

Perceptions of Childlessness in Women among the Kipsigis Community in Fort-Ternan Region, Kericho County

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Abstract

In the recent past, an increasing number of couples dealing with childlessness have been willing to discuss their predicament. This is observed among the Kipsigis in Fort-Ternan, Kericho County. It is worrying to note an identifiable number of couples suffering from childlessness. Thus, there is a need to understand why childbearing is important in the Kipsigis community and its implications for churches. The study sought to answer the research question: How does Kipsigis society perceive childlessness? A qualitative study using an open-ended interview and focus group discussion are employed in gathering information for this study. Heibert's critical contextualization theory is adopted in scrutinizing the Kipsigis perceptions. The narratives' analysis revealed five influencing factors: social, cultural, family, religious and economic factors as significant influencers of the Kipsigis perceptions. The results suggested that child-bearing is a celebrated and respected act in human life and thus children are perceived as an inevitable part of life. Child-bearing is a social and religious duty which is central to marriage. There was, however, a repeated emphasis by the informants on the role of women in marriage. Childbearing is believed to be a woman's primary role; thus childless women are expelled from their matrimonial home for failing to contribute to the family. It is recommended for the Kipsigis Christians to understand the implications of childlessness in the Bible and to acknowledge an alternative view in light of God's perspective and mission in the world and to offer biblical and cultural guidance for the Kipsigis churches and the Kipsigis society.

KEY WORDS: barrenness, involuntary childlessness, infertility, church

Introduction

Infertility is a painful state that no one would like to be associated with. In Africa and particularly in my Kipsigis community it is viewed as anathema/abomination to be barren. Even if a barren couple adopts children, they are still considered childless for lack of their own biological offspring. For this reason, most churches find themselves unprepared to adequately respond to this phenomenon. Most Christian couples with problems of infertility find themselves in a dilemma between religious allegiance and cultural norms. For this reason the researcher sought to explore the social meaning of infertility in women among the Kipsigis with a view to mobilize the church to respond to cultural and theological challenges of childlessness in an authentic way which is biblically guided.

I have lived and interacted with men and women for several years in Kipsigis society as well as talking to childless couples both in church and the society. Their stories were very valuable. An example of these stories illustrates this point: “I was brought up to believe that those who work hard will be rewarded. I have tried many times to conceive but to date I not been able to conceive. I have come to realize that to bear children is not easy as they say.”¹

Human suffering occasioned by misfortune such as childlessness informed my decision to do an investigation to establish the views of the Kipsigis people on childlessness. I believe that the traditional view of childlessness, mandating motherhood

¹ W 3, interviewed by the researcher in church A.

The names of the interviewees and their churches have been coded to protect identity. Pastors are labelled P1- P7; members in the focus group discussion (FGD) are listed: FGD and the childless couple with H1- H14 for husbands; W1 - W20 for wives. The churches are coded from A to K.

above all else, is misguided and blinds us to other important values that should be considered. I value this research because I have had to address critical concerns on this matter that have gripped my life over the years and have motivated me all the more to deepen this research. This paper therefore, seeks to explore the Kipsigis perceptions of childlessness in women and their implications for mission.

Literature Review

Brief Introduction of the Kipsigis

The Kipsigis people are part of the eight ethnic groups that form the Kalenjin. These tribes include: Kipsigis, Tugen, Nandi, Keiyo, Marakwet, Sabaot, Terik and Pokot. The Kipsigis speaks *Kipsigis* as the mother-tongue. Geographically, the Kipsigis community lives in the highlands of Kericho from Timboroa to Mara river in the south rift, and to the west from Mau escarpment to Kebeneti in Kipkelion district.² In addition, there are other Kipsigis communities living in other regions like: Nakuru, Eldoret, Kitale, Narok and Nandi Hills. However, the Kipsigis are concentrated in South Rift mainly within two current counties: Kericho and Bomet, in the former Rift-valley province.

Culture and Religion of the Kipsigis

The Kipsigis people have a high regard for the rites of passage (birth, initiation, marriage and death). Circumcision and marriage are important customs one is expected to fulfill in his or her life time. Initiation is a transitional stage during which training and teachings are given to the initiates. These teachings include gender roles and responsibilities as well as moral Values.

² Burnette C. Fish, *The Kalenjin Heritage : Traditional Religious and Social Practices / Burnette C. Fish and Gerald W. Fish.* (Kericho, Kenya : Africa Gospel Church ; c1995.), 11.

