

Influence of Changing Family Transition on Gender Roles Among Chuka Community in Meru South District, Tharaka Nithi County

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Abstract

The instability of family structure has become an increasingly salient part of people's lives in Kenya. Lack of stable parenting coupled with strained relationships between parents and other family members as a result changing gender role have impacted negatively on family cohesion. This study investigated to investigate effects of family transitions on gender roles among the Chuka community. The objectives of the study was to determine the influence of changing family transition on gender roles among Chuka community in Meru south district, Tharaka Nithi county. The study was guided by social structural theory. This study utilized the descriptive survey research design and the target population was 140 subjects comprising of 98 household heads in Magumoni division, 30 Church leaders, 6 women group leaders and 6 Chiefs. A total of 5 church leaders, 6 location chiefs, 6 women leaders and 98 households participated in this study. Questionnaires were used as the instruments of collecting data from all the respondents. A pilot study revealed a reliability coefficient of 0.7047 with the house hold head questionnaire, 0.7014 with chief's questionnaire, 0.7020 for both church leaders and women leader's questionnaire. The study concluded that the change in traditional family gender roles heavily impacts on gender household responsibilities and ultimately the cohesiveness of the family household. The study recommends counseling and other intervention programmes such as to mitigate the negative outcomes arising from the changes in the traditional family gender roles.

Introduction

The family is a basic unit of social structure, the exact definition of which can vary greatly from time to time and from culture to culture. How a society defines family as a primary group, and the functions it asks families to perform, are by no means constant. The LO diverse data coming from ethnography, history, law and social statistics, establish that the human family as an institution and not a biological fact founded on the natural relationship of consanguinity (Forbes, 2005). Chick and Meleis (1986) define family transition as passage from one life phase, condition, or status to another. Further, Chick et al. argue that transition refers to both the process and the outcome of complex person-environment interactions. This may involve more than one person and is embedded in the context and the situation. Family transitions represent connections between people and their changing environment.

Gender roles in Western societies have been changing rapidly in recent years, with the changes created both by evolutionary changes in society, including economic shifts which have altered the way people work and indeed which people work as more and more women enter the workforce, and by perhaps pressure brought to make changes because of the perception that the traditional social structure was inequitable (Cohany & Sok, 2007). In Africa, the traditional gender roles vary from culture to another and might vary in the same culture as time goes by. There are expectations and roles, which are expected to be met by the proper gender in certain cultures; for example, men in a traditional culture are expected to be able to find work and be the main source of income for the household. Women on other hand are expected to know about the housework. In Meru South District in Kenya, traditional gender roles to still exists to some extent, but some of them have changed over time; for example, women can help men in providing some of the households as well as men can help women in the housework and looking after children to some extent as well. The negative effect is when men think that they should do only what men had done in the past and nothing else; in addition, women have no place in men's work and that the women's place is inside the house. Women on the other hand think that men should help women in the housework; in addition, women should be able to work outside of the house on equal footing with men. The roles on gender household responsibilities determine the cohesiveness of the family. Those who believe that particular behaviors and attitudes are innate to each gender are more likely to subscribe to traditional concepts. The attitudes that men and women hold towards appropriate gender roles have a significant influence on many aspects of marital and family dynamics. The attitude helps to perpetuate gender household differentiated opportunities in education, politics, religion, employment and other areas.

Statement of the Problem

Family transitions represent connections between people and their changing environment. Little is known at present about how family transitions are influenced by social trends and historical forces and how these changes are influencing changes in perceived gender roles within the institution of the family in Kenya. When a family is in transition, interactions among family members and subsystems within the family facilitate or impede the process of family cohesion. Family transitions are accompanied by a wide range of changes in family gender roles with women bearing the greatest blunt. Women in Meru South District typically spend much more time in the house than men as they perform their reproductive and household roles. This imbalance has implications on poor rural women, especially as the structure of the family unit is changing and female-headed households are on the increase in this area. The effect of such structural changes has on family have received little attention in research. It is against this background that this study was conducted to investigate the influence of changing family transition on gender roles among Chuka community in Meru south district, Tharaka Nithi county.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on social structural theory by Eagly and Wood (1999), which expands role theory to address the differentiation of power between men and women. Eagly and Wood (1999) developed social structural theory to challenge evolutionary theories of gender differences. The theory posits that the roles

