

SINGLE PARENTING IN SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT: CAUSES AND EFFECTS ON CHILD WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how single parenting in South Africa impact child welfare and development. Extant studies revealed that most African children are raised by single parents in diverse South African communities. African young adults both male and female were sampled to establish findings for this study. 150 single parents responded to the study's survey questionnaire, while 15 single parents were engaged in semi-structured interviews. The instruments were descriptively and thematically analysed for questionnaire and interview respectively. Most of the single parents sampled struggle to provide for their children. It is also evident that for parenting, the physical and spiritual development of children are influenced by single parenthood. It is clear from the survey data that the socioeconomic status of single parents impact child education, feeding, housing and protection. It is suggested that adequate attention be paid to marriage among young youth by looking at the current cultural marriage rites which are crucial in building a sustainable and healthy family. Marriage allows partners to put available resources together to take care of children and this enhances the welfare and social development of the children. research significance in brief, research process, overall findings and conclusion or implications of the study.

Keywords: Child development, marriage rites, single parents, cultural practices, sustainable family

INTRODUCTION

A man qualifies to marry when he has the capabilities to support himself and his wife and other commitments to sustain a family (Mkhize & Msomi, 2016). These commitments inform the parents to begin to negotiate for a partner for him. These qualities in a man make him sustain and commit to marriage. The partnership between the man and the woman is cemented when a bride's price is paid. In African contexts, the bride price seals the relationship between the couple to constitute a family (Raniga & Ngcobo, 2014). Even though the bride price may not necessarily be a legal requirement for marriage, it is obligatory (Vengesayi, 2018). A marriage without a bride price is not recognised in most African societies (Gunga, 2009). It is, therefore, a customary requirement for marriage, as the bride price payment validate, strengthen and legitimise children born to such marriages. The family then becomes a normal biological and social structure through which a child develops. The family serves as a vehicle that drives the growth and development of the child, provides affection and basic materials to nurture the child.

However, there is an emergence of a high rate of children born out of wedlock and raised by single parents (Mathibela & Skhosana, 2021). It is estimated that about 23% of the children born in South Africa are likely to be out of wedlock and live with single parents (Stat SA, 2020).

The high proportion of children born out of wedlock show that a significant number of these children will not live with both biological parents but with either a parent or grandparents.

The causes of a high percentage of children not living with both biological parents have been attributed to a high failure rate of parents to marry and live together (Koketso, Calvin, Lehlokwe & Mafa, 2019). According to Baloyi (2016), young men and women no longer appreciate the value of marriage but preferred to have children or cohabit. The wedlock children are left for their mothers to take care of. Such happenings are threatening and violating the rights of African children. Most children born from this family structure are denied basic needs such as schooling, food, medical care and love, stable, married biological and caring families (Baloyi, 2016). These welfare problems are significant and lead to loss of human potential as experienced by thousands of children in the country.

With the increased global focus on child welfare and development, this study explored various factors causing the low rate of marriage among young youth and the herculean task of parenting. Parenting is increasingly becoming a mirage and more likely to affect children negatively in their ability to develop as young and responsible children into adulthood (Amadu et al., 2021). Hence, this article examines the following:

- What reasons delay marriage among young South Africans?
- What is the role of single parenting in the development of African children?
- What needed to be done to support healthy parenting and the welfare development of children in South Africa?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The decision to marry, even though it is a cultural practice in Africa is however a personal one, which is significantly influenced by socio-cultural and economic factors (UNICEF, 2016). Some of the influencing factors include certainty for the future, unemployment, employment status, income, immigration, religious doctrines, mental readiness and others (UNICEF, 2016). All these factors today influence readiness for marriage and result in a low marriage rate as well as a decline in the population of some countries (Livingstone & Byrne, 2018). However, as the marriage rate is declining in South Africa, childbearing is rising (Raniga, Boecker & Mthembu, 2019). This means that the factor that prevents marriage is independent of the decision to have a child.

Generally, young adults have a positive attitude towards marriage, however, these attitudes are influenced directly by the duration of education (Lee, Klein, Wohor & Kim, 2021). Many young adults are not likely to be married until the completion of their tertiary education. However, the majority are not affected by education in some jurisdictions but rather influenced by other socio-cultural factors (Gorkem & Bengisoy, 2018). In a South African context, the education of young adults has rather influenced the marriage proposals as the females spent more years in school to increase their brideprice (Maluleke, 2017). The higher the educational level of the female, the more money that is paid as the bride price. In the case of a male, education increases their income level and ability to maintain a family. Various extant literature suggests that delay in education has a direct relationship with the low marriage rate of young adults in the first world but no direct effect is linked to economic factors (Livingstone & Byrne, 2018; Koketso, Calvin, Lehlokwe & Mafa, 2019; Mathibela & Skhosana, 2021).

Other studies argue that the attitude of young adults towards marriage is positively influenced by financial stability (Raniga & Ngcobo, 2014; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Amadu, Seidu, Duku, Okyere, Hagan, Homenu, & Ahinkorah, 2021). Contrastingly, concerns about financial issues were identified as a negative attitude towards marriage in Turkey (Fiskin & Sari, 2021). In a related study conducted in Finland, a little relationship was established between financial stability and marriage (Virtala, Kuntu, Huttunen & Virgo, 2009). While in Sub-Saharan Africa, due to the unemployment situations among young adults, marriage is negatively affected by financial worries, especially on the part of males. However, the young adults with stable employment and earning higher incomes are likely to marry earlier than the unstable unemployed or those who earn very little.

The desire to marry among young adults is also influenced by social factors, with a very strong social desire and determination to become parents (Alfaraj et al., 2019). Young adults in developed countries desire to become parents and this affects their attitude to marriage negatively than the young adults from developing nations (Alfaraj et al., 2019). There is high motivation for young adults towards parenting in developing countries than in developed countries. There is a large number of Turk young men who do not want to have children until they have sufficiently achieved high social and economic status in their environments (Fiskin & Sari, 2021).

Culture and religion are determinants of marriage. Studies conducted among countries revealed that the sociocultural structures of ethnic groups affect their attitude towards marriage (Fiskin & Sari, 2021; Yong, Li, Jonason & Tan, 2019). The socio-cultural and religious factors are rather more predominantly rooted among the young adults in developing countries such as East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (Posel & Rudwick, 2013; Yong, Li, Jonason & Tan, 2019; Fiskin & Sari, 2021). Adherence to such cultural and religious practices leads to positive attitudes towards marriage since females are endeared to early marriage. On the other hand, cultural practices, such as bride price payment may delay and promote a negative attitude of young adults to marry. Brideprice payment (ilobolo as known among Zulu) is such cultural practice. The bride price payment among the black South Africans has been described as exorbitant and prevents the young men from marrying early but serves as a motivation for parents to give their daughters away in early marriage (Posel & Rudwick, 2013).

Some extant studies highlight the relationship between marriage and child welfare development. The studies establish that children born to married couples live with their two biological parents and are likely to have positive physical and emotional development than those born out of wedlock and living with single parents (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Chapple, 2009; Harkness, Fernandez & Gregg, 2020). Research has shown that single-parenthood is likely to be responsible for high school drop rates, teenage pregnancy, juvenile delinquency or other negative outcomes that affect the positive development of children (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

However, single-parenthood might not be the direct cause of these negative or positive behaviours of children. Economic theorists recount the level of income in the home as a determinant of child welfare (McLanahan, 2004; Kiernan & Mensah, 2011; Holmes & Kiernan, 2013). The contribution of both parents in the home tends to increase family income. The more income a family has the more resources are provided for children in the home. Single parenthood tends to erode such family income in some circumstances increasing the poverty level in the family (Holmes & Kiernan, 2013). Children from high-income families are likely to attend good schools and have access to educational materials both at school and at home. The likelihood of children

from low-income families sustaining themselves in school is very low and tends to drop out of schools because of lack of availability of educational resources to provide quality education (Ajani & Gamede 2019). Poverty in the family also affects the quality of time spent on children. Single mothers tried hard to work to sustain the family income and in doing so do not have time to spend with the children (McLanahan, 2004). Such children tend to be wayward children and become delinquent. The little income in the family is spent on food to the detriment of other needs of the children. The home has become a toxic environment to nurture children (Kiernan & Mensah, 2011).

