

Single-Parent Families in Urban Areas: Management, Resilience and Life Stories. The Case of Bukavu

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Abstract

This article describes the situation of single-parent families in urban areas, in the city of Bukavu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It shows the process that the parent undertakes in the detours of building a new life after the absence or loss of a spouse. Through interviews and observation, the study presents the forms of single-parent families with the aim of assessing family models in this contemporary social mutation. Managing this state of life depends on the mechanisms that the single parent displays to get round the difficulties in organising the household. Strategies for coping with the phenomenon of single parenthood provide an opportunity to indicate the criteria that determine household management and organisation, but with consequences that reveal the problem of single parenthood in society and above all for the future of the child and the single parent.

Keywords

Single Parenthood, Management, Survival Strategies, Bukavu

1. Introduction

This study is oriented towards reflection in socio-anthropology, focusing on the functionality of a single-parent household. It was carried out in the town of Bukavu, in South Kivu in the DRC, with the aim of describing contemporary

family models in a context of social change in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in the DRC. The surveys were conducted over a period of six months, from October 2023 to May 2024.

Any family in general is first and foremost a composition, an arrangement and then a reunion of individuals through parental ties. Each member is at the mercy of a possible breakdown, either through the physical disappearance of one of the spouses or the separation of the couple (Damon, 2012). Indeed, the family is undoubtedly the microsocial institution that has undergone the greatest transformations in recent decades in sub-Saharan Africa (Calvès et al., 2018: p. 1). And yet it is often presented as the basic unit of production, communication and social reproduction, but also as a place of power where inequalities between men and women and between generations are constructed and affirmed (Weisner et al., 1997; Mucchielli, 2001; Adjamagbo & Dalaunay, 2018).

While some authors (Noël & Cyr, 2012; Godelier, 2014; Mucchielli, 2001) denounce the increase in the number of divorces and single-parent families, and question the absence of the father, others point to the lack of studies on single parenthood in Africa (Delaunay et al., 2018; Unterreiner, 2018; Tichit, 2005a). With this in mind, assessing the transformation of family models remains a historical and socio-anthropological question about the contemporary dynamics of social life in the DRC. The city of Bukavu in DR Congo, which currently has more than 2 million inhabitants in an area of 41,000 ha, has not been spared this natural and social phenomenon.

The town is an outstanding example of family building, with regular marital unions being celebrated both at the civil registry office and in the churches. At the registry office, for the calendar year 2023, the communes recorded marriages as follows: in the commune of Ibanda with a total of 1632 marriages contracted, in the commune of Kadutu with a total of 636 marriages contracted, and in the commune of Bagira with a total of 452 marriages contracted. This brings the total number of marriages celebrated to 2720. This is a source of pride for the communities and the different customs and cultures that come together. Every Thursday, Saturday and sometimes Sunday, community offices, churches and festive halls welcome the bride and groom, along with their families and guests, to make their nuptials (i.e. the celebration of the marriage) official and enjoyable. Nonetheless, few families have a good time together. Even when the death of one of the spouses is observed, divorce or separation and abandonment gain more prominence during the calendar year. Since divorce justifies single parenthood, we contacted the Justice of the Peace. The town is an outstanding example of family building, with regular marital unions being celebrated both at the civil registry office and in the churches.

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In fact, the only statistics on children from 2020 to 2023 are as follows: children in difficult situations, with a total of 556 children aged 0 to 18, i.e. 292 boys and 264 girls registered with the juvenile court; children in conflict with the law, with a total of 1220 children aged 0 to 18, i.e. 1060 boys and 166 girls registered with the juvenile court. However, the way these children are managed by the State, the statistics on divorced or separated couples at court level and, in some cases, women with children who have not experienced married life, mean that the situation of single-parent families is rejected or even difficult to understand.

This situation poses serious problems in terms of recognition. Early marriage, unwanted pregnancies among girl mothers, abandonment of the family by one of the spouses, divorce or undeclared separation, or the death of one of the spouses provide an opportunity to talk about single parenthood. The lack of knowledge about the exact number of single-parent families in each household and the way they are managed means that the extent of this phenomenon needs to be investigated in this city.

This paradigm leads us straight to the central question of how the single parent with child(ren) and other dependents manages the social state of single parenthood. Alternatively, this research addresses questions such as: 1) how is the current situation of single parent and child(ren) described? 2) what are the forms of single parenthood? and 3) what are the self-help strategies?

The main objective is to understand and interpret the typology and management of single-parent family models in the city of Bukavu from 2019 to 2023. This study also aims to identify typical situations and their characteristics in order to clarify single parenthood and reconstruct the various configurations.

This study shows that single parenthood is a widespread phenomenon in the city of Bukavu. The single parent is responsible for the children, whatever the form of single parenting. However, the causes of single parenthood provide parents and children with a number of strategies for getting round the day-to-day difficulties. Female lone parenthood also hides a male lone parenthood that is not often expressed. In this order, the absence of the father creates an imbalance and opens up a crisis in the organisation of the household.

This study presents the various points of reference on the basis of single parenthood and then goes on to analyse the causes and forms of single parenthood, focusing on the strategies adopted by the parent to reorganise the parental house-

hold.

2. Methodology

The qualitative method was used as the methodological approach in this study. This allowed us to proceed by making an appointment with some of the interviewees, which leads to the interview being conducted with their consent. To make these appointments, we used the following strategies: travel by motorbike, by public transport (bus, taxi, bajaj motorbikes). The interviews took place during the day with the respondent without the presence of a third party. In the occasional meetings, we sometimes improvised the subject of single parenthood (“maisha ya mzazi peke” in Swahili) while travelling, over a drink with people in order to find out more similar information.

The interviews were recorded on the Android phone with the respondent’s consent, and notes were taken in our field diary to supplement our interviews. This ensured that the full notes of the interview were available for transcription. The length of the interview depended on the respondent’s availability. The longest interview lasted no more than 45 minutes on average. The shortest interview lasted no more than 19 minutes. However, transcribing a single twenty-minute interview took around three hours. These interviews took place at the respondent’s home, workplace and leisure areas. This type of meeting was often programmed into the appointment with the respondent. At the end of the interviews, we sometimes gave the respondent the cost of transport once we had met outside their home or workplace. For those of us who met in leisure areas, the cost of a glass of water covered our access to the place to talk. Those who should be providing us with documentation and other notes relating to this research, the incentive fee made sense to be given so that we could have the data in real time.

We used the snowball to quickly identify the respondents. In this option, some of the respondents helped us to find others who were in the same state. Free observation enabled us to describe the behaviour of the actors and the locations. But it also enabled us to describe the situation in the city of Bukavu and the various phenomena that the city presents in terms of the political, economic and religious situation and the way of life of its inhabitants.