people occupy whether due to individual choice, sociocultural pressures, or biological potentials lead them to develop psychological qualities and, in turn, behaviors to fit those roles. Parenthood is more salient for women’s self-conceptions than for men’s and men tend to perceive fathering as something they “do,” whereas women generally experience mothering as something they “are”. Parenthood is also salient for men, although not as salient as the worker role. The role of economic provider for men is supported by society through opportunities for work and higher pay, thus leading men to be more committed to the provider role than to the parental role. The degree of developmental change taking place following the birth of a child depends on how much the individual invests in the parental role. For individuals for whom the parental role is more salient than other roles, developmental change is expected to be more dramatic than for individuals for whom the parental role is less salient. As noted above, parenthood is more central for a woman’s self-concept than for a man’s self-concept and women perceive more change than men following the first-time transition to parenthood. The salience tenets of this theory make it useful in guiding this study. It is conceptualized that family transitions are responsible for changes in perceived gender roles as men and women adopt new roles as a result of modern changes in lifestyles.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study is shown in Figure 1.

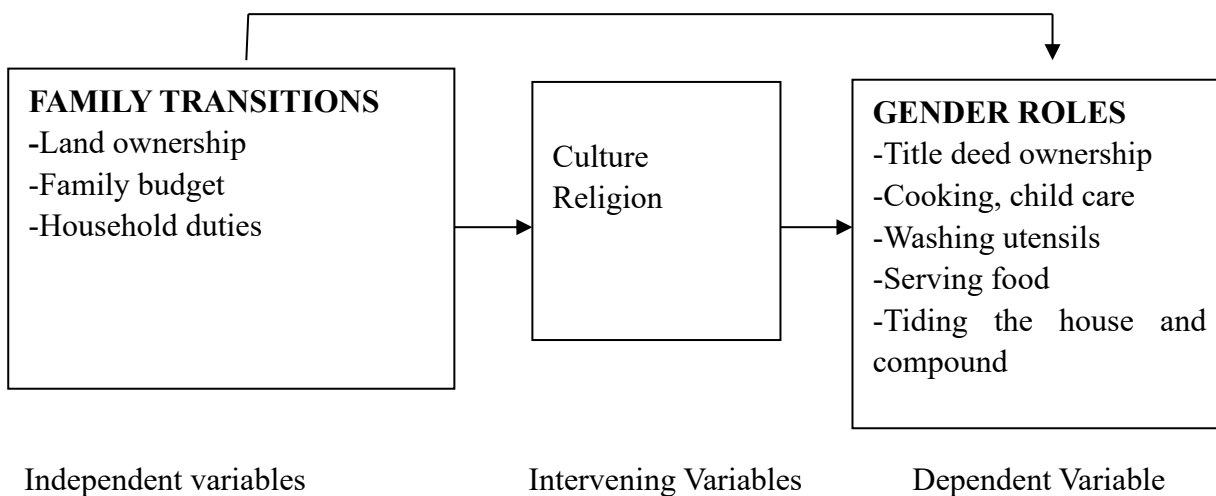


Fig 1. Effect of family transition on gender roles

The independent variable is family transitions, which is indicated by household duties, headship of the family, land ownership and family budget. Gender is the dependent variable and is denoted by cooking, child-care roles, washing of utensils, serving of food and tiding of the house and compound. This study sought to determine the effects of family transition on gender roles in modern society.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, descriptive survey design was adopted. The study was carried out in Magumoni Division in Meru South District. Magumoni Division was selected out of three divisions that make up Meru South

district because it has more indigenous population than the other two. The target population for this study was 140 comprising of 98 household heads in Magumoni division, 30 Church leaders, 6 women group leaders and 6 Chiefs. Thus 10 mainline church leaders, 6 location chiefs, 6 women group leaders and 98 households heads were purposively selected for the study making a sample size of 120. The study employed two types of data collection instruments: a questionnaire and an interview schedule. The questionnaire was used to collect data from the church leaders, location chiefs and women leaders. The interview schedule was used to conduct interviews for 98 households. The data was collected by administering questionnaires to the mainline church leaders, locational chiefs, and women leaders and to the households. The researcher introduced himself to the respondents and gave the questionnaires in person. He gave the guidelines on how to respond to the questionnaires and gave assurance of confidentiality. The researcher collected the filled questionnaires as soon as they were complete. The data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 11.5) which yielded descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, pie charts and bar graphs.

