Familial roles, responsibilities and solidarity in diverse African societies

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Section XI: Sociology of the Family

Familial Roles, Responsibilities and Solidarity in Diverse African Societies

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santé", financed by AFD to combat gynecological and obstetric violence in Senegal from a gender perspective. She recently coordinated the research project on maternal and child health, funded by IDRC and the Canadian Institute of Health.

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Abstract

Familial roles and responsibilities, household structures and support networks are changing in many African societies in response to global and local processes. These include economic restructuring, chronic poverty, urbanization and rapid technological change, chronic health emergencies and migration affecting many African societies. This chapter explores contrasting contexts affected by such challenges in East and West Africa by focusing on the disruptions and changes in familial responsibilities caused by the death of a family member. Women's and children's crucial roles in caring for sick, disabled and older family members and orphaned siblings have been increasingly recognized in the HIV epidemic in East Africa. Maternal kin, particularly grandmothers, have filled gaps in the care of orphaned children conventionally provided by paternal kin in patrilineal societies. This chapter reflects on the policy implications of these changes in terms of social protection and care of vulnerable family members.

Keywords

Familial responsibilities, children's caregiving, solidarity, care after death, diverse family forms, social protection, Africa

Introduction

In many African societies, familial roles and responsibilities, household structures and support networks are changing in response to global challenges, including economic restructuring, urbanization and rapid technological change, chronic illness and health emergencies (HIV, Ebola and Coronavirus), climate change, conflict and displacement. Such challenges are often viewed through the lens of crisis, chronic poverty and exclusion facing African youth (Cruse O-Brien, 1996; De Boeck & Honwana, 2005). This chapter explores understandings of 'the family' and family structures in Africa from a gendered and generational perspective and analyses how roles and responsibilities may change in response to such pressures at the local level.

Drawing on qualitative research with children and families conducted in Tanzania, Uganda and Senegal, this chapter seeks to address the following research question: what disruptions

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and changes in familial responsibilities are caused by the death of a family member in East and West Africa?[1] Grandmothers and orphaned children and youth have played increasingly important roles in caring for children following AIDS-related parental death and in post-conflict situations in Eastern and Southern Africa, leading to the emergence of what have been termed 'skipped generation' and 'child- and youth-headed households' (Beegle et al., 2010; Foster et al., 1997; Samuels & Wells, 2009).

The impacts of the HIV epidemic have been less severe in many West African countries. Yet in Evans' (2014) and Evans et al.'s (2016) research on family deaths in Senegal, a strong sense of familial responsibility to care for surviving parents and siblings was also evident, impacting young people's wellbeing, educational opportunities and aspirations for the future (Bowlby et al., 2021). This chapter reflects on the policy implications of these changes in familial responsibilities on social protection and care of vulnerable children and families following a family death.

Family structures and responsibilities in African societies

Families in Africa are characterized by considerable diversity, as they are globally. They often comprise extended family structures and exercise multiple functions, roles and responsibilities. As Sy (1999) remarked, they can be seen as a network of solidarity and reciprocal support. Consequently, it is difficult to delineate the boundaries of 'the African family.' Even if some have comparatively restricted (nuclear) forms in terms of family members sharing the same residence, they are nevertheless more complex due to relationships and linkages that may not be immediately visible, whether nuclear or extended.

Although qualitative understandings of the meanings of 'family' in African contexts are limited, classic authors such as Ocholla-Ayayo (1976) observed that the family represents the basic social unit in which the norms and values, beliefs, knowledge and daily life skills and competencies are communicated to younger generations. It is also regarded as the basic economic unit which affords survival chances to babies and children. Moreover, Ocholla-Ayayo (1976) argues it is the biological unit where reproduction and biological continuity usually take place. According to Adepoju and Mbugua (1999), the family remains the most important factor in socialization, composed of individuals in long-term interaction with each other, translated through relations of reproduction and production. From this perspective, the family is not only a "center of life", but a "socio-economic organization" (Diop, 2012 [1985]), a unit or "cell" of production and consumption in the subsistence economy mostly found in traditional settings.

Authors such as Oheneba-Sakyi and Takyi (2006, p. 2) emphasize the way 'family' is practiced as "a dynamic social institution with members coming and going," rather than being defined primarily by "biological ties that household members may have with each other." This presents a fluid understanding of 'family' and kinship that is constantly being re-made, with particular relationships being emphasized at certain times, while others may be de-emphasized.

Although the terms ‘family’ and ‘household’ are subject to debate and are often used interchangeably, they are significantly different. Varley (2008) defines households as ‘task-oriented residence units,’ characterized by the following features: co-residence, economic co-operation, reproductive activities and socialization of children. Instead ‘families’ are ‘kinship units that need not be localized’ and family members may reside in different places at some distance from each other while still retaining kinship ties and responsibilities across space.

Based on our study in Senegal, for example, the family cannot be equated to the household. The family may be composed of father, mother and their children, whether they are married or not. Yet the family also comprises the whole lineage from ancestors to the youngest (last born) and is accorded great significance. Elders are treated with the utmost respect and their words have a major influence on family decisions. In the past, in both urban and rural areas all members of the family in one household lived under the same roof and shared the same meals.

Over time, these arrangements have shifted. Even in rural areas, a family may live in the same concession, but is constituted of different households—they may not share meals, but each couple has meals with their own children. This process can be seen as a dislocation, possibly leading to the break-up of large families. It is usually accompanied at the very least by a reduction in cooperation and solidarity, which in its traditional form had been crucial in organizing labor on the large agricultural fields managed by the father or eldest brother. A concern to preserve the autonomy of the household following the death of the father or brother who owned the land is often the key factor involved in the retention of the extended family structure, or the reconfiguration of extended family relations. In urban areas, smaller families mean that each family lives in their own household. There is often a powerful nostalgia to reunite with the wider family during religious ceremonies such as *korité* (Muslim festival of *Aid el fitr*) and *tabaski* (Muslim festival of *Aid el Kébir)* to celebrate together at the familial home.

In many African societies, patrilineal and matrilineal lineages may be significant in understanding meanings of ‘family.’ Among the Wolof in Senegal, each lineage has different names and attributes that children inherit (Diop, 2012; Ndiaye, 2009). Additionally, it is through the paternal lineage, *Guegno,* that one inherits the family name, family totem (an animal which represents family belonging or membership) and social status, based traditionally on a hierarchical caste system. The latter ranges from the superior class (free men), the middle class of artisans or craftsmen with hereditary specialisms, and the inferior class of slaves (Diop, 2012). In contrast, it is from the maternal lineage or *Meen* that one receives one’s character or personality closely linked to one’s mother and the lineage’s association with blood, flesh and spirit (Diop, 2012). Among most ethnic groups in Senegal, mystical powers are perceived to be transmitted by the mother to the next generation.

Such meanings of maternal and patrilineal lineages underpin familial caring responsibilities and generational transfers of values, attributes and wealth in many African societies. Material inheritance practices and generational transfers of wealth are shaped by gender, ethnicity,

religious, customary and statutory law, with considerable legal pluralism and syncretism in African countries (Evans, 2016).

Changes in family structures, roles and responsibilities

Recently, processes of urbanization and economic crises have led to increased marital dissolution in many African countries, and growing numbers of women head or principally maintain households, particularly in urban areas (Dial, 2008; Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 2006). Such changes are accompanied by considerable mobility between rural and urban households and intra-household exchanges of resources. Family members of different generations may move to live with relatives for temporary or longer periods to gain access to care, material resources, education, training and employment opportunities (Skovdal, 2011; Van Blerk & Ansell, 2006).

Generational transfers and intergenerational caring responsibilities can be theorized using the framework of a 'generational bargain' (Collard, 2000) or 'intergenerational contract' (Kabeer, 2000). The bargain is that the most economically active 'middle generation' makes transfers to the young with the expectation that resources will be reciprocated to them in old age when they require care and support, while also fulfilling their obligations to support their elderly parents.