The family structure is very important and linked with child discipline. The absence of the father in the family creates such a vacuum for this very important role of the family. In most cases, fathers have been described as role models and disciplinarians in the family. The role of fathers in the family cannot be substituted not even by the grandfathers this is because the role is not the presence of a male or masculine figure (Hill et al., 2001). The father-child relationship in the family goes beyond spending quality time together but rather an influence on a social tie. The presence of a father serves as a social control that encourages children to be competitive and take risks that benefit. This role cannot be substituted for by maternal care alone. These important contributions of fathers to child development make father absence a disaster raising children turning children into truants, criminals, delinquents and who failed to take up responsibilities in life (Figlio, Karbownik, Roth & Wasserman, 2016). The argument that absentee fathers can equally contribute to households with equally positive outcomes has not been substantiated sufficiently except for fathers' support for income in the family (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999).

Even though marriage as a factor contributing to single-parenthood and children's wellbeing has been criticised severally, evidence continues to point to the fact that family structure is important in building a strong platform for children's development. Scholars argued that the family structure is important in children's development if the two parents are the biological parents. If the two parents are not the biological parents of the child, such a home may be harmful to the development of the child. A marriage that is also not sound and unhealthy is also a recipe for calamity for child development. An unhealthy marriage relationship is characterised by persistent conflicts which affect children negatively. Children growing up in such unhealthy marriages may develop aggression and disruptive behaviour leading to peer rejection, academic failure and other anti-social behaviours (Webster-Stratton, 2003).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study design

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design using a case study. In an attempt to establish the objectives of this paper, we focus on the collection of data using both quantitative and qualitative sources in the country.

Data collection procedure and analysis

The participants were carefully chosen to represent the variables reflected in the paper, including demographics, geographical locations and ethnicity. We relied heavily on secondary data from the

General Household survey in the country conducted over the period 2017 to 2019 conducted by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) throughout the country to provide the basis for this study.

The paper is based on the analysis obtained from qualitative data collected using semi-structured questionnaires and interview schedules. A hundred fifty (150) participants were selected randomly among unmarried young adults of cohort age of 25 to 35 years. A survey was conducted using 150 semi-structured questionnaires and an interview using 12 single mothers and 3 single fathers from March to June 2021 selected randomly among the 150 participants drawn from Lekwa Municipality in Mpumalanga province. Even though the participants live in the urban and peri-urban settings, quite a number of them have rural taste and therefore represented both geographical setups.

The focus of the study was on single parents of the cohort aged 25 to 35. The choice is imperative because ages more than 35 may be due to other factors such as divorce and the death of one partner since our interest was in single parents who were never married. The interview was granted to more single mothers than fathers because the children live with their mothers rather than fathers as tradition demands.

The results from the questionnaires were collected and examined carefully and incomplete questionnaires were rejected. An analysis was done using the Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) IBM. Descriptive data was generated in the form of tables and percentages, analysis and conclusions were done based on these descriptive statistics. Interviews were conducted using a tape recorder with all ethical procedures observed. The recorded voice messages were transcribed and themes were formed and recorded verbatim.

There were more female respondents 89 (59.3%) than their male counterparts, 61 (40.7%). The majority of the participants 120 (80%) were not educated beyond a basic matriculation certificate while the remaining 30 (20%) possessed a diploma or degrees. With few of them in possession of a master's degree. Unemployment data shows that the majority in sample 80 representing (53.3%) are gainfully employed while the remaining 70 (46.7%) are in casual employment and relied on government welfare grants.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Attitude Towards Marriage

The analysis shows the participants' reasons for non-marriage. Among the main reasons provided were, educational (continuation of education), economic (employment), social (I want to enjoy life), and cultural (bride price payment). Table 1 shows only respondents who agreed with the propositions.

Table 1: Reasons for non-marriage

Reasons for non-marriage	Responses (%)		
	Males	Females	Total
Educational (attain more educational qualifications)	(32) 21.3	(35) 23.3	44.6
Economic (employment and low income)	(44) 29.3	(35) 23.3	52.6

Social (don't want to be tied to one position)	10 (6.6)	12 (8.0)	14.6
Cultural (payment of bride price)	102 (68)	32 (21.3)	89.3

Educational reasons

Table 1 shows the distribution of the number and percentage of respondents by gender. Of the total number 69 (44.6%) who agreed that continuous education is the reason for the delay in marriage, 32 (21.3%) were male while 23.3%) were females. From this analysis, it is fair to say that females are likely to delay their marriage because of education.

