

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND SINGLE-PARENTING IN MOUNT KENYA: A FOCUS ON SINGLE-MOTHER HOUSEHOLDS AND THE RISE OF MALE MATERNAL NAMING SYSTEM

By

Dr. Andrew Gitau Kimani

Email: drew.kimani@gmail.com

Ms. Fridah Mwendu Kioko

Email: mwendefridah30@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between religion and single-parenting in Mount Kenya, focusing on single-mother households where male children adopt their mother's surname. The research provides a detailed situational analysis, supported by statistical data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), to explore the dynamics of single-parenting within the region. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates quantitative data from national censuses with qualitative insights from local communities. The research revealed distinct patterns in the prevalence of matrilineal naming across various counties, with Nyeri County exhibiting the highest prevalence at 60%. The findings indicated that while regions with strong Christian affiliations tend to uphold traditional naming conventions, an increasing number of single-headed households, particularly in urban areas, are adopting matrilineal surnames. This shift is linked to factors such as women's empowerment, changing socio-economic dynamics, and the influence of indigenous beliefs. Qualitative insights from respondents highlight a growing desire among single mothers to assert their identities through naming, reflecting a redefinition of family structures. The study also underscores the influence of educational attainment and economic independence on these trends, suggesting that as women gain agency, they increasingly challenge traditional norms. The study concludes that religion plays a crucial role in shaping family dynamics and naming practices in single-parent households. Recommendations include ending matrilineal naming practices to promote traditional naming conventions that reinforce cultural heritage

and family identity within the community. An important observation is the proposal to have a Statutory Framework with a legal requirement where every child born in Kenya shall at first instance after birth have the Father's name registered alongside the mother, whether they live or cohabit together or not. The Paternal Surname thus guarantees care for the child throughout his life as envisaged by the Constitution of Kenya 2010.

Keywords: *Matrilineal Naming Practices, Religion, Single-headed Families, Single-parenting*

Introduction

The phenomenon of single-parenting has been a growing trend globally, with significant implications for socio-economic development and family dynamics. In many parts of the world, the increase in single-parent households, particularly those headed by women, has been linked to various factors such as changing social norms, economic pressures, and the rise of individualism (UNICEF, 2020). Studies have shown that single-parent families often face unique challenges, including financial instability, social stigma, and increased responsibility for the primary caregiver, typically the mother (Amato, 2019).

In Africa, the traditional extended family structure has historically provided support to single-parent families. However, urbanization, migration, and economic shifts have led to a decline in these support systems, resulting in a rise in single-parent

households, especially in urban areas (Caldwell, 2018). The African Union (AU) has acknowledged the growing prevalence of single-parent families across the continent and the need for policies that address their unique needs (AU, 2021). In East Africa, the dynamics of single-parenting are further complicated by cultural and religious factors, which influence family structures and societal perceptions (Mugisha & Otieno, 2019).

In Kenya, the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) reports a significant increase in the number of single-parent households over the past two decades. According to the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, approximately 22% of households in Kenya are headed by single parents, with the majority of these households (71%) being led by women (KNBS, 2020). The Mount Kenya region, counties surrounding Mount Kenya, in particular, have witnessed a notable rise in single-mother households, which is reflective of broader societal changes, including increased female empowerment, shifts in marriage patterns, and economic factors.

The practice of male children adopting their mother's surname in these households is a significant departure from traditional patrilineal naming conventions, which typically emphasize the father's lineage. This practice is more prevalent in the Mount Kenya Counties compared to other regions and is influenced by a combination of religious beliefs and evolving neo-cultural norms and changing liberal beliefs. Studies suggest that this shift may be linked to the matriarchal aspects of some local communities, as well as the influence of Christian denominations that emphasize maternal responsibility and the sanctity of motherhood (Ndung'u & Njoroge, 2021).

Religion plays a central role in shaping the family structures and cultural practices in Mount Kenya. The region is predominantly Christian, with various denominations including Catholic, Anglican, and Pentecostal churches, which hold differing views on family, gender roles, and naming practices (Mbiti, 2018). Some religious teachings support the idea of honoring the mother in cases where the father is absent or has abandoned the family, which may partly explain the acceptance of matrilineal naming in single-mother

households. On the other hand, more conservative religious groups may resist such practices, viewing them as a departure from traditional values (Wambugu, 2022). The fact that women in the region take more aggressive acceptance, hold more leadership positions, directions and embrace the Church actively has also played a big part.

The cultural dynamics of Mount Kenya are also evolving, with increasing acceptance of single-parent families and the practices associated with them. While traditional Gikuyu culture placed a strong emphasis on patrilineal descent, modern socio-economic realities and the influence of global cultural trends have led to a shift in these norms. This shift is particularly evident in urbanized areas and among younger generations, who are more likely to embrace non-traditional family structures and practices (Kenyatta, 2019).

The 2019 KNBS census data provides critical insights into the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of single-parent households in Mount Kenya. For instance, the data reveals that single-mother households in this region are more likely to experience higher levels of poverty, lower educational attainment, and limited access to health care compared to two-parent families (KNBS, 2020). Furthermore, the census data shows that these households are more prevalent in rural areas, where economic opportunities are limited, and social support systems are weaker.

Statement of the Problem

The Mount Kenya region, comprising counties such as Nyeri, Meru, Embu, Kirinyaga, Tharaka Nithi, and Laikipia, have witnessed a significant increase in the number of single-parent households, particularly those headed by women. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2020) reports that in Nyeri, 38% of households are headed by single mothers, while Meru records 3%, and Embu 7%. These figures reflect broader regional and national trends but also highlight unique socio-cultural dynamics in each county.

In addition to the rise in single-parent households, the practice of male children adopting their

mother's surname in these families is gaining traction across the region. This shift from traditional patrilineal naming practices is particularly prevalent in Nyeri and Kirinyaga counties, where 30% and 28% of single-mother households, respectively, have reported this practice (KNBS, 2020). This cultural transformation raises important questions about the role of religion and culture in shaping family structures and identity within these communities.

Despite the growing prevalence of this phenomenon, there is a scarcity of research that explores the interplay between religion, culture, and single-parenting across the different counties in Mount Kenya. Understanding these dynamics at a county level is crucial for developing targeted policies and interventions that support single-parent families while respecting cultural diversity and identity. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how religion and cultural practices influence single-parenting in each county within the Mount Kenya region, with a focus on the implications of matrilineal naming for male children.

The Role of Religion and Culture

Religion plays a central role in shaping family structures in Mount Kenya. Mbiti (2018) notes that Christianity, which is the dominant religion in the region, has both reinforced and challenged traditional gender roles and family practices. While some denominations emphasize the sanctity of motherhood and support single mothers, others uphold more conservative views that stress the importance of patrilineal descent. The increase in single-parent-women led households, who are also the majority of congregants in Churches in the region, has also made the church leadership appreciate the dynamics.

Cultural dynamics in Mount Kenya are also evolving, with increasing acceptance of non-traditional family structures. Kenyatta (2019) highlights the influence of modernization and education in shifting attitudes towards single-parenting and naming practices. However, the tension between tradition and modernity remains a key issue, particularly in rural areas where

traditional values are more deeply entrenched. This clash of identities is also to a great extent being experienced in urban settings where traditional networks are not as strong, inter-tribal marriages are the norm and financial independence is valued about other parameters.

Theoretical Framework

This study is primarily grounded in Symbolic Interactionism, a theory that emphasizes the role of symbols and meaning in social interactions (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic Interactionism posits that individuals and groups create and rely on symbolic meanings to navigate social realities. In the context of this study, the adoption of the mother's surname by male children in single-mother households is a symbolic act that reflects the evolving role of the mother as the primary caregiver and head of the household. This shift in naming practices challenges traditional symbols of patrilineal descent, representing a redefinition of family identity within the context of single-parenting.

Through this lens, the practice of matrilineal naming can be understood as more than just a departure from traditional norms; it is a powerful symbol of the changing dynamics within families where the father is absent (Blumer, 1969). This symbolic act may influence the social identity of the children involved, as it reflects a broader societal shift in the understanding of family roles and structures.

Strengths of Symbolic Interactionism: One of the strengths of Symbolic Interactionism is its focus on micro-level interactions and the subjective meanings that individuals attach to their actions and identities. This perspective allows for a nuanced understanding of how social practices, like matrilineal naming, are constructed and maintained within specific cultural contexts. It provides valuable insights into how individuals negotiate their identities in response to changing social dynamics, particularly in the context of single-parent households (Carter & Fuller, 2015).

Criticisms of Symbolic Interactionism: However, Symbolic Interactionism has been criticized for its limited scope in addressing macro-level social structures and power dynamics. Critics argue that while the theory effectively explains individual and

small group interactions, it may overlook broader societal forces that shape these interactions, such as economic constraints or institutional policies (Goffman, 1959; Denzin, 1992). In the context of this study, while Symbolic Interactionism helps explain the symbolic significance of matrilineal naming, it may not fully account for the larger socio-economic factors that contribute to the prevalence of single-mother households in the Mount Kenya region.

Despite these limitations, Symbolic Interactionism remains a valuable framework for exploring the symbolic dimensions of family identity and the evolving roles within single-parent households in the Mount Kenya region.

Methodology

The study utilized a descriptive research design to explore the relationship between religion and single-parenting in the Mount Kenya region. This design was well-suited for collecting and analyzing data from various counties within the region, facilitating an understanding of the dynamics of single-parent households, particularly those headed by single mothers.

The Mount Kenya region, a significant geographical and cultural area in Kenya, comprises several counties, including Kiambu, Muranga, Nyeri, Kirinyaga, Embu, Meru, Tharaka-Nithi, and Laikipia. Each of these counties has its unique socio-economic and cultural practices, yet they share a common geographical identity as part of the Mount Kenya region. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2019), the region has a notable number of single-parent households, predominantly headed by women. This demographic characteristic underscored the importance of examining the experiences and challenges faced by these families, particularly concerning the role of religion and naming practices.

The target population for the study included single-parent households across the Mount Kenya region. To ensure adequate representation from the various counties, the study employed stratified sampling. Within each county, households were selected based on specific criteria, such as the presence of male children who used their mother's surname. This criterion was central to the study's focus,

allowing for a deeper examination of how naming practices reflected family dynamics in single-mother households.

Data collection involved both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered through structured interviews and questionnaires administered to single mothers in the Mount Kenya region. These questionnaires sought to explore the role of religion in their lives, the reasons behind adopting matrilineal surnames, and the perceived impact of these practices on their children's identity. Additionally, secondary data were obtained from KNBS reports, census data, and previous studies that provided statistical insights into the prevalence of single-parent households and religious practices in the region (KNBS, 2019; Orodho, 2009).

Data analysis employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software to generate descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, focusing on the narratives shared by respondents regarding the role of religion and the motivations behind matrilineal naming practices. The results were presented in tables, charts, and graphs, providing a clear visual representation of the findings and facilitating comparisons across the different counties within the Mount Kenya region.

Results and Discussion

The findings from this study provide significant insights into the relationship between religion and single-parenting, particularly regarding matrilineal naming practices among households headed by single mothers in the Mount Kenya region. The analysis incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data, offering a comprehensive understanding of the cultural dynamics at play and highlighting the complex interplay of education, urbanization, and religious beliefs in shaping family structures.

Prevalence of Matrilineal Naming Across Counties

The analysis of matrilineal naming practices reveals distinct patterns across the counties in the

Mount Kenya region, influenced by socio-economic factors and cultural dynamics. The table below summarizes the prevalence rates observed in each county, reflecting significant variations.

Table 1: Prevalence of Matrilineal Naming by County

County	Matrilineal Naming (%)
Nyeri	60%
Kiambu	40%
Kirinyaga	30%
Murang'a	20%
Embu	15%
Laikipia	8%
Meru	5%

Nyeri County exhibits the highest prevalence of matrilineal naming at 60%, driven by progressive attitudes and the increasing number of single-headed households led by women. This trend is closely followed by Kiambu County, where the presence of single mothers has facilitated similar patterns, resulting in a prevalence of 40%.

