests that a family functions as an emotional system wherein each member plays a specific role and must follow certain rules. Based on Bowen's theory and his study of the family, roles within the emotional system, patterns develop within the emotional system, and each member's behaviour impacts the other members. Depending on the specific human relationship systems and how the emotional systems operate, the Bowen family systems theory suggests these behavioural patterns can lead to either balance or dysfunction of the system or both.

Conceptual Framework

This study was based on the conceptual frame work that believed that **Contemporary Psychosocial Factors** had a direct influence on **Family Dynamics** as indicated in the figure 1.

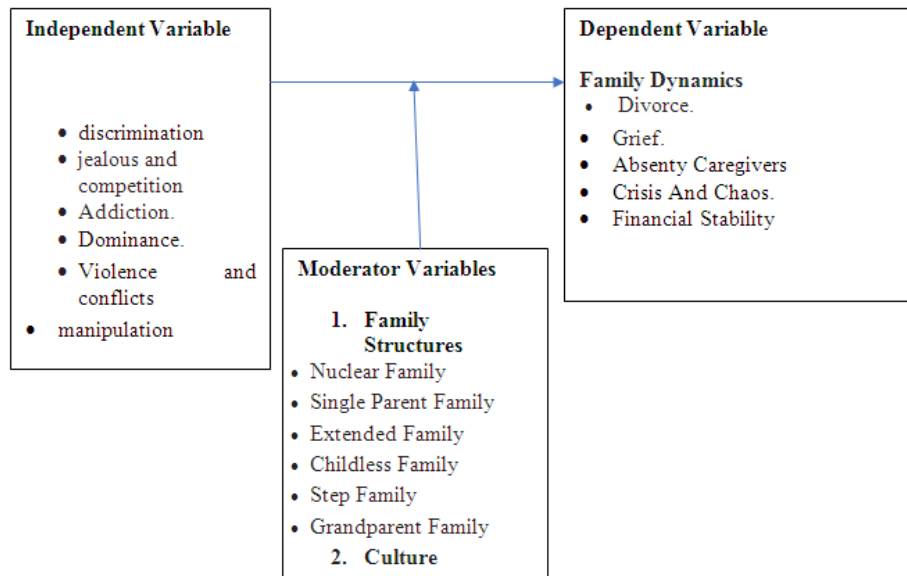


Figure 1: The Contemporary Psychosocial Factors and Their Influence on Family Dynamics in Kenya

Contemporary Psychosocial Factors formed the independent variable with the indicators being; discrimination, jealous and competition, Addiction, Dominance, Violence and conflicts, and manipulation. Family Dynamics formed the dependent variable, where the indicators include, Divorce, Grief, Absent Caregivers, Crisis and Chaos and Financial Stability. The family structures formed the moderator variables. In a nut shell the Contemporary Psychosocial Factors and Their Influence on Family Dynamics in Kenya, however, Family structure and culture serves as moderators.

II. Methodology

This study adopted descriptive research design. The both quantitative and qualitative techniques were involved in description. (Kombo and Tromp, 2006) This design was found suitable because it makes use of a natural setting like homestead as compared to a laboratory situation. It also allows for the use of research tools which are flexible and interactive like the questionnaire. The researcher used the questionnaires to gather information for the study. The target population was 27,862 households in Kenya of Kakamega County. Simple random sampling techniques were used to select 756 households. Questionnaires were used to collect data from children while an interview schedule was used to collect data from head of “family” for collaboration. A pilot study involving 76 households was carried out in neighbouring Likuyani Subcounty. Using Spearman Brown Prophecy formula by split half technique reliability coefficient of 0.745, and 0.736 were realized for children and head of family tools respectively. This was accepted because an alpha value of 0.7 and above is considered suitable for making group inferences that are accurate.

The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics. They included frequency distribution and percentages tables. The researcher first sorted the tool manually in order to identify the incomplete ones. They were then coded and scored before entering in computer. With the assistance of a computer SPSS, the data was then analysed. The qualitative items were analysed thematically.

III. Findings

The demographic study identified six types of family structures that were used in this study. They included: Nuclear family, single parent family, extended family, childless family, step family and Grant Parent Family. The result was as in Table 1:

**Table 1:
Family Structure that are common in Kenya**

Family structure	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Nuclear Family	25	3.3%	3.3%	3.3%
Single Parent Family	122	16.2%	16.2%	19.5%
Extended Family	341	45.2%	45.2%	64.8%
Childless Family	4	.5%	.5%	65.2%
Step Family	234	31.0%	31.0%	96.2%

Grantparent Family	29	3.8%	3.8%	100.0%
Total	756	100.0%	100.0%	

In Table1, the extended family was the highest with 45.2%. According to Biblarz and Gottainer (2000) the extended family comprised of people who are either related by blood or marriage who lived in the same household or homestead with many other relatives or close family friends. Extended families consisted of uncles, aunts, nieces, and nephews. In some community, children referred to their paternal uncles as 'younger father' or 'older father', depending on the age in relation to the child's father's age. It helps in giving mental and financial support to one another. The findings agreed with Brown (2004) who said that most extended family raise the child together, support each other, maintain the household duties, share a strong emotional bond and shares common goals. The benefits reported included: constant support especially in case of emergencies, financial, mental, and social support and division of chores and income. The challenges included: Lack of privacy, financial burden or instability of income (if members aren't contributing), interference in other relationships and understanding family dynamics.

This was followed by step family at 31%. According to Banuelos and Obeso (2003) a stepfamily or blended family is a family where at least one parent has children that are not biologically or adoptively related to the spouse. Either parent, or both, may have children from previous relationships or marriages. Similarly, the children may be from a polygamous relationship. A number of the marriages end in divorce, separation or early death of spouse. Besides, many of the concern opt for remarriage. The new relationships, leads to a stepfamily or a blended family. it was reported that stepfamily led to maladjustments for parents as well as children. In such case family members experienced anger, frustration, confusion, and jealousy. These findings agree with Becvar, and Becvar, (2002) who found that a stepfamily can get challenging at times but it all depended on how they tackle the situation with love and care. The benefits include: Children have a big family and siblings from both their parents, both the parents are always around, children form strong bonding with both families, there is financial security from both families. The challenges are: It might get tough for children to adjust, Parents might have fights over their respective kids, and children may become undisciplined.

The third was Single Parent Family with 16.2%. Single parent family consists of a single parent raising one or more children. The single parent could be either a mother or a father. In Kenya a single parent families comprised of a parent and one or more dependent children without the presence and support of a spouse who was sharing the responsibility of parenting. The Reasons for single parenting include separation, break-up, abandonment, domestic violence, and death of the other parent. Single parenting has become very common after the step family. Either a mother or father alone raises a child which poses a challenge for love and affection. Statistics show that 17.2 million children under 18 live with a single mother and 3 million with a single father in USA. The benefits of single parent family included: sharing of household duties with kids. The challenges included: Financial instability, Limitation on opportunities and income.

Grandparent's families was one of the least common family structures with 3.8%. Grandparents get involved in raising their grandchildren when the parents get embroiled in some circumstances or grave situations. The main reason for Grandparent's families in Lugari was an arrest of parent especially father, a parent on long term medical treatment, a negligent parent mainly drugs abusers or death of the parent who was single. Sometimes grandparents raise their grandchildren though they might not be physically fit. With grandparents, children can cope up since grandparents look after the child with caution and care. The benefit included: grandparents form a strong family while maintaining a healthy relationship with children, children raised in affection and care, and secured feeling and a way to learn moral values. The challenges were: grandparents have to find a source of income, owing to health, their energy levels to do not match with kids, generation gap may lead to conflict in thinking and compassion may lead to indiscipline mannerism. This was in agreement with Brown (2010).

The nuclear families also known as the traditional family structure formed 3.3%. These families consisted of husband and wife (two parents) along with children. This family structure is common and basic. It is the most ideal structure to raise children. The children could be either biological or adopted. But the aim of this family is to raise the children independently and with togetherness. According to the U.S. Census Bureau as reported by Brown (2010), 69% of children under the age of 18 continue to live in a family with two parents. The benefits of living in a such family included: financial stability, stable parenting, education, health, upbringing, is a top-notch priority, and emphasis on efficient communication. the study finding contradicted Brown (2010), because 3.3% was small compared to 69%. However the challenges were similar to those postulated by Brown which included, loneliness because of no extended family, isolation leads to stress and depression, and resolving conflicts can become difficult.