The Kipsigis people have ceremonies to “greet” a mother and her newborn. This is a celebration of the fulfillment of marriage obligation. Marriage is not regarded complete until the arrival of the first born child. Childless couples are then perceived as unnatural and inferior. Even woman who bears only girls is perceived as being childless because boy child was preferred over girls. Children play a major role in the family; for example, the eldest son will bury his father and the youngest son will bury his mother. Traditionally, ancestors are also respected, and the ancestor’s spirit is believed to be reincarnated in the bodies of the newly born who is named after them; hence the Kipsigis have a circular view of spirituality. The whole soul of the departed cannot be reincarnated, but their characteristics and physical appearance can be reborn

One of the Kipsigis religious belief is the existence of God, whose manifestation, the sun, is called Asis. Kipsigis are likely to trace misfortune to transgressions committed against God, ancestors or spirits by individuals, family (particularly a parent) or one of their close kin. The religion of the Kipsigis is clearly seen in moments of crisis like sickness, death and tragedy, and it also comes to the surface at key moments of life like birth, wedding, and death.

Cultural practices and Issues Involved in Infertility

This research addresses cultural and theological issues that continue to affect women. It seeks to provoke church’s response to issues of injustice, stigmatization, and oppression that have made it hard to even address issues of polygamy, divorce and other forms of marriage in the society. Polygamy and divorce are procedures traditionally undertaken in cases of known barrenness of the couples. To provide solutions to such

culturally and theologically complicated challenges of infertility is not easy. But the church has an opportunity to provide an alternative view that is biblically guided.

Marriage and family life have always remained important in African social setting such that if a woman turns out to be unproductive or childless she was perceived as an outcast (Weigner, p.46). Further still, childlessness inhibits opportunity to serve in the society. Uchendu states that “Motherhood brings an important change in a woman’s status. She shares in the dignity of her husband who has increased the lineage membership” (1975, p.57). Thus, mothers are held in honor because of their contribution to the family through child-bearing but an infertile woman is not acknowledged. Therefore, childlessness in African culture is best understood as a socially constructed process whereby couples come to define their inability to bear children as a problem.

It is crucial to identify how and where the society has placed its priorities in marriage. The value of children was so prominent to the point that conception in Africa was/is taken as part and parcel of woman’s identity. Moreover, in cultural social setting, husband and wife’s responsibilities are not limited to their own selves but have a much wider application. This kind of perception demands that a married woman does not belong only to her husband but also to the clan and even society at large. She is recognized as “our” wife. Indeed, marriage in Africa is a complex institution.

Kalu notes, the roles attributed to women which have shown enormous influence on African collective consciousness is that of motherhood. This plays a pivotal role in defining their condition (1995, p.55). What this entails is that the clan expects the woman to extend the lineage through child-bearing. If this is not fulfilled it introduced other

forms of marriage like polygamy,³ or woman-to-woman marriage.⁴ Woman-to-woman marriage may sound strange to other cultures, but within this domain, a female husband is the woman who pays bride-wealth and thus marries (but does not have sexual intercourse with) another woman. A kin's redeemer would then be appointed to provide children to this other married woman. By so doing, the old lady becomes the social and legal father to her wife's children. The female husband should always be a woman of advanced age who is barren or has failed to bear a boy child. The purpose of the union is to provide a male heir. Several steps are necessary to understand why child-bearing is important in Kipsigis and how the church could respond to this belief, fully in a Christian way.

Women's Stories and Perception of their Struggles

Among the Kipsigis community, infertility is perceived as a woman's problem. Culturally, men are always assumed to be fertile. Strikingly, the definition rendered in an encyclopedia affirms this position.⁵ It is no wonder why most cultures are quick to conclude that a couple's childlessness is from the wife rather than from the husband. Even in known cases of men sterility, a woman's in-laws and neighbors will continue to blame the woman for childlessness and expect her to take steps to overcome it. One infertile woman said:

They usually use the symbols: "You are like a hen without chicks." Men are never told anything because it will embarrass them. But for me, my in-laws always

³ Polygamy is African practice is a state of marriage where a man marries more than one wife and is obligated to provide for them all. The proper English rendering is polygyny.

⁴ The female husband will make every attempt to conform to male role behavior within the sociocultural domain. For example, the female husband would not carry any load on the head because of the assertion that female husband is a 'man masked.'

