



PERCEPTIONS AND CULTURAL ATTITUDES TOWARD SAME-SEX MARRIAGES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY STRUCTURE IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the culture and attitudes of gay marriages in Kenya with a focus on how these attitudes overlap with and can counter the sustenance of African traditional family values. In the backdrop of increasing global campaign for LGBTQ+ rights, Kenya stands at a cultural juncture where rights-based discourses of the modern era meet deeply rooted African values that define family as man and woman union, primitively geared towards procreation, continuity of lineage, and community solidarity. To probe into such dynamics, the research employed a systematic literature review, based entirely on secondary data. Utilizing reliable scholarly databases such as JSTOR, PubMed, and Google Scholar, a precise search was conducted with tactical search terms such as "same-sex marriages in Kenya," "continuity of family system," and "LGBTQ+ rights in Africa." The review emphasized peer-reviewed journals, government reports, and case studies released between 2010 to 2023 to guarantee that the analysis captured the historical and dynamic legal and socio-cultural features of same-sex unions in the context of Kenya. Thematic analysis of the selected literature revealed that most of the sources treat same-sex marriage as a cultural revolution, one generally recognized as incompatible with conventional African ideas of the family. Key concerns were around perceived loss of intergenerational continuity, subversion of gender roles, and destabilization of society conventionally based on heterosexual family structures. At the same time, the literature projected a modest but emerging counter-narrative among rights movements and youth for inclusivity and legal enfranchisement of non-traditional family forms. The study concludes that while the attitudes towards same-sex marriages are gradually shifting in certain urban and cosmopolitan settings, the culture narrative within Kenya is strongly opposed to the enfranchisement of non-traditional family values. It underscores the importance of placing any family reform discussion in culturally sensitive contexts that respect African communal heritage and intergenerational knowledge, while proposing policy debates bringing together human rights and cultural preservation and civic education to foster critical but respectful dialogue with changing social realities.

KEYWORDS: Same-Sex marriage, Traditional African values, Cultural attitudes, LGBTQ+ rights, Family structure, Civic education.



BACKGROUND

Same-sex marriages remain a highly contested topic in many African societies, including Kenya, where cultural, religious, and legal frameworks largely uphold heterosexual unions as the only legitimate form of marriage (Amnesty International, 2021; Mutua, 2011). Traditional African family systems are typically characterized by their emphasis on lineage, procreation, and the collective well-being of the community (Mbiti, 1990). These values are deeply rooted in customs that prioritize the continuation of bloodlines and the fulfillment of clearly defined gender roles within the family unit. As such, any deviation from the heterosexual, procreative model of family is often perceived not merely as a personal choice, but as a threat to societal order and continuity (Njoroge & Mwaura, 2019). Kenya's legal stance reflects these cultural convictions. Same-sex relationships remain criminalized under Section 162 of the Penal Code, and public discourse around LGBTQ+ rights is often polarized, with dominant narratives aligning with religious and traditional doctrines (Kenya Law Reports, 2020). Despite this, global advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights and increasing exposure to international human rights standards have begun to influence segments of the Kenyan population, particularly in urban and cosmopolitan settings (Kaoma, 2012). These shifts are prompting debates about the meaning of family, identity, and societal cohesion in a rapidly changing cultural landscape. The tension between modern rights-based perspectives and traditional African values is particularly evident in discussions surrounding family structure. In many Kenyan communities, the family is not just a private institution but a social and cultural cornerstone that embodies values such as respect for elders, communal responsibility, and the transmission of cultural heritage (Chitando & Mateveke, 2020). Consequently, same-sex marriages are often viewed as incompatible with these expectations, raising concerns about the perceived erosion of cultural identity and moral values. At the same time, advocates for LGBTQ+ rights argue that family structures should evolve to reflect contemporary understandings of love, partnership, and human dignity. This study sought to explore how Kenyans perceive same-sex marriages and the extent to which these perceptions are shaped by cultural norms and values. It also examined the implications of these attitudes for the preservation or transformation of family structures in Kenya. By focusing on the interplay between tradition and modernity, the research aimed to contribute to a nuanced understanding of how societies negotiate change while striving to maintain cultural integrity. Ultimately, the study endeavored to inform culturally sensitive approaches to social inclusion, legal reform, and public discourse on family and human rights.

Research Objectives

Objectives of this study guided the collection and analysis of data, ensuring that the research remains focused, relevant, and aligned with both scholarly inquiry and real-world concerns.

General Objective:

To examine the perceptions and cultural attitudes toward same-sex marriages in Kenya and assess their implications for the structure, continuity, and preservation of the traditional African family.

Specific Objectives:

1. To explore societal and cultural perceptions of same-sex marriages within Kenyan communities.
2. To examine how same-sex unions impact traditional African family structures, roles, and lineage continuity.



3. To assess the legal environment surrounding same-sex marriages and its implications for family recognition and stability.
4. To analyze the psychological, emotional, and social effects of family and societal rejection on LGBTQ+ individuals.
5. To propose culturally sensitive policy recommendations aimed at regulating same-sex unions to safeguard the continuity and preservation of the traditional African family.

Research Questions

1. What are the dominant societal and cultural attitudes toward same-sex marriages in Kenya?
2. How do same-sex marriages affect traditional family roles, values, and the generational continuity central to the African family model?
3. What legal protections or limitations currently exist for same-sex couples in Kenya, and how do these affect family stability?
4. What are the emotional and social impacts on LGBTQ+ individuals due to stigma, rejection, and lack of familial acceptance?
5. What policy measures can be developed to regulate same-sex marriages in a way that upholds cultural values and protects the structure of the traditional African family?

Problem Statement

The traditional African family has historically functioned as the cornerstone of social organization in Kenya, grounded in values such as heterosexual marriage, procreation, lineage continuity, and collective responsibility (Mbiti, 1990). These foundational principles have long informed societal roles and reinforced intergenerational cohesion. However, in recent years, global movements advocating for LGBTQ+ rights, including the recognition of same-sex marriages, have increasingly influenced public discourse and legal debates across the continent. This evolving dialogue is challenging entrenched cultural norms and raising critical questions about the future of the traditional family model in Kenya. Although same-sex relationships remain criminalized and socially stigmatized in Kenya, the topic of same-sex marriage is gaining visibility through media narratives, activism, and international human rights frameworks (Kaoma, 2012). This growing prominence has elicited a spectrum of responses—from calls for inclusivity and legal reform to strong cultural resistance and reaffirmation of traditional values. While some view these shifts as part of a broader process of social transformation, others argue that they constitute a direct threat to established family structures, potentially undermining long-held roles, responsibilities, and systems of kinship that have historically sustained Kenyan communities. This study addressed the increasing tension between contemporary advocacy for same-sex marriage and the preservation of traditional African family values within the Kenyan context. Specifically, it seeks to examine how evolving cultural perceptions and societal attitudes toward same-sex unions are influencing, challenging, or redefining the concept of family. Despite the growing visibility of these issues, there remains a lack of nuanced, context-specific research that critically engages with the cultural, legal, and social dimensions of this debate. This study aimed to fill that gap by providing an in-depth exploration of the ways in which Kenyan communities navigate the intersection of cultural preservation and emerging frameworks of inclusivity.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review serves as a foundational component of this research, offering a critical examination of existing studies relevant to the topic. By synthesizing past research findings, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches, this section highlights the progression of knowledge within the field and identifies prevailing gaps or inconsistencies. Understanding prior work not only situates this study within the broader academic conversation but also justifies the need for further investigation. Through a comprehensive review of scholarly articles, books, and credible sources, this section provides the context and rationale for the research questions and hypotheses guiding the current study.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides the lens through which your research problem is understood and analyzed. For this study, which examines the tension between evolving views on same-sex marriage and the preservation of traditional African family values, a combination of sociocultural and anthropological theories is most appropriate.

This study will be anchored in the following three interrelated theoretical approaches:

Structural Functionalism

Talcott Parsons' theory of structural functionalism views society as a complex system with interconnected parts that work together to maintain stability and social order (Parsons, 1951). This perspective emphasizes how social institutions fulfill essential functions to meet basic needs and ensure society's survival. The family is seen as one of the most important institutions in society, responsible for socializing children, maintaining cultural continuity, and fulfilling economic and emotional needs. Parsons identified four key functional imperatives: adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and pattern maintenance, which are necessary for any social system to function effectively. This theory helps explain why traditional family structures in Kenya are so deeply protected. From this perspective, same-sex marriage is often viewed as a threat to societal cohesion because it is seen as disrupting established roles (father, mother, child) and functions (procreation, lineage, inheritance). The theory provides insight into why many cultural and religious institutions resist the inclusion of same-sex unions.

Afrocentric Theory

Afrocentric theory centers African cultural values, traditions, and worldviews as valid and authoritative sources of identity and social organization (Asante, 1987). It emphasizes the need to interpret African societies based on their own histories, not through Western frameworks. To adopt the idea of Afrocentricity, one must first accept the proposition that there is a coherent African cultural system based on values and experiences common to the people of the African diaspora. Asante cautions that an Afrocentric people should not replace its history, culture, mythology, or language. The infusion and adoption of another culture into the African experience is in direct conflict with traditional African values. People of African descent throughout the world, Asante argues, should embrace what is theirs and discard values and ideologies acquired from other cultures. Asante claims that such acquisitions serve to cripple and dilute the rich heritage of Africans everywhere. Using Afrocentrism allows the study to explore how traditional African values regarding family and marriage can be preserved in the face of globalization and external ideological pressures. It also challenges the common framing



of LGBTQ+ rights solely through Western human rights discourse by encouraging a culturally grounded conversation about identity, kinship, and morality within African contexts.

Social Constructionism

Advanced by Berger and Luckmann (1966), the theory of Social Constructionism asserts that all meaning is socially created. Social constructs might be so ingrained that they *feel* natural, but they are not. Instead, they are an invention of a given society and thus do not accurately reflect reality. It argues that knowledge, norms, and values, including those about gender, sexuality, and family, are not fixed or universal but are created through social interaction and cultural context (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The theory helps explain the variability in attitudes toward same-sex marriage across different generations, regions, and social groups in Kenya. It also allows the researcher to interrogate how “family” and “marriage” are constructed and reconstructed over time and how global influences (e.g., media, human rights) are shaping new discourses that may challenge or coexist with traditional norms. This theoretical framework offers a balanced approach to understanding the central dilemma of this study: how Kenyan society perceives and responds to same-sex marriage in light of deeply rooted cultural values. Structural Functionalism provides the rationale for preserving traditional family forms, Afrocentric Theory justifies cultural self-determination and resistance to external pressure, and Social Constructionism allows room for analyzing evolving attitudes and the possibility of change. Together, they enable a nuanced, culturally sensitive, and critically reflective analysis of how family, identity, and morality are negotiated in modern Kenyan society.

Empirical Review

This empirical review section presents a critical analysis of studies that have employed data-driven methodologies to investigate issues related to the current research topic. By focusing on research that utilizes observational, experimental, or survey-based methods, this section aims to highlight key findings, methodological approaches, and contextual differences across various studies. Reviewing these empirical works allows for a deeper understanding of how theoretical concepts have been applied and tested in real-world settings. It also helps to identify patterns, inconsistencies, and gaps in the existing body of knowledge, which this study seeks to address.

Traditional African Family Values

The African family has historically been the bedrock of social structure, identity, and moral education. In traditional Kenyan society, the family is more than a nuclear unit—it is an extended system that emphasizes communal living, intergenerational support, heterosexual marriage, and lineage continuity (Mbiti, 1990). Marriage, in particular, is seen not merely as a union of two individuals but as a covenant between families and a mechanism for social reproduction and stability (Ncube, 2010). The secrecy of the same-sex marriages also renders them harder to accept and integrate into the social life of Kenyan society. Prone to operating secretly due to stigma, such marriages are not encompassed in cultural ceremonies and rituals through which familial bonds and social identity are reasserted. Practices such as weddings, funerals, and inheritