

# **Single motherhood in Africa: Prevalence, associated factors and multidimensional deprivation**

Ntoimo Lorretta Favour Chizomam<sup>1</sup>

Department of Demography and Social Statistics, Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria

Mutanda Nyasha<sup>2</sup>

Demography and Population Studies Programme, University of the Witwatersrand,  
Johannesburg, South Africa.

## **Introduction**

One of the major global trends in family transition is single parenting occasioned by out-of-wedlock childbearing, marital dissolution through divorce, separation and widowhood. This increase in single parenthood is viewed as a component of the Second Demographic Transition that reflects changes that are occurring in marriage patterns, disconnection between marriage and childbearing, increase in premarital births, rise in divorce rates and decline in remarriage rates (Van de Kaa 2002; Lesthaeghe 2010). Increase in single parenthood particularly among women is of concern because research has continued to document negative health (physical, mental, psychological) and economic (poverty, reproduction of poverty) outcomes that are associated with single motherhood (Elliott et al. 2008; McLanahan 2009; Kalmijn and Monden 2010; Burstrom et al. 2010; McKeever and Wolfinger 2012).

Compared to married mothers, single mothers are the poorest and live below poverty datum line (Chzhen and Bradshaw 2012; McKeever and Wolfinger 2012) in most cases. Higher levels of poverty among single mothers have been found to be linked to their socio-economic status (educational level, employment status, financial resources), family background and lack of support from their family members and spouse (Seccombe 2000; Brady and Burroway 2012; McKeever and Wolfinger 2012). For instance, in most cases single mothers are more likely to have lower educational levels, more likely to be unemployed and if employed they are more likely to be employed in low paying jobs that are usually part-time and unstable jobs, and lack financial support from the fathers of their children (McLanahan and Percheski 2008; Dlamini 2010; Mather 2010; McKeever and Wolfinger 2012; Jordal et al. 2013). On the other hand, economically stable single mothers and their children tend to do well (Bock 2000).

However, the subject of single parenthood has been well researched in more developed countries compared to developing countries. In Africa in particular, the phenomenon has received negligible research attention, even though the population of women and men parenting alone is comparable and in some cases higher than what is obtainable in the more developed regions. For example, the population census of Burkina Faso in 2006 showed that single parents with children constituted 9.2% of all nuclear households and 80% of these households were single mother families (United Nations Statistics Division 2014). Also, in sub-Saharan Africa the percentage of children who live with a single parent ranges between 13% in Nigeria and 43% in South Africa (Lippman et al. 2014).

Moreover, evidence from related literature also show prevalence of single mothers (Moyo and Kawewe 2009; Dlamini 2010; Jordal et al. 2013) and high prevalence of some of the pathways that lead to single motherhood such as premarital fertility and divorce in some countries within the sub-Saharan Africa region (Clark and Hamplová 2013; Palamuleni and Adebawale 2014; Clark and Brauner-Otto 2015). Palamuleni & Adebawale (2014) study showed that the prevalence of premarital childbearing among young women in sub-Saharan Africa ranges between 25.5% in Namibia and 4.8 in Nigeria. A study by Clark & Brauner-Otto (2015) showed that divorce is a common phenomenon in sub-Saharan Africa that leads to union dissolution. About a fifth of first time marriages dissolve as a result of divorce within the first 20 years of marriage (Clark and Brauner-Otto 2015).

Therefore, this paper explores single motherhood in Africa among women aged 20 years and above. The specific objectives are to; - examine the prevalence of single motherhood in Africa; investigate the factors associated with never married hood after teenage; examine the level of multidimensional deprivation among single mothers in Africa and determine the association between single motherhood in Africa and multidimensional deprivation.

Understanding the demography of single parenthood in Africa especially among women is of importance because single motherhood could be more detrimental within this region considering the prevalence of poverty and economic status of women in Africa. In many African countries, a large proportion of the population live below US\$1.95 per day and access to high-wage and

stable employment, particularly for women is limited (Moyo and Kawewe 2009; Sibanda and Mudhovozi 2012; UNDP 2015). Moreover, public support is limited and usually absent in most countries and where it is available it is not enough to shield these families against poverty; this further worsens the situation (Mokomane 2012, 2013).

The decision to focus on women aged 20 years plus and never married motherhood is key because little is still known about single motherhood among older women as well as never married motherhood in Africa. Majority of previous studies that have been conducted within this region have focused mainly on adolescent motherhood (Meekers 1994; Kaufman et al. 2001; Sibanda and Mudhovozi 2012; Williamson 2012; Palamuleni and Adebawale 2014). Moreover, single mothers have also been studied as a group without paying attention to differences that exist within this group. According to findings from studies that have been conducted in developed countries, the effects of single motherhood vary with the type of single parent family. Among single mothers, the never married mothers have been found to be worse off in their health, economically deprived, more likely to come from economically disadvantaged and non-intact families- implying that they are usually deprived even before they become single mothers, compared to those who are single mothers by divorce/widowhood and married mothers (McKeever and Wolfinger 2011, 2012; Van de Velde et al. 2014).

Studying never married motherhood among older women is also of interest because it clearly shows disconnection between marriage and fertility, changing values about childbearing within marriage, suggest rejection of marriage, breakdown or destabilization of the traditions of marriage, separation of partnering and parenthood. These are indications of transition in nuptiality and fertility behaviour which are consequential for fertility levels, well-being of women and children, parenting, and transformations in gender roles as more never married women become household heads.

### **Marriage and motherhood in sub-Saharan Africa**

Marriage in the traditional African society was described by Evans Pritchard (1965) as a “given”, there was no such thing as unmarried adult woman or one who was childless by choice; ... and

women could not choose a career instead of marriage” (Gage and Bledsoe 1994). Most African societies had sanctions for childbearing outside marriage, in some East African communities, it was punishable by death, in other places in Africa it was abortion or infanticide (Gage and Bledsoe 1994). There was no place for permanent singlehood except for religious celibates. (Isiugo-Abanihe 1994) confirmed this notion about marriage in his study of bridewealth and nuptiality patterns among the Igbos of Nigeria. He quoted Basden (1938) “It looms upon the horizon of every maid and youth as an indispensable function to be fulfilled with as little delay as possible after reaching the age of puberty. The idea of a celibate life finds no favour whatsoever to the Ibo it is rank foolishness as well as being utterly contrary”. In most societies in sub-Saharan Africa, marriage and motherhood still ascribe adult status on women and provides a source of prestige. Except in the matrilineal societies, women’s inheritance right is linked to their husbands and surviving sons (Isiugo-Abanihe 1998). Marriage is the acceptable setting for procreation and raising of children and people marry to raise valuable children who will support them in acquisition of economic resources and in old age (Caldwell and Caldwell 1987; Isiugo-Abanihe 1998). However, in some cases, such as among the Mende in Sierra Leone when there is no husband in view, as observed by Bledsoe, 1990 women, particularly the educated are encouraged to have children, because a never married woman without a child is considered worse off than one with a child.

However, forces of social change have continued to influence marriage and family in sub-Saharan Africa, leading to transformations in the traditional nuptiality norms, individual sexual and marital behaviour (Isiugo-Abanihe and Obono 1999; Moyo and Kawewe 2009). There is a growing number of women who are never married in their late thirties and over (Antoine and Nanitelamio 1991; Pazvakawambwa et al. 2013). Alongside these changes is increasing proportion of women who are never married mothers by choice or circumstance. This category of women is on the increase in almost all countries in sub-Saharan Africa. (Guyer 1994) observed what she called polyandrous motherhood in Lagos, Nigeria where women have children with more than one man but are not married to any of them, to secure extended social and economic network with such men. (Moyo and Kawewe 2009) reported that single motherhood in Zimbabwe was a deliberate decision by some women who do not want to be under men’s control. There are others who are constrained to single motherhood by their birth

order as first daughters and family responsibilities associated with that position. For such women, though they wish to marry, family responsibilities might compel them to postpone marriage until it becomes “too late” to be found suitable for marriage (Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe 2014). This category of women might want to satisfy their maternal instincts by adopting or having their own biological children (Siegel 1995; Bock 2000; Simpson 2007).

The rising levels of single motherhood in the region is occasioned in part by adaptation to changes brought about by education, mobility associated with employment, gendered migration, poverty, shortage of marriageable men, increased death rate due to HIV/AIDS pandemic, decline in early and arranged marriage and polygyny (Gage and Bledsoe 1994; Isiugo-Abanihe 2000; Gustafsson and Worku 2006; Smith 2007; Moyo and Kawewe 2009). Information on factors associated with single motherhood phenomenon and the differentials across countries in the region is essential for cross-cultural understanding of single motherhood and consequential for evidenced-based policy on vulnerable women and children in the region.

## **Methodology**

### *Source of data and study population*

Cross-sectional data were obtained from the Demographic and Health survey (DHS) conducted between 2010 and 2016 in 31 African countries. The DHS uses a nationally representative sample of women and men of reproductive ages to generate data on diverse demographic and health indicators. Details on the sampling design are published elsewhere (dhsprogram.com). The data for all the countries were pooled to generate a single dataset for the continent. There was only one country in Northern Africa (Egypt) that had a DHS conducted between 2010 and 2016, however, Egypt was excluded from the analysis because never married women were not in the distribution for marital status for that country. Following the United Nations classification, the countries were categorized into five sub-regions: Northern Africa (Egypt), Western Africa (Burkina Faso, Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Niger, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Togo), Eastern Africa (Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Comoros, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe), Central or Middle Africa (Chad, Congo Democratic Republic, Congo Brazzaville, Cameroon, Gabon), and Southern Africa (Lesotho, Namibia).

The analytical population for determinants was limited to all never married women (n=36,122). Thus, single motherhood was defined as a never married woman aged 20-49 years old who had her first birth from ages 20 and above, and currently, has a living child less than 19 years old. For consequences, all categories of single mothers (never married, widowed, divorced and separated) whose first birth took place at age 20 and above, and currently had living children less than 19 years old were included in the analysis (n=22,003).

### *Variable Description*

Two outcome variables were used for this study. To examine the determinants of single motherhood, the outcome variable was parenthood status, indicated by whether a respondent has a child aged  $\leq 18$  years or not. The explanatory variables were informed by findings in past studies and availability in the dataset. They included age, place of residence, highest level of education, occupation, number of respondent's siblings, respondent's birth order, household wealth index, access to the media (radio and television), and respondent's father ever beat her mother. Sub-regions were added as controls. Previous studies document the influence of neighbourhood characteristics on a number of demographic and health outcomes, such as non-marital fertility (South and Crowder 2010), formation of marriage (South and Crowder 1999), mortality (Pickett and Pearl 2001), adolescents' sexual and reproductive health (Lundberg & Orr, 2011). Thus, it is expected that residence in neighbourhoods, where many people are poor, have little or no education, and divorce/separation is common will influence single motherhood. Neighbourhood variables included in this study were community level of poverty, community level of female education, measured as the proportion who attained at least secondary education, community level of divorce and separation. These variables were derived from aggregating individual women responses and sorted by clusters provided in the DHS, a proxy for community.

The consequences of single motherhood was examined from the perspective of deprivation on a multiple dimensions of access and ownership of health insurance, getting medical help for self, education measured in years of schooling (less than 6 years is considered deprived), ownership of land, ownership of house, employment status in the last 12 months, household wealth index (re-categorized into poor and not poor), and access to the media (radio and television), a respondent is considered deprived if she has no access to the media to all. Dichotomous index

of access to health was generated from 8 questions on getting medical health help for self whether it was no problem, big problem and not a big problem.

The outcome variable was a dichotomous index for multidimensional deprivation generated from the 8 indicators listed above and respondents were categorized as deprived and not deprived. Drawing from the Human Development Index, a respondent in this study was considered deprived if she is deprived in at least a third of the 8 indicators (UNDP, 2015). The eight indicators were reduced to dichotomous variables with codes 0 and 1. No deprivation in all eight indicators and deprivation in 2 indicators was coded 0 (not deprived), and deprivation in 3-8 indicators was coded 1 (deprived). The explanatory variable was single motherhood, consisting of two categories: never married mothers and ever married mothers. **The ever married single mothers (widowed, divorced and separated) were disaggregated in the descriptive analysis.** Potential confounders were included in the estimation as control variables. These included whether child resides with the respondent or not, place of residence, religion, highest educational level, the number of respondent's siblings (likely source of support), and the number of living children.

### *Analytical Approach*

The characteristics of the study population were described using percentage, and presented in a tabular form. The prevalence of single motherhood in percentage was described for the continent, sub-regions (except Northern Africa), using tables and figures. The multivariate analysis involved the use of multi-level logistic regression model to estimate the main effect of individual and community variables. The relationship between single motherhood and multidimensional poverty was examined using logistic regression. The experience of multidimensional deprivation by never married parents was compared to other categories of single mothers. Results of the multivariate analysis were presented in odds ratio with their 95% confidence interval. A separate analysis was conducted for the sub-regions due to the observed statistically significant difference across the sub-regions. A separate analysis was also necessary to highlight similarities and differences in factors associated with single motherhood across the sub-regions.

## **Results**

### *Prevalence of single motherhood in Africa*

Out of a sample of 36,122 never married women aged 20-49 years in the continent, 22.4% were single parents of children 18 years or younger. Among the 8,073 single parents, the highest proportion was in Eastern Africa (37%), and the least was 16% in Central Africa (See Figure 1). Distribution within the sub-regions (Figure 2) shows wide variations across the regions. Whereas over 50.5% of never married women in Southern Africa were mothers, only 15.7% in Western Africa ever had a child. The potential factors associated with the wide variation are examined in the next section.