FINDINGS

Demographic Data of the Participants

This study benefitted from information provided by a total of one hundred and fifteen (115) respondents categorized into households, chiefs and women leaders. More than fifty percent of the household respondents 57 (58.2%) were female while 41 (41.85%) were male. Majority of the chiefs 4 (66.75) were male while 2 (33.3%) were female. All the women leaders 6 (100%) were female while most of the church leaders 5 (83.3%) were male and 1 (16.7%) was female as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Gender of respondents

Gender	Households		Chiefs		Women leaders		Church leaders	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Male	41	41.8	4	66.7	0	6	5	83.3
Female	57	58.2	2	33.3	6	100	1	16.7
Total	98	100	6	100	6	100	6	100

Information shown on Table 1 indicates that 13 (13.3%) of the households’ respondents were of the ages between 20-29 years, 26 (26.5%) were aged between 30-39 years, 34 (34.7%) were aged between 40-49 years, 16 (16.3%) were aged between 50-59 years and 9 (9.2%) were aged 60 years and above. Most of the chiefs 4 (66.7%) were aged between 40-49 years and the rest were aged between 30-39 years. Also, most of the women leaders were of the ages between 40-49 and 2 (33.3%) were of the ages between 30-39 years. Most of the church leaders 4 (66.7%) were of the ages between 40-49 years and the rest 2 (33.3%) were aged between 30-39 years. Gender disparities are evident in the study population. The study further sought to establish age of the respondents and the data shown on Table 2

Table 2: Age of respondents

Age	Households		Chiefs		Women leaders		Church leaders	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Between 20-29	13	13.3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Between 30-39	26	26.5	2	33.3	2	33.3	2	33.3
Between 40-49	34	34.7	4	66.7	4	66.7	4	66.7
Between 50-59	16	16.3	0	0	0	0	0	0
60 and above	9	9.2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	98	100	6	100	6	100	6	100

The study's findings on Table 2 indicates that most of the respondents 70 (71.4%) of the households, 6 (100%) chiefs, 6 (100%) women leaders and 6 (100%) church leaders had 'O' level education and above while the rest 26 (26.5%) households had primary level qualifications and 2 (2%) households said they never went to school.

Table 3: Education level of respondents

Education level	Households		Chiefs		Women leaders		Church leaders	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Bachelor's degree	6	6.1	0	0	1	16.7	3	50
Diploma	33	33.7	2	33.3	1	16.7	3	50
'O' Level	31	31.6	4	66.7	4	66.7	0	0
Primary	26	26.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
None	2	2.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	98	100	6	100	6	100	6	100

Data on Table 4 shows that most of the households 85 (86.6%) had between 1 and 4 males and females in the households. This indicates that most of the respondents were literate and were aware of the issues that the study investigated.

Table 4: Population in administrative units

Population in administrative location	Male population in administrative location		Female population in administrative location	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Between 1000 and 1499	2	33.3	3	50
Between 1500 and 1999	3	50	3	50
2000 and above	1	16.7	0	0
Total	6	100	6	100

The study’s findings on Table 5 indicates that all the chiefs 6 (100%) had served for 5-10 years as chief while 2 (33.3%) church leaders had served for 5-10 years in church leadership, 2 (33.3%) had served for 11-15 years and 2 (33.3%) had served for 16-20 years. This study further sought data on years of service of chiefs and Church leaders and the information captured is shown on Table 5.

Table 5: Years served in current position

Years served in current position	Years served as chief		Number of years served in church leadership	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
5-10	6	0	2	33.3
11-15			2	33.3
16-20			2	33.3
Total	6	100	6	100

Majority of the church leaders 5 (83.5%) said that they have 300 or less male members while 4 (55.6%) said they have 300 or less female members. Only 1 (16.7%) church leader said has above 300 male members while 2 (33.3%) they have more than 300 female members as shown on Table 6. The study established that the possible reasons for church membership gender differences include the fact that in urban setting males are more attracted to issues of modernity and less in church faith. In addition, it emerged that males are more attracted to business activities than female. The study captured data of Church membership and obtained data shown on Table 6

Table 6: Church membership

Church membership	Male church membership		Female church membership	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Between 101 and 200	3	50	2	33.3
Between 201 and 300	2	33.3	2	33.3
Above 300	1	16.7	2	33.3
Total	6	100	6	100

Changing family transitions on gender roles among Chuka community in Meru south district
Designated duties for males and females

Information shown on Table indicates that only fifty percent 5 (50%) of the chiefs said that among the Chuka community duties are not designated for males and females and 1 household respondent did to comment. However, most of the respondents 97 (97%) of households, 6 (100%) of women leaders, 6 (100%) of church leaders and 3 (50%) of chiefs indicated that the duties are designated according to gender. The women explained the state of affairs as arising due to the fact that males are believed to be stronger and tradition bestows upon them the role of being heads of families. Therefore, some duties especially those requiring a lot of effort are designated for males while light duties are designated for females.

Designated duties for males and females	Households		Chiefs		Women leaders		Church leaders	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	97	97	3	50	6	10	6	100
No	0	0	3	50			0	0
No response	1	1					0	0
Total	98	100	6	100	6	100	6	100

Table 7: Designated duties for males and females

The church leaders indicate that traditional male household responsibilities includes providing security, building family house (i.e. providing shelter), organizing the family, providing basic needs, paying dowry, dividing family property and making decision on behalf of the family. For them, traditional female household responsibilities include serving males, showing respect, maintaining hygiene, doing laundry work, handling kitchen work and nurturing children. These leaders observed that male traditional dominated family roles include cultivation, settling disputes, construction, dowry issues, providing security, among others. Some of the female traditional dominated family roles include child bearing, grinding, cooking, laundry work, kitchen work and babysitting. This concurs with Duncan, Edwards, Reynolds, & Alldred (2003) who argued that women are still more likely to perform household labor than men and, in practice, the division of work and household labor is still gender differentiated. This is so because if males do the female roles, they are termed inferior and outcast and the vice versa.

Women leaders identified a number of traditional family gender duties performed by males to include providing security, fathering children, providing education, among others. They identified traditional family gender duties performed by women to include cooking, washing clothes and child care. According to the households’ respondents, male household duties include disciplining family members, safeguarding the homestead, keeping records and organizing the family. The female household duties include taking care of children, childbearing, cleaning and cultivating land. Some of the family gender dominated male roles in the households include maintaining cash crop, construction and overall discipline, while family gender dominated female roles in the household include preparing meals, washing and ironing. This agrees with Rogers & Amato, (2000), who argued that although division of household labor has become more equal over time in that men’s contribution to housework has increased and women’s contribution has decreased. Half of the women leaders’ respondents 5 (50%) said the male is given more attention in education while the other half 3 (50%) said both the male and female. This is because children are gifts from God (Fig. 1)

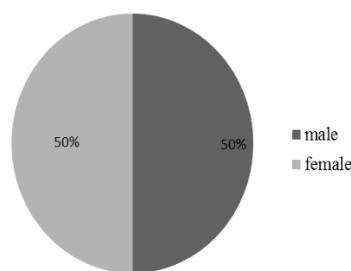


Fig 1. Who is given more attention in education? – Women leaders

All the church leaders 6 (100%) were unanimous that leadership positions in the church are held by males. Explanations for this state of affairs include the fact that the church does not recommend women for senior jobs in the church, the church constitution is gender biased, females tend to shy off from leadership i.e. refer themselves as weaker sex and traditional believes that men should lead in public sections. The main gender challenges church leaders encounter in their leadership, include gender bias in leadership, homosexuality, infidelity, HIV/AIDS and males denied conjugal rights. The strategies that are used to deal with these include group counseling, seminars, group therapies, support groups and family life counseling.

Traditional family gender roles and gender household responsibilities

The study’s findings indicate that traditionally it was the male who owns land and title deeds. All the church leaders 6 (100%) said traditionally the male owns land and has possession of title deeds. The males were expected to be community leaders and thus owners of the land. Most of the chiefs 5 (83.3%) indicated that the female should be the one to prepare and serve meals in a traditional family, while 1 (16.7%) said both can prepare and serve meals. Aulette (1994) supports this claim and argues that in the nuclear family, the wife/mother typically assumes the expressive family role which means she does the housework, cares for the children, and ensures that the relational and emotional needs of those within the family are met.

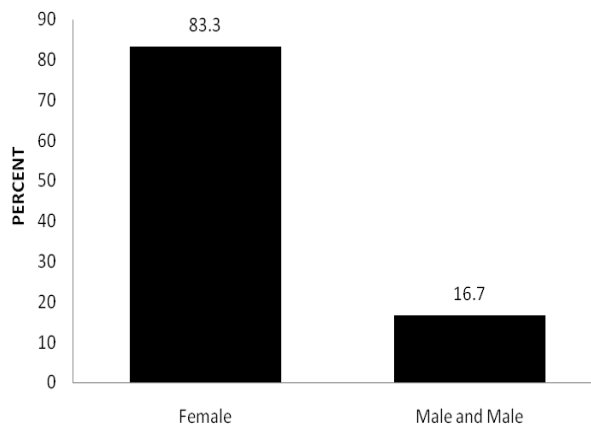


Fig 2. Who should prepare and serve meals in a traditional family?-chiefs

It emerged from the study that most household respondents 55 (56.1%) were of the opinion that it is the male who determines the household budget, 13 (13.3%) said the household budget is determined by the female and 30 (30.6%) said it is determined by the breadwinner (Fig. 3).