In the content analysis, we proceeded by understanding the interviews, identifying the key words and coding the interviews. Coding led us to group the interviews according to their content. We chose the themes and then went on to write up the accounts, orienting them according to the questions and observations of the phenomenon. Without losing our way in the batches of interviews and observations, numbering the interviews made it easier to analyse them. In this way, the definitions of certain concepts prevailed before each analysis.

As the research concerned a case study (Yin, 2009), this approach enabled us to understand and analyse a complex phenomenon of interest, such as single parenthood. It enabled us to go into the life story of the actor concerned in depth, taking account of its context. This flexibility enabled the triangulation of multiple data

sources. This approach encouraged respondents to tell us their secrets. With this in mind, we turned our attention to single-parent families. We conducted 21 interviews with the respondents. In the commune of Ibanda, we interviewed the following categories of parents: 6 women, including 2 abandoned, 1 divorced, 2 separated, 1 single, 3 Bashi, 3 lega. Their ages ranged from 23 to 50. The duration of single parenthood varied between 3 and 11 years. The number of children ranged from 1 to 9. 3 abandoned men, including 2 lega and 1 Hunde. Their age ranged from 44 to 54, the duration of single parenthood from 2 to 5 years, and the number of children from 3 to 5. In the commune of Kadutu, 9 women, including 4 abandoned, 2 widowed, 1 divorced, 2 single, 4 Bashi, 1 mubembe, 1 muvira, 1 Fuliru, 1 mutembo, 1 muluba. Age ranged from 27 to 48. The duration of single parenthood varied between 1 and 20 years, but the number of children varied between 1 and 8. In the Bagira commune, 6 women, including 3 abandoned, 2 widows, 1 single, 5 Bashi, 1 lega. Age ranged from 27 to 57. The duration of single parenthood varied between 2 and 20 years. The number of children varies between 2 and 8. 1 abandoned man from the lega tribe. His age is 37. Single parenthood lasts 2 years. The number of children is 3.

By analysing the open interviews on single-parent situations, the players were able to define this state as they experienced it. At this level, individual resources and living conditions were determined. In addition, the analyses revealed the different positions taken by the single parent in relation to managing the single-parent situation and looking after the child. This led to an understanding of the trajectory and economic regulations of single-parent families and their children. These data were used to analyse the prevalence of single parenthood. The data collected from different structures and those received from other personalities, as well as our observations, constituted a triangulation to reinforce the results.

3. Single Parenthood: A Few Points of Reference on Its Basis

As Jean-François [le Goff \(2005\)](#) points out in his comments on single parenthood, that it was the sociologist Andrée Michel who introduced the term “monoparentalité” in France in 1975. Modelled on the American expression “single-parent family”, to designate, without stigmatising, an irregular family model deemed more negative than the reconstituted family, daughter-mothers were then renamed “single mothers”. Other names were added to join a cohort of irregular situations caused by the absence of two parents in a family group. These include divorcees, separated women, unremarried widows and all sorts of single people with sole custody of children. This is when the single-parent family came into being, with one parent and one child under the age of twenty-five. What characterises these families is the absence of the parent couple on a day-to-day basis.

In the same vein, authors such as Raphaël [Noël and Francine Cyr \(2012\)](#) strongly emphasise the concrete definition of single parenthood as the presence of a single parent on a daily basis, and consequently the absence of the other. This leads these authors to conclude that the father’s absence causes effects on the child

that are more closely correlated with the consequences of separation, such as a drastic drop in income, on the mother's emotional health and on the form of depressive feelings.

Without a doubt, Laurent Mucchielli (2001: p. 211) agrees with the extent of single parenthood in the West, marking an upheaval in divorce. He notes that the contemporary family is undergoing profound transformations in family or conjugal forms, such as single-parent families (with children of known or unknown fathers). The authors focus on the increase in the number of divorces and single-parent families, and question the absence of the father. The meaning and purpose of the family have changed. The importance and respective roles of men and women, and even children, are no longer the same (De Singly, 2017).

Laurent Mucchielli (2001: p. 212) highlights sociologists' concerns about the social transformation of families. Sociologists point out that analyses of concerns about nostalgia for the traditional family are well-founded. These analyses refer to the disappearance of a supposedly traditional model that has never been the historical foundation it is believed to be. Ultimately, the model of the nuclear family based on marriage, the father's job and the mother's upbringing of the children, is a model that only lasted a few years (roughly the 1950s) as a totally dominant static norm.

Khalid Boudarse and Régine Scelles (2016: pp. 55-63) undoubtedly believe that the fragility of fathers in the event of marital breakdown is reflected in the vulnerability of father-child relationships, with the main residence going to mothers. These authors believe that professionals and researchers should reflect on the pragmatic question of "the appropriate father without more" in the same way as "the appropriate mother without more". Since the current social and institutional situation shows that in the event of separation, when the mother has the main residence, recourse to the father is very often only made when the mother is in great distress.

However, the reality is quite different, and the position of father after separation is often not the same as that of mother. After a divorce or separation, men get back together more quickly than women and in greater proportion (Déchaux, 1998). However, since conjugality is not at all tied to the form of marriage, women's position places considerable emphasis on parenthood. Gérard Neyrand and Patricia Rossi (2004: p. 128) report on the lives of women who have experienced separation. These authors note that women from very working-class social backgrounds who separate from their spouses illustrate very well the gap between norms and reality, since most of them find themselves bringing up their children alone, in a precarious employment situation, after a separation that is often experienced as a violent break-up.

Although Laurent Mucchielli's (2001) analyses note the absence of longitudinal studies to fully test the hypothesis that there is little empirical work to show the impact of father absence on the child's cognitive and emotional development, the catastrophic consequences are still observed for both the child and the single

custodial mother. To this end, Marie-Christine Saint-Jacques (2004) mentions a fact inherent in the single-parent family, which can be summed up as follows: the disruptive effect of living in a single-parent family is partially reduced when the non-custodial parent maintains close relationships with his or her children. Consequently, children whose parent has died will have the same adjustment problems as those whose parents are divorced.

The context of this study demonstrates more in the analysis and description of single parenthood. However, despite the unpleasantness of the family shift towards single parenthood, we can retain, on the basis of Laurent Mucchielli's definition (2001: p. 224), that "the family is above all a relational system, a system for organising relationships, exchanges and communication within a living community".

In the city of Bukavu, single parenthood poses serious problems in terms of recognition. In many nuclear families, single-parent families are the result of early marriage and women being abandoned by their husbands. However, the phenomenon worries no-one and it is thought that everything must be resolved by silence. This complicity plays into the role of existing customs and the powerlessness of the state to exercise social control, as is the case in the West. Hence the inability to know the exact number of single-parent families in each community in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In Africa, and particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo, marriage is a luxury as a sign of identity that can be enjoyed on a daily basis in society. On the other hand, celibacy is a lesser status for young adults. This is why the majority of young people indulge in marriage or love affairs without measuring the consequences of the traditional family structure. Very quickly, there are early and violent divorces, separations and occasional abandonments. This leads to large numbers of single-parent families (Médard et al., 2023). This study will provide us with some of the facts experienced by the people concerned, to give us an idea of the extent of the phenomenon of single-parent families.

