

## SUB-THEME 4: FERTILITY/SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

### SESSION 423: FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD DYNAMICS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

#### Title: Changes in Family Structure and its Implications on Wellbeing of Children in Murang'a County, Kenya

##### Introduction

The 2022 Study on the Status of the Family in Kenya; Case Study Murangá County was one of the first studies to be conducted in Kenya focusing on families<sup>1</sup>.

##### Objectives of the Study:

The study sought to understand;

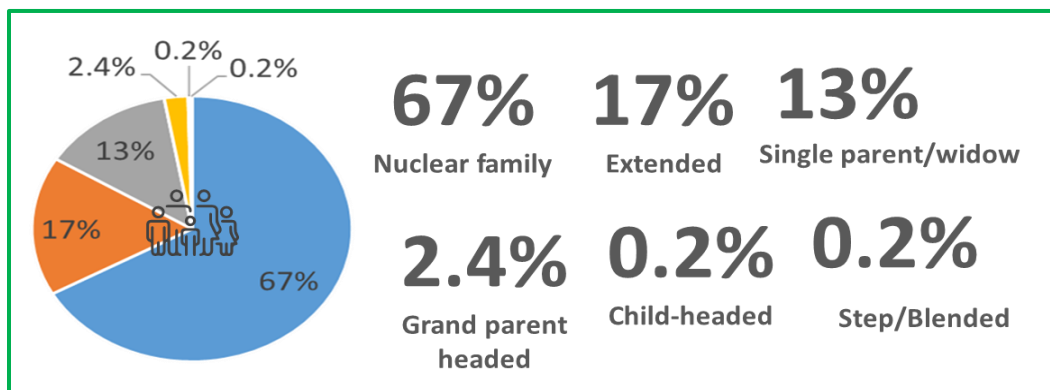
- Family structure; types/forms, composition
- Functions and roles of family
- Changes the family has experienced including their drivers and consequences
- Family wellbeing and stability

##### Methodology

This was a cross-sectional study that employed mixed approaches of quantitative and qualitative data collection. Quantitative method was employed to describe the structure and family well-being while qualitative approach was adopted to determine changes, their drivers and implications on the most vulnerable - children.

##### Key Findings

###### Family Structure Murang'a County



- More than two-thirds of families in Murangá are nuclear family
- 17% are Extended families
- 13% are single parent families

##### Changes in Family Structure and Implication on Children's Wellbeing

###### i. Rise in Cohabitation

Commonly referred to as “come we stay” or “come we risk” is becoming common in Murang'a; two people decide to live together and have children with no legal obligations. This is a temporal and risky affair that is likely to dissolve with negative consequences on the children.

<sup>1</sup> National Council for Population and Development (NCPD) Study on the Status of Families in Kenya; A Case Study of Murang'a County (2022)

*“In fact, most of the marriages are cohabitation, there is no legal document. They have not legalized it and that is why we have many reported cases in the Children’s office. They meet and give birth to children, then things don’t work out and so they separate. They then come here in the office for child support issues. This is prevalent especially in the young generation, 25 and below” (Key Informant, MCA, Murangá)*

## **ii. Rise in Single Families**

The number of single-parent is on the rise, with one parent typically taking on the primary caregiving responsibilities. Some of the reasons cited were divorce or separation due to alcohol abuse, or the choice to raise a child as a single parent. Single-parent families may face additional challenges, such as financial strain and limited time for parental involvement, and a potential lack of a positive male or female role model in their lives which can affect children's development and welfare<sup>2</sup>.

*“Here we call it “come-we-risk” because these people are not well prepared for marriage but are living together. After sometime; like a year or so they part ways and go separate ways if he gets a job transfer to another place, he will just relocate alone leaving her behind and then get into another relationship in his new place of residence...and you might find he is married and already has children” (FGD, male never married 35-60. Murangá urban)*

## **iii. Blended Families on the Rise**

Formation of blended or stepfamilies is on the rise: this refers to Remarriage or re-partnering after divorce or death of a spouse. These families consist of a couple and their children from previous relationships. Adjusting to a new family structure, navigating relationships with stepparents and stepsiblings, and dealing with potential conflicts can impact children's well-being and stability.

## **iv. Grandparent-headed Families (Skip Generation) is Surging**

In some cases, grandparents were taking on the primary caregiving role for their grandchildren due to various reasons, such as parental absence due to work, separations or divorce, alcohol and substance abuse, or death. Grandparent-headed families provide a stable and supportive environment for children, but they may also face challenges related to financial strain, health issues, and intergenerational conflicts.

## **Changes in Family Function and Implication on Children’s Wellbeing**

### **i. Shift in Gender Roles**

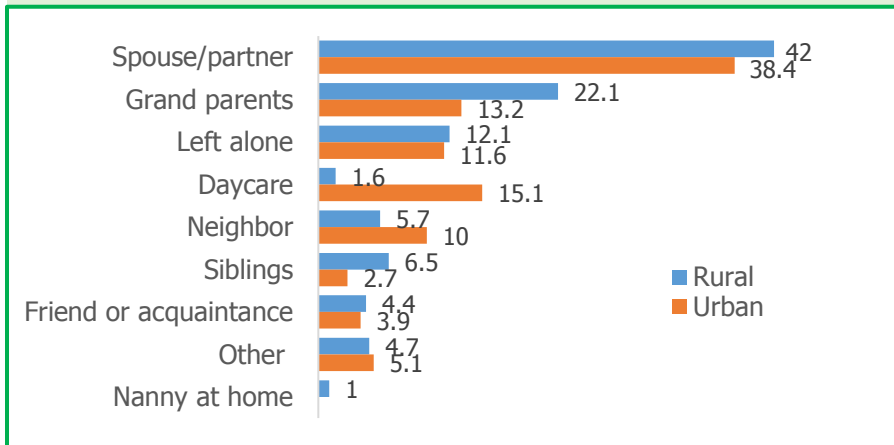
Traditional gender roles are evolving with both parents increasingly participating in paid work outside the home and men also taking on caregiving responsibilities<sup>3</sup>. This can impact children's well-being as they may experience changes in caregiving arrangements and family dynamics. When parents are working, children are either left alone or may spend more time with grandparents, in child daycare or with other family and non-family members. Quality childcare, supportive relationships with caregivers and security are important for children's well-being.