Research suggests that the 'generational bargain' is coming under increasing pressure in many African countries due to societal transformations associated with a range of global processes (Evans, 2015). These include globalization, neoliberal economic restructuring, the HIV and AIDS epidemic and the consequences of reduced public health spending, user fees and policies that emphasize home-based care, rapid urbanization, high levels of transnational and rural-urban migration, greater emphasis on education, changing family structures and the individualization of kinship responsibilities (Kabeer, 2000). Such changes affect the ability of middle generations to provide care and support for older people and children in different contexts, with relatives from maternal and paternal lineages and young people holding different roles and responsibilities from those usually expected.

In Senegal, significant transformations in family structures and responsibilities have been observed for decades. These changes have taken place in long term contexts of poverty (Antoine et al., 1995). Referring to changes in the socio-economic organization of the family, Diop (2012 [1985]) emphasized that completely integrated family communities no longer exist as before amid the subsistence economy. Differentiations between households are evident across all types of family communities. These dynamics are closely linked to the unfavorable socio-economic climate. While the family is the principal source of protection, many families now often lack the means to provide parental care for their children due to exposure to multiple vulnerabilities. Global challenges and crises directly affect families' abilities to provide for their children's basic needs, with extreme poverty and precarious health and social environments (Tall, 2009).

Household size is one of the most important factors in categorizing families' circumstances. Size may vary due to choices made by concerned actors or by the needs and challenges they face. Tall (2009) suggests that while the family in the widest sense remains the key identity-forming network of support, the close family can be seen as the "space of actual support, while the extended family is a space of emotional support." The extended family system remains the most common in Senegal and in many African countries. Traditionally, families lived in a concession grouping several households and small families were discouraged. The family provided total security for individuals and unmarried people often stayed with their parents until they were 40 years old. Leaving the family concession to live elsewhere was seen as transgressing social norms and values.

Gender and generational relations are central to analyzing changing familial caring responsibilities, intra-household resource allocations and inequalities. In Senegal, De Vreyer and Nilsson (2019) conceptualize households and intra-household resource allocations by distinguishing sub-groups of household members or 'cells' that are at least partly autonomous in their budget management, with gender and generational inequalities. Productive and social reproductive works, including domestic chores, caring for children, sick, disabled or older relatives and decision-making within the household, are often shaped by such sub-groups of co-residing family members, underpinned by hierarchies of gender and generation including sibling birth order. Nevertheless, non-resident patriarchs or other senior kin who might live some distance away may still play important roles in family decision-making and resource allocations.

The literature often represents extended families as reflecting a low standard of living, based on for example, a lack of education of the head of household, low income and a household size of over seven people (Adepoju & Mbugua, 1999). Some argue that smaller households are more able to meet the educational and health needs of their children (Berger & Font, 2015). It is interesting to consider if general household composition directly or indirectly affects the wellbeing of the family. Evans and others (2016) research into families who experienced a family death in urban Senegal, however, demonstrated that many larger families with middle or higher incomes were often able to provide more support and protection to bereaved family members, compared to those living in smaller households, who may be more isolated and lack sustained social support after the death (Bowlby et al., 2021).

Changes are also evident in the socialization roles of parents and their brothers and sisters of the same generation, who previously were considered to play the same role in a child's upbringing as their biological parents. This 'social parenting' role of uncles and aunts meant that they could instruct children and correct their behavior and act whenever they wanted. Social parenting, which was common and widespread in Senegal, has declined in the last decade and wider family members no longer have a responsibility to act towards children around them. Only parents are responsible for their children. In the context of globalization, children's independence has also increased, with greater access to mobile phones, information technology and knowledge which no longer relies exclusively on parents (Porter et al., 2015). This has resulted in a reconfiguration of the social roles of parents and new

demands and expectations placed on both children and parents, resulting in intergenerational tensions.

It is important to acknowledge that many children in Senegal and other African countries do not live with both biological parents, related to the widespread tradition of *confiage* or child fosterage/ kinship care arrangements in many West African countries (Beck et al., 2015). Children are often entrusted to a close relative, an uncle, aunt, namesake, grandparents or sometimes a *marabout* (religious teacher) for Koranic education or to meet their educational needs (see also Evans et al. (2017). According to a mapping and analysis of child protection systems in Senegal (Krueger & de Wise-Lewis, 2011), 68 per cent (58 per cent in urban areas and 72 per cent in rural areas) of children aged under 15 years were living with both parents. Almost 9 per cent of girls and 7 per cent of boys were entrusted to relatives through kinship care arrangements, while almost 6 per cent of children had lost one or both parents. Another survey (République du Sénégal, 2011) suggested that the proportion of children not living with either biological parent is much higher among those aged 10 years and over (20% aged 10–14 with 17% girls and 13% boys). This may be linked to gendered expectations of girls' contributions to the household in terms of domestic and care work and hence a preference among relatives to foster girls to undertake these roles.

Changes in familial responsibilities after a family death in urban Senegal

This section presents the particular dynamics of care and familial responsibilities after the death of a family member in urban Senegal, based on Evans et al.'s (2016) qualitative research in Dakar and Kaolack, where large, multi-generational households continue to be common. Urban households with seven people on average are slightly smaller than rural ones where the average is ten people (ANSD, 2014). Households are comparatively large in urban Senegal compared to elsewhere in West and Central Africa, where on average between 4.5 and 6 people live in urban households (Jacquemin, 2010).

Evans and colleagues' (2016) research[2] with families affected by bereavement found that familial responsibilities and a renewed commitment to the 'success' of the family were central to the identity and wellbeing of family members after a death. Such responsibilities are enmeshed in wider family and community networks of solidarity, which provide crucial support in the short term, but are less able to meet longer-term social protection needs. This may result in considerable mobility and the dispersal and reconfiguration of households and familial responsibilities, sometimes including child fosterage arrangements.

In most cases, interviewees received care and support from family members in adjusting to the death. For some families and individuals, the loss of income that the deceased had provided and changes in familial roles and relationships following the death led to financial difficulties and to challenges to the continuation of children' s schooling. Significant changes in material circumstances were particularly apparent if the deceased was the head of household or main income earner. Several young people had to start working following the death and some young people had stopped studying due to poverty and the need to work.

Poorer households were more likely to suffer major disruptions such as migration in search of work or residential relocation to join another household, including child fosterage practices. Such movements may help to prevent extreme poverty but may also create emotional, social and practical difficulties for adults and children. ‘Comfortable’ and 'middling' (middle income) households were less likely to have to make such major adjustments to their lives.

Most interviewees reported that the deceased had very few heritable assets to pass on to family members or significant others. Clothing and other small items, and sometimes furniture, were usually the only belongings which were shared out between family members and others as offerings.

Young people's caring and domestic responsibilities, particularly for daughters, may increase following the death of a mother or older sibling with detrimental impacts on their education. For example, Hawa (16-years old) who was in secondary school and whose older brother (the main income earner) died, explained:

> “It was my brother who used to go and look for water. He would take a cart (and horse) to go and get water. And now, it’s my sister and me who do it. […] In any case, every day I go to school after having done the housework. When I finish I go and get water. […] [During vacations] I’m at home with my father and my mother but they are elderly. So I stay with them.[…] My sister-in-law was here at home, when my brother died, she went back to hers.[…] I go to the market, prepare meals, do the housework.”

Family deaths often led to changes in family practices and household routines, with young men acknowledging the need to be at home more than previously and not socializing as much as before the death. Young people also often provided emotional support to siblings, their remaining parent and other bereaved family members, especially among older youth:

> “I’m my father’s support, we talk about things. What’s important for me is to try and focus on him because me too, I feel he’s alone. It’s just to support him you know.” (N'diogou. young man, 29-years old, whose mother died).

Several people talked about needing to be a role model and take on new roles in disciplining younger siblings, especially among young men. There was often a strong sense of responsibility for siblings, especially among older youth and married young women. Diami, aged 26 (married with two children) commented about her siblings:

> “I don’t want them to go hungry or thirsty. I want them to succeed in their life. […] I stopped my studies so they could continue theirs” (Bowlby et al., 2021).

The death often led to closer family relations among the living, especially between co-resident siblings and the remaining parent. The loss of material support, which was interwoven with the emotional impact of loss, could lead to feelings of fearfulness and even

despair as to how to face problems in life without a much-loved relative. Young people in particular missed their parent's guidance, protection and care:

> "When my father was alive it was him who gave me strength. […] Today I don't see him anymore; I only have my mother and my brothers and sisters to advise me" (Selbe, young woman, 13-years old).