⁵ "Infertility refers to the state of a woman who is unable to conceive" (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia).

blame me and they talk badly about me even giving me derogatory names like, “mother of missing one.”⁶

The sufferings of stigmatization in a society where children and women’s motherhood are highly valued are deep. I believe it is not only missing children that bring about suffering to infertile women but also the lack of motherhood.

Marcia (1994, p. 63) observes that in Egypt women are seen as having a maternal instinct that makes them naturally loving and nurturing toward their children. It is believed that every woman must experience motherhood in order to be complete. When a woman cannot have children, she is viewed as incomplete or lesser than other women. This implies that for one to be normal, a woman must bear children. Kipsigis community view infertile women the same way. It is widely accepted normative standard in the society that every married woman must be a mother to the children of her husband. One fertile woman (women’s leader) puts it this way:

When a woman has a child she feels she is a woman of substance, and she is always happy carrying her child. I think everyone wants to feel motherhood, because it is substance. I love holding my baby, feeding and making my child happy. I think this is what every woman desires.⁷

In the same light, this is how one other fertile woman explained:

God created a woman to be a mother and to handle motherhood. She has to be affectionate. She carries all the affection, all the love and she is the one whom whenever her child is sick, she stays awake to take care. The mother’s role is very big. She suffers when delivering. She teaches and raises her child. She is everything.⁸

In addition, one infertile woman expressed: “It is terrible not to have children. Some people think it is still okay if a woman does not have children. They use the symbol:

⁶ W 8, interviewed in church C

⁷ Church leader in church A, interviewed in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

⁸ Ordinary members in church C, interviewed in FGD

‘God is training you for something good; just trust him and pray perhaps he may remember you like Rachel.’”⁹

It is evident that infertility is bad for women because of the intensity with which women tend to bear all sorts of consequences. It is lamentable that some of this suffering associated with infertility is intimately connected because one can do little or nothing about it. You are simply infertile. In fact, one pastor gave a contrary view. He believed that men want children not for the sake of children themselves or for the joys of being a parent, but rather for the special kind of ego satisfaction that men derive from proving their manhood in a society where men are believed to be fertile. He explained:

A man wants children to be proud, to say he has children and to feel he is a man. He sees his friends have children and he wants his own children too. It is like envy whereby every man wants to have children and a family. Exactly like a fertile woman. It makes him feel complete and a man of substance.¹⁰

Consequently, fertility has been used as a mark for identity and worth. One informant said, “A woman’s identity can only be complete through motherhood. This is what makes a woman a woman: Her ability to produce offspring for her husband.”¹¹ In the same vein, one woman with several children said: “Some people talk about a barren woman and say, two men are living together. She is the same as him. She has no womb.”¹² This implies that a woman is either fertile and important, or infertile and of no importance whatsoever. Barren woman cannot be acknowledged.

Marcia (1994, 59) notes that a female body whose internal organs are unproductive is an ambiguous body, suspected of having some hidden male attributes.

⁹ W 9, in church K

¹⁰ P 3, in church B

¹¹ Ordinary member in FGD, Average man in church B

¹² Ordinary member in church B, Old woman aged 73years

Kipsigis community would view a woman who is childless as inherently unfeminine. Though infertile women know themselves not as masculine, they often admit that they feel less feminine than other women because of their inability to bear children. Infertility casts doubts on woman's sexual identity in a society where maleness and femaleness are closely bounded categories. Those individuals who fail to conform to such identity norms of the society in which motherhood is a priority often cannot help but to admit fertility failure as their problem. Besides, they experience subsequent feelings of shame, incompleteness, self-hate and pity.

As McQuillan (2004, p.53) puts it, "The painfulness of sudden stigmatization can come not from the individual's confusion about her identity, but from her knowing too well what she has become." This is a cultural misconception that this study seeks to address. Women should not be punished because infertility itself is not a product of choice. The argument presented here is that women should not be solely blamed for infertility problems because infertility can affect anyone since it is a reproductive quest. Feminists have lamented the fact that people often fail to recognize how much being infertile is biological (Hinga 2002, p. 82). Blaming women for infertility shows how extreme the issue of reproduction has been treated. They argue that women are not to blame for lack of children because they are not the cause of infertility. This is nothing but oppression.

Since childbearing is tied to the identity of a woman, when a woman is childless, she feels she has lost that sure mark of identity. Respondents were asked, "What happens to a woman who is unable to give birth to a child?" Most respondents said, "She is seen as a curse to the community." The church should bring to awareness the realities of

infertility in women that are usually taken for granted. In fact, the purpose for this study was to motivate the church to a wakeup reality for understanding of interactional circumstances over these issues.

