Marital Instability and its Impact on Female-Headed Household Livelihoods in Machakos County, Kenya

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Abstract

Marital instability is an emerging and increasing phenomenon in Kenyan societies. This study examined, the nature of marital instability among women in the rural areas, the major causes, and its impact on the female-headed household livelihoods. The study adapted a cross-sectional case study design and it involved women of the 15-49 age interval years who were separated, divorced or deserted by their husbands. The collected data were subjected to descriptive analysis, and inferential statistical analysis using Chi-square (χ2) test, correlation analysis, and logistic regression. Results indicate that, irresponsibility (74%) and infidelity (51.3%) were found to be the leading factors influencing marital instability. Violence (42.3%), alcoholism (38.7%), in-law problems (24%), unemployment (11%), age difference (10%), and polygamy (10%) were the other cited reasons. Most of the separated mothers are faced with challenges of achieving and maintaining their livelihood due to financial hardships. From the research findings, it was recommended that, there is need to sensitize the public about the causes and outcomes of family conflicts and to create livelihood opportunities and poverty reduction schemes for separated/divorced parents in the rural areas. These policies will improve livelihoods and reduce poverty especially among the affected female headed households in the rural area.

Keywords: Marital Instability; Female head; Households; livelihoods; Machakos; Kenya

1. Introduction

Marriage and family life have undergone major changes during the past few decades globally, Kenya included. Research on marital instability in Kenya is virtually lacking. The existing research by Kenya Demographic Health Survey(KDHS), (1999, 2002), Kenya National Bureau of Statistics(KNBS), (2010), and Kenya Integrated Household Survey(KIHBS)(2005/06) revealed that marital instabilities are increasingly becoming common and that women are three times more likely, than men, to report a divorce or breakdown in marriage (KDHS, 1999). However, important issues such as the factors associated with this trend and their effects on the female headed household livelihoods were left out. Lack of research findings on this topic have meant that, our knowledge on this contemporary social issue in the Country is still rudimentary. As a result of the increasing cases of marital instabilities, the Kenya government has introduced the matrimonial property bill to enable even distribution of family assets in event of separation or divorce. Moreover, the Kenya Vision 2030 second medium term plan 2013-2017 aims at integrating sustainable development goals (SDG's) to improve the wellbeing of the women (Government of Kenya, 2013). Despite these goals and policies, Kenya is still faced with the problem of increase in marital instabilities and there is little information available about the causes of this trend, its effect on the family institution and the effectiveness and appropriateness of the existing policies and programmes in curbing the problem. Thus, this study sought to bridge this existing gap in literature on this direction by focusing on the nature of marital instabilities, the major causes, and the impact of marital instability to the livelihoods of the affected households in Machakos County.

Poor households face many livelihood challenges and employ a number of coping and adaptive strategies to survive; thus the need to understand the driving factors of each livelihood options by separated/ divorced women in order to improve on their security to food, poverty and general wellbeing.

2. Study Area

The study was carried out in Machakos County, which lies between latitude $0^0 45^'$ south and $1^0 31^'$ South and longitudes $36^0 45^'$East and $37^0 45^'$ East. The study took samples from three randomly selected Districts in Machakos County, namely: Machakos, Kangundo and Yatta. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the Districts where the study was conducted (**Figure1**).