4. Distant or Nearby Origin of Single Parenthood in Bukavu

4.1. The Causes of Single Parenthood

The causes of single parenthood are multi-factorial. In Africa, for example, Christine Tichit (2005b) refers to current trends linked to economic, political and health crises, among other factors. She refers to the work of Vimard (1997), in which the loosening of family ties has contributed in one way or another to the increase in single-parent families. In addition to this, divorce and new forms of family disruption have caused a sharp rise in single-parenthood rates (Antoine, Thirirat cited by Tichit, 2005b). For this reason, single parenthood can no longer be thought of as a state but as a sequence in life, a sequence that is all the shorter the younger the parent and children (David & Séchet, 2004). In this order, the cost to the mother of divorce is remarkable. For most women, divorce leads to impoverishment. One of the signs of this post-marital movement is the weight of single-parent families (mainly divorced and separated). As a result, mothers are more

likely than fathers to look after children, both by personal choice and by court order (De Singly, 2017: p. 70). The situation of Emilienne (50) and Nicole (32) is a good illustration of this thinking. The case of Emilienne (50) is a separation under an undeclared divorce. She is entering a moment of crisis after her post-marital life. Taking care of the children is not easy. Even if she wanted to find other partners to help her cover the costs, she had to deal with her privacy so as not to compromise her religious education. She recounts:

“There was a time when the children didn’t study for 6 years. I was at the end of my tether and couldn’t cope. I was also tempted by men and solicited. And I saw that I couldn’t offend God to get the children to study. And I told myself that they would study one day. God helped me to have this little activity and the children went back to school. I’m a Christian, but I never wanted the church to know about my husband’s trip. But they don’t know the difficulties I’m going through! But I suffer, I suffer so much in my heart”.

For Nicole (32), the sudden divorce has left her with the hope that her husband will continue to help her with the children’s school fees, including alimony. As the legal proceedings failed to follow up, Nicole sank into waiting for the obligations her ex-husband could meet on a daily basis. She explains:

“After our divorce, the father of my children no longer thought of fulfilling the obligations that the public prosecutor told him to do. In fact, at the end of each month he had to pay 200 dollars to cover the children’s rent, food and school fees. Now, with two children left behind, one aged three and the other aged five, I’m not in a position to support them with my current situation. I have no job and no activity”.

For her part, Médard et al. (2023) describes the sociological profile of single women, recognising that they are sometimes single mothers, divorced, widowed or never married. They may or may not have children who attend school. In their environment, they are victims of moral frustration. They have no marital status of their own and do not have stable jobs.

In observations relating to family situations, the studies conducted show that there are realities that need to be grasped and described, taking into account the duality of modern law and traditional law in Africa. Séchet R. et al. (2003: p. 12) note that “Marital status under these laws is an important factor in explaining certain phases of single parenthood. These can last for varying lengths of time, depending on the situation. The most transitory periods are generally linked to divorce or widowhood, which are very frequent events in sub-Saharan Africa”.

In this study, we will consider six factors that are at the root of female single parenthood. These are widowhood, divorce, separation, prolonged absence of the husband, total abandonment by the husband and marital breakdown due to lack of a husband. To do this, we will use the data collected from the field surveys.

4.1.1. Divorce in the Household

Emilienne (50) left her husband and did not want their case to go to court. She had experienced difficulties in her household that she could no longer bear:

“I couldn’t cope with a lot of things. There were times when the husband offended me. It made me uncomfortable. I loved him very much, so by loving him very much, he sometimes did things that were not appropriate. When the love left, I couldn’t stand it any more. I put up with too many of his mistakes, so I told myself I had to free myself.”

After the birth of her first child, Nicole (28) asked her husband to enrol her at university. But her husband couldn’t stand her late arrivals and her time management in line with the academic year’s programme. He used to hit and hurt her. Nicole decided to do away with her husband and went to court to ask for a divorce. She won the case and was able to buy a house and a car.

“After the birth of my second child, things didn’t get any better with my husband. Things got complicated. My husband is a doctor in a hospital. We started the divorce process, which took about four years. In any case, it wasn’t easy. First of all, you have to convince the lawyers and the judges. And then you have to have a lot of money. In the end, we managed to wrest a house and a single car from them”.

Based on this case, some women manage to succeed in the divorce procedure. Some women, at the age of youth and with an intellectual baggage nourished at university, do not hesitate to reclaim their freedom once married life no longer holds out. They understand that life can be different after divorce.

As Cécile Bourreau-Dubois and Myriam Doriat-Duban (2016: p. 492) point out: “Divorce gives rise to direct costs perceived in the short term. Over and above the costs associated with the procedure itself, these costs correspond mainly to the overall loss of standard of living of the members of the couple, caused by the reduction in economies of scale following the separation.” Taking such a decision is not without negative consequences for women, as divorce requires a heavy commitment of resources and time. Some resort to legal proceedings, while others, out of shame and because of the slowness of these procedures, decide to divorce without further ado.

Divorce is not just a problem for women. Some men are also subject to the whims of women in married life, which in some cases lead to divorce. This is often the case when the wife has a lucrative job that takes up most of her time. Many husbands don’t appreciate this kind of time management, which is the root cause of marital breakdown. The case of Adolphe (54) is also explanatory on a certain level. Married to his wife since 2005, their married life lasted only 18 years, with a total of two children. A teacher by trade, he was no longer able to keep up with the household costs. He took a job with an international organisation, but it only lasted a few years and he became unemployed. It was at this point that he allowed his wife to work. He explains:

“The main reason for the separation, as far as I’m concerned, is her pride, because when she started working nothing worked out. It was, ‘I who looked for work for her.’ I even wrote a letter of application. But things changed. She went out when she wanted, she came in when she wanted. Sometimes she spent the

night where she wanted. There really was a pattern of behaviour that wouldn't let us evolve. Nothing worked. And it was when I was unemployed that she left. I'd just finished my contract. And during that time, my wife continued to work and I couldn't control her salary or ask her where she was going."

This situation concerns men who allow their wives to work in town. The women are given unbridled freedom and the men have to bend to their wishes. As a result, they soon start to show neglect towards their spouse, which leads to a great deal of misunderstanding in the home and ultimately to divorce.

4.1.2. Separation of the Couple (Undeclared Divorce)

Irène (42) is a civil servant. She has difficulty identifying her marital status:

"[...] Um, my situation is ambiguous. Neither married nor single, divorced even. And what I can call in easy French: 'vivant seul'". She continues: "Following repeated incompatibilities with my ex-husband, if I can call him that, I found myself in a situation I could no longer bear. My husband behaved as if he had no commitment to me. By behaving in this way, I was forced to slam the door."