The Role of the Christian Community

Asamoah-Gyadu expressed that there is no possibility that even in God's scheme of things some couples may be destined never to have children of their own (2007, p. 441). This belief was rightly held by FGCK members. Some of the respondents believed that since children are special to God, and have been destined by God to do great things, they come to learn that their miracles would come. However, some couples would live oblivious of this fact wondering how God may use infertility and other suffering to prepare Christians or his people for future task. This theory of suffering as training was attributed by some respondents. Many childless women shared that some of the attributes that fellow ordinary church members could afford to give to them was the assurance that their suffering was God's way of sending a message to the sufferer. One childless woman expressed:

I have asked God many times in prayer what value I have now that he chose not to give me children. But I remember this word in Philippians 3: 13, 14 that my pastor taught me. From this scripture I discovered something that changed me. The pastor explained that the overriding goal of becoming more like Christ is a reminder that marriage and childbearing are not our highest aims. But we still have the value in the Christian community to serve God.

While infertility may not be imposed by God in order to cause growth, God's challenge to the believers is to be a part of his work for the good of others even in suffering. The process of understanding and coping with realities of childlessness takes time. Christians are called to value the infertile but not to explain the value of that suffering.

The comments most offensive to infertile women I interviewed were those which assumed a theory of suffering saying, for example, “May be God is trying to tell you something.” It assumes that suffering is a direct message or training towards a different plan for life. Infertile person does not need judgment, but grace which confirms and nurtures the person toward spiritual and emotional health through the love of God as reflected through Christians. However, infertile women that I interviewed differentiated between comments for the care that was offered to them by the church. Nevertheless, they were grateful for the care even though it was offered in an ungainly manner.

The informants further revealed that the pre-determination view that sees others not able to get their own children from an African perspective is not linked to God. Their explanation showed that traditional religious view was more of biomedical cause that says “either someone bewitched the couple or they are cursed by their ancestors” (Asamoah-Gyadu, p. 443). It became clear through the respondents’ information that the fear of witchcraft cannot be neglected unless the worldview of every Christian has been transformed by Christ. Most women I interviewed exclaimed, “I do not know why we should live under a curse when we have turned our lives to Jesus Christ?” The church then should seek to understand these varied views of causality of infertility in order to arrive at a diligent way of helping women deal with the misfortune. The church should empower the infertile and childless women through teaching and preaching, whose stories depict their daily struggles to resist stigmatization, fear and oppression.

Unfortunately, some denominations never exegete the scriptures rightly, but they preach and treasure it as simple as they get it. In such churches they say, “Childbirth is productivity which the scriptures indicate to be glorifying God and antithetical to the

devil's work" (Ibid, 443). According to them God must be understood as the God of impossibilities. It makes sense why most women would blame themselves for infertility and in so doing, point to the fact that God denied them children.

Women's Understanding and Response to Infertility

As I interacted with these scriptures in Genesis 16:1-15 and I Samuel 1: 1-5, it is difficult to imagine the challenges and complexity of infertility. Barrenness is a word that scripture uses to describe women who cannot have children. One cannot grasp how Hannah, Sarah and the other barren women of scripture found it offensive and depressive to be barren (1 Sam 1: 7). Images of a desert wasteland emerge. Some respondents expressed their response to infertility much like Hannah's: loss of appetite, depression, and grief. One respondent told me, "I am asked regularly, 'Do you have children?' When I say "no," people often further inquire about why we have no children, as if any normal couple would naturally have children." It is evident that infertility may cause bitterness. How Hannah dealt with such taunting from Peninnah is worth emulating (1 Samuel 1: 10-15). Many women have prayed Hannah's prayer but are still waiting for an answer. One woman explained:

For me infertility has been a test of trust. I don't think I require a God that I can control. But I am willing to trust in a God who can never be manipulated. I am still waiting for God to open my womb and stitch together the hole in my heart.¹³

Looking at some Genesis narratives, they present women struggling with barrenness (Gen 30:1-2 and 16: 1-5, 21: 8-21). Mbuwayesango (1997, p. 30) argued that beyond any doubt, the social status of a woman in Hebrew Bible in general depended on the woman's

¹³ W 1, in church B

ability or inability to bear children. His findings on infertility from a Zimbabwean woman's perspective carry great similarities with the Kipsigis. It is evident that the fear of barrenness and its difficulty to provide solutions is felt in many cultures.