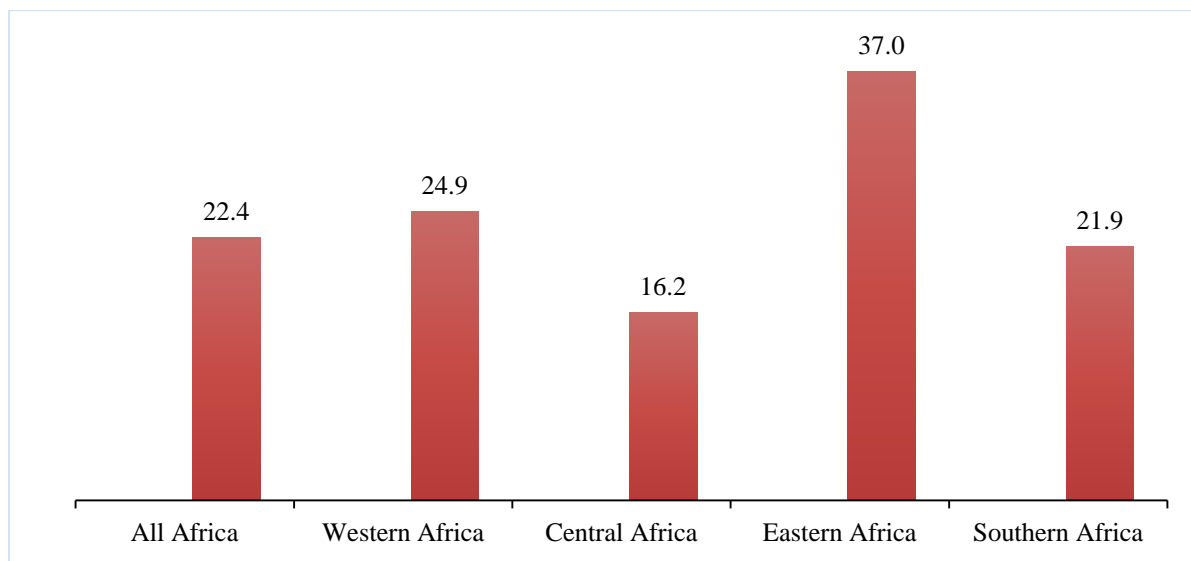


Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of Single Mothers in Africa



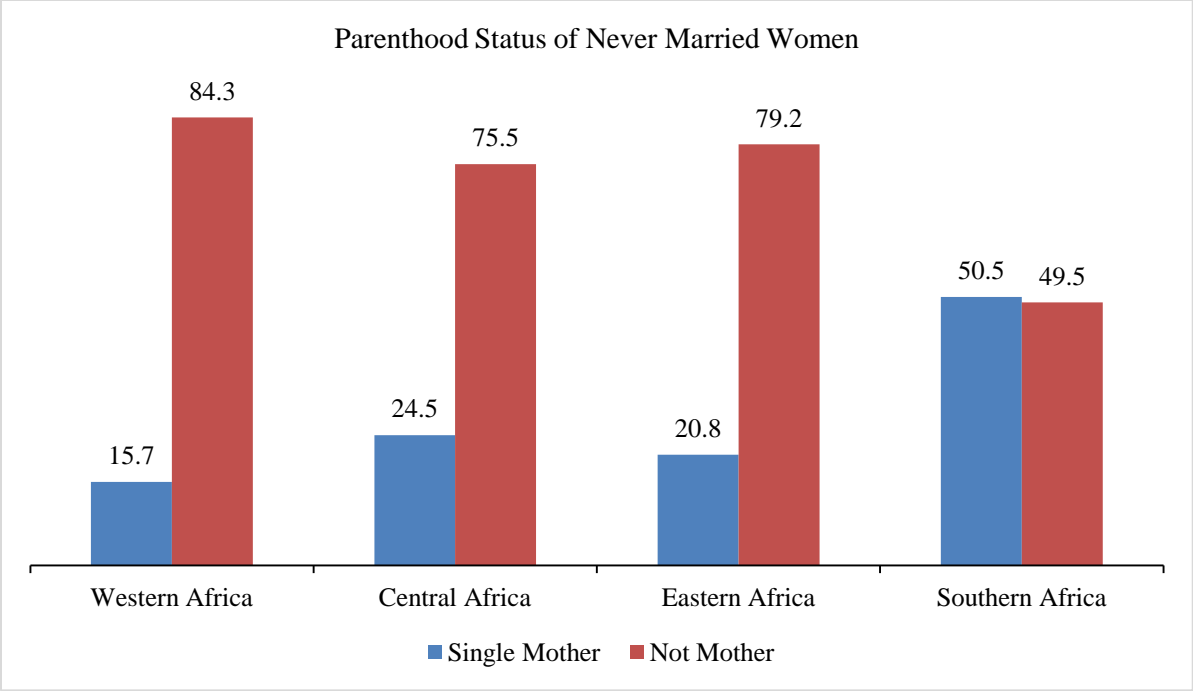


Figure 2: Distribution within sub-regions

*Determinants of single motherhood in Africa*

This section presents a profile of the study population used for the analysis of determinants, and the main effect results of a multi-level logistic regression model predicting factors associated with single motherhood in Africa, and the sub-regions

*Characteristics of the study population*

Normalized weighted frequencies of never married women (Table 1) in the continent showed that most of them were aged 20-24 (60.7%). The majority resided in urban areas (61.9%), attained secondary education (51.5%), only 8.9% had no education. Many of the respondents were not working (40.9%), and almost half (49.7%) had less access to the media (less than once or at least once a week), and 39% had more regular access to the media (almost every day).

Distribution of the selected background characteristics within each sub-region reflected the pattern in the entire continent except in a few characteristics in Eastern Africa. Unlike other sub-regions, more than half of the never married women in Eastern Africa resided in rural areas, and close to one-third attained primary education unlike less than 20% in other sub-regions, and slightly above a quarter worked in agricultural related occupations.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Never Married Women by selected background characteristics

Characteristic	All Africa (n=36,122)	W/A (n=12,943)	C/A (n=5,237)	E/A (n=14,502)	S/A (n=3,439)
<b>Parenthood status</b>					
Not mother	77.65	84.28	75.47	79.20	49.49
Mother	22.35	15.72	24.53	20.80	50.51
<b>Age</b>					
20-24	60.71	62.24	62.38	63.00	42.81
25-29	22.63	24.35	21.93	21.21	23.24
30-34	8.53	7.64	8.00	8.33	13.48
35-39	4.34	3.60	3.78	4.00	9.46
40-44	2.32	1.40	2.55	2.00	6.79
45-49	1.46	0.77	1.37	1.46	4.22
<b>Place of Residence</b>					
Urban	61.99	72.52	77.16	47.43	60.73
Rural	38.01	27.48	22.84	52.57	39.27
<b>Education</b>					
No education	8.90	13.14	6.23	7.76	1.82
Primary	19.93	12.75	13.61	30.61	11.53
Secondary	51.45	53.00	57.84	43.60	69.01
Higher	19.72	21.11	22.32	18.04	17.64
<b>Occupation</b>					
Not working	40.92	45.46	47.34	33.87	40.12
White Collar	10.70	9.59	8.10	11.28	17.54
Sales	14.33	17.40	19.74	8.56	16.16
Agriculture	13.01	4.35	8.37	26.38	1.68
Services	7.32	7.90	5.90	5.72	14.05
Household-domestic	3.23	2.12	2.06	5.07	-
Manual	9.05	11.70	5.85	8.02	7.60

Others	1.44	1.48	2.64	1.10	2.86
<b>Access to Media</b>					
No access	11.06	9.71	17.36	10.37	9.50
Less access	49.74	46.74	44.65	52.59	56.70
More access	39.20	43.55	37.99	37.04	33.80

*Multilevel Analysis predicting factors associated with single motherhood in Africa*

The result of the mixed effect model is presented in Table 2. Age was positively associated with single motherhood in Africa and in all the sub-regions. A similar pattern of increasing likelihood with age was observed in the region as well as the sub-regions. Place of residence was a significant determinant of single motherhood in Africa. Women who resided in rural areas were less likely to be single mothers than their urban counterparts (OR 0.81  $p < 0.001$ ). Disaggregating the analysis into sub-regions showed that this factor was only significant in Eastern Africa (OR 0.76  $p < 0.01$ ), and marginally significant in Southern Africa but in a positive direction (OR 1.24  $p < 0.10$ ).

Respondents who attained primary and secondary education were 30% and 18% more likely to be single never married mothers, respectively, than those who had no education. Single motherhood was significantly less likely among women whose highest level of education was tertiary (OR 0.45  $p < 0.001$ ). This pattern of association was consistent in Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa, albeit higher education was not significant in Central Africa, and only of marginal significance in Eastern Africa. But in Western Africa, the odds of single motherhood was significantly less among those who had a secondary education (OR 0.78  $p < 0.05$ ), compared to respondents who had no education.

Never married motherhood was significantly more likely among women who worked in any occupation than those who had no work, although insignificant for those in manual (skilled and unskilled) and other occupations. This pattern was similar in Central Africa and Eastern Africa, but Western and Southern Africa presented inverse association which was insignificant in many categories. Household wealth was inversely associated with the odds of unmarried motherhood in Africa and all the sub-regions. However, it was not a significant factor in Southern Africa except for those in the richest quintile (OR 0.38  $p < 0.001$ ) who were 62% less likely than

respondents in the poorest quintile to be single never married mothers. Also observed is that the effect size decreased as wealth quintile increases. Thus, indicating a strong relationship between single motherhood in the region and household economic well-being.