This illustrates the increasing importance of parental roles in providing advice and guidance to their children and perhaps an accompanying decline in 'social parenting' by relatives, as discussed earlier. Many young people felt that a mother or father was 'irreplaceable,' in terms of the loss of their love, guidance and care, despite being often surrounded by aunts, uncles, grandparents and other relatives.

The next section draws on Evans' (2011, 2012a, b) research on orphaned siblings living in child- and youth-headed households in Tanzania and Uganda, in order to explore changing familial roles and responsibilities in the contrasting setting of Eastern and Southern Africa, both regions having been severely affected by the HIV epidemic.

Changes in familial roles and responsibilities in households affected by AIDS in Eastern and Southern Africa

Evidence from 21 African countries, including those with high and low HIV prevalence, suggests that there has been a shift toward grandparents providing childcare in recent years, especially where there are high orphan rates (Beegle et al., 2010). The crucial roles of women and children in caring for sick, disabled and older family members and orphaned siblings have been increasingly recognized in response to the HIV epidemic in Eastern and Southern Africa. The loss of the parental 'middle generation' has led to the emergence of new household forms, such as 'skipped generation households' (Samuels & Wells, 2009). Maternal kin, particularly grandmothers, have filled gaps in the care of orphaned children that would conventionally be provided by paternal kin in patrilineal societies (Beegle et al., 2010; Cooper, 2012; Evans & Thomas, 2009; Nyambedha et al., 2003; Oleke et al., 2005). Data from Demographic and Health Surveys from 24 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa indicate that 41 per cent of adults aged 60 or over live with a grandchild under the age of 15 years (cited in Zimmer & Dayton, 2005). Of these grandparents, almost 14% live with one or more grandchildren without any co-resident adult children and most of these households are headed by grandmothers living with young children in rural areas (Zimmer & Dayton, 2005).

Children and elderly grandparents living in skipped generation households often share caring and domestic responsibilities and may develop close loving relationships, enhancing the emotional wellbeing of both children and older people (Clacherty, 2008; Evans & Becker, 2009). They may also experience chronic poverty that impacts older people's health and longevity and children's educational outcomes and life. The number of skipped generation households is expected to increase in the future because of the continuing impacts of orphanhood related to AIDS, Ebola and Coronavirus among other long-wave health

emergencies, and the intensification of negative shocks such as conflict, natural disasters and climate change (Samuels & Wells, 2009).

Several studies have highlighted the significance of children's roles in caring for chronically ill parents, younger siblings and other community members in HIV-affected communities in Eastern and Southern Africa (Bray, 2009; Evans & Becker, 2009; Skovdal, 2011). Children's responsibilities to provide care for adults call into question conventional norms of childhood, youth, parenting and intergenerational relations. Research reveals the poverty, stigma and marginalization that child- and youth-headed households may face (Francis-Chizororo, 2008; Meintjes et al., 2010; Ruiz-Casares, 2009; Thurman et al., 2006). Orphaned children's inheritance rights to their deceased parents' land and property may be denied following their parents' death (Clacherty, 2008; Evans, 2005). This appears to be linked to the stigma surrounding AIDS and children's weak socio-economic position in the community (Evans, 2005; Rose, 2007).

While the majority of orphaned children and youth are cared for by extended family members (Beegle et al., 2010; Cooper, 2012; Meintjes et al., 2010), Evans' (2011, 2012a, b) exploratory research in Tanzania and Uganda showed that some orphaned children and youth are heading households independently to care for younger siblings and safeguard inherited assets from unscrupulous relatives. The research[3] found that the eldest co-resident sibling was usually considered to have more caring responsibilities than other siblings, although both older and younger siblings engage in 'care-giving' and 'care-receiving.' A strong familial responsibility toward each other as siblings was evident, particularly if young people had experienced harassment or exploitative relations among extended family or community members. Young people emphasized:

> "We are happy living together as a family" and Tumaini, aged 19 commented: "I feel good because we comfort each other about everything. We feel bad when we're harassed."