Figure 1: Sampled Districts in Machakos County
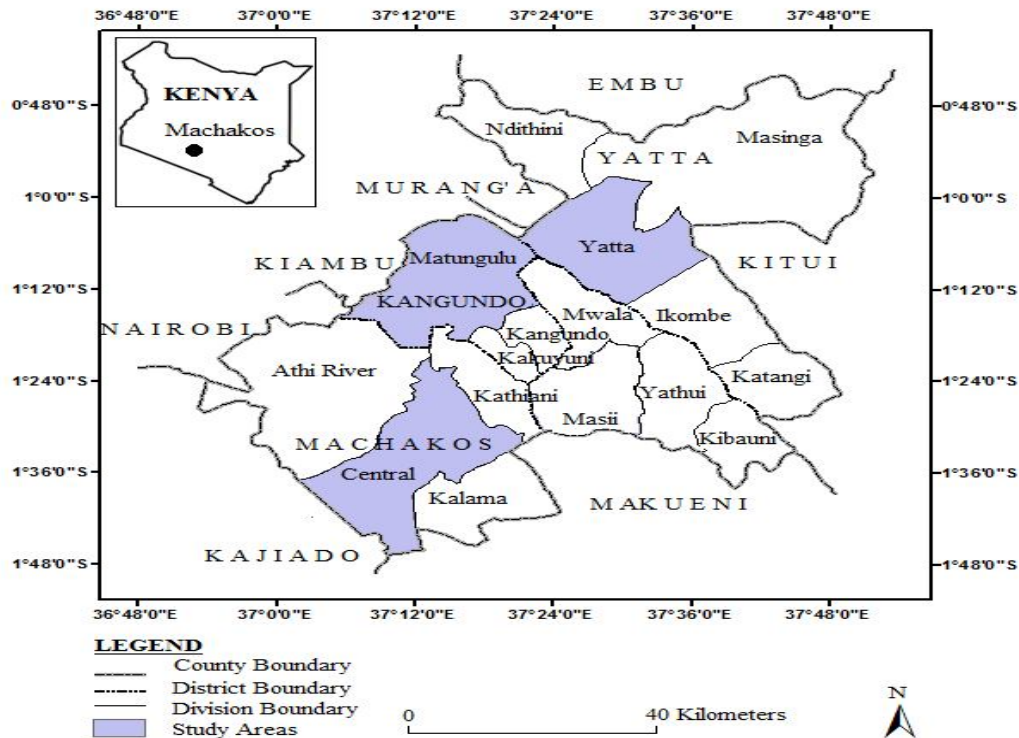
Source: National Council of Population and Development (NCPD), 2010
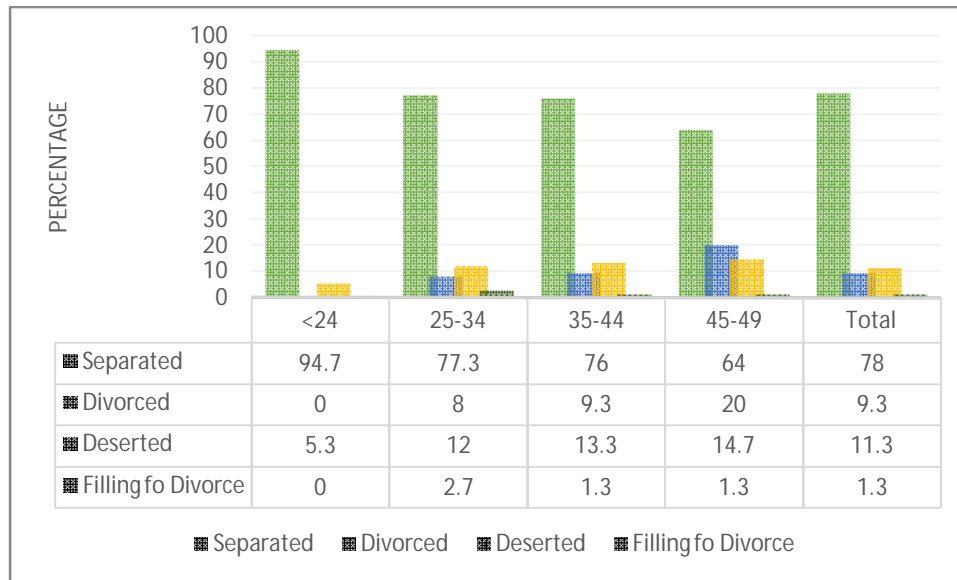
3. Data and Methods of Analysis

The data for the study were obtained from primary sources which involved 300 women in the age cohort of 15-49 years. In the field, one respondent was randomly selected, and then snowball sampling technique was used to find the next respondent, since there is no existing data on the number of separated or divorced women in the County. Purposive sampling method was employed to collect the data since the study targeted women who were separated, divorced or deserted by their husbands. The study also used non-proportionate quota sampling method since it involved sub-groups based on age cohorts to study the intergenerational similarities and differences on factors associated with marital instability and livelihood options after separation or divorce. The collected data were subjected to descriptive analysis and inferential analysis using chi-square (χ2) text, cross tabulation and logistic regression.