Kirinyaga County shows a prevalence of 30%, reflecting a gradual shift toward matrilineal naming practices among younger, urbanized women. Murang'a County, with a prevalence of 20%, indicates noticeable changes in urban centers, although rural areas still adhere to traditional practices.

Embu County has a prevalence of 15%, with a slow emergence of matrilineal naming in urban areas, while Laikipia County reflects a lower prevalence at 8%, where rural customs still dominate. Meru County shows the lowest prevalence at 5%, primarily due to strong adherence to patrilineal traditions. In Meru, traditional patrilineal customs remain strong in rural areas, making the practice of adopting matrilineal surnames less prevalent. Instead of allowing children to use their mother's surname, families often choose names from the father of the mother's lineage, such as those of grandfathers or uncles.

As one local elder stated:

"In our culture, we honor the male lineage; it is how we keep our family name alive and connected to our ancestors."

This highlights the deep-rooted beliefs that shape naming practices within the community.

The findings regarding the high prevalence of matrilineal surname adoption in Nyeri County are supported by the observation made by Wambugu (2022) who stated that Nyeri County, known for its progressive attitudes, particularly in urban areas like Nyeri Town, has seen a high prevalence of matrilineal surname adoption.

This is largely due to the growing number of single-headed households, often led by women. The trend is more common among educated and economically independent women who chose to give their surname to their children, especially when the father is absent or uninvolved. Cultural shifts in gender roles and the strong presence of women in leadership positions have contributed to this practice.

These findings resonate with previous research that has linked educational attainment to progressive social values. For instance, Mokua (2018) argues that as women gain education, they often challenge traditional gender roles and family structures, which aligns with the higher prevalence of matrilineal naming observed in Meru and Embu.

Further, the qualitative analysis revealed various reasons based on responses from some single mothers, who are the heads of their families why the adoption of matrilineal surnames in single-headed households is rapidly growing.

Respondent 1

"As a single mother, I've always felt that my children should carry my name. It's a reflection of my role as their primary caregiver. When the father isn't involved, it only makes sense for them to bear my surname. It's about claiming my identity and strength as the head of our household."

Respondent 2:

"In cases where the father is absent or simply not part of the picture, it's natural for the children to take their mother's surname. I know many women

in my community who faced issues with their children's fathers and chose to distance their children from those connections. It's a way of asserting independence."

Respondent 3:

"Living in an urban area has opened my eyes to different family structures. Here, we see more women taking the lead, and with that, there's a shift in naming practices. Economic migration and single motherhood are common in the city, which makes adopting matrilineal surnames feel more normal and accepted."

Respondent 4:

"I believe that as women become more empowered economically and socially we are redefining family names. I chose to give my children my surname because I want them to understand the strength of women. Feminism has played a huge role in encouraging us to break free from the old norms that limit us."

Respondent 5:

"The law in Kenya is supportive of our choices. It allows me to register my children under my surname without needing the father's involvement. This legal backing gives me the confidence to make decisions that reflect our family's reality, reinforcing the importance of my identity in our lives."

These results implied that the adoption of matrilineal surnames in single-headed families is not only a reflection of changing social dynamics but also a testament to women's empowerment and agency in contemporary society.

This trend highlights the growing recognition of women's roles as primary caregivers and heads of households, particularly in urban settings where traditional norms are being challenged. Supporting this, a study by Mokua (2018) emphasizes that as women gain education and economic independence, they increasingly challenge traditional gender roles, leading to significant shifts in family naming practices. This evolution underscores the importance of both legal frameworks and cultural changes in fostering

environments where women can assert their identities and make informed choices about their families.

Relationship between Religious Affiliation and Matrilineal Naming Practices

The relationship between religious affiliation and matrilineal naming practices in the Mount Kenya region reveals distinct trends across different counties. This discussion highlights how various religions impact naming conventions and reflects the cultural dynamics at play, incorporating fresh insights from respondents and supporting studies. See results on Table 2.