Young people heading households in such situations can be seen as reconfiguring the usual intergenerational expectations of household headship and their place in the family and community. In contrast to previous negative experiences in the households of foster relatives, several young people enjoyed the freedom of being able to 'manage their own lives' and make their own decisions. Others expressed more contradictory feelings about assuming 'adult' responsibilities whilst they are still a 'child.'

Young people's care work within the household was usually shared but often reproduced conventional gender norms. Young women had greater and more direct involvement than young men in childcare and domestic work within the home. Although siblings of both genders undertook household tasks, young people's care work appeared to reproduce conventional norms about the gendered division of labor within the household and other public and private locales. Young women spent more time managing the household and doing household chores while young men spent a significantly longer time seeking paid work to support the family. These findings are related to gendered constructions of care and young

women's reduced access to employment opportunities in Tanzania and Uganda, as previous research in African contexts has shown (Chant & Jones, 2005; Langevang, 2008).

Young men also spent more time seeking support and participating in the neighborhood. Older and younger boys reported spending more time in community engagement activities outside the household compared to girls, reflecting conventional gender norms about the use of public and private space, and boys' and young men's greater spatial mobility and freedom to engage with the wider environment (Katz, 1993). Young men shared or allocated household chores to younger siblings, especially girls. Young women heading households appeared to be in a weaker bargaining position to allocate household chores to younger brothers. Younger siblings mainly spent their time doing household chores, self-care activities and playing with friends.

The gendered division of labor was not as pronounced as expected (Evans, 2012a). Young men were responsible for activities conventionally perceived as 'women's work'. They reported spending almost as much time as young women doing household chores and more time engaged in childcare. This suggests that age and sibling birth order may be more significant than gender in determining young men's involvement in care and domestic work in sibling-headed households when they lack sisters perceived as old enough to perform these tasks. In such situations, young men heading households were likely to allocate domestic tasks to younger brothers, as well as undertaking more childcare and household chores themselves. These findings about the involvement of young men and boys in domestic and care work refute broad generalizations that women and girls do all the unpaid care work in Tanzanian society, and are supported by Budlender's (2010) analyses of time-use data from Tanzania.

Young people's ambivalent position in between norms of 'childhood,' 'youth' and 'adulthood,' appeared to be sanctioned by some adult family and community members through harassment, bullying and property grabbing. Almost all of the young people interviewed had inherited agricultural land, property and/or other assets from their parents. As Evans (2012b) observed, according to conventional inheritance practices in patrilineal societies, paternal relatives would usually keep children's land and other inherited property in trust until they reached the age of majority (Rose, 2007). The deaths of both parents due to AIDS and children's negative experiences of foster care resulted in some young people, especially older children, securing control of their land at a younger age than usual. Young people's ownership of land, property and other assets before they make 'successful' transitions to adulthood (Langevang, 2008), challenged conventional norms of inheritance, household formation and generational relations. This resulted in young people sometimes experiencing property grabbing, stigmatization, exploitation and accusations of wrong-doing in the community (Evans, 2011). Despite such negative experiences of stigma and marginalization in the community, young people developed supportive social networks to meet their needs and protect themselves and their property, gaining access to material and emotional resources and enhancing their skills and capabilities to develop sustainable livelihoods.

The final section explores policy implications in the context of social protection that stems from the death of a family member and the changes in household structures and disruptions to family life. This is based on the findings from the diverse research contexts in urban Senegal, and Tanzania and Uganda.

Policy implications for social protection following a family death

The research from Tanzania and Uganda found that safeguarding asset inheritance and building the resilience of child- and youth-headed households to chronic poverty were best supported through a combination of:

- *physical and financial assets* and material resources (support from non-governmental organizations)
- *individual factors* (age and capabilities when eldest sibling started caring, health and wellbeing, motivations, values and beliefs, outlook and aspirations)
- *relational factors* (availability of supportive older siblings, relatives and/or neighbors who can share unpaid and paid work responsibilities, strong social ties)
- *structural factors* (access to education, skills development, healthcare, employment opportunities) (Evans, 2012b, p.187).