The number of respondent's siblings had no significant effect except in Central Africa where a marginally significant inverse association was observed. Respondents who were first born children of their parents were significantly more likely to be single never married mothers, but the statistical significance was marginal. However, in Southern Africa, the positive relation was stronger (OR 1,27  $p < 0.05$ ). The experience of intimate partner violence by a respondent's mother was a significant determinant of single motherhood. Relative to those whose mothers never experienced intimate partner violence, respondents whose fathers ever beat their mothers were significantly more likely to be unmarried mothers (OR 1.36  $p < 0.001$ ). The significant positive relationship was prevalent in all the sub-regions except Southern Africa but was only significant in Central and Eastern Africa. Access to the media reduced the odds of single never married motherhood in the region. Respondents who had less and more access were 15% and 20%, respectively, less likely than those who had no access to be an unmarried mother. In Western Africa, only more access was significant, in Central Africa, only less access was marginally significant, whereas, in Eastern Africa, both less and more access were significant predictors of single never married motherhood.

Neighbourhood factors were not as significant as individual-level factors in predicting unmarried motherhood in the region. Community level of poverty was significant only in Western Africa where respondents who resided in neighbourhoods with high poverty level were 2.18 times as likely as those in low poverty neighbourhoods to be single never married mothers ( $p < 0.05$ ). Community level of female education was significantly associated with single motherhood in the region and Eastern Africa but was of marginal significance in Southern Africa. In all, the odds of single motherhood were less among respondents who resided in communities where the level of female education was moderate and high. The proportion of women whose marriage dissolved through divorce and separation in a neighbourhood was no significant predictors of single motherhood in the region.

Table 2: Multilevel Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Factors Associated with Single Motherhood in Africa, Pooled Dataset, DHS

	Africa	Western Africa	Central Africa	Eastern Africa	Southern Africa
Variable	OR(95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR(95% CI)	OR(95% CI)	OR(95% CI)
<b>Age</b>					
20-24 (RC)					
25-29	3.74(3.44-4.06)***	4.01(3.44-4.68)***	4.30(3.52-5.25)***	3.63(3.16-4.16)***	4.60(3.65-5.79)***
30-34	6.11(5.47-6.82)***	5.48(4.37-6.86)***	6.50(4.94-8.55)***	6.89(5.76-8.22)***	8.02(6.01-10.70)***
35-39	8.69(7.52-10.04)***	9.79(7.28-13.15)***	10.42(7.15-15.18)***	7.36(5.83-9.30)***	15.18(10.25-22.50)***
40-44	9.50(7.83-11.52)***	8.12(5.16-12.79)***	18.72(11.39-30.75)***	9.47(6.85-13.10)***	9.98(6.62-15.06)***
45-49	11.3(8.98-14.45)***	9.12(5.08-16.37)***	21.23(11.00-40.99)***	11.35(7.91-16.30)***	13.54(8.04-22.79)***
<b>Place of Residence</b>					
Urban (RC)					
Rural	0.81(0.74-0.89)***	0.96(0.80-1.16)	0.87(0.69-1.10)	0.76(0.65-0.89)**	1.24(0.99-1.57)†
<b>Education</b>					
No Education (RC)					
Primary	1.30(1.14-1.49)***	1.16(0.93-1.46)	1.99(1.41-2.81)***	1.73(1.40-2.15)***	1.10(0.56-2.16)
Secondary	1.18(1.04-1.34)*	0.78(0.64-0.95)*	1.88(1.35-2.64)***	1.78(1.42-2.23)***	1.05(0.56-1.96)
Higher	0.45(0.39-0.54)***	0.29(0.22-0.39)***	0.79(0.51-1.21)	0.76(0.57-1.01)†	0.44(0.22-0.87)*
<b>Occupation</b>					
Not working (RC)					

White collar	1.48(0.91-2.40)	0.85(0.40-1.82)	2.96(0.94-9.27)†	2.09(0.88-4.92)†	0.95(0.72-1.26)
Sales	1.67(1.04-2.68)*	0.93(0.44-1.94)	3.68(1.21-11.19)*	2.27(0.97-5.32)†	1.19(0.89-1.59)
Agriculture	1.68(1.04-2.71)*	1.17(0.55-2.48)	4.36(1.39-13.66)*	2.81(1.21-6.51)*	0.67(0.34-1.30)
Services	1.72(1.06-2.80)*	1.09(0.51-2.33)	3.68(1.16-11.65)*	2.79(1.18-6.59)*	0.82(0.62-1.10)
Household-domestic	1.84(1.11-3.05)*	0.79(0.30-2.04)	2.79(0.80-9.68)	2.86(1.20-6.78)*	-
Manual	1.41(0.87-2.28)	0.99(0.47-2.06)	3.58(1.13-11.29)*	1.36(0.57-3.26)	0.72(0.49-1.05)†
Others	1.40(0.78-2.50)	0.61(0.22-1.68)	2.98(0.86-10.31)†	1.97(0.63-6.18)	0.59(0.34-1.03)†
<b>Household wealth index</b>					
Poorest (RC)					
Poorer	0.83(0.72-0.95)*	0.74(0.54-1.02)†	0.96(0.72-1.28)	0.74(0.59-0.94)*	1.10(0.74-1.65)
Middle	0.64(0.56-0.74)***	0.63(0.46-0.85)**	0.52(0.39-0.71)***	0.72(0.57-0.90)**	0.99(0.67-1.48)
Richer	0.50(0.43-0.57)***	0.48(0.35-0.66)***	0.36(0.27-0.50)***	0.63(0.50-0.78)***	0.73(0.49-1.10)
Richest	0.36(0.31-0.42)***	0.38(0.27-0.53)***	0.26(0.19-0.36)***	0.42(0.33-0.54)***	0.38(0.24-0.59)***
<b>Siblings</b>					
0-4 (RC)					
5+	0.96(0.89-1.04)	1.09(0.95-1.25)	0.85(0.71-1.01)†	0.91(0.81-1.03)	1.09(0.89-1.32)
<b>Birth order</b>					
Not firstborn child (RC)					
First born child	1.08(0.99-1.18)†	1.09(0.93-1.28)	0.96(0.79-1.17)	1.08(0.93-1.24)	1.27(1.01-1.60)*
<b>Father ever beat mother</b>					
No (RC)					
Yes	1.36(1.19-1.56)***	1.06(0.81-1.38)	1.39(1.03-1.87)*	1.63(1.32-2.02)***	0.99(0.62-1.56)