Some scholars (Asamoah-Gyadu, 1997; Nwachuku, 1994; Pearce, 1999; Mbuwayesango, 1997) have even pointed out more disturbing aspects depicted in the Bible. One outstanding reality in Genesis 16:1 is the endorsement of the patriarchal value system in regard to the status of women in society. The idea that every woman must fulfill the obligation of childbearing and especially a son is really wanting. Kipsigis communities hold similar views. The concept of male sterility in the two contexts is not considered. In both cases women have to provide solution and as a result it grieves her a lot. The words of one woman capture the depth of such grief: "I feel sort of disconnected from life in this regard. Fertility is very profound part of life. Imagine everything procreates, everything continues: plants, animals and people but not me."¹⁴

The problem of infertility is a factor that really needs holistic healing. One informant told me that the reaction of others can open avenues of healing. She commented:

My husband reacted with sadness and anger on my behalf. His sentiments affirmed the reality of my injury and my worth in spite of it. His pain, for me, made my pain more real, but less frightening, because he was willing to risk with me. My husband confessed to me that he never knew I would not give him children.¹⁵

Issues of infertility that are not addressed do not go away. In fact, they usually prompt negative feelings such as guilt and feelings of shame making one think that one has let people down. Infertility and childlessness are complex cultural issues that need

¹⁴ W 8, in church D

¹⁵ W 5, in church A

careful attention. A church that has learned to listen well to the painful feelings of childless women can provide healthy solutions.

Contextualization process

Critical contextualization theory¹⁶ as championed by Paul Hiebert offers a lead toward scrutinizing cultural beliefs and values of reproduction in Kipsigis traditional marriage in light of biblical truth. Hiebert enumerates four steps: the phenomenology, ontology critique, critical analysis and transformational ministry.¹⁷ How is this done? Beginning with phenomenology, the researcher gathers information about the incident. The researcher uncovers and scrutinizes the deeper beliefs, values, worldviews and practices of the study population on a traditional practice without judging them. Secondly, in the ontological step, study of the biblical teachings about the cultural issue, for instance death. Thirdly, evaluation of the traditional way of observing the practice in the light of biblical teachings is undertaken. The respondents' terms are evaluated based on the biblical standards. Fourthly, create a new contextualized Christian practice (a transformational ministry). The researcher leads the church to evaluate critically their own past customs in the light of their new biblical understandings of childlessness, and to reach a decision regarding their use.

Procedure

¹⁶ Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1999), 21; Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1983), 88.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 88-90.

This research is based on the analysis of the interviews conducted within a period of six months from February to July 2016 among members of Full Gospel Churches of Kenya in Fort-Ternan region. The sample consists of 20 childless couples and 7 pastors and 57 ordinary members from a Pentecostal church (Full Gospel Churches of Kenya-FGCK), Kericho. Before the interview, the respondents were told that the information they provided would be used for this research. With their consent, I conducted face-to-face interviews and focus group discussion. The results of couples' interviews were handwritten but the pastors' results and ordinary members were taped in a digital recorder.

Discussions of the findings

The researcher coded the information to identify patterns of agreements in regard to the research question and it enabled the researcher to interpret the findings based on commonality of information given by the respondents. 1. Phenomenology-The assumption that men and women need children to be complete and that a childless woman is inferior to other women who are biological parents calls for urgent attention to several underlying issues of this view. This is how one childless husband described their ten years of disappointment:

Were we in some way cursed? I can't believe life would be over without children. Our lives are ruled by the projections of pregnancy, and we can't help it. I have at some point made wrong decisions and later to realize that I shouldn't have done it. The risk of dying without kids really scares me but these are the fears no one knows are there with many childless couples.¹⁸

¹⁸ H8, from church G

Some of the childless husbands felt that childlessness meant that you are cursed and if this is not reversed then that means the end of life. Again, the fear of dying without children is a belief hinged in the traditional religion that one must contribute a life seed in order to be remembered long after they are gone. Another childless husband said:

Even though I am the first-born son in my father's family, my contribution is always valueless because I have no child. Whenever I try to speak, I cannot be listened to. I am still placed in one status with young boys. You are seen as immature adult.¹⁹

All the respondents agreed that children were indispensable. The Kipsigis community value children and they do not see any other function of marriage apart from childbearing.