The study supports the significant literature that argues that unconditional cash transfers and other direct means of providing financial and material support to households have the considerable potential to alleviate the chronic poverty that most vulnerable children and families experience (Molyneux with Jones & Samuels, 2016; Richter, 2010). Such approaches need to be part of a rights-based long-term commitment to social protection institutionalized in government-led structures (Richter, 2010). The research also reveals the dangers of creating dependency on external support available only in the short and/or medium term. This may have long term negative consequences for building strong social networks and ensuring that child- and youth-headed households are closely integrated within communities when funding streams come to an end. Targeted external support only for the category of 'orphaned and vulnerable children' for example, rather than supporting other community members in need, may result in resentment and increased stigma, exacerbating the marginalization of young people (Thurman et al., 2008).

In Evans et al.'s (2016) research with families who experienced the death of a relative in urban Senegal, only a tiny minority of participants mentioned receiving support or assistance from formal government or non-governmental services, and most were not aware of support services or assistance available in their locality. The vast majority of interviewees relied on their social ties and informal networks of family, friends, neighbors and colleagues for material, practical and moral/ emotional support following the death of a relative. Some also drew on informal relationships with members of local associations, local and religious leaders and members of their faith community to access support. Governmental and NGO representatives expressed frustration with the very limited resources available for social protection services for 'vulnerable' children and families in need. Lack of funds, alongside a

lack of co-ordination and shared understanding of the target beneficiaries, undermined their ability to 'function' and do the minimum needed in their professional roles.

The overall messages for policy and practice from Evans et al.'s (2016) research focused on the need to consider the death of a relative as a potential criterion for vulnerability when targeting cash transfers and other social protection services to poor families. There was considerable consensus among community members and policymakers and practitioners that, alongside indicators of poverty, vulnerability criteria should include orphaned children and youth, widows (particularly in polygamous unions) and widowers with young children, as well as other female-headed households with young children. Efforts to tackle governance issues and greater co-ordination among policymakers, practitioners and community members were also identified as necessary to develop a shared understanding of the diverse circumstances of 'vulnerable' children and families in need of support.

A further policy recommendation from the research in Senegal (Evans et al., 2016) focused on raising awareness of social services and assistance available to poor families, making services more accessible at the local level, and improving governance issues in the allocation of resources to target groups. The minimal government assistance that is currently available for 'vulnerable groups' through local social service centers in urban areas of Senegal, and the lack of trained personnel and logistical problems such as lack of transport, severely undermine the contribution of social workers and those responsible for social action and support services. Although some school and university bursaries were reported to be available to orphaned young people, no interviewees had received such support or knew about it.

Similarly, there was almost unanimous skepticism among family interviewees, focus group participants and local and religious leaders about whether available government or NGO resources would reach the intended beneficiaries. This calls for urgent action to build the capacity of social workers, schools, universities and other social support services to provide more inclusive and transparent social and educational support for poor children, young people and families who experience the death of an adult relative.

These policy and practice recommendations relate to a broader concern highlighted by Evans et al. (2016) and Evans (2017) for development agencies, policymakers and practitioners to globally recognize the interconnected nature of the material, emotional, social and spiritual dimensions of the death of a relative, with lasting repercussions for children, younger, middle and older generations. The widespread poverty, lack of social protection and welfare services, adherence to widowhood-mourning practices and religious and moral imperatives about the need to persevere , make death not just an emotional upheaval, but an economic, social and cultural struggle to survive and 'succeed' in life.

These findings need to be understood within the wider legal and political framework of social protection for vulnerable children and families in Africa. While an appropriate legal and political framework has been established recently in Senegal to provide a program of support for vulnerable children and families, analysis reveals that there are numerous diverse actors

working on child protection who are often invisible in policy documents and national strategies. Significant barriers are also evident in the application of laws surrounding the protection of vulnerable children. There is also a lack of information on the considerable funding available from international organizations and private donors, while funding provided by governmental cash transfers and other welfare benefits and from the community is wholly inadequate for meeting the social protection needs of vulnerable children and families. Greater coordination and political will is needed to implement policies and strategies that have been developed and to maximize the use of funding from diverse sources to more effectively support families and communities in Africa. (Krueger & de Vise-Lewis, 2011).