4. Nature of Marital Status

In reference to marital status; most (78%) of the sampled women were separated, while another 11.3% were deserted by their husbands, 9.4% were divorced and 1.3% were filling for divorce. It appears that, the rate of separation decreases with increasing age where as the rates of desertion and divorce increase with age (**Figure2**). During the Focus Group Discussion's (FGD's), it was reported that, separation was higher than divorce because most women are not informed on the procedure followed in filing for a divorce.

Figure 2: Distributions of Respondents by the Nature of Marital Status

	<24	25-34	35-44	45-49	Total
Separated	94.7	77.3	76	64	78
Divorced	0	8	9.3	20	9.3
Deserted	5.3	12	13.3	14.7	11.3
Filling fo Divorce	0	2.7	1.3	1.3	1.3

Source: Field data (Author, 2013)

5. *Reported Major Reasons for Marital Instability*

Most women reported to have separated because of their husbands irresponsibility (74%) or Infidelity (51.3%); violence (42.3%), alcoholism (38.7%), in-laws (24%), unemployment (11%), age difference, (10%) and polygamy (10%) being the other reasons cited factors. Out of all the reported causes of marital instability, irresponsibility was the most significant ($\chi 2=9.381,df=3,p=0.025$) (**Table2**) factor influencing marital dissolutions in Machakos County. This study also aimed at assessing the intergenerational patterns of marital instability in relation to the causal factors. An in-depth study revealed that, irresponsibility was highly reported by those in the age groups 45-49 (78.7%) and 25-34 years (74.7%); infidelity, by those with less than 24 years (61.3%) and 25-34 years (58.7%); violence was common among the age groups 45-49 (53.3%) and 35-44 (45.3%).Alcohol and drug abuse was a major reason for those aged 35-44 (45.3% and <24 years (49%). Unemployment was reported as a major factor by the young generations aged 25-34 (14.7%) and in-laws by mostly the young; <24 (30.7%) and 25-34 (25.3%) (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Cross Tabulation Result of Interpersonal Variables and Age Cohorts

Variables	Age cohort				Cross tabulation results		
	<24	25-34	35-44	45-49	$\chi 2$	df	p
Reasons for Separation							
Infidelity	61.3	58.7	38.7	46.7	10.087	3	0.018
Irresponsibility	68	74.7	74.7	78.7	2.287	3	0.515
Violence	41.3	29.3	45.3	53.3	9.217	3	0.027
Unemployment	12	14.7	12	5.3	3.643	3	0.303
In-law	30.7	25,3	24	16	4.532	3	0.209
Alcohol and Drug Use	40	30.7	45.3	39.7	3.503	3	0.320

Source: Field data (Author, 2013)

According to Kierman (1997), the risk of divorce or separation is higher among those who experience their parents' marriage instability. This study also found a significant association ($\chi 2= 32.882$, *df=15,p= 0.005*)(**Table2**) between parents' marital status and the respondents marital instability. The results, however, show that 60.3% of the respondents parents were living together. It appears that, the association is as a result of death of either one (18%) or both parents (7.7%) or the separation (10%) of the parents (**Table2**).

Table 2: Cross-Tabulation Results on Separation/Divorce Trend and the Current Respondent Marital Status

| Variable	N	%	χ2	df	P
Marital status across age cohorts					
Separated	234	78			
Divorced	28	9.3	26.296	9	0.002
Deserted	34	11.3			
Furring for divorce	4	1.3			
Which marriage					
1st	285	95	7.730	3	0.052
2nd	15	5			
What happened to husband after separating:					
Remarried	149	49.7			
Still single	81	27			
Cohabits	44	14.7			
Stay with the first wife	15	5	10.350	15	0.797
deceased	7	2.3			
I don't know	4	1.3			
Parents marital status					
Divorced	3	1			
Separated	30	10			
Living together	181	60.3			
Single parent	9	3	32.882	15	0.005
One deceased	54	18			
Both deceased	23	7.7			
Major reasons for separation/ divorce					
Infidelity	154	51.3	2.930	3	0.403
Irresponsibility	222	74	9.381	3	0.025
Violence	127	42.3	3.394	3	0.335
In-law's	72	24	5.971	3	0.113
Unemployment	33	11	0.847	3	0.838
Barrenness	2	0.7	0.568	3	0.904
Child Preference	4	1.3	1.105	3	0.776
Husband married 2nd wife	30	10	29.591	3	0.000
Age difference	7	2.3	3.393	3	0.335
Alcohol/drug use	116	38.7	3.209	3	0.360
Evil spirits	7	2.3	0.379	3	0.945