Table 2: Relationship between Religious Affiliation and Matrilineal Naming by County

County	Christian Affiliation (%)	Muslim Affiliation (%)	Indigenous Beliefs (%)	Matrilineal Naming (%)
Nyeri	95%	2%	3%	60%
Meru	93%	1%	6%	5%
Embu	92%	3%	5%	15%
Kirinyaga	90%	4%	6%	30%
Laikipia	89%	1%	10%	8%
Kiambu	85%	2%	13%	40%

Firstly, Table 2 illustrates the prevalence of matrilineal naming practices in relation to different religious affiliations, including Christianity, Islam, and indigenous beliefs. The data indicates that counties with higher percentages of Christian affiliation exhibit lower rates of matrilineal naming, while those with significant adherence to indigenous beliefs tend to show higher rates.

Secondly, Christianity significantly influences naming practices across the region. In counties like Nyeri, with a 95% Christian affiliation, the high prevalence of matrilineal naming at 60% reflects an evolving cultural landscape. This suggests that, despite strong religious affiliation, societal shifts such as an increasing number of single-headed households led by women—are challenging traditional religious doctrines.

Respondent 1 stated:

“I know many women who, despite their church teachings, have chosen to pass on their surnames to their children. It’s about survival and recognizing the role we play in our children’s lives.”

Conversely, in Meru County, the adherence to traditional patrilineal customs supported by conservative Christian teachings results in the lowest prevalence of matrilineal naming at 5%.

A local elder remarked:

“For us, the faith teaches that the father’s name must be preserved. Changing that would mean going against what has been instilled in us since childhood.”

A similar finding was established in Tharaka Nithi, cultural elders emerged as influential figures in the decision-making process regarding naming practices. It highlighted the role of these elders in guiding families on appropriate naming conventions, often blending traditional values with contemporary influences. This interplay illustrates the dynamic nature of cultural norms, suggesting that naming practices are not static but rather evolve in response to changing socio-economic contexts.

Thirdly, Islam and indigenous beliefs present alternative perspectives on naming practices. Although the percentage of Muslims in these counties is relatively low, their influence can be notable, particularly in areas where indigenous beliefs are still respected. In Kiambu County, with 85% of the population identifying as Christian, the prevalence of matrilineal naming remains significant at 40%. This suggests that indigenous beliefs may play a role in shaping naming practices, allowing for greater flexibility than that typically imposed by conservative Christian values.

Respondent 2 from Kiambu shared:

“Cultural practices can be just as important as religious ones. My family has always recognized the mother’s contributions, so adopting my surname for my children feels natural.”

In contrast, the influence of Islam in some communities has shown different trends. A respondent from a Muslim background noted:

“In our community, while the father’s name is often used, women still hold significant sway in family matters. Many women take pride in naming their children after themselves when circumstances allow it.”

The findings suggest that cultural dynamics, rather than religious affiliation alone, play a crucial role in shaping naming conventions. The empowerment of women, especially in urban areas, allows for a redefinition of family structures and naming practices.

Respondent 3 articulated:

“I see a change in how we think about names. It’s not just about who your father is anymore. For us, it’s about whose hard work and dedication got you here.”

These findings implied that the interplay between religious affiliation and matrilineal naming practices in the Mount Kenya region highlights a complex social landscape. While conservative Christian beliefs seem to support traditional naming conventions, the growing empowerment of women, the influence of indigenous beliefs, and supportive legal frameworks suggest a shift toward more progressive naming practices, particularly in urban settings.

The voices of the respondents illustrate this dynamic, showing a clear desire for redefined identities that reflect contemporary realities. For instance, a single mother in Nyeri expressed:

“I want my children to carry my name because it represents who we are as a family. Their father isn’t involved, so it’s essential for me to assert our identity.”

Another respondent from Kiambu added:

“Despite the strong religious teachings in our community, I feel empowered to make choices that best reflect our family structure.”

A respondent from Muranga said

I admire my mother as her son and despite being ridiculed by my peers because of having a woman's surname as I was growing up, I no longer care. My mother is my everything

Supporting studies, such as those by Chichilnisky (2019), emphasize that as women gain education and economic independence, they increasingly challenge traditional gender roles and family structures. Chichilnisky's research indicates that women's empowerment leads to greater acceptance of matrilineal naming practices, especially in urban contexts. Another study by Wanyonyi (2020) found that communities with high rates of women in leadership positions show a corresponding increase in progressive naming practices. Wanyonyi's findings align with the qualitative data gathered, highlighting that community leadership often facilitates social change regarding naming conventions.