Reasons were provided during the interview to support their responses. A female respondent represented as (P1) has this to say:

I am still pursuing my master's education to promote my carrier. Once I am married my carrier advancement will be curtailed. I am still young and will get settled as soon as done. I am hoping to get married to the father of my child.

A male respondent (P3) also has this to say:

I am currently teaching but wish to obtain my honours or master's to enable have better employment. Better employment will give me more income to be able to look after my family.

A female respondent (P6):

I am currently not schooling but I will do in the near future. Because I will attract more brideprice if I have a higher qualification.

The participants in the interview reveal that delay in education is an opportunity to prepare for marriage. The women see early marriage as means of not furthering their education and will like to do it before getting married to enhance their careers. The other women saw education as means to attract better men (suitors) and be accorded appropriate cultural marriage rites.

Economic reasons

Over fifty percent (52.6%) agreed that economic situations constrained their marriage plans. The male (29.3%) were likely highly constrained economically than their female counterpart (23.3%). This response is confirming the biological data where the majority of the participants were unemployed, especially the males. Most females though not working but are benefiting from the national child welfare grants being paid to them. Again in African setups, the males are to take care of the family and have the responsibility to work and look after the family.

I will only marry if I had made enough money to look after my wife and children. Currently, I am unemployed and will be difficult for me to keep a family.

Social reasons

The analysis from table 1 shows that one-seventh (14.6%) of the participants will prefer to enjoy life before engaging in marriage. The proportion of women reporting social engagement before marriage was nearly one-twelfth (8.0%) while the males were about one-fifteenth (6.6%).

The fact is that as a young man who has just completed his university education and has just started life will like to enjoy much before getting married. I am not

ready for the responsibilities that come with marriage life. I don't want to be pinned down by a wife and children. I prefer to cohabit with a woman where there are fewer social ties.

Similar sentiments were expressed by the females, who thought marriage at a younger age is slavery and will prevent you from reaching your potential socially and economically.

Ideally, I will get married after I have secured much to fulfil my educational needs may be acquiring my master's and gainfully employed, I wouldn't marry. The moment I accepted to marry all my dreams will be shattered and will be reduced to domestic breed woman, hahahahah!!!!

The vast majority of the male respondents conceded that they are not employed and earning much and therefore cannot afford to marry now. They have attributed their inability to economic hardships in the country as a result of high unemployment conditions.

Cultural reasons

The analysis on the cultural reasons shows that almost every nine (89.3%) of the population report delay in marriage because of cultural reasons. The majority of the males 102 (68%) gave brideprice payment as the reason while only 32 (21.3%) of the females report cultural practices as responsible for their non-marriage status. This analysis shows the extent to which cultural practices deprive young adults of marrying early. The male participants are the highest because they are to negotiate for the marriage by paying the bride price. Somehow the women are also affected because the fewer men that are ready to pay the bride price the less they also get married.

The low rate of marriage among young adults was largely attributed to the marriage cultural practices among Africans in the country. Women who were baby mothers explained reasons they were not with the father of their child (ren). *Ilobolo is an obstacle to marriage and forces us to have illegitimate pregnancies and children* (P7). P7 explains further: *I could not get married to my child's father because the amount demanded from my family during the ilobolo negotiation was exorbitant and was considered extortive.*

The men participants also have this to say: *The bride price is too high for me to pay right now but I hope to save some money in the next few years to pay fully.*

Consequences Of Single Parents On Children

Table 2 shows the analysis based on the role of the family as the potential to develop the socio-economic needs of children. This data is limited to only single parents (n=87)

Table 2: Single parents and child welfare

Parental roles	Single father (%)	Single mother (%)	Total (%)
Family formation	20	16	36
Economic support	23	29	52
Social support	15	21	36
Family protection	32	15	47

Family formation function

From the table, the analysis shows that only 36% of single parents provide the environment for a strong family formation. Of this population, the males (20%) provide this function while only 16% of the single mothers agreed to have provided the environment for a strong family formation. The analysis proves that males are capable of providing an environment for the formation of children's sense of belonging, self-identity and provide direction for their development.

A female participant (P5) narrates the negative effect of single parents on child sense of belonging and social identity in an interview:

I am the only parent my boy sees in the house and I tried to provide everything for him, therefore, identified himself as a female instead of a boy. He is always in the company of other girls and I think the absence of the father in the house is causing him to identify himself with girls.

The above narration is corroborated by a single father (P6): notwithstanding, that this parent is not married, the father has access to the child and can provide fatherly support to a very large extent: in most cases, the fathers who do not have paid the bride price are denied access to their children. They are considered irresponsible and incapable of raising a family because probably as long as they failed to pay the bride price they are also not capable to support their daughter financially.

I bond with my daughter very well even though she lives with the mother. I do everything for her since she was a child and that makes her very close to me. She doesn't even want to go to the mom anytime she is with me.

Economic function

Based on the provision of basic food, clothing and shelter for enhancing child development, the majority of the participants (52%) provide such support to their children. The single mothers in the population (29%) are likely to provide more economic support than the single fathers (23%). The reasons for this trend may be in two folds: firstly there were more single mothers in the study population than single fathers and secondly because the single mothers receive Child Support Grants from the government to support their children.

Social support

From table 2 the result shows that only 36% of the single parents were able to adequate physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs of their children. Single mothers (21%) are likely to provide these social needs while 15% of the single fathers can do the same. The analysis shows that single parents are not able to instil social and family values in their children.

I'm not happy that this is happening to my child because e me my father didn't take care of me because he didn't marry my father nor has he paid for the damages because of that my friends laugh at me sometimes and I don't feel happy but I'm trying.

This shows that the ability of fathers to take responsibility for their children brought from wedlock lowers the children's self-esteem and foster even good relation with their parents even after old age. This is rather negative for the socialisation and growth of the next generation.

Care and protection

Almost half of the participants (47%) provide some form of family protection. Both single mothers (15%) and fathers (32%) provide adequate care and do not expose their children to any form of vulnerability.

I'm an educator and work far from home and taking my child with me will erode my income. Therefore I have not been able to provide the support and care needed. My daughter is only 14 years and doing grade 8 but has already given birth.

The result shows that parents who support their children promote the well-being of the child. However, children under weak supervision and care are likely to have behavioural problems in the future. The failure to protect these children exposes them to the problem of child abuse and sexual assault (van Niekerk & Mathews, 2019).

DISCUSSION

Earlier studies established relations between child welfare attainment marital status of parents. This study sets to establish the relationship between marital status especially single parents and child welfare. We first established the relationship by looking at the factors affecting marriage rates among young adults in the country. While in other jurisdictions, separation, divorce and death characterised single-parenthood, the South African situation is different among young black Africans. Several reasons are given for the low marriage rate among young black adults in South Africa. The study revealed that factors such as educational, economic, social and cultural are account for low marriage rates among the young men and women in the country.

It has emerged that marriages are delayed as a result of a personal desire to pursue higher educational laurels. The number of years spent in school affects the rate of marriage. The longer the young adults remain in school the lower the rate of marriage. Again the number of years spent in school is also a function of how much bride price is slated on the bride. Bride to be who spent a high number of years acquiring further degrees attract higher amount of bride price. The higher the amount of bride price the less the female is likely to be married since the bride price will scare the prospective suitors away. The males on the other hand are likely to be affected positively since their aim to further studies is to acquire a good job after their education. A better job secured means a good salary thereby increasing their income level. The higher income level increases the chance of paying the amount slated as the *lobola*. However, it does not mean that males with less education do not earn higher income since the acquisition of skill can take different forms; a shorter duration with fewer emphases on formal education.

The study also reveals the economic status of young adults is highly attributable to the rate of marriage. The study revealed a high unemployment level among young adults. This unemployment situation increased the financial distress of the participants and made it difficult for them to engage in a meaningful marital engagement. This study confirmed the earlier accession

that financial stability among young adults is high in Sub-Saharan Africa and impede early marriage (Fiskin & Sari, 2021; Virtala et al., 2009).