This is how things are in the city, and women don't want to be known as single so that they don't lack social status. The status of marriage often allows women to take pride in being in communion with those around them, and this sometimes enables them to take on responsibilities in the exercise of their profession. This being the case, giving an opinion on one's status and being well known to those around you that you are married and, what's more, that you are divorced, raises a lot of questions that can put women in a gloomy situation. So they decide not to declare themselves separated.

Separation at couple level does not seem to be given the same consideration as open divorce. It conceals an understanding of marital status. Sometimes, separation is understood as a reservation on the part of certain women who think that this situation may cause them problems in their social environment. This attitude depends on their socio-professional and socio-economic position in society. Those who have the financial means and the work don't mind getting divorced at all. Separation has financial and psychological effects that can be devastating, especially for female carers, because the more the previous situation was marked by a lack of autonomy and dependence, the more problematic the post-separation period will be (Kaufmann, 2015).

Kaufmann (2015: p. 187) notes on the issue of women at odds with their husbands in these terms: "The separation of women in marriage sometimes seems to be taken as a liberation and a vibration; it seems like a real breath of happiness, but they don't envisage staying in this state for long. There are women who, without divorcing their husbands, lead a difficult life and consider themselves to be living alone, especially when their husbands do not take responsibility for the household."

For some men, the separation from their wives often begins with the impromptu departure of the wife, especially when the husband is away. These women either take advantage of their husbands' travels or their husbands' absence when he's at

work. Adolphe (54) explains:

“There were already problems of misunderstanding with my wife. But when she left home, I wasn’t here myself. I was out of the country. She left the house in my absence and abandoned the children here at home. It was only when I returned that I realised she had left. When I was away, she came to take the children.”

In the town, the women don’t say anything about their departure from the marital home. They pretend that everything is fine. While you are living together, they adopt certain behaviours that hide the true version of life together, even though they had already planned to leave. Opportunities to leave often arise when the husband is temporarily absent from the household or for service reasons.

The case of Maurice (42) is similar to that of Adolphe, but with relevant nuances. Married to his wife since 2015, they have only been married for 7 years and have three children at an early age. Their separation is only in the second year of marriage. He recounts:

“I am married, but currently I am not with my wife. It’s already been two years. She left on her own. I’m left with five children, three of whom I had with her and two others under guardianship. And I look after them on my own. My wife left without cause. I was at church and when I came back, the children told me that my mother had gone home. She told us she can’t go home any more.”

Marital separation is sometimes motivated by the husband’s often mediocre economic position. Some urban women are unable to bear and overcome the bad weather associated with the economic crisis in the household. The case of Maurice (42) was no exception to this phenomenon. He said:

“The reason for the separation was that I had had an incident in the service and I was suspended. The suspension lasted a year. Imagine being in Bukavu without a job! I spent a whole year at home without work. So the wife endured that year. Then I was reinstated at work. After being reinstated, I only worked for two months and then the problem of COVID-19 came to the Congo. There was an imbalance in the company. Service resumed. After a month’s service, the problem of the workers’ strike for non-payment of government wages arose. And from then on, the woman was disappointed! We went back to work. But there was the problem of over-management by our authorities. We were working, but at the end of the month there was no local bonus. The woman couldn’t stand the situation. So she tried to get me to kick her out of the house and get rid of her.”

This case reassures us that in the city, economic instability is causing women to hope that they won’t be able to cope with married life. Men find themselves in a quandary when it comes to making ends meet once there is disruption in their service and unexpected phenomena. Few women accept and understand the “lean times” in the home. They leave home when their husbands are away.

Other cases of separation were also recorded for men in urban areas. These include Marius (48) and Célestin (44). For Marius, the separation was due to a disagreement in their married life. Married since 1999, the marriage only lasted 23 years. A civil servant, he amassed many means of survival in the city of Bukavu.

This lifestyle makes him so greedy that he finds other children outside the couple. While his wife was not at all worried about the fact that he was a “spare part” in his household, the fact that their marriage had been regularised by the Civil Registry ignited the fire. The wife could no longer stand the birth of children by her husband outside the marital home. As a result, the wife slammed the door and abandoned her husband with the children. Marius is left with five children at home, barely two years old. He recounts:

“I was at the service, where I spend the whole week, and I didn’t come back until Saturday evening. When I got home, I found my wife packing up her things. She said to me: ‘I’ve had enough of your nonsense. They tell me you’ve had a new child with one of your concubines and you’re putting up with it here in town. I’ve had it shown that it’s nothing serious. This situation is not on your plate.’ She seemed to understand, but after a week she sold the car I gave her and went home; a province far from the city of Bukavu.”

With this in mind, it can be seen that beyond any tribal considerations in the city, the husband’s debauchery is a source of many misunderstandings. Sometimes, the wife can tolerate it when she is not under the influence of another culture which does not put forward the consideration of polygamy. However, when the husband lives with his wife without formalising the marriage, everything seems to be tolerated and with fewer problems. But as soon as the marriage becomes official, the wife adopts a different attitude. As a result, the old habits are no longer acceptable to the wife. This is a frequent occurrence in the town of Bukavu.

For Célestin (44), his separation is a different matter. Married to his wife since 2004, they have only had five children. For a time, he lived in opulence on the income from his service. Over time, he was made redundant. However, he agreed with his wife to undertake commercial activities after selling a large part of their property. While the husband was busy recharging his batteries elsewhere with other work, the wife continued to work in the business. This business only led to losses and debts of sums of money that the wife had contracted without the slightest knowledge of her husband. As a result, the problems in the home are getting worse. So it was that the wife decided to leave the marital home when her husband was away two years ago. Célestin explains:

“My wife left the marital home when I was on a trip to Goma. Our eldest son called me and said, ‘Dad, Mum’s gone, she’s not at home any more’. When I got home, I found that she’d taken all her suitcases, cooking utensils and tableware. What’s more, she left with the eldest and youngest daughters. Now I’m left with three children. I had the courage to go and meet her where she was already living. I told her to go back home, but she flatly refused. I went back with the youngest daughter, who was eight. But the eldest daughter refused to return home.”

Sometimes the lust of women in the city no longer conceals its momentum. Many households break up when the wife has received a mandate from her husband to carry out a commercial activity. This creates misunderstandings when the husband takes control of the output. The wife is threatened and, what’s more, her

motive for leaving is based on manoeuvres to flee with all the profits and without leaving even the capital of the business. In this context, the man remains helpless to the point where he cannot claim anything.

4.1.3. Prolonged Absence of the Spouse

Another form of single parenthood is the prolonged absence of the husband. This situation is well explained by Séchet R. et al. (2003: p. 12) in the following terms: “[...] In the de facto single-parent family, the man is absent for a long period (imprisonment, emigration). [...] The woman, who is responsible for the day-to-day upkeep of the family, is in the position of head of household with children”. Sometimes a husband abandons his wife because he is looking for the means to support his family. This is known as geographical separation. Ruth (41) is in this situation; she is left alone with nine children in her care. Her husband has migrated to mining areas for a prolonged period and is nowhere to be seen. For Ruth (41), the situation is stark:

“It’s been a year since my husband left on a ‘travelling’ trip. He left me with a child that I was still breastfeeding. I’m trying to get on with life, and without even a little greeting from him or any contribution or help from my husband. And then we hear that he’s alive and playing with money. But all he forgets is the home. He’s left me with nine children and only me to look after them (head bowed to the ground and his hand on her cheek).”

Séchet et al. (2003: p. 14) point out that this situation is commonplace in Africa: “male migration is commonplace throughout sub-Saharan Africa (to cities, to foreign countries, to mining areas, to rural areas in demand)”.

It should be noted here that men are in a complicated situation when it comes to accounting for the survival of their conjugal families. Due to a lack of jobs in the city, they decide to move to areas where they can work and earn money. As these areas are mainly populated by traders and miners, the women respond favourably to single men, and by bad luck, married men are quick to fall into these relationships, which often make them forget all about their homes back in town.

4.1.4. Women Who Have Been Abandoned by Their Husbands

This is a common occurrence in the city of Bukavu. Three out of five women are in this situation and rely on family members to help them survive. One example is Marie (40), who was abandoned by her husband over six years ago. She is unable to pay her rent or cover her children’s needs. She was forced to return to her parents’ home with her six children. Living conditions are no better there either; she lives in a small room and has insufficient resources to support her family. Lacking financial resources, men often tend to abandon their wives because they are unable to provide for their families. In this case, daily life is more difficult for the single mother (David & Séchet, 2004).

The other case is that of Jeanne (42), who married a man with three wives. Her husband abandoned her 14 years ago. She lives in the commune of Kadutu in a two-bedroom house that she rents. She has partners who pay for her accommodation, food and her children’s school fees. The other case we can cite is that of

Sandrine (27). She got married when she was still studying. Four years after her marriage, her husband enlisted in the army. Sandrine stayed with her children and was forced to move in with her parents in the commune of Bagira. She subsequently had two children who were not legitimate. This situation puts her in a rather delicate position.

However, the case of Louise (23) is different from the others mentioned above. Abandoned by her husband in the commune of Kadutu (Bukavu), she is nevertheless concentrating on living with all the difficulties. As her family is not in good shape, Louise has no choice but to rely on herself. She explains:

“My husband left when I was a month pregnant. Since then, he hasn’t spoken to us or sent us anything. He can’t remember if he married a woman. I’ve learned that where he’s gone, he already has a wife and child. I’m in a rented house. I alone pay the rent. If the children are sick, I’m the only one who looks after them. I’m the one who eats. So all my needs are met by me.”

The absence or abandonment of husbands in the city reveals many ills in the household. In the places where they leave to look for something to support their conjugal families, the husbands are in such disarray that they no longer think of returning or sending anything to help their wives and children. As a result, their wives and children become a burden on society. This is compounded by the fact that even their wives’ family members are unable to cope with the difficulties they face. The testimonies presented above by these women indicate that there is a new form of single parenthood that is not found in the old family models.

4.1.5. Women Who Have Never Been in a Marital Union

Obtaining marital status is a topical issue in Africa. Séchet R. et al. (2003) have already pointed out that “girl-mothers” who are excluded from their families experience demographic single-parenthood because the man is not recognised and is even absent. This can be seen in Lingoli (48), who lives in the commune of Ibanda. In the course of her life, she became pregnant and had to leave her parents’ home. Single, she lives with her four children in a flat. The children’s fathers give her no support. For lack of means, she is forced to live with her extended family and works as a poser.

Finding a husband in the city is no easy task. Sure, you can meet a man for casual sex, but not one who might consider marrying you. Many are men who can knock up a woman, but to marry and take charge of the wife and child on a regular basis is a godsend. This is why there are so many women who are not in a marital union and who are looking for a child in a temporary union with a man, married or not. These women are often housed with their biological families, or sometimes they decide to pay their own rent. But these women are often unable to cope and quickly return to their biological families.

4.2. Different Forms of Single Parenthood for Women

As Christine Tichit (2005b) explains, passive single parenthood often concerns women who have stopped having children after the advent of their residential

autonomy and whose legitimate dependence (which belongs to the father's lineage) is orderly. This phenomenon is best explained by the non-residence of spouses (the interruption of conjugal cohabitation) for several reasons, including multiple residence due to official polygamy and de facto separation without divorce. This means that women retain their maternal rights.

4.2.1. Passive Single Parenthood

Judith (34) describes passive single parenthood in the following terms:

"It's been nine years since my husband abandoned me. I stay in my husband's family home with the children. But sometimes I have other members of my husband's family over, but my husband doesn't give me anything. I struggle on alone and have to live on the sale of tomatoes and sweet potatoes here at the Kadutu market. But the income is very low. I wanted to change activities, but I'm stuck because my husband's family are watching me. At the moment, I'm doing nothing and making do with my husband's family's income from the fields."

It is true that certain cultural practices in rural areas have not ceased to be lived by certain customs in place. In the Lega tribe, women are often controlled by members of their husband's family, whether he is present or absent. This situation often makes it difficult for women to meet the needs of the household. As a result, women remain inactive when it comes to taking care of themselves. What's more, not only can she not want to go anywhere outside the household, but she can't carry out any activity whatsoever without the slightest knowledge of her in-laws, where everything she does is supervised. So it's severe social control. She is forced to endure this state of life for fear of being punished by her absent husband.

In fact, single parenthood becomes unbearable for a woman who has to take total responsibility for herself; she is obliged, without her husband's knowledge, to do odd jobs that earn her money, which she uses to cover the needs of the household. This experience is passive in that it is carried out without her husband's knowledge or permission. Take the example of Jeanne (42) from the commune of Ibanda; she is married to a polygamist who has three wives. She recounts the following:

"My husband rented me a one-bedroom flat with a sitting room, where I live with my two children. After the birth of my second child, my husband abandoned me and provides no assistance to cover the needs of the household and the children. I started begging my brothers and neighbours, but without any lasting solution. I decided to work as a photocopier in the cyber café. I also sell doughnuts through my daughter, who goes to school with them. I make my children study. So I meet men who pretend to marry me, but most of them are already married. I find it hard to accept because, not only do I not know how to resume polygamy, but above all I have had a bad experience of men. I'm also afraid to let the partners stay with me because the husband's brothers come to visit their nephew all the time".

There is no doubt that single parenthood also lurks in the wake of polygamous marriage. After a long period of polygamous marriage, women in this situation

are not active. They are plunged into the despair of waiting for the helping hand of their husbands, which is not forthcoming when life becomes difficult. They try to save themselves with the help of their children. In this case, they are tempted to enter into romantic relationships with other men, but as the accusing finger of their entourage disturbs them, they remain passive in deciding on the option they deserve in relation to the difficulties of life in the city. Not only does the woman have other options to consider, but the man leaves his brothers to look after the woman.