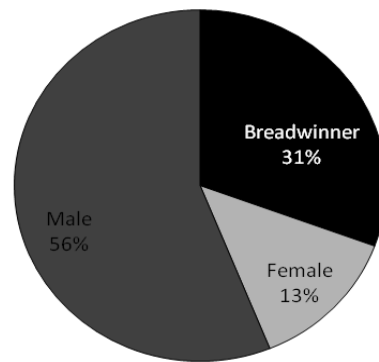


Fig 3. Who determines household budget? -household

The study's findings indicate that the traditional household male barriers, include society's expectation that males are supposed to maintain security in the household, valuing of polygamy, age difference, inability to maintain and sustain a family, uncircumcised limited from mixing with the circumcised, the initiated males cannot stay in their parent's house, some hard tasks are left to male, female oriented duties like cooking and grinding, if one impregnates a girl he was forced to take dowry, lack of finances, inability to select the marriage partners of their own. The other male barriers include societal discouragement of a male marrying a girl from another community, divorce and separation, many sexual partners, sexual crimes e.g. rape, homosexuality and drug abuse. The research revealed that though men are benefiting from patriarchal structures, a majority is caught in a paradoxical and frustrating situation where the male roles are being seriously undermined. On the one hand, men are the acknowledged heads of the households, and they have the formal authority. On the other, lack of employment or low/insufficient income prevents men from fulfilling their expected roles as men, husbands, and in particular as providers of the needs of wife, children and other dependants. In this process, many men have become figure heads of household.

Some of the ways of dealing with traditional male barriers, include encouraging monogamy so as to maintain family cohesion and for the man to be answerable to a single family setup, being free to marry regardless of ethnic group or culture, holding seminars on change from tradition, sensitizing the public on the roles that are expected to be played by either gender to make them more responsible and productive, changing law that discriminates and that allow males to sell family property without consulting females, involving clan members so as to avoid intermarriages, building separate houses for female children to avoid interactions of male parents with their daughters and initiating male children at an early age so as to make their future decisions as early as they can.

Women leaders indicated that some of the traditional female role barriers, include females being forced to early marriages due to poverty, exalted to child labour so as to feed their younger siblings, being taught household chores while still young, lack of powers to give ideas and decisions, lack of self-esteem, traditional practices such as FGM, isolation of females who get pregnant before marriage, particular foodstuffs being restricted to females, style of dressing e.g. wearing trousers, poor education, early pregnancies and abortion.

According to church leaders, ways of dealing with traditional female barriers include, encouraging females to pursue higher education to overcome outdated traditional practices and restrictions, parents advising

their daughters on ways of handling family matters before marriage to reduce family gender conflicts, readdressing historical imbalances to allow women to access to title deeds, males also participating in household chores and seeking guidance from church leaders.

The households' respondents identified modern male gender barriers that they experience in their households to include, irresponsible drinking, poor clothing, severe punishment for males who impregnate girls especially those who are uninitiated, domestic violence, shake hands with in-law, male who are financially unstable feel unwanted and the possibility for a female to leave her husband for another man.

They identified female gender barriers to include polyandry, restriction on wearing trousers, being dismissed from the husband's land or being humiliated by in-laws after the death of a spouse, females being forced to leave their children behind in case of a divorce, females being denied access to land use and ownership, household duties such as cooking and fetching firewood or water being left to females, females being burdened with the household chores, males being given the mandate to give orders to females and head the family, polygamy and early marriages.

Conclusion

The study's findings demonstrate that traditional family gender roles (i.e. household duties, family headship and the control of family budget) have been changing over time among the Chuka community in Meru South District, thereby impacting on the cohesiveness of the family. Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusion are drawn: With regard to objective one of the study, the study found that traditional gender roles existed among the Chuka community and that family transitions have made men and women in Magumoni division to adapt to new gender roles with most women taking to undertake the role of breadwinner in the family as most men were preoccupied with alcohol abuse and engagement in petty trade.

Recommendations

The study's findings indicate that to mitigate the negative impacts on gender household responsibilities and ultimately the cohesiveness of the family household arising from the changes in the traditional family gender roles, counseling and other intervention programmes will have to be put in place.

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