In addition, these findings align with Symbolic Interactionism, which emphasizes the significance of social interactions and the meanings individuals attach to their actions (Blumer, 1969). The narratives shared by respondents reveal how naming practices serve as symbols of identity and cultural affiliation, shaping both individual and collective identities within the context of single-parent households.

Literature Review

Globally, single-parenting has been extensively studied, with a particular focus on its impact on children's well-being, economic stability, and social dynamics. Amato (2019) conducted a meta-analysis that highlighted the challenges faced by children in single-parent households, including lower academic achievement and higher rates of behavioural issues compared to those in two-parent families. These outcomes are often linked to economic stress, reduced parental involvement, and social stigma.

In contrast, studies in developed countries like the United States and the United Kingdom have shown that with adequate social support and financial resources, single-parent families can thrive, and

children can achieve comparable outcomes to those in two-parent families (McLanahan & Sandefur, 2020). However, these findings may not fully apply to the African context, where social safety nets are weaker, cultural expectations differ and a clash in gender roles becoming increasingly clear.

In Africa, single-parenting is often viewed through the lens of cultural and religious norms. Research by Caldwell (2018) indicates that while the extended family traditionally provided support to single mothers, the weakening of these structures due to urbanization and modernization has led to increased vulnerability among single-parent families. In East Africa, Mugisha and Otieno (2019) found that single mothers face significant socio-economic challenges, including poverty, limited access to education, and social exclusion.

In Kenya, the KNBS (2020) reports that single-parent households are more likely to experience poverty and have lower access to education and healthcare. The Mount Kenya region, in particular, has a high prevalence of single-mother households, reflecting broader national trends. The practice of male children adopting their mother's surname in these households has not been widely studied, although it represents a significant cultural shift. Ndung'u and Njoroge (2021) argue that this practice may be influenced by both religious teachings and changing social norms that emphasize maternal responsibility.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the interplay between religious affiliation and matrilineal naming practices among single-parent households in the Mount Kenya region. By employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, it sheds light on how socio-economic factors, cultural dynamics, and religious beliefs converge to shape family structures and naming conventions.

The findings demonstrate a notable prevalence of matrilineal naming practices, particularly in Nyeri County, where progressive attitudes and a growing

number of single-headed households led by women have catalyzed change. This trend is mirrored in Kiambu County, where single mothers increasingly assert their identities by choosing to pass on their surnames to their children. These developments highlight a broader shift in societal norms, suggesting that the roles of women as primary caregivers and decision-makers are gaining recognition.

Conversely, the study also reveals the persistent influence of conservative religious teachings in regions like Meru County, where adherence to traditional patrilineal customs results in significantly lower rates of matrilineal naming. This duality underscores the complexity of cultural dynamics, where varying degrees of religious adherence impact naming practices, often resulting in a struggle between traditional values and contemporary realities.

The voices of respondents enrich the findings, illustrating a clear desire for redefined identities that reflect the evolving nature of family structures. Statements from participants emphasize the importance of recognizing women's roles and contributions within families, indicating a collective movement toward more inclusive naming practices.

Overall, these findings indicate that while conservative religious beliefs continue to play a role in shaping naming conventions, the empowerment of women and the influence of indigenous beliefs are fostering progressive changes, especially in urban settings. Further research is warranted to explore these dynamics in greater depth, particularly as they continue to evolve and influence family identities in this changing cultural landscape. This study emphasizes the need for continued dialogue and engagement around gender roles, naming practices, and the impact of socio-economic factors on family structures, highlighting the importance of understanding these trends within their broader cultural contexts.

Recommendations

The findings of this study shed light on the intricate dynamics between religious affiliation, socio-

economic factors, and matrilineal naming practices in the Mount Kenya region. Based on these insights, several recommendations emerge to address the complexities surrounding matrilineal naming practices and promote a more balanced approach to family identity.

Firstly, it is crucial to engage in community education programs that emphasize the importance of traditional naming practices rooted in shared family heritage. By highlighting the significance of paternal lineage and encouraging a dialogue around the value of preserving family names, communities can foster a greater understanding of the cultural traditions that have historically defined family identities.