As Christine Tichit (2005b) explains, passive single parenthood often concerns women who have stopped having children after the advent of their residential autonomy and whose legitimate dependence (which belongs to the father's lineage) is orderly. This phenomenon is best explained by the non-residence of spouses (the interruption of conjugal cohabitation) for several reasons, including multiple residence due to official polygamy and *de facto* separation without divorce. This means that women retain their maternal rights. Thus, the passivity of experience is characterised by the maintenance of the single-parent household under male authority (the woman cannot work as she wishes) or by submission to the family. It is in this logic that the experience is associated with residential maintenance, which obliges the woman not to leave and sometimes forces her to receive different offspring and siblings from her husband. This study concerns women who have been abandoned by their husbands for a very long time. As these women do not know how to deal with the situation of abandonment, they are subject to the orders of members of their husband's family.

In the logic of separation without divorce, passive single parenthood is just as clear. Women who have not divorced are under an active parenting model, since the father or members of the children's father's family still have decisions to make about the activities they pursue. This means that when women want to be autonomous, the situation is not self-evident. As Christine Tichit (2005b) has shown in her research, single parenthood is defined by a woman's investment in protecting her offspring, which translates into a refusal to sacrifice children to remarriage.

This is the situation with Irène (42). After eight years of marriage, her husband has left her with four children under the age of ten. She was worried about her children's future. She left them with her husband's parents and went to work in a different province from where she lives. She refused to remarry. When she got a job at the provincial tax office in Bukavu, she went to collect her children, who were staying with her parents-in-law. She explains:

"The constraints I face are numerous. If there's a need at the children's school, I'm not in a position to pay directly. I realise that there isn't a second hand to help me. Psychologically it really puts me in an uncontrolled state. Sometimes I wonder why this is only happening to me and at my age, because I couldn't imagine that I could live alone and that my husband wouldn't care. I manage all this by the grace of God and of course through my wages as a government employee. As far as my three children are concerned about their dad, there's not enough stress because,

as their dad lives far away from me, they ask me questions but not in the sense of worrying about him. I pour out my love to them so that at that age they don't get frustrated. I know that with time, and with everything that's whispered left and right, they'll know everything. But, for the moment, I'm doing my best so that my children don't feel mistreated, ill-treated or deprived of affection."

Considering the views of women who have not divorced and who have the same lifestyle as those who no longer live with their husbands, single parenthood can be observed with a vengeance. The woman is living a married life, but in the details this status is no longer worth living because the man is invisible and parental burdens fall on the woman. In this logic, the woman is active in the contour of managing the psychological shocks of children and her work to finally cover the cost of living in the city.

4.2.2. Active Single Parenthood

Emilienne (50) and Irène (42) are active single parents. Because of their marital situation, they have separated from their spouses. What's more, they have a higher education and a well-paid job. As a result, their salary income enables them to live in decent accommodation with a diet equivalent to more than ten dollars a day. Emilienne, for example, lives in the commune of Ibanda with her children, so she is not totally dependent. Her testimony speaks for itself:

"I'm a civil servant. With my salary, I manage to cover the needs of my household. The income is always monthly, as we depend on the salary. [...] I stayed in one house and now I've sold it to buy another."

It should be noted that intellectual capital is a very necessary element for women living with a single parent. This is reflected in the wage cover that comes from the skills that some women have acquired at school. In the city, women who have studied have the advantage of adapting after their separation or marital breakdown. They are employed in paid services that enable them to organise themselves usefully and can help them forget about dependence on anyone else.

In active single parenthood, material difficulties are reduced and the risk of dependency is avoided. It's true that there are organisational difficulties associated with dividing time between work and looking after the children, but at least the woman becomes autonomous. This way of looking at things is not far removed from Irène's comments:

"...Second constraint, that's what I was saying earlier. I may want to rest, but I can't tell the children to go to X first because I'm resting."

Based on the passive single parenthood expressed in these life stories, active single parenthood differs in that the experience of single parenthood predisposes women to the capacity for self-organisation. This, moreover, gives her the position of head of household. In passive single parenthood, the woman does not have the experience of residential autonomy and the facility to carry out financial activities freely without the husband's consent and to depend on various forms of assistance.

In this study, the most frequent cases concern female heads of household who

are civil servants. With their residential and salary autonomy, they are increasingly active in their decisions and organise themselves without waiting for advice from their ex-spouses or their ex-spouse's family members. However, being gainfully employed, as is the case for female heads of household, frees them from any form of dependency. This means that there are no opportunities for them to submit to orders from their spouse. These women are considered to be exceptional in society and sometimes have names (terms used to designate this type of woman) such as "hermaphrodite", i.e. someone who has the characteristics of both sexes.

It is important to realise that these two forms of single parenthood often go unnoticed. As a result, female lone parenthood does not take over, with some women experiencing difficulties that force them to become heads of household themselves. In our study sample, the majority of cases concerned women abandoned by their husbands. The concern thus expressed reflects the difficulties that some women who have children at an early age have in organising themselves. In the city, neighbours are not given the same consideration as in the villages. In the latter, assistance with childcare is provided by the various members and neighbours of the village. In the city, on the other hand, it's up to each individual to take charge and manage their own problems.

4.2.3. Dependent Single Parenthood among Lodging Mothers

Marie (30) was abandoned by her husband seven years ago. She is left with five children in her care. With the difficulties of meeting survival and housing needs, she decides to stay with her father and children. Her biological family responded favourably to her situation of abandonment in place of the children's father. This accommodation is part of the assessment of her trajectory, which sometimes no longer reflects the fact that she is a single parent like the mothers living with her.

For Ange (28), the situation is complex. After living together for three years in a non-legal cohabitation with the father of her children, he abandoned her with two children, one aged 2 and the other a year old. In this situation, Ange remained a tenant in the house, to the point where she could no longer pay the rent. The landlord threatened to evict her by throwing her belongings out. She was forced to spend nights and nights at her old friends' houses, but this didn't help her life with the children. Finally, she was forced to return to her biological family. Here again, it's a big worry. She recounts:

"There are a lot of people in the house. So I sometimes find myself overwhelmed because all this work weighs on me. While I don't have a job that can earn me money, all this work is left to me. This burden is left to me. There are 11 people in this household, including 8 members of my father's family and 3 members of my small family".

According to Christine Tichit (2005b), the single-parenthood of lodging mothers explains the position of women who have taken on a little autonomy and fewer economic constraints. However, this does not mean that all female heads of household are in decent economic circumstances.

These comments show that in the city it is not always easy to get organised and

live properly once a partner has left. Women are quick to turn to their biological families for help. With this in mind, they opt to return home with their children, as they have no other choice. In the meantime, they are obliged to work hard and look after their children jointly with members of their families. Sometimes, they find it difficult to respond favourably when their families are unable to provide for them, especially if there is insufficient sleeping space. At this point, they suffer even more and sink into despair. These women who find themselves in the single-parent life sequence sometimes oscillate between this state and that of women who entrust their children to their care for various reasons.

4.2.4. Single Parenthood among Women Who Entrust Their Children to Their Families

Irène's situation is relevant to this sequence of life. Aged 27 with two children, she was living with her parents after her husband had abandoned her and the children. She was given a small room where she lived with her offspring. As life was no longer tenable, she planned to enter into a new union and live on her own. Then, unexpectedly, she finds herself pregnant. As Kaufmann J. C. (2015) shows, this type of life is imposed in specific circumstances such as distance from home, a period of crisis, material difficulties, and support for children when the woman lives with them. As a matter of principle, people living alone need "close protection" (Martin, 1997).

However, the situation of Gloria (23) is another illustration of the need to entrust a child. Engrossed by a polygamous man with three wives, Gloria's parents did not accept that their daughter should be in the hands of this man. And as Gloria was only 16 years old and in the fourth year of secondary school, her parents kept her until she gave birth. Now that her child is two years old, Gloria lives far away from the child, entrusting him to her parents. She has no activities other than spending her days with men who can help her with money, which she calls friends. She recounts:

"For the moment, the child stays with my parents in the village. The child is now 2 years old. And it's my mother who pays all the expenses. And he's not here in Bukavu where I live, but he stays with my mum in the village. Here in Bukavu, I only live with my brothers. I stay here, but I haven't had any work yet. I manage to get by (smile a little!). If I have a friend who helps me with money, then I can either buy beauty oil or I call my mother to help me with money so that I can buy beauty oil. However, after two weeks I have to go back to the village to meet my child and find out how he's progressing."

As Christine Tichit (2005b) demonstrates, this form of single parenting concerns women who entrust all their offspring (minor children) to the care of their families of origin. The entourage plays a key role in these practices, which sometimes go against the wishes of the custodial mothers. There are three types of single parent. These are: the young girl who wants to remain in the labour and marriage market; the mother who delegates the care of her child(ren) because she is not in a position to provide a motherly experience or presence on a daily basis,

but she entrusts them in order to try to earn enough to meet the needs of her entrusted children. This situation also affects women who have become heads of household in their own right. Single parenthood is experienced as latent. For example, mothers in common-law unions and single women are the most affected by this practice, which leaves them with no opportunity to enter into a new marital union or to take up work. This practice also concerns women under the age of thirty. Following divorce or separation, or in the absence of a legal union, this sequence of life also allows women to enter into effective single parenthood. Thereafter, these women remain independent and live alone (Kaufmann, 2015).

In these stories, we can see that parents have a role to play in deciding on marital consent once their daughter has been tested for a polygamous marriage. Polygamy is certainly a form of marriage envisaged in established cultures, but certain city customs do not envisage certifying this option. Not only because the girl cannot bear the marriage, but above all because her future is still promising. For this reason, it is not too late to opt for the parents to keep the child, and the girl who has been knocked up can expect to start her life again in a different way. Certainly, it is common practice in the city for parents to take responsibility for their daughter-mother who is the victim of an unwanted pregnancy.

5. Survival Strategies and Time Management of Activities by Women Living with a Single Parent

Louise (33) was abandoned by her husband five years ago. She was left with 4 children in her care. Her strategy is to find a job as a maid in a restaurant to help her father take care of them. Now she has to spend the night in the restaurant after the service and only comes home on Sunday morning as her only day off.

Sandrine (27) is a different case. Abandoned by her husband with her two children, she returned to live with her parents. In the commune where she lives, finding work is not easy. She started selling doughnuts to cope with her financial constraints.

Organisation in single-parent households indicates the way in which female heads of household undertake different activities to circumvent life's problems. Instead of relying on the resources of family members and relationships, these women opt to take care of themselves and their children. Despite this, they encounter difficulties and try to overcome them in different ways. Women who are not civil servants and who have no source of income to help them run their households, engage in petty trading and sell fruit, vegetables, other food products and various commercial items.

Two cases illustrate more clearly the survival strategies of single-parent women: that of Alice and Jeanne. Alice is 26 and Jeanne is 43. Both were abandoned by their husbands. Sandrine sells doughnuts at the small market in the commune of Kadutu, but she doesn't make much from it. That's why she gave up the trade and got a job with a government organisation called Fonds Social as a street sweeper. As her pay was irregular, she returned to her old job selling doughnuts, and at the

same time began selling sweet potatoes and tomatoes.

Jeanne has been running a photocopier in the centre of Ibanda for six years. As the income she earns from this is insufficient to pay her rent and her children's school fees, she has decided to give up this activity and has turned her attention to selling food products such as groundnuts, rice and cassava flour. She buys these products once or twice in Maniema province, 450 km from Bukavu, and sells them in Bukavu.

The process of social integration for women heads of household depends on their original social situation, their material and especially financial capital, and the networks of relations they have developed. In these three communes in the city of Bukavu, it emerged that most of the resources that enabled women heads of household to successfully organise their daily households came from inherited property and loans from cooperatives. In the Ibanda commune, five out of seven women are involved in commercial activities. These women apply for loans from the FINCA cooperative (Foundation for International Community Assistance) for a period of three to six months, and sell used shoes. But this activity is not lucrative. In addition, the procedures for repaying the loans used by this cooperative are not conducive to the development of commercial activities. These women resort to other strategies, in particular the help of friends, acquaintances and colleagues. But their situation is not improving.

Despite these difficulties, some housekeepers manage to become self-sufficient and take care of their households, albeit with considerable effort. The areas in which they extract the products for their activities are experiencing an economic crisis, and the road infrastructure is poor. The conditions in which these women travel expose them to accidents. They climb onto lorries travelling on impassable roads and sit on the goods. This practice is commonly known as "doing the Apollo, doing the Armstrong". One of our interviewees told us about it:

"In Hombo-Bunyakiri, I left by vehicle only. I would climb on top of the vehicle and sit on the planks of trees that the vehicle carried to Hombo. It was only God who helped us. One day, it rained while we were in the middle of the forest. We were completely wet. I remember we were all covered with a tarpaulin. The tarpaulin came off the ropes we'd tied together, and some people were blown away with it."

This account shows just how high-risk the women's sacrificial strategies are. Because there is no other way, some women in the town opt to travel to complicated places to ensure the lives of their children. Lacking the financial means to pay for their children's rent and schooling, they endure a great deal of suffering beyond their control. Because that's the way it is, single parenthood gives these women the opportunity to dare to rebuild their lives in unacknowledged contexts.