To be a mother was a life dream for all the women interviewed. For example, one woman was asking herself, "Lord, why do other women conceive so easily and here I am asking for children and I get no answer."²⁰ For the Kipsigis community, children are gifts to family. To be childless or to have difficulty in bearing children is a serious and greatest calamity that can befall a woman. As one man puts it, "The main purpose of marriage in Kipsigis is procreation." One woman lends support to this view and said, "A happy and fulfilled marriage is one with many children. It leaves the homestead bursting in laughter because of its strength."²¹

Another equally important factor that influences this view is the religion. This belief is related to the understanding that God is good and He gives good gifts to good people. The Kipsigis people have high value in their faith in God. They see their children

¹⁹ H7, A 39 year old, from church K

²⁰ W10, 11 years of childlessness, from church A

²¹ W13, in church H

as gifts from Asis. The Kipsigis in their religion recognizes that Asis is a good God who sends them blessings and the absence of it is seen as a punishment. Because of this established worldview, some Christian childless couples when they face infertility are bound to believe that they are reaping for their wrongs deeds. This is a misconceived notion that needs to be transformed after conversion and embraced. It is an opportunity for the couples to seek to understand what God is doing in their lives.

2. On ontological critique- the words of the respondents are subjected to scrutiny by use of scriptural truth. Many responses from the focus group stressed that childlessness is “a taboo.” It is “an abomination.” It is “unwomanly.” It is a “calamity.” These perceptions are influenced by traditional beliefs and values regarding children. In Kipsigis, marriage without children is incomplete. Again, a woman who bears only girls in Kipsigis society is tauntingly called a “*chebotibin*,” which means “a girlish woman.” This displays our cultural biases, because both genders are wanted. However, a woman who had only boys would not be mocked, because boys were preferred over girls, especially in cases where all of the children were the same gender. A woman who bore only girls was perceived as inferior and as being childless, even today. Because of the societal value for children, childless women made no distinction between failed bodies and their identity. They seem to adapt to the notion of role failure as equivalent to loss of identity and also name. In Kipsigis, it is believed that husband and wife are reproduced in their children thus perpetuating the chain of humanity. A person who has no children in effect has extinguished his fire of life- “*ma laal mat*.” On the contrary, God sees childless couples as perfect creation, created for divine purpose.

3. The critical evaluation- it was apparent that the Kipsigis society mandates motherhood. The biblical perspective sees a complete marriage beyond procreation. Marriage without children is accepted in God's view because children are gifts from God. No couple has rights to demand for children because it is God who opens and closes wombs.

4. Transformational ministry- Church view of childlessness should rise above the cultural view that mandates motherhood. It is time we ask ourselves such questions like: What happened to the diversity of gifts, abilities or skills? The time has come when the church needs to break the silence surrounding infertility and childlessness and champion advocacy for other vocations contrary to the role of motherhood which is limited to societal convention.

Conclusion

For the purpose of this research on the Kipsigis perceptions of infertility and childlessness in women, it supports some conclusions and recommendations. Childlessness is still a challenge to the couples, the family, the church and the Kipsigis society, but church response and perception of infertility and childlessness should come in a way that reflects the spirit of the Gospel and God's perspective. There is need for a perspective that engages people's situations today as the starting point of understanding God's mission in the world and in the lives of His people as He works out His will and purpose, particularly in the lives and families of childless men and women. The church needs to assess her perceptions and/or misconceptions of childlessness and ask if she has really moved away from the traditional view as a critical beginning point towards a transformed view of childlessness that is sound biblically and theologically. The Kipsigis

Christians should do this because the church's theology is most often transformed through engagement with local situations and contexts.²²

Recommendations

The study hereby recommends the following:

1. It is necessary for the church to consider the worldview level that exerts much influence on the Kipsigis view of childlessness in women. The traditional perception that places the value of women in childbearing needs to change.
2. It is essential to explore the unexplained reasons for the possibility of male sterility by which traditional belief forces women to take responsibility for childlessness
3. Pastors will be able to aid childless couples if they follow the biblical guide contrary to being directed by societal biases that are most often misleading, misconceived and not compatible with Christianity. For example FGCK should give redefinition of infertility, free from culturally wrappings.
4. Pastors need to become more intentional and design programs to help the members who are diverse in their spiritual and material needs. The role of the pastor as a spiritual leader is critical in helping believers in the church to find solutions in Christ through obedience to His word.
5. The Kipsigis Christians and their churches need to broaden their vision of childlessness while seeking for avenues to create awareness among the believing community on the needs of the childless people.

²² Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Rev Exp edition. (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2002); David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th Anniversary edition. (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2011); A. J. Swoboda, *A Glorious Dark: Finding Hope in the Tension between Belief and Experience* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2015).

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