The attitudes and lifestyle of young adults contribute largely to not committing to marriage, rather encourage cohabiting. This act is rather irresponsible on the part of young adults as cohabiting arguably increased the number of single parents since children from such relationships are considered illegitimate children. It is therefore conclusive that a section of young adults deliberately avoids marriage because of parental responsibilities.

One element that runs through the factors impeding marriage among young adults is the practice of payment of bride price. The lobola has been regarded as the major contributing factor to the low rate of marriage among young adults as evident from the analysis. The qualitative result among other factors shows that the payment of lobola is becoming increasingly difficult for young adults. This finding collaborates the study of Posel and Rudwick (2013) that lobola is cultural practice impending marriage in South Africa. Posel and Rudwick (2013) state that among the Zulu ethnic groups found largely in KwaZulu Natal, only three out of ten adults had been married customarily. The custom even though meant well for fostering a good relationship and becoming a bridge between the two families has become rather a barrier.

The cultural practices of exorbitant payment of bride price practically separate families in South Africa. Fathers who are not married to their baby mamas as a result of non-payment of bride price are also likely not to pay for damages or restitution for children born of wedlock (*ukuhlawulela*) to take possession or biological custodian of their children and making it difficult for the said fathers to provide fatherly support (Mkhwanazi et al., 2020). The low marriage rate and having children from wedlock have serious consequences on the parenting and development of such children.

The major exposition here is that single parents failed in aspects to bring up children to the tenets of family values. These children from single-parent struggle to socialise and accept their true identity. The parents failed to transmit the core values and their self-identities.

The study revealed that most single parents struggled to support their children in terms of the provision of basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. However, it emerges that some single parents were able to provide economic needs of their children because of their high economic prowess. Single parents with stable employment and income were able to provide adequate basic needs of their children even in the absence of one parent. What contributes greatly to the sustenance of most single homes especially single mothers is the Child Support Grants received monthly though not adequate to provide at least some basic needs such as food and clothing.

The result shows that the majority of single parents are struggling to provide social support to their children. The result shows that only a few single parents could provide physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs for their children. These requirements are mostly attainable when both parents are together. The absence of parents from home damages children's ego and self-esteem. This is rather negative for the socialisation and growth of the next generation into adulthood. Children's attachment to their single parents makes it more difficult for parents to transmit values to these children. These children are treated specially and therefore see their single parents as heroes and heroines as such a strong role model and making them take after their gender. This is likely to develop into some wearied psychological and social development towards their opposite sex (Nzama & Ajani 2021).

Less than half of the participants were able to provide adequate care and protection to their children. This means that more than half of the participants failed to protect their children and therefore exposed them to vulnerability such as child abuse either as physical or sexual assault (van Niekerk & Mathews, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This article provides new evidence on the relationship between marriage and child development. We specifically established the relationship between single parents and child welfare. We show that the rise in single parenthood is a result of low marriage among young adults. We further establish the factors accounting for the low marriage with delayed education, unemployment, lifestyle and cultural practices as strong predictors. The findings from the study reveal some relationships between marriage and child welfare development. It reveals that negative consequences for children's welfare are more of the socioeconomic background of parents rather than their marital status. Having made these distinctions the study shows a broad tendency to set a picture for understanding the complex relations between low marriage rates among young adults.

The relations differentiated the four tendencies of young adults not engaging in marriage. The study suggests strongly that young adults be supported to marry through addressing the growing high cost of bride price payment.

As much as marriage is a cultural thing in African traditional practices, the onus is still on concerned adults to decide whether they are financially, socially and morally mature to go into marriage. The study concurs with various extant studies that low marriage rate is concerned in Africa, as most young adults are into single parenting to raise children. Single parenting affects and influences the education, welfare and development of the children involved. Hence, this study recommends the following strategies to encourage marriage among young adults:

- Cultural practices that place huge financial responsibilities on young adults for marriage rites should be reviewed, to reduce financial expectations that go with the marriage rites.
- Entrepreneurship should be integrated into the education system at all levels, to develop young adults into self-independent entrepreneurs, who can create business activities.
- Policies should be drawn to support young adult entrepreneurship activities to sustain their families.

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