As David O. & Sechet R. (2004: p. 13) show, it is difficult for single mothers to organise their time between work and childcare. With children to look after, female heads of household find it difficult to organise their time. Sometimes, the activities they carry out do not allow them to take sufficient care of their children. In urban areas, this situation is very common. Some women find it almost

impossible to reconcile looking after their children at school, domestic work and petty trading. The same applies to women in paid employment. They are obliged to make arrangements with their dependants for the distribution of these tasks. The older children take over some of the household chores, such as preparing meals, washing clothes and looking after minor children. Sometimes, members of their families, particularly young girls, help out with small household chores and looking after the children's schoolwork. Managing these women's time is particularly complicated for female civil servants, as they have to work full time on a permanent basis. They have no time to look after their children. Irène, 42, is a civil servant at the Tax Department in Bukavu. Her work schedule does not allow her to rest or look after her children.

Unlike some communes, the commune of Bagira has its own realities when it comes to time management by women heads of household. In this commune, the social ecosystem enables some women who work in the fields to reconcile their domestic chores with looking after their children in an orderly fashion. As the fields are not very far from where they live, they prepare the children for school without haste, leave the meal at home that the children will eat when they get home from school, and leave for the fields. Such is the case of Cirezi, a 56-year-old widow. Her story speaks for itself:

"In the morning, I prepare what the children should eat. If I'm off to the field, I can leave the children with the neighbours if they haven't yet enrolled in school, and those who have gone to school can wait for me with the neighbours until I get back from the field. Those who are older often come and join me in the field after school to get some food."

What's more, the time of women traders is very difficult to manage, given that they travel to the areas linked to the town to sell their various items and buy food-stuffs to resell in town. They have to travel 57 km to reach the rural areas where they spend one or two nights. They make arrangements with their dependents to ensure that their absence does not cause any particular problems. Also, as they live in a guild, their neighbours are ready to intervene in their absence if a particular problem arises in their household. This practice of mutual aid by friends and family refers to the notion of the "entourage-family" advocated by Catherine Bonvalet (2003).

This study we have just carried out reveals and arouses curiosity about the phenomenon of the life of a single parent living with one or more children. For this reason, certain considerations deserve to be taken into account in scientific research in order, finally, to delimit the scope of the question on family models undergoing contemporary change.

Indeed, talking about single parenthood is tantamount to highlighting the social ills that afflict single parents; in particular, the women and men who have to chart their children's destiny in hostile circumstances such as poverty, discrimination, denial of opportunity and the feeling that women and children are disintegrating in order to survive. Being a single parent living with one or more children requires

a helping hand that can intervene from time to time during the moment of solitude. To this end, the intervention of a culture of help is necessary for the equilibrium of single-parent families in urban environments (Médard et al., 2023).

As the responses from the players concerned by the phenomenon required a broader understanding, the various services revealed data that could situate the extent of the phenomenon of single parenthood, but with few details about the phenomenon itself. The data provided by the parents in the interviews still needs to be thoroughly researched in order to clarify the limits of this study. Certain limitations and difficulties have justified this constant. Not enough written data on the state of the issue of single-parent families in Bukavu. To this end, the field surveys posed serious difficulties: identifying the actors concerned by the phenomenon. Respondents are not very open to providing the expected information in depth, falsely rummaging through interview appointments. In contrast to single parenthood in Europe, this study gives a different tone to the consideration of single parenthood in Africa and specifically in the city of Bukavu. First of all, the situation of single-parent families is experienced by the actor as an unspoken ordeal, as the woman, for example, is forced to fend for herself in order to save her life and that of her children; often alone and sometimes with the help of members of her biological family and colleagues. Secondly, as the single-parent situation is not pronounced in front of the entourage, there is a lack of interest to tabulate on this phenomenon at the level of the various tribes (cultures) and at the level of the State. As a result, finding an estimate of the number of single-parent families is a headache. Thirdly, the people living in this state of life are not willing to work to express that this state of life is a phenomenon that disturbs society. So, succeeding in making single parenthood official at a societal level, so that the State can consider it as a landmark situation for the reorganisation of society, is not on the agenda of the cultures in place.

Or the same reason, the Dictionnaire de sociologie (Etienne et al., 2004) notes some conclusions about the revolution in the contemporary family. It notes that the sociology of the family today oscillates between two models of analysis. The normative model, which remains dominant, and the “resource mobilization” model. Two perspectives give way to considerable nuances. In the first, the conjugal family is the norm, and other family forms are analysed as deviations from this reference model. In the second, the different family forms are placed on an equal footing. They constitute differentiated responses to the problems encountered by new players who manage their economic, cultural and symbolic resources better in order to adapt to the constraints of their environment. Of course, we can’t be opposed. But it should be noted that the different forms of family tend to follow one another sequentially over time. So each situation corresponds to a phase in a family cycle whose coherence needs to be restored.

What makes today’s situation so irresistible are the cases of divorce or separation of couples, abandonment, and the phenomena of step-mothers in repetition and in very high numbers. Marie-Thérèse Letablier (2011: p. 6) notes that “Single

parenthood covers a wide range of situations: single mothers, early widowers and widows, separated or divorced parents. It is emerging from increasingly complex family histories, marked by a growing number of separations and marital breakdowns". Most of these phenomena occur in cities undergoing social change. This is creating a fragmentation of family forms, which are conceding life models in diverse forms, and family configurations offer opportunities to talk about "variable geometry single parenthood". The consequences of this situation can be seen in the living conditions of single parents living with their children. Firstly, covering the role that the absent parent should assume, then the child's education and the psychological well-being of the mother, including that of the child. However, the functions that adults assume in responsibility are universal, whatever the system of kinship. With this in mind, adult children living with one of their parents present other ways of understanding single parenthood, which we can refer to here as "single parenting of children in households with one parent". This situation opens the door to research into how these children organise themselves by living with a single parent.

6. Conclusion

In this article, we present research carried out as part of a doctoral thesis. The aim was to assess family models in the context of contemporary change, and the field data revealed that the phenomenon of single parenthood does exist in this city. The problem of this phenomenon concerns not only the single parent living with one or more children, but also children at the age of majority living with a single parent (an issue that remains to be addressed in our future research). However, state and non-state services are making it their concern to do something about the problem at their level.

To this end, the mechanisms for tackling this phenomenon are to be found at several levels. Firstly, the position of those affected by the burden of building a new life after the loss or absence of a parent, gives rise to the identification of the distant or proximate origins of single parenthood and the organisation of different forms of single-parent families. Secondly, the strategies for coping with life and difficulties have the double nuance of understanding how the management of single-parent households is constructed and positioning oneself in the face of this state of life.

Appropriately, this study has addressed a crucial socio-anthropological topic, exploring the dynamics of single-parent families in urban areas in an African context, in particular Bukavu in DR Congo. However, the concept of passive and active single parenthood is crucial to understanding the diverse experiences of single parents, and contributes to the existing body of knowledge in socio-anthropological and family studies.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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