

1 **Globalization Influence on Alternative Trajectories to Family Formation in Africa**

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7 **Abstract**

8 Family is the most basic institution of the society with several socialization functions. Previously,
9 the traditional “normative” family in Africa was a large household made-up of the extended
10 family. Later, globalization processes led to the institutionalization of the nuclear family
11 arrangement as the “typical” married-couple family setting. Currently, the agents of globalization
12 have popularized and made single-parent family (having child/children without being married),
13 and two-parent cohabiting family (living with one’s partner without being married) lost some
14 social stigma in many African societies. Single-parenthood and cohabitation are becoming
15 “trendy” family structure in many African societies. Guided by the structural functionalism
16 approach, the influence of globalization on the African family structure was discussed. Data from
17 Demographic Health Surveys, World Family Map and various studies from some sub-Saharan
18 African countries were used to examine the prevalence of the married-couple, cohabiting-couple
19 and single-parent family structures. Since family is the most prominent family structure in Africa,
20 the society, governmental and non-governmental agencies, education and religious institutions as
21 well as clinical and social services should be attuned to the currently diverse “new normal” family
22 systems to ensure that families thrive.

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23 Keywords: Single parents, Cohabitation, Married couple, Globalization, African family

24

1 **Introduction: What is a family?**

2 The family is a socially recognized group joined by blood relations, marriage, co-residence, or
3 adoption. It perpetuates society, both biologically through procreation, and socially through
4 socialization. In African traditional setting, the “normal” family structure is large, multi-
5 generational and polygamous. It consisted of a breadwinner husband (who worked outside the
6 home), his homemaker wife/wives (who did household chores, child-rearing, elder care and
7 assisted in the farm), their children, the spouses’ parents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, nephews,
8 nieces, and cousins. Maternal role is that of childcare and home making while the paternal role is
9 that of economic responsibilities and discipline of children.

10 Globalization is a critical tool for cultural homogeneity and end to cultural diversity in the world.
11 It is a “buzzword that is being used under all conceivable circumstances. We are living in an ‘era
12 of globalization’, where the four corners of the world have come together, where commodity and
13 factor markets are strongly interlinked, where technologies spread from more advanced to less
14 advanced regions, where information travels virtually instantaneously, where financial capital
15 moves in milliseconds, where economic policies in different countries tend to be more and more
16 entangled with each other, where political systems spread, mainly from the western democracies
17 to other parts of the world, where different cultures borrow elements from each other and fuse
18 them, where legal systems clash and influence one another, where traditional family and gender
19 patterns are broken up as a result of foreign influences, where religions confront each other, and so
20 on” (Therborn, 2006:9).

21 The forces of globalization are replacing Africans traditional cultural values with the global
22 cultural values. Due to the processes of globalization, there are increasing changes in family
23 formation and structure across Africa (Ntoimo, Odimegwu, Dansou, and Ola, 2016; Udegbe and
24 Bamgbose, 2001); polygamy and extended family system became less normative while nuclear
25 family became more popular (Olutayo and Akanle, 2007). Couples are marrying at older ages,
26 nurturing fewer numbers of children, and parental roles turned out to be less rigid. Apart from
27 marriage, single parenting (having children without being married) and cohabitation (living with
28 one’s partner without being married) are popular choices for forging a family (Kamgno and
29 Mengue 2014; Otite and Ogonwo, 2006; Popoola and Ayandele, 2019). These shifts in family
30 structure have made families to become smaller, more complex, diverse, and unstable, and less
31 “normal.”

32 **Statement of the problem**

33 This research is important because of the need to understand diverse family forms since families
34 and households are the foundational hubs of societal development. There are signs of breakdown
35 in African traditional moral norms regarding family formation and family structure. Many are
36 worried about the breakdown of the “normal” family structure that fits their own established
37 social, cultural, and religious norms. Also, there is a decline in the proportion of people who view
38 having premarital sex, living with one’s partner, and having children without being married, with
39 or without a partner in moral or religious terms. Furthermore, the concept of family has changed

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1 from the large multiple-parents extended families to the small two-parent nuclear families, and
2 nowadays to even smaller single-parent families. Researchers (e.g. Ellwood and Jencks, 2004;
3 Mashau 2011) have argued that explaining the spread of single-parent and cohabiting-parent
4 families has been both an intellectual challenge and a source of persistent frustration for social
5 scientists. The increasing diversity of family structure in African countries compels this paper to
6 examine the contributions of globalization processes to the public permissiveness, growing
7 popularity, and prevalence of single-parent and cohabiting-parent families in Africa.

8 **Theoretical framework**

9 Structural functionalism theory assumes that the society is a system of interdependent parts that is
10 in equilibrium and that the society has evolved, over time, from a simple to a complex type (Otite
11 and Ogionwo, 2006). Social institutions and practices have evolved due to the processes of
12 industrialization, modernization, urbanization, and globalization. Institutions like the family that
13 fulfilled needs and maintained the social system in a traditional society are superseded by modern
14 ones. The theory posits that families are an important social institution and they perform sexual,
15 procreation, economic, and socialization functions which facilitate the prosperity, stability, and
16 development of society (Otite and Ogionwo, 2006). Structural Functionalism is generally seen as
17 being supportive of nuclear family (status quo) as the most natural and efficient way for family to
18 be organized.

19 **Family Structures**

20 The family structure refers to whom a child lives with, including parents and other family
21 members, and the relationships between them (Ryberg, Lippman, Wilcox and DeRose, 2015). The
22 family structure is important for procreation, socialization of children, emotional support and
23 economic cooperation in the society. A household is defined as all the people who live together in
24 a dwelling unit, either as married-couple family households, cohabiting-couple family households,
25 single-parent family households or non-family single person living alone households (U.S. Census
26 Bureau, 2010).

27 **Married-couple family**

28 Traditionally, marriages are what create families, and families are the most vital units in social
29 organization, the social control upon which society is built (Otite and Ogionwo, 2006). Marriage is
30 a social institution or legal contract between spouses in which interpersonal, intimate and sexual
31 relationships are formalized through a wedding ceremony, and provides a stable context for
32 bearing children, rearing them, and integrating fathers into their lives (Heuveline, Timberlake and
33 Furstenberg, 2003). Through marriage, the newly formed family establishes relationship between
34 the families of the husband and wife, creates status, roles, and sexual division of labors that are
35 sanctioned by society, and teaches young children manners, civility, and behaviors that follow
36 social and cultural norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes (Okyere-Manu, 2015).

37 Married-couple family with two married parents (husband and wife), and their unmarried
38 biological or adopted children are referred to as a nuclear family. The central concept of this

1 family type is that the parents live together and raise their children together in the family home
2 and the children are the focus of parental financial and emotional investment. Social researchers,
3 policymakers and most people regard two-parent married family as the golden standard of family
4 structure and the “normal” family environment to raise children in (Brown, 2010).

5 Two-parent married families tend to have better economic status, problem solving skill, and
6 communication ability, more efficient division of labor, greater ability to support one another, and
7 more affective responsiveness and involvement within the family (Brown, 2010; Ekpenyong and
8 Lawrence, 2016). So children from this family often have many advantages over children from
9 other families. But many nuclear families are under stress, have weak social supports, are isolated
10 from their extended family, perceived itself to be self-reliant when many are not, and the couples
11 have unrealistically high expectations for spouses to fulfill their needs (Coontz, 2005).

12 **Cohabiting-couple family**

13 Cohabitation is conceptualized as a short-term, non-legal, private, co-residential union of
14 unmarried man and woman in a sexual relationship which brings some but not all of costs and
15 benefits of marriage (Popoola and Ayandele, 2019). It allows the cohabiting partners to have
16 interpersonal, intimate and sexual relationship similar to marriage but without the same formal
17 recognition or sanction of governments, law, religions, or cultures.

18 In African traditions, marriage is not just an important life event; it also represents responsibility,
19 respectability and morality. But the dramatic increases in the prevalence of cohabitation and single
20 parenthood is making the marriage institution to become more of an option for adults, rather than a
21 necessity for their and their children’s survival and less relevant in many countries (Ntoimo et al,
22 2016; Popenoe, 2008). Researches, practical experience and media reports show that cohabitation
23 has emerged as a common precursor or alternative to marriage in many sub-Sahara African
24 countries (Ntoimo et al, 2016; Popoola and Ayandele, 2019; Ryberg et al, 2015).

25 Cohabitation seems to offer cohabiting partners more flexibility in their relationships, opportunity
26 to test their compatibility, and the freedom to leave an unsatisfying relationship than marriage
27 (Ariyo 2013). Therefore, many people think cohabitation will give them all the perks of marriage
28 like interpersonal, intimate and sexual relationships, and none of the downsides of marriage.
29 Unfortunately cohabitation may distract cohabiters from their purpose in life and expose them to
30 varieties of emotional, relational and social problems as it also seems to be counterproductive to
31 long-lasting marriage (Duyilemi, Tunde-Awe, and Adekola-Lois, 2018; Mashau, 2011; Ojewola
32 and Akinduyo, 2017; Popenoe, 2008; Svodziwa and Kurete, 2017).

33 **Single Parent Family**

34 A single parent family is a family with children that is headed by a single parent. A single parent
35 is a person who lives and cares for a child or children younger than 18 years without the assistance
36 of the other biological parent, and who is widowed, divorced, never married, or does not have a
37 live-in partner. Single parenting means that one of the two individuals (i.e., mother or father)

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1 involved in the conception of the child is solely responsible for the upbringing of the child
2 (Azuka-Obieke, 2013).

3 Single parenthood is a social phenomenon that may arise due to relationship breakdown,
4 abandonment, divorce, separation, death of the other parent, premarital childbirth, teenage
5 pregnancy, unintended pregnancy, poverty, stereotypical beliefs about single women of high
6 occupational and economic status, and choice (Dlamini, 2006; Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014).
7 It could also be caused as a result of women raising children singlehandedly as their husbands are
8 working elsewhere (military/business/labor migration) (Smit, 2001). Single parenthood was
9 previously unknown because of high rate of remarriage after bereavement or divorce to maintain
10 'balance' in the society (Ayodele, 2014) and where they existed; they were ignored as exceptional
11 cases (Tijani, Afolayan, Sanusi, Olubiyi, Iman, Ibraheem and Adeniran, 2015). However, the
12 numbers of single-parent families have recently increased drastically (Adelani and Ogunbanwo,
13 2008).

14 Walsh (2012:13) noted that "increasingly, older single women have been choosing to parent on
15 their own when they lack suitable partners for childrearing. Children generally fare well in
16 financially secure single-parent homes where there is strong parental functioning, especially when
17 supported by extended kin networks." Also parents and children can become very resilient and
18 close, but life in a single parent family can be stressful for both the child and the parent, as the
19 single parent is likely to suffer deprivations, stigmatization, lack social support, be unable to
20 supervise their adolescent children and may be overwhelmed by the responsibility of juggling
21 caring for the children, maintaining a job and keeping up with the bills and household chores,
22 while their children's school performance, social behavior and peer relations could also be
23 adversely affected (Ellwood and Jencks, 2004; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

24

25 **Globalization and the African Family Systems**

26 Globalization in Africa has its antecedents in slave trade, introduction of Islam and Christianity,
27 colonialism, modernization, urbanization, western education, independence of African countries,
28 gender equality/equity, neocolonialism, mass media, and individualism among others. Its
29 economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions collectively make globalization a complex
30 process with numerous implications. During the colonial era, the imperialists imposed their
31 language, modes of dressing, institutions, and culture on African societies. They enfeebled African
32 traditional authority and communal living patterns (Mashau 2011) and introduced 'strange'
33 lifestyles among Africans (Okyere-Manu, 2015). Colonialism also led to the dislocation of peoples
34 and introduction of law and religion which disrupted traditions that shape sexual behavior,
35 marriage, procreation, and gender relations (Calvès, 2016; Rijkma, 1996).

36 The culture and religion in most African societies often stigmatize single- and cohabiting-parents
37 as morally debased and promiscuous (Essien and Basse, 2012; Ndagurwa, Odimegwu, Singini,
38 and Baruwa, 2015) even though cohabitation is also a way to escape the stigma associated with

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1 prolonged singlehood for women (Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). However globalization
2 processes have led to changing views and decrease in the social stigma attached to pre-marital
3 sexuality, out-of-wedlock birth, and single- and cohabiting-parenthood in many segments of
4 society, the fears of raising children alone are becoming a thing of the past as many are taking a
5 walk from a bad marriage or relationship. Those who initiate premarital sex are more likely to
6 cohabit with an intimate partner (LeGrand and Younoussi, 2009) and premarital pregnancy and
7 birth may pressurize girls to cohabit with their partners or raise her child alone. In Southwest
8 Nigeria, the fading away of the traditional society stigma attached to single motherhood has
9 encouraged increasing numbers of single mother to have sex at will with any man of her choice,
10 have her own house, and have children (Adelani and Ogunbanwo, 2008).

11 Urbanization facilitated the process of spousal selection in many urban centers to be transformed
12 from the traditional pattern built around family-centered orientations and community-based goals
13 to more individualistic pattern based on love and self-selection (Olutayo and Akanle, 2007;
14 Stevenson and Wolfers, 2007). Also, unlike the older generation, many young people do not
15 regard marriage as the first step of adulthood but wanted to complete their education or apprentice,
16 be established in their career, buy a car, get an apartment, and cohabit before tying the knot
17 (Gibson-Davis, Edin, and McLanahan, 2005). This may be due to the more prominent influence of
18 globalization in urban than rural areas in many African countries (Kamgno and Mengue, 2014;
19 LeGrand and Younoussi, 2009).

20 The increase in educational attainment of women meant more females leave schools at older age
21 and many females are employed in wage work. Studies show that women who had attained any
22 level of education were more likely than their uneducated counterparts to cohabit (Kamgno and
23 Mengue, 2014; LeGrand and Younoussi, 2009; Ntoimo et al, 2016). Although girls are
24 traditionally groomed for heterosexual marriage from an early age, the processes of globalization
25 have led to the emergence of an increasing number of educated women who, by choice or
26 constraint, remain unmarried till later age in certain socio-cultural groups in Nigeria (Isiugo-
27 Abanihe, 2000). The Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey conducted in 2008 shows that 70.6
28 percent of Nigerian women age 15-19 are unmarried, but by age 30-34, 94.2 percent are married
29 (National Population Commission and ICF Macro, 2009).

30 The harsh economic conditions in African states deepened by the globalization policies of the
31 World Bank/IMF group are having a devastating impact on family formation, stability, and well-
32 being. Many young people are experiencing “marriage gap” due to unemployment, job loses,
33 business failure, financial insecurity, high bride price and wedding cost (Cherlin, 2010; Ojewola
34 and Akinduyo, 2017). Those with bleak earnings prospects are less likely to get married and more
35 likely to cohabit (Kamgno and Mengue 2014; Popoola and Ayandele, 2019). Similarly, some
36 economically secured women may even see no need to sacrifice their freedom for a “bondage”
37 called marriage (Tijani et al, 2015) while the financial pressures and responsibilities that come
38 along with marriage may make some men to avoid marriage.

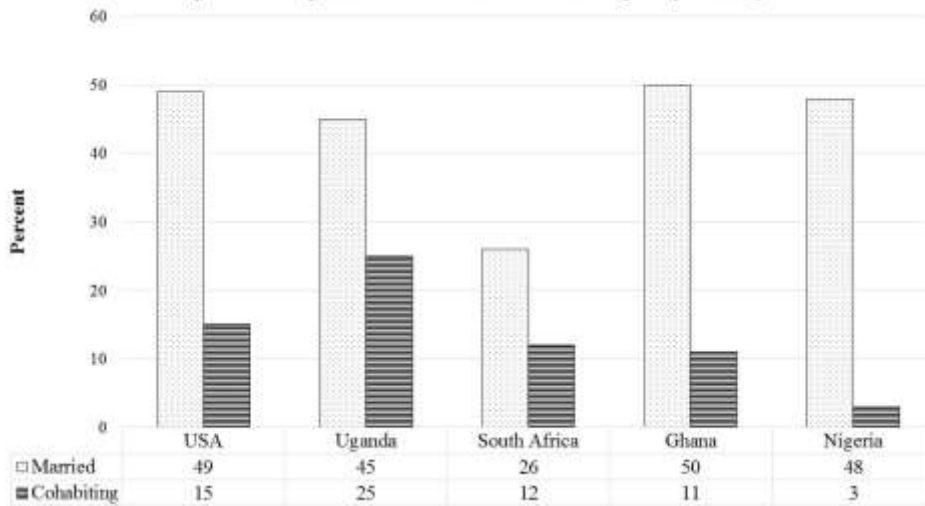
1 Increase in media exposure to and acceptance of foreign cultures by Africans have led to the
 2 liberalization of sexual activities, for example there are high incidences of premarital sex among
 3 African youths (Duyilemi et al, 2018). Foreign media also placed more emphasis on individualism
 4 (Olutayo and Akanle, 2007) which has adversely affected the traditional communalism system
 5 operated by Africans. Similarly, depiction of marriages in the media is contentious as it is the
 6 unhappy rather than the happy relationships that are typically brought to our attention and the oft-
 7 cited statistic that “half of all marriages end in divorce” was never really correct (Science20.com,
 8 2014; Stevenson and Wolfers, 2007). Correspondingly, television families in American television
 9 sitcom have moved from a father, a mother, and children structure as seen in “The Cosby Show”
 10 and a less flattering “The Simpsons” nuclear family to a mixture of nuclear, step- and same-sex
 11 “Modern Family”; single-parent “Hannah Montana” or “One Day at a Time”; and cohabiting
 12 surrogate “Two and a Half Men” family. Also many of the widely followed celebrities on social
 13 media are single parent or in cohabiting relationships. All these could possibly influence young
 14 people’s changing attitudes toward marriage itself.

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15 **Prevalence of Married-, Single- and Cohabiting-Parenting Household**

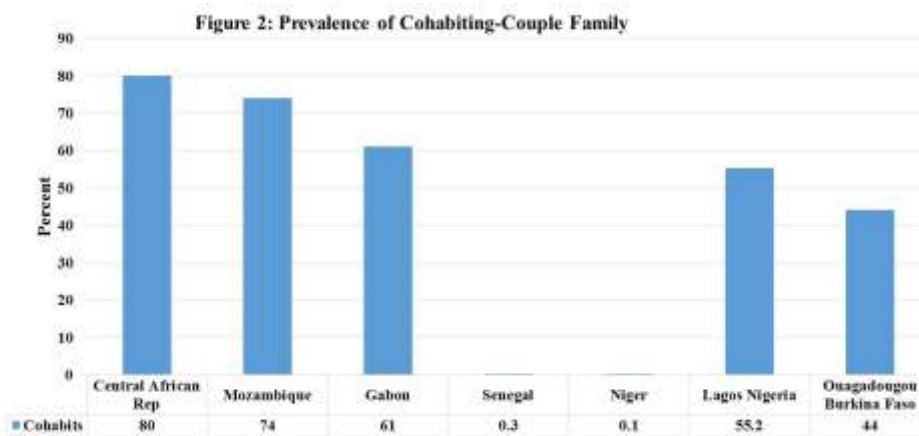
16 The prevalence of marriage and cohabitation among adults in their prime childbearing and child-
 17 rearing years (18 to 49) according to the World Family Map revealed that in the United States 49
 18 percent are married and 15 percent are cohabiting while in Uganda 45 percent are married and 25
 19 percent are cohabiting (Ryberg et al, 2015). The percent of married couples in South Africa is 26
 20 percent and 12 percent are cohabiting and in Ghana 50 percent are married and 11 percent are
 21 cohabiting whereas in Nigeria 48 percent of adults are married and 3 percent are cohabiting
 22 (Ryberg et al, 2015). The rates in these countries are presented in figure 1.

Figure 1: Comparison of Married- & Cohabiting-couple family



23

1 A regional analysis of cohabitation in sixteen African countries by Ndagurwa et al. (2015) as
 2 presented in figure 2 show 21.7 percent prevalence of cohabitation in Central Africa, 11.7 percent
 3 in Eastern Africa, 10.4 percent in southern Africa and 6.8 percent in Western Africa. The top three
 4 countries with the highest prevalence of cohabitation in Africa are Central African Republic (80
 5 percent), Mozambique (74 percent), and Gabon (61 percent) while Muslim dominated Niger (0.1
 6 percent) and Senegal (0.3 percent) have the least prevalence (Mokomane, 2006). Whereas, in
 7 Lagos, Nigeria, 55.2 percent of the respondents of a study cohabited before marriage (Ariyo,
 8 2013) and 44 percent a study sample in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso used cohabiting as a stepping
 9 stone to marriage rather than direct marriage (Calvès, 2016). The results are presented in figure 2.



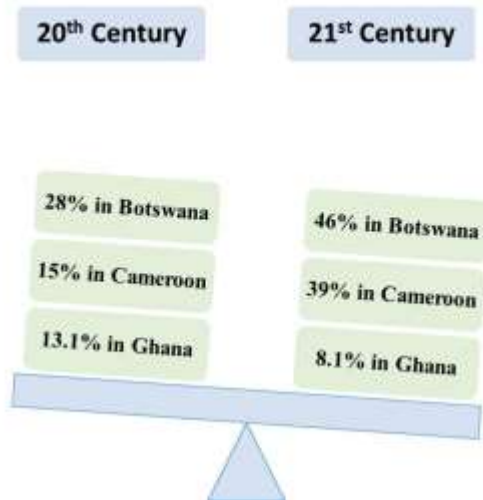
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11 Among working youths and students, cohabitation is a common and socially acceptable practice
 12 (Duyilemi et al, 2018; Mashau, 2011) with 66 percent of students living outside four public
 13 universities campuses in two south west Nigerian states cohabiting (Adejumo, Okojide, Adejumo
 14 and Bateren, 2017). Likewise in Zimbabwe, 76 percent of the sampled populations of
 15 undergraduate students were practicing cohabitation (Svodziwa and Kurete 2017). Younger and
 16 educated African women were found to be more likely than their older and uneducated
 17 counterparts to cohabit (Kamgno and Mengue, 2014; LeGrand and Younoussi, 2009).

18 The population of cohabitating couples in South Africa increased from 1.2 million in 1996 to 2.4
 19 million in 2001 (Department of Social Development, 2012). Similarly, data from Demographic
 20 Health Surveys in many African countries revealed increase in cohabitation (Ntoimo et al, 2016);
 21 in Cameroon cohabitation rate among women aged 15–34 years increased from 15 percent in 1991
 22 to 31.5 percent in 1998 and 38.9 percent in 2004 (Kamgno and Mengue 2014) while Ghana’s
 23 cohabitation prevalence rose from 8.1 percent in 2003 to 13.1 percent in 2008 (Ghana Statistical
 24 Service, Ghana Health Service, and ICF Macro, 2009) and the proportion of cohabiting unions

1 among all unions in Botswana moved from 28 percent in 1988 to 46 percent in 2001 (Mokomane,
2 2006). This is presented in figure 3.

Figure 3: Increase in Cohabiting-couple family across Africa



3
4 Increase in the rate of children living in single-parent household in some African countries was
5 affirmed by data from Demographic Health Surveys (Dlamini, 2006) and World Family Map
6 (Ryberg et al, 2015) which revealed that the prevalence moved from 10.1 percent to 12 percent in
7 Nigeria, from 16.9 percent to 24 percent in Uganda, and from 34.4 percent to 43 percent in South
8 Africa while Tanzania stays at 17.3 percent between 2006 and 2015. The results are in figure 4.

Figure 4: Increase in Single-parent family across Africa



1

2 The 2013 Demographic Health Surveys in Nigeria showed that 16 percent of children under the
3 age of 18 live with a single parent, 11 percent with their biological mother and 5 percent with their
4 biological father (Better Care Network, 2015). It was revealed that single-parent household is
5 currently becoming a fast-growing family pattern in Nigeria (Adelani and Ogunbanwo, 2008) with
6 about 1 million divorced or separated women and 1.7 million widows in 2006 (National
7 Population Commission and ICF Macro, 2009)

8 This proliferation of non-marital childbearing and single-motherhood indicates that many children
9 in Africa are born and reared in single-mother households (Clark and Hamplová, 2013; Ryberg et
10 al, 2015). These results show that single-parenting and cohabitation that are hitherto considered an
11 aberration in the recent past are now gaining societal acceptance (Azuka-Obieke, 2013) and are
12 becoming a norm rather than anomaly in many African countries (Adelani and Ogunbanwo, 2008;
13 Popoola and Ayandele, 2019).

14 Recommendations

15 It is important for policy makers, education and religious institutions, clinical and social services,
16 and the general public to understand that globalization has led to increasing diversity in family
17 structure, and ensure that governmental and non-governmental organizations implement and fund
18 programs to prevent unintended pregnancies, improve relationship skills, provide employment
19 opportunities, encourage father's involvement and promote stable marriage. The organizations
20 should also provide environments that are warm, nurturing, structured, and authoritative for
21 children and support mother or father who is parenting alone.

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1 Families need to make the best of their situations and show resilience, love, and support for each
2 other. Married-parent, single-parent or cohabiting parent family can be a positive or a negative
3 influence on a child. A happy, healthy single-parent family can be more beneficial to a child's
4 development than a nuclear family that is made up of unhappy or abusive members. It is really
5 about the constituents of the family and how they interact, not the structure of the family.

6 The society, policy makers, clinicians and family scholars should be aware that “normality have
7 been constructed by dominant groups, reified by religion or science, and used to pathologize those
8 who do not fit prescribed standards” (Foucault, 1980 cited in Walsh, 2012:4). Therefore, so as to
9 ensure the survival of the “family” in Africa, no family structure should be privileged while others
10 are stigmatized and marginalized.

11 Conclusion

12 In sum, the influx of modern ideals, urbanization, rising education, job opportunities and
13 independence of women, changing economy, media influence, and sexual revolution instigated by
14 globalization have caused radical structural and cultural transformation of the African family
15 system leading to more permissive attitude to and greater prevalence of premarital sex, single
16 parenthood, and cohabitation. It should be noted that married-couple family will still remain the
17 prominent family structure in Africa even as the “new normal” families are diverse, defy labeling,
18 look different, and are formed at later dates, by couples who are married, unmarried, or single.

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