Conclusion

This chapter, through research in Tanzania, Uganda and Senegal, showed that families in Africa are characterized by a considerable diversity of household structures and networks of solidarity and interdependence. Familial roles and responsibilities have changed in response to global challenges and are constantly being reinforced and transformed through diverse kinship relations and community ties at the local level in often resource-constrained environments.

In many African societies, the social protection of children and families significantly depends on processes of socialization and social values of solidarity. Familial roles and responsibilities are often based on gendered and generational hierarchies which shift over time. Global challenges, including the HIV and Ebola epidemics, economic crises, climate-related shocks and processes of urbanization linked to economic, political and cultural globalization, placed particular pressures on families regarding their socio-economic status, extended family systems and conventional matrilineal and patrilineal responsibilities, household structures and relationships.

Such pressures and transformations may lead to an increased individualization of familial responsibilities and declining solidarity, particularly in urban areas. In some situations, such transformations are linked to conflict, disruptions, migration and dispersal of households and ruptures within families and communities. Conflictual, asymmetrical power relations often result in gendered and generational inequalities in outcomes for education, training, employment, health and wellbeing, and mostly impact children and other marginalized groups.

Thus the situation of vulnerable families is embedded in the dynamics of economic and socio-historical changes over time, provoked and accelerated by a wider context of crises, chronic poverty and exclusion (Cruise O-Brien, 1996; De Boeck & Honwana, 2005). Young people who head households or have significant caring responsibilities for family members occupy an ‘in-between’ place between childhood and adulthood, as ‘not-quite adults’ taking on ‘adult’ roles, considered with suspicion and sanctioned by society (Evans, 2011). Unease about the place of orphaned children and youth can be related to wider concerns about the

large youthful population in many African societies regarded as posing a threat to the moral and social order (Cruise O-Brien, 1996; Diouf, 2003).

Within this dynamic context of urbanization, socio-economic pressures, and changing familial responsibilities and intergenerational relations in many African cities, Evans et al. (2016) concluded that there is a need for more recognition of family and community solidarity as crucial sources of reciprocal informal support in urban environments, while also recognizing the limits of such resources. Informal mechanisms of social solidarity beyond the family and neighbors, based on ethnic, religious or community networks, women, youth and civil society's associations, were particularly important for poorer families and those of minority ethnicities or religious affiliations, who often had less extensive family ties to draw on. Strengthening informal associations and networks may help to support families in need in low-income urban neighborhoods. Such sources of support may be increasingly important within the context of urbanization, perceived to coincide with a declining sense of solidarity in urban Senegal.

Moreover, this analysis of the literature suggests that there is a need to develop a family-focused approach that goes beyond targeting individuals or households for social protection. Instead, a more holistic understanding is required of the interdependent, reciprocal and extensive nature of family and community ties, diverse arrangements for care, and recognition of the fluidity and mobility of people and resources between households. Efforts to strengthen existing forms of informal family and community solidarity and support networks are needed, alongside a significant expansion and effective implementation of formal social protection mechanisms such as cash transfers, for the most vulnerable in African societies.

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Notes

[1] This chapter summarizes key research findings of the first author, Ruth Evans' (2011; 2012a, b) research in Tanzania and Uganda, and Evans et al.'s (2016) research in Senegal.

[2] Using a qualitative methodology, in-depth interviews were conducted with 59 family members who had experienced the death of a family member in recent years living in two cities (Dakar and Kaolack), comprising 9 children (aged 12–17), 21 youth (aged 18–30), 22 middle generation adults (aged 31–60) and 6 older adults (aged 61–77). Focus groups were also facilitated with women and youth and interviews were conducted with local and religious leaders, policy and practice professionals. See Evans et al. (2016) for further information.

[3] Using a qualitative, participatory methodology, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted with orphaned young people (9 girls, 5 boys) from 8 child-headed households, 3 youth-headed households and 1 skipped generation household in rural and urban Tanzania

and Uganda. Interviews were also conducted with 15 project workers from 5 non-governmental organizations. Participatory feedback workshops were later conducted with 33 orphaned young people (15 young people heading households and 18 of their siblings from 16 child-/youth-headed households) and 39 NGO workers and community members. See Evans (2012a & b) for further information.