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<sup>2</sup> David, H. P. (1978). Healthy family functioning: a cross-cultural appraisal. In Consultation on family health (pp. 327-342). Geneva: World Health Organization

<sup>3</sup> Waringa, J. (2016). Changing Family Structures and their implications on the gender roles in Nakuru Municipality, Nakuru County, Kenya. International Journal of Research in Applied and Social Sciencesv.au/meaningful-life/connectedness/community

**Figure 2: Percent Distribution of Main Child Care Arrangement by Residence**



- 22% of children in rural and 13% in urban are left with grandparents
- 12% of children in both rural and urban are left alone when the mother is away

**ii. Influence of Alcohol Abuse**

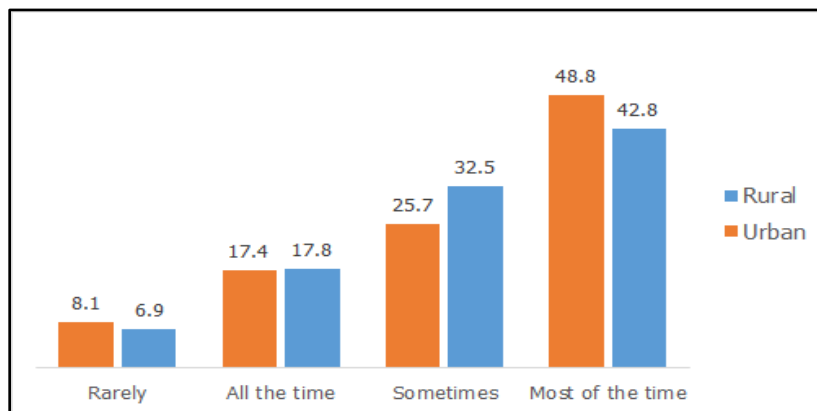
Reduced ability for the man to provide and fulfil his roles in the family due to unemployment aggravates the problem of alcohol and substance in families. This is a cause of domestic violence, child abuse, neglect and abandonment affecting the cognitive development and emotional well-being of children in Murang’a county<sup>4</sup>.

**Change in Parenting**

The level of parental involvement and active engagement positively impacts on children's emotional and cognitive development.

**i. Reduced Time Spend with Children**

**Figure 6: Percent Time Spend by Parents with Their Children by Residence**



- Only 18 percent of parents in rural and 17 percent of parents in urban spend all the time with their children
- 8% and 7% of parents in urban and rural rarely spend time with their children

**ii. Rise in Co-parenting or Shared Parenting**

In cases of divorce or separation, some parents in Murang’a opt for co-parenting arrangements where they share parenting responsibilities and decision-making for their children. When co-parenting is cooperative and focused on the best interests of the child, it can provide stability and emotional support. However,

<sup>4</sup> Pillai R. K. et al. (2022). Changing families and its effect on the health of family members in Kerala: A qualitative exploration

conflicts and inconsistent parenting can negatively impact children's well-being, causing stress, emotional difficulties, and disrupted relationships<sup>5</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

Findings demonstrate that changes in the family structure experiences have a negative bearing on care giving environments, child development, economic resources, family savings and investments, parental time and attention, family conflict and well-being. Creating a nurturing, supportive, and stable family environment is crucial for promoting children's well-being in the face of changing family functions. A nurturing family environment foster children's well-being and promote healthy development. Family wellbeing is a collective responsibility and requires multi-sectoral collaborative efforts targeting the families, employers, learning institutions, civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, communities and media.

## **Policy Recommendations**

1. Fully implement the National Policy on Family Promotion and Protection
2. Fully implement Alcoholic Drinks Control (amendment) Bill, 2020 – that regulates sell, manufacture, pack or distribute an alcoholic drink
3. Reinforce legislations on Social Protection Act to protect wellbeing of children
4. Mobilize resources to ensure all counties in central region of Kenya have active and functional rehabilitation centres that are economically friendly and offers quality services to address alcohol and drug abuse
5. Fully implement the Work Place Policy on Gender Mainstreaming 2021
6. Policies that aim at mainstreaming family well-being in programming to be encouraged so as to promote family welfare including parental competence, positive relationships, supportive parenting, parental involvement, healthy work-life balance, can help mitigate challenges faced by families<sup>6</sup>
7. Train community social/volunteer workers to provide counselling services to families (MOH and Social Protection) and give them incentives to trace and follow up on families<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Aye, et al (2016). Family conflict and managing strategies; implication for understanding emotion and power struggles. Global Journal of Psychology Research

<sup>6</sup> AU. (2003). Plan of Action on the Family

<sup>7</sup> GOK. (2022). Draft Kenya National Parenting Training Programme Manual. Nairobi