Source: Field data (Author, 2013)

6. Impact of Marital Instability on the Female-Headed Household Livelihoods

The aim of this study was to highlight the key findings concerning the antecedent's process and impact of marriage instability to the livelihoods of the affected women and their families. The rise in the level of marital instability rates has become a key phenomenon underlying significant changes in family structure and for an effective economic production, development and maintenance of human capital; there is need for a stable family structure. According to Smith (2004), family instability is followed by a period of single parenthood and repeated changes in family structure, associated with parallel changes in living circumstances, parental employment and fluctuations in income. To Smock (1994), marital instability has more serious consequences for women, making them prone to poverty due to their disadvantaged position. All these chain of events interact in complex ways and have cumulative effects.

6.1Socio-economic Changes/ Challenges Faced by Separated Women

Figure2 shows some of the reported challenges faced by the respondents after separating with their spouse.

Figure 2: Reported Socio-Economic Challenges Faced by Separated Women
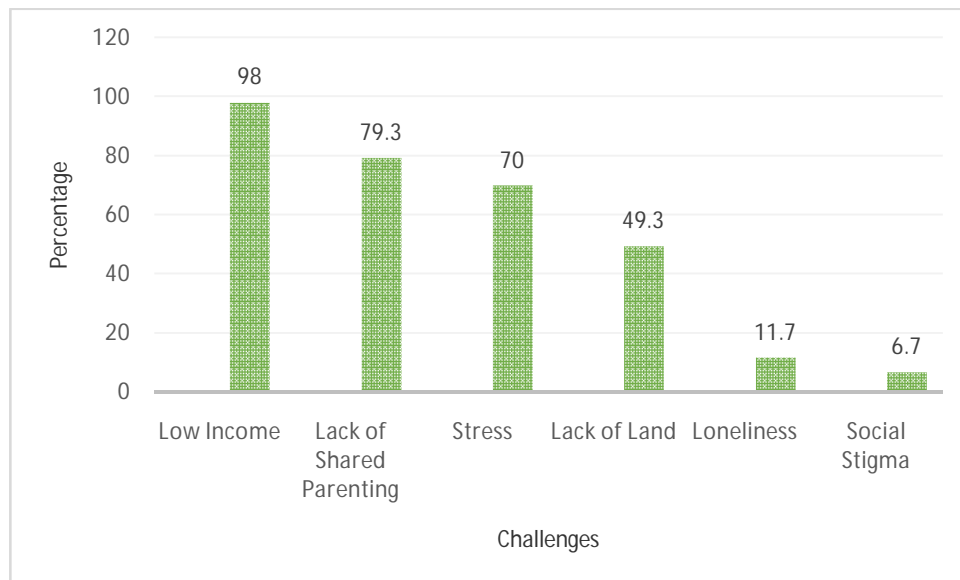
Source: Field data (Author, 2013)

Most of the separated women (98%) are faced with financial hardships as a result of low income, because the results indicate that, after separating they engage in either casual jobs (44.7%) or are in self-employment (42.7%) (**Table3**). Due to low education level and skill training, these women engage in a range of livelihood activities which have different outcomes, which may be more or less sustainable. The results suggest that, marital instability propels women to seek for employment; that is, separated women employment in the rural areas is an outcome rather than a cause of marital instability. Results in **Figure2** indicate that, due to the nature of their jobs, they get low income and thus cannot save money to generate capital to start up a meaningful business, leading to poverty. About 49.3% of the respondents reported that, they lacked land to settle their family and carry out agricultural activities for them to be able to supplement their little income.

According to Machakos District Development Plan (MDDP) (2008-2012), over 70% of income in Machakos County came from agriculture and many women lack this productive asset and depend on irregular, low paying and physically demanding daily wage labour thus vulnerable to income shocks. Generally, the rural economy is dominated by agriculture and the rural women especially the married (60%) reported to rely on the land for their livelihood (**Table3**). A few women own land and where women own land; their plots are generally smaller than those held by men as reported through Focus Group Discussion's (FGDs). It was only 6% of the women who were living on their own land while the majority (61%) lived on rented houses (**Table5**). This implies that, vast majority of the women cannot afford to buy land and can only access land through male relatives (29.7%) (**Table5**), which is dependent on good marital and family relations. However, this was found to vary from region to region and from family to family. The results suggest that, after separation, most women are denied their rights to access, own, control or inherit land or property jointly owned with their husbands. Social stigma and lack of livelihood in the rural areas has pushed the women to migrate to the market centers or peri-urban areas thus contributing to the increasing numbers of women headed households (61%); (**Table5**) in the market centers within the County. The female heads of the households are obliged to be the main bread-winners of their household and are forced to do other work apart from the usual household jobs without assistance from their former husbands.

Table 3: Cross-Tabulation Results between Livelihood Options & Marital Instability at the time of Separation/ After Separation

Husband Occupation at Separation	N	%	χ2	df	P
Casual Job	178	59.3			
Self-employed/ business	72	24			
Public servant	25	8.3			
Farmer	15	5	39.920	12	0.000
Unemployed	10	3.3			
Total	**300**	**100**			
Wife Occupation at Separation					
Casual job	54	18			
Self-employed/business	65	21.7			
Public servant	1	0.3	16.343	9	0.060
House wife/farmer	180	60			
Total	**300**	**100**			
Husband Occupation After Separation	N	%			
Casual job	151	50.3			
Self- employed /business	65	27.7			
Public servant	25	8.3			
Farmer	8	2.7			
Unemployed	20	6.7	42.267	18	0.000
Deceased	11	3.7			
I don't know	20	6.7			
Total	**300**	**100**			
Wives Occupation After Separation	N	%			
Casual job	134	44.7			
Self- employed /business	128	42.7			
Public servant	1	0.3			
Farmer	3	1	37.928	12	0.000
Unemployed	34	11.3			
Total	**300**	**100**			

Source: Field data, 2013

6.2 Other Sources of Income for Separated Women

Among those wives who are unemployed (11.3%) (**Table3**), 14.7% got help from relatives, their working children (3.7%) or boyfriends (12%) (**Table4**). As reported during FGD's, the parents helped them in looking after children to allow them work or search for their livelihood. This suggests that, in the County, most of the separated women generally experience a decline in their economic situation following marital separation. However, this was found to depend on the nature of job done by each of the affected women and their family background.

Table 4: Distribution of Other Sources of Income for Separated Women

Source	N	%
Help from relatives	44	14.7
Children support	11	3.7
NGO's	4	1.3
Boyfriend	36	12
Self	205	68.3
Total	**300**	**100**

Source: Field data (Author, 2013)

It is thus evident that, most (68.3%) of the respondents lacked economic support after separating with their husbands (**Table4**). This suggests increasing cases of vulnerability to poverty among the rural women, compounded by limited employment opportunities. To alleviate the economic problems, these women have formed social groups ("Merry go round") to help each other to cope with financial hardships as reported during the FGD's.

6.3 Respondent Place of Residence after Separation

In relation to the current living arrangement of the respondent, greater percentages (61%) of the separated women lived in rented houses or were living with their parents or relatives (29.7%). It was only a few who own their land/premises (7%) (**Table5**).

Table 5: Respondents Place of Residence after Separation

Place of Residence	N	%
Own land/premises	21	7
With parents/relatives	89	29.7
Rental house	183	61
Living with employer	7	2.3
Total	**300**	**100**

Source: Field data (Author, 2013)

As reported through FGD's, most women lived in rented houses in the rural market centers because in the County, traditionally, women do not own land and it is a widespread practice for the parents, mostly the fathers to leave land to the sons in the expectations that daughters would be cared for by their husbands. Therefore, in the County, customary land tenure remains widespread even with the new constitution policies. However, this varies from family to family depending on the level of enlightenment and economic status of the family as reported through FGD's. The study further found that, most children (51.3%) lived with their mothers at the time of the interview while 26.3% lived with their grandparents. In other families 10.3% of the children were either working in towns and others lived with their parents. It was only 4% who lived with their fathers (**Table6**)

Table 6: Children's Place of Residence after Separation of their Parents

Place of Residence	N	%
Lived with the mother	154	51.3
Lived with the father	12	4
Lived with their grandparents	79	26.3
Lived with relatives	15	5
Got married	6	2
Town working and others with the parents	31	10.3
No child	3	1
Total	**300**	**100**

Source: Field data (Author, 2013).