<b>Access to the media</b>					
No access (RC)					
Less access	0.85(0.77-0.95)**	0.98(0.81-1.20)	1.23(0.97-1.57)†	0.65(0.55-0.77)***	0.78(0.55-1.10)
More access	0.80(0.71-0.91)**	0.78(0.62-0.99)*	1.10(0.83-1.45)	0.64(0.52-0.78)***	0.89(0.61-1.30)
<b>Community poverty level</b>					
Low (RC)					
Middle	0.85(0.60-1.20)	1.08(0.54-2.13)	-	1.00(0.63-1.59)	-
High	1.11(0.77-1.60)	2.18(1.04-4.57)*	1.11(0.80-1.55)	0.88(0.53-1.45)	1.02(0.72-1.46)
<b>Community level of female education</b>					
Low (RC)					
Middle	0.31(0.20-0.49)***	-	-	0.54(0.33-0.90)*	-
High	0.32(0.20-0.50)***	0.98(0.70-1.37)	1.24(0.85-1.80)	0.45(0.26-0.78)**	0.70(0.48-1.01)†
<b>Community level of divorce/separation</b>					
Low (RC)					
Middle	0.98(0.70-1.37)	0.74(0.43-1.29)	-	0.81(0.51-1.30)	-
High	1.03(0.72-1.48)	1.16(0.62-2.18)	0.90(0.67-1.20)	0.76(0.45-1.26)	0.96(0.72-1.28)
<b>Sub-region</b>					
Western Africa (RC)					
Central Africa	1.50(1.34-1.66)***				
Eastern Africa	0.91(0.83-1.00)†				

Southern Africa	4.32(3.84-4.87)***				
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Note: white collar – professional/managerial/clerical; manual – skilled and unskilled; sub-regions and religion were controlled.

Note: \*\*\*p<0.001 \*\*p<0.01 \*p<0.05 † p<0.10 (marginal significance); AOR – Adjusted odds ratio; CI – Confidence interval



*Consequences of single motherhood in Africa.*

Table 3: Distribution of the study population by the 8 indicators of multidimensional deprivation and selected background characteristics

Characteristic	All Africa (n=22,003)	W/A (n=5,314)	C/A (n=3,602)	E/A (n=10,713)	S/A (n=2,373)
<b>Deprivation1</b>					
Not deprived	15.81	13.66	10.23	16.82	23.52
Deprived	84.19	86.34	89.77	83.18	76.48
<b>Single Moms (1)</b>					
Ever married	64.50	63.44	65.99	72.58	28.09
Never married	35.50	36.56	34.01	27.42	71.91
<b>Single Moms (2)</b>					
Widowed	21.61	25.01	16.05	23.50	13.87
Never married	35.50	36.56	34.01	27.42	71.91
Divorced	17.11	13.85	10.38	23.98	3.59
Separated	25.78	24.58	39.56	25.10	10.62
<b>Age</b>					
20-24	15.11	14.95	16.38	14.79	15.03
25-29	21.11	20.44	23.47	20.39	22.28
30-34	17.92	17.64	17.78	17.95	18.64
35-39	16.62	16.29	16.21	16.90	16.70
40-44	14.63	15.00	12.33	15.21	14.73
45-49	14.60	15.69	13.83	14.77	12.62
<b>Place of Residence</b>					
Urban	47.89	60.64	61.89	36.09	51.34
Rural	52.11	39.36	38.11	63.91	48.66
<b>Schooling</b>					
6+ years	63.71	52.05	67.27	62.52	89.82

<=5 years	36.29	47.95	32.73	37.48	10.18
<b>Health insurance</b>					
Covered	10.07	10.63	11.91	8.19	12.37
Not covered	89.93	89.37	88.09	91.81	87.63
<b>Work status</b>					
Working	77.53	76.23	77.04	82.30	62.34
Not working	22.47	23.77	22.96	17.70	37.66
<b>Wealth Index</b>					
Not poor	67.57	75.55	64.17	64.69	67.86
Poor	32.43	24.45	35.83	35.31	32.14
<b>Owns a house</b>					
Owns	29.85	20.85	22.06	40.93	29.19
Does not own	70.15	79.15	77.94	59.07	70.81
<b>Owns a land</b>					
Owns	26.08	17.97	21.75	36.60	18.78
Does not own	73.92	82.03	78.25	63.40	81.22
<b>Access to healthcare</b>					
Not a big problem					
Big problem	68.67	69.89	59.76	68.95	78.22
	31.33	30.11	40.24	31.05	21.78
<b>Access to media</b>					
Access	76.41	79.15	65.53	76.70	85.44
No access	23.59	20.85	34.47	23.30	14.56

Note: W/A – Western Africa; C/A – Central Africa; E/A – Eastern Africa; S/A – Southern Africa

Weighted frequencies of the study population indicate that 84.2% of the study population (ever and never married single mothers) were multi-dimensionally deprived. In the sub-regions, a similar proportion (over 80%) was deprived except in Southern Africa (76.5%). Distribution of

the single mothers showed that 35% were never married. There was an even distribution by age group across the regions. Slightly more than half of the respondents resided in rural areas, but in Western Central and Southern Africa, the majority lived in urban areas.

Out of a sample of 22,003 single mothers (never married, widowed, divorced and separated) in the continent, the never married are the most deprived (Figure 3). Distribution of deprivation across the sub-regions (Figure 4) indicates that Southern, Western and Eastern sub-regions are home to the majority of deprived never married mothers in sub-Saharan Africa.