The least family structure was childless family at 0.5%. According to Becvar, and Becvar, (2002) this consisted of partners who do not have children. Amidst them, some wished to have children, but thought that it was not right time for them. Thus, they choose to not have children. While some wanted to have children but

due to health issues or infertility complications could not bear a child. Some people preferred career and enjoyment over children. Those who opt for voluntary childlessness were doing so in order to succeed in a career, enjoy life or travel. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that around 23% of childless adults under 50 in USA showed voluntary childlessness (Biblarz & Gottainer, 2000). This figure is larger compared to 0.5% found in the study due to African culture which discourages childlessness. Biblarz and Gottainer, (2000) adds that such couples prefer to have pets in place of children. The benefits here include: No dependency, abundant income, couples get more time to spend with each other, and cherish other activities like adventure, travel, etc. The challenges were: sometimes the parents felt isolated, and missing something.

The main objective was to determine the contemporary psychosocial factors and their influence on family dynamics in Kenya. Earlier studies have shown that not every person is born into a stable family system. A stable family is one which offers psychosocial support to the family members. The psychosocial support indicators include: love and caring from other family members; providing security and a sense of belonging; open communication; making each person within the family feel important, valued, respected and esteemed. Unstable families show high rates in divorce or separation, grief or loss, absentee caregiver, frequent crisis and chaos and unpredictable financial stability. The level of psychosocial support may be a recipe for toxic changes in a family if not well managed. The toxic relationships are all about discrimination, jealousy and competition, addiction, dominance, violence and conflicts or even manipulation. Thus, toxic family dynamics affect members by pulling them towards depression or mental illness. This study considered responses on the influence of psychosocial factors on family dynamics in Kenya and the findings were as indicated in Table 3.

**Table 2:
The Influence of Psychosocial Factors on Family Dynamics in Kenya**

Psychosocial factors	Family dynamics						Total	Percentage
	Divorce/ separation	Grief	Absentee caregivers	Crisis and chaos	financial stability			
discrimination	12	21	6	3	3	45	6.0%	
Jealous and Competition	5	12	64	34	4	119	15.8%	
Addiction	1	16	67	110	9	203	26.8%	
Dominance	0	12	65	170	12	259	34.2%	
Violence and Conflicts	0	11	31	47	5	94	12.4%	
Manipulation.	0	4	1	10	21	36	4.8%	
Total	18	76	234	374	54	756	100%	
Percentage	2.4%	10%	31%	49.5%	7.1%	100%		

In table 3, the indicators for family dynamics were divorce or separation, grief, absentee caregiver, crisis and chaos and financial stability. The highest percentage of respondents (49.5%) reported that there were frequent crises and chaos in their families. It was reported that family crisis occurred when a family was undergoing a change. This acted as a turning point where things were either to get better, or they got worse. It included day-to-day hassles which had piled up and caused stress overload. This finding agrees with Antecol and Bedard (2007). According to their research other causes of crises reported were sudden events or something unexpected that suddenly hit your family and that crises always led to chaos where it could not be well managed. A high percentage of respondents reported that at this point the chaos was due to two or more of the four elements that contributed to a crisis. These elements were: Experiencing an anxiety and stress producing situation, having difficulty coping stress, showing a chronic inability to meet basic family responsibilities, and having no apparent sources of social and economic support to deal with the stressor. The second highest rated at 31% was absentee caregivers. Caregivers provide care for family members in need as an act of kindness, love, and responsibility. Day after day, caregivers gift their loved one with care and attention, improving their quality of life, even if they're unable to express their gratitude. The opposite occurs when the care giver is absent. A rate of 31% showed that most family members experienced absentee caregivers thus missing a lot of essential care. Grief on the other hand was reported at 10%. Amato (2000) argued that grief is a natural response to loss and therefore coping with the loss of someone or something you love is one of life's biggest challenges. The absence of caregiver and frequent crises and chaos may be one of the contributors to grief in Kenya. However, grief depends on many factors, including personality and coping style, life experience, faith, and how significant the

loss was to one. This in itself might have caused the lowering of the percentage rate. Financial stability and Divorce/separation were rated at 7.1% and 2.4% respectively. The result contradicted Belle (1990) who said that financial stability was key to a stable family. The finding showed that financial stability and Divorce/separation may not be of high consideration in family stability in Kenya. It may be because this region is high potential farming zone and the culture of the society embraces extended family structure.

Psychosocial factors in the study included: Jealous and competition, addiction, dominance, violence and conflicts and manipulation. Dominance as an indicator of Psychosocial factors was the highest rated with 34.2%. The study found out that there was an environment of dominance in families in Kenya. These meant that one or a few of the family members ruled and decided everything for others. There was no consideration of the opinions or views of the other family members. Some older toxic sibling ruled over the younger ones. Addiction was the second rated at 26.8%. The study found out that the children of the addicted parent had to take care of themselves. They took up the daily duties of parents like cooking, cleaning, and tending animals while the parents were away. The children and parent roles were reversed. Jealous and competition was the third rated at 15.8%. It was reported that there was unhealthy control within parents exercised for selfish motives. Examples included, emotional blackmailing, and over-controlling. According to the study children with over-controlling parents had lower mental wellbeing. Violence and conflicts as the key highlighter of toxic change was rated at 12.4%. This was related to physical, psychological, sexual, financial, emotional, and abusive relationships. The study noted that some children were growing up amid domestic violence. This led to children showing signs of mental illness, depression, or drug abuse. Discrimination was rated at 6%, in this case the toxic family member provides less or no emotional support to any member. This agreed with Acs G. (2007) who argued that this led members into emotional detachment. There was also a tinge of favouritism by focusing only on members and neglecting others. Manipulation was the least at 4.8%. It was reported that in families which had manipulation as an indicator of toxic change had no room for privacy and there was a lack of empathy. Having personal possessions was difficult for younger siblings because they were either destroyed or borrowed for an indefinite period without consent.

IV. Conclusion

This study found out that family dynamics differs from one family to another. They revolve parenting style and family stability. Family structure and culture were the major moderators in family dynamics. These factors can maintain or fracture the base of a family. It was important to note that, every family structure was unique and adjusting to contemporary issues was not uniform. The extended family was the most common family structure in Kenya with 45.2%. These were people who were either related by blood or marriage who lived in the same household or homestead. The extended family raise the child together, supported each other, maintained the household duties, shared a strong emotional bond and shared common family goals. This was followed by step family at 31%. This was a family where at least one parent had children that were not biologically or adoptively related to the spouse. Either parent, or both, may have had children from previous relationships or marriages or polygamous relationship. Indicators for family dynamics were divorce or separation, grief, absentee caregiver, crisis and chaos and financial stability. The highest percentage of respondents (49.5%) reported that there were frequent crises and chaos in their families. This collaborated well with the fact that it was reported that there were 45.2% of families experienced damaged relationship. It was reported that family crisis occurred when a family was undergoing a change. Crises always led to chaos where it could not be well managed. A high percentage of respondents reported that at this point the chaos was due to experiencing an anxiety and stress producing situation, having difficulty coping stress, showing a chronic inability to meet basic family responsibilities, and having no apparent sources of social and economic support to deal with the stressor. The second highest rated was absentee caregivers at 31%. Caregivers gift their loved one with care and attention, improving their quality of life, even if they're unable to express their gratitude. The opposite occurs when the care giver is absent. In a nut shell the study found that there was instability in families in Kenya. The psychosocial factors that influenced Family Dynamics in the study included: Jealous and competition, addiction, dominance, violence and conflicts and manipulation. Dominance as an indicator of family dynamics was rated at 34.2%. This meant that there was dominance in families in Kenya. In other words, one or a few of the family members ruled and decided everything for others. It means that there was no consideration of the opinions or views of the other family members during a decision. Addiction was the second common psychosocial factor rated at 26.8%. It was found out that the children of the addicted parent took care of themselves and there was reversed role. In overall, research found out that psychosocial factors influenced family dynamics in Kenya.

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