Table7 shows the study results findings of school dropout rate for children of separated mothers in primary and secondary school levels in Machakos County. The results revealed that, school dropout rates for children of separated mothers were higher (21%) in primary schools than in secondary (9.7%) schools (**Table7**). This rates are slightly higher than the general dropout rates for primary (3.89%) and secondary schools (3.87%) recorded during the 2009/08, KNBS census; (KNBS, 2010). According to Eurostat (2009a), children in single parents households, mainly headed by single mothers are much more likely to live in poverty than children in household with two parents. This is in line with studies by Bianchi and Mc Arthur (1991), which revealed that, increase in child poverty, is attributed to changing family structure especially to the increase in female-headed families.

Table 7: School Dropout Rates

Primary School Dropouts		
Number of Children	**N**	**%**
0	237	79
1	12	8.4
2	27	9
3	11	3.6
TOTAL	**300**	**100**
Secondary School Dropouts		
Number of Children	**N**	**%**
0	271	90.3
1	17	5.7
2	11	3.7
3	1	0.3
TOTAL	**300**	**100**

Source: Field data (Author, 2013)

In this study, 98% of the mothers claimed to be faced with a challenge of low income (**Figure 2**) based on the nature of jobs they were doing after separating which were mainly casual jobs (44.7%) or self-employment (42.7%) (**Table3**). This implies that most of the separated mothers are faced with challenges to achieve and maintain their livelihoods. They face prolonged economic hardships and thus live in poverty. This mostly affects the children education depicted by the high dropout rates in primary schools (21%) and secondary school (9.7%) (**Table7**). With poverty among women headed families increasing, children have been spending more time working to supplement family income. During FGD's, most respondents reported that, due to poverty they are assisted by their children to accomplish casual jobs for pay especially after school, weekends and over the vacations. Child labour is a reflection of poverty and according to the KNBS, (2010), absolute poverty within the County is relatively high (60.7%). Generally this study has not identified behaviour problems among children's of the separated mothers. Most of the problems reported are related to search for livelihood, and thus the reason for increasing dropout rates from schools and non-marital fertility in the rural areas (Jackson M Musau *et al*, 2012).

6.4Perceptions on the Quality of Life after Marriage Dissolution

Table 8: Level of Respondents Satisfaction with Current Living Standards

Satisfied with Your Living Standards	N	%
Happy	73	24.3
Unhappy	140	46.7
Mixed feelings	87	29
Total	**300**	**100**
Satisfied with the Children Living Standards	**N**	**%**
Happy	66	22
Unhappy	154	52.3
Mixed feelings	80	26.7
Total	**300**	**100**

Source: Field data (Author, 2013)

The results indicate that, 46.7% of the respondents reported to be having unhappy living regarding their overall happiness, while 26.7% reported to have mixed feelings because of the burden of raising the family alone. Those who are happier and satisfied with life now than during marriage life accounted only for 24.3%. Among this group, majority were happy because the level of stress on marital problems went low as reported through FGD's.

On the other hand, majority (52.3%) of the respondents were not satisfied with the living standards of their children, while 26.7% had mixed feelings (**Table8**).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the results of data analysis, the study concludes that; marital instability is a significant component that in reality continues to tear marriage and the family fabric in Machakos County. The study further concludes that, whatever the reasons for marital instability, in most cases, the consequences are undesirable and the women are indeed in a most difficult situation than the men. The predisposing factors that lead to such a vulnerable state and the process thereof are needed to design an effective intervention in order to improve the prevailing livelihood situation of the affected women and their families .The findings clearly indicate the need for broad based socio-economic development programmes for women especially to enhance their education, skill building and reduce their vulnerability to marital instability and its consequences.

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