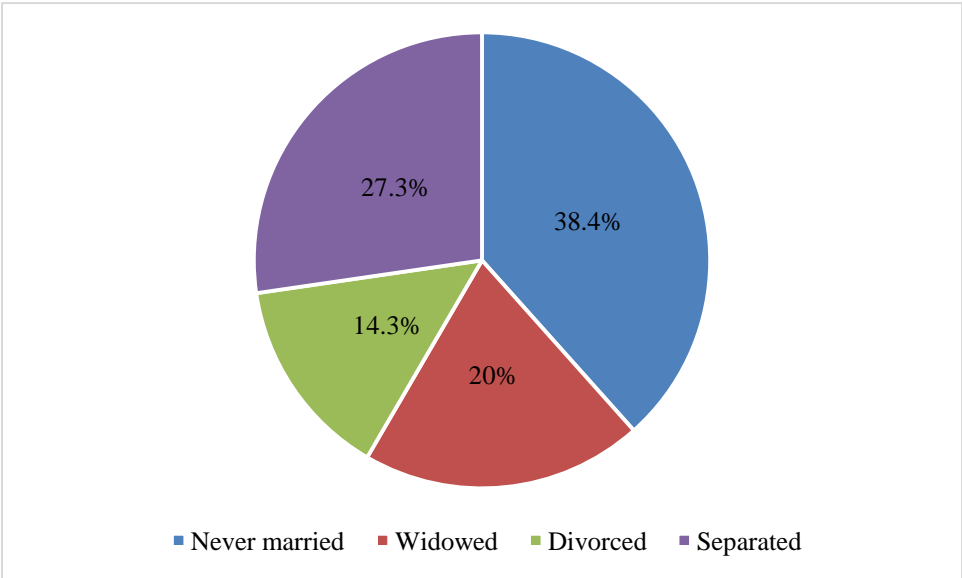


Figure 9.3: Multidimensional Deprivation among all single mothers

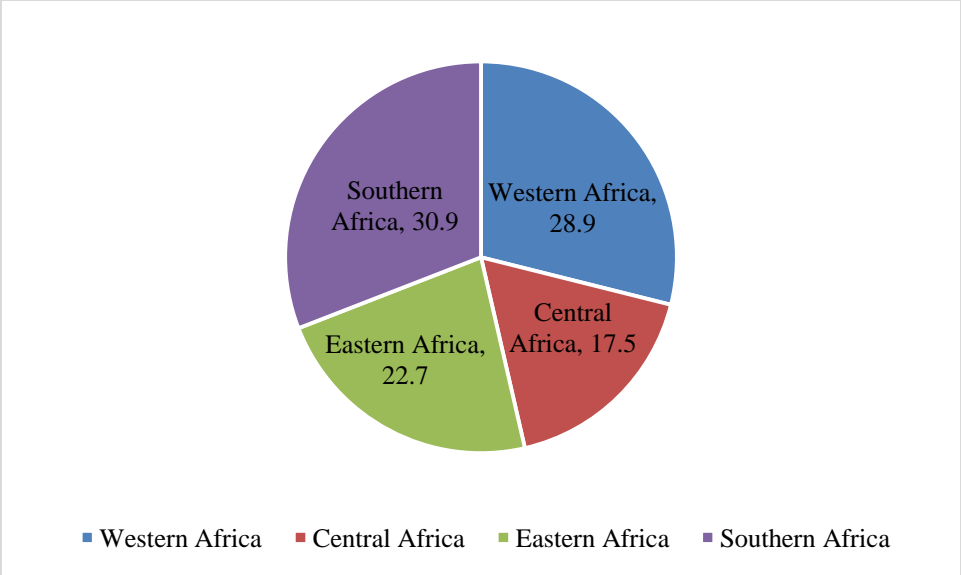


Figure 9.4. Proportion (%) Deprived among never married mothers by sub-region

*Predictors of multidimensional deprivation among single mothers*

Multivariate analysis predicting the relationship between single motherhood among women and multidimensional poverty shows that never married mothers compared to their ever married counterparts were more likely to be multi-dimensionally deprived in Africa (Table 5). In the bivariate association, never married mothers were significantly more likely to be deprived than single ever married mothers (OR 1.10 p<0.05). When the covariates and sub-regions were adjusted, the relationship between never married motherhood and multidimensional deprivation relative to ever married mothers remained positive and the effect size became stronger (AOR 1.77 p<0.001). Due to the statistically significant variations across the sub-regions, a separate analysis was conducted for each region controlling for the covariates in the adjusted model.

Table 9.5: Logistic Regression models predicting the relationship between single motherhood and multidimensional deprivation in Africa, DHS

Variable	All	W/Africa	C/Africa	E/Africa	S/Africa
Unadjusted Model					
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
<b>Single motherhood</b>					
Ever married (RC)					

Never married	1.10 (1.01-1.21)*	1.44 (1.19-1.78)***	1.08 (0.78-1.50)	1.07 0.91-1.26)	1.59 1.32-1.91)***
Adjusted Model					
	AOR(95% CI)	AOR(95% CI)	AOR(95% CI)	AOR(95% CI)	AOR(95% CI)
<b>Single motherhood</b>					
Ever married (RC)	1.77	2.19	1.32	1.53	2.30
Never married	(1.56-2.01)***	1.57-3.05)***	0.92-1.90)	(1.26-1.86)***	(1.80-2.90)***

Note: \*\*\*p<0.001 \*\*p<0.01 \*p<0.05 † p<0.10 (marginal significance); AOR – Adjusted odds ratio; CI – Confidence interval

In Western Africa, never married mothers remained significantly more likely than their ever married counterparts to be multi-dimensionally deprived; when the covariates were adjusted the odds became larger (AOR 2.19 p<0.001). In Central Africa, although never married mothers were more likely than ever married single mothers to be deprived, the relationship was not significant. In Eastern Africa, the odds of deprivation was insignificantly positive for never married mothers, but when the covariates were included in the model, the relationship remained positive and became significant (AOR 1.53 p<0.001). In Southern Africa, in both the unadjusted and adjusted models, never married mothers remained significantly more likely to be deprived than ever married single mothers.

### Discussion of the Findings

This study examined single motherhood in Africa with a specific focus on the prevalence, determinants, and consequences. Due to the small number of men who are single parents, the analysis was limited to women. The significant results of this study are discussed below with policy implications and suggestions for further studies.

The prevalence of single parenthood among women was 22.4% with variations across the sub-regions. Drawing from the analysis conducted, a number of individual and community-level characteristics were associated with single parenthood by women in the region. With respect to current age, a pattern of increasing likelihood of single motherhood with age was observed in the continent and all the sub-regions. The pattern may be indicative of pressure on older never married women to have a child when there is no husband in sight (Gage and Bledsoe 1994). Compared to younger never married women, older married women have little chance of marriage (Calvès, 1999).

Although Gage & Bledsoe (1994) and Antoine & Nanitelamio (1991) identified unmarried motherhood as a prevailing urban attitude, the result of this analysis may not necessarily indicate that more urban women become unmarried mothers than their rural counterparts. It may be that women who become never married mothers in the rural areas migrate to urban places which provide them a shield from the stigma associated with unmarried motherhood. Also, urban areas provide more economic opportunities which unmarried mothers may want to take advantage of in providing care for their children. However, this result provides useful information that will guide programmatic efforts aimed at this category of mothers with respect to their location. Except in Southern Africa, programmes to enhance the well-being of single never married mothers and their families should concentrate more in urban than rural places in Africa.

One of the known ways to keep women out of early marriage and out-of-wedlock motherhood is to keep them longer in school. This may explain why high education was inversely associated with single never married motherhood in this study. There is the need to implement policies and programmes to keep women longer in school. The result of this analysis suggests that primary and secondary education is very important but not enough to keep many women from unmarried motherhood. Therefore, more programmes are needed in the continent to encourage more women to aspire and attain higher education. Studies in more developed countries suggest that highly educated women are less likely to become involuntary single mothers (Bock 2000; Berg-Cross et al. 2004). It is likely that most of those who became single never married mothers in this study did so involuntarily, possibly as a failed attempt to attract a spouse or concretise a relationship (Meekers 1992). Although highly educated women use contraceptives more than other categories of women in Africa (Odimegwu 1999; Indongo 2008), given Gage & Bledsoe's (1994) observation in Sierra Leone that unmarried educated women, in particular, are pressurized to have a child when no husband is in sight, there is need for more scholarly inquiry into the views of highly educated never married women on unmarried motherhood.

The result on occupation was expected given that kins support which was prevalent in many sub-Saharan Africa (Bruce 1995; Gibson and Mace 2005) is declining due to prolonged economic downturn in the region, single mothers would have to work to sustain their children. However, because low-wage employment is highly prevalent among women in sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP 2015), unmarried mothers will be more vulnerable than other categories of women because of

their no or low education attracts low-income employments (McKeever and Wolfinger 2011; Brady and Burroway 2012). With no other source of support, the implication is poverty and the recycling of poverty to the younger generation (McLanahan 2009; Ntoimo 2011), which becomes more prevalent as the number of single mothers in the region increases. In Southern Africa, the prevalence of unmarried motherhood is over 50%, other sub-regions may get to that high point sooner than expected. Thus, further scholarly investigation is needed into the economic well-being of unmarried mothers, particularly in Central and Eastern Africa, to provide useful evidence to guide interventions on poverty alleviation among vulnerable single mothers.

Birth order in some African communities is symbolic of responsibility and authority in the home. For instance, birth order, particularly being a first daughter or first child places a demand on her to support her parents in caring for younger siblings. In some poor families, the first daughter particularly if she is also the first child is sent out to work, in order to alleviate the financial burden on parents of training younger siblings. Parental demands on daughter's wage labour constitute a family background factors that results in postponement of marriage in some cases and unmarried motherhood (Ferguson 2000; Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe 2014).

Another important finding in this study is the positive relationship between the experience of intimate partner violence by one's mother and unmarried motherhood. This is an indication that experience of intimate partner violence by one's mother is a risk factor for unmarried motherhood in the region. The experience of domestic violence is intergenerationally transmitted (Lalasz 2004), but the pathways through which the transmission takes place in Africa is yet to receive adequate scholarly attention. However, it is likely that conflictual parental relationship would increase children's emotional detachment from the abusing parent, usually the father, thus leading to an aversion to marriage (Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe 2014). This underscores the need for governments in the region to strengthen and effectively implement resolutions and policies on eliminating all forms of violence against women. Furthermore, this study revealed a significant role of the media (radio and television) in determining never married motherhood in Africa. The media in Africa has been shown to play a significant role in reproductive health (Agha and Van Rossem 2002). Therefore, it is likely that those who listened to the radio and watched television more frequently would be more likely to avoid single never married motherhood.

With regard to multidimensional deprivation, there was a striking similarity across the regions. In the entire region, never married mothers were more likely than their ever married mates to be multi-dimensionally deprived. This finding corroborates past studies that relate higher levels of poverty and poor health to never married mothers (McLanahan 2009; Burstrom et al. 2010; Ntoimo 2015). Also, in this study, the odds of becoming a single never married mother reduced with higher household wealth quintile. Deprivation has diverse and far-reaching implications for the well-being of the women and their children. Reduction in poverty levels across the countries in Africa will not only reduce the prevalence of unmarried motherhood among older women, it will also increase the well-being of those who are unmarried mothers and their children.

#### *Limitations of the study*

Due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, this analysis reflects the current characteristics and status of single mothers in the continent, not the risk factors associated with single motherhood in Africa. However, the findings provide useful insight into the characteristics and status of single mothers in the region that will guide future research, policies, and programmes aimed at alleviating all forms of deprivation among women.

#### **Conclusion**

In summary, over 22% of women ages 20-49 years in Africa were unmarried mothers. The significant factors associated with never married parenthood among women in the region include current age, place of residence, highest level of education, occupation, household wealth quintile, birth order as first born child, experience of intimate partner violence by respondent's mother, access to the media, community level of poverty, and community level of female education. Notably, most of the determinants were similar across the sub-regions. Among all categories of single mothers in the region, the never married were the most vulnerable in all eight indicators of multidimensional deprivation. In conclusion, unmarried motherhood is obviously a common nuptiality pattern in contemporary Africa. With its diverse implications for wellbeing, family-oriented policies, programmes and studies have become more imperative.

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