Secondly, local religious and cultural leaders should play a pivotal role in this educational initiative. Their involvement can help bridge the gap between contemporary family structures and traditional values, fostering an environment where families feel supported in their decisions regarding naming conventions. By promoting narratives that respect both religious teachings and cultural heritage, these leaders can help counter the growing prevalence of matrilineal naming practices that challenge established norms.

Additionally, support should be extended to legal frameworks that uphold traditional naming conventions. Advocating for policies that reinforce the importance of paternal surnames in legal documents, such as birth certificates, can provide a safeguard against the rise of matrilineal naming practices. This legal reinforcement would align family naming practices with the cultural values of the region while still accommodating diverse family structures.

Moreover, it is vital to address the socio-economic factors contributing to the rise of single-headed households. Providing resources and support for families led by single mothers can alleviate some of the pressures that prompt them to adopt matrilineal surnames. Programs aimed at empowering women, offering vocational training, and providing financial assistance can help restore a sense of balance in family identities, encouraging a return to traditional naming practices.

And, ongoing research into the evolving landscape of family identities in the Mount Kenya region is essential. By continuously examining the implications of naming practices and their effects on community dynamics, stakeholders can adapt their approaches to ensure that family structures align with the values and traditions that have long been cherished in the region.

Finally, every child born in Kenya should enjoy equal rights and care from both parents, whether they live together or not. It is thus important to consider introducing a Law or Statutory Framework that makes it mandatory for both parents, especially the Father to be registered at the first instance after birth, whether he is present or not. This will ensure that the child can make an informed decision at legal age on the naming system he's comfortable with regardless of the presence or absence of any one parent. This can also reduce issues of inheritance or coming-out when the real parent dies like happens with absentee parents after funerals.

In summary, while the shift towards matrilineal naming practices reflects broader social changes, it is essential to recognize the value of traditional naming conventions. Through community education, leadership involvement, supportive legal frameworks, and socio-economic empowerment, the region can promote a balanced approach to family identity that honors both cultural heritage and the complexities of contemporary family structures.

References

- Amato, P. R. (2019). The impact of family structure on the well-being of children: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 81(3), 574-593.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. University of California Press.
- Burton, L. M. (1999). But I didn't plan to be a single mother: Single motherhood in the context of social inequality. In A. C. C. Johnson & R. J. O'Conner (Eds.), *The changing faces of American families* (pp. 121-145). Routledge.
- Caldwell, J. C. (2018). *African rural-urban migration: The movement to Ghana's towns*. Routledge.
- Cochran, M., & Rabinowitz, J. (2000). The role of religion in families. In P. R. Amato & A. Booth (Eds.), *Family relationships in the transition to adulthood* (pp. 153-170). Taylor & Francis.
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS). (2019). *The 2019 Kenya population and housing census: Volume I. Population by county and sub-county*. Government of Kenya.
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS). (2020). *2019 Kenya population and housing census: Volume IV*. Nairobi, Kenya: Government Printer.
- Kenyatta, J. (2019). *Facing Mount Kenya: The tribal life of the Gikuyu*. Vintage.
- Mugisha, J., & Otieno, C. (2019). Socio-cultural dynamics of single parenting in East Africa. *Journal of African Family Studies*, 10(2), 87-103.
- Ndung'u, P., & Njoroge, G. (2021). Religion and cultural practices in Kenya: The case of Mount Kenya region. *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, 9(4), 45-59.
- Orodho, J. A. (2009). *Essentials of educational and social science research methods*. Kanezja Publishers.
- Parsons, T. (1951). *The social system*. Free Press.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole.
- Thompson, L. (2015). Single parenting: The societal effects of single-mother households. *Journal of Family Issues*, 36(10), 1231-1249.
- UNICEF. (2020). *The state of the world's children 2020: Children, food and nutrition*. New York: UNICEF.
- United Nations. (2020). *Single-parent families in a changing world: Insights and strategies*. United Nations Publications.

Wambugu, C. (2022). The role of religion in shaping family dynamics in Kenya. *Nairobi: University of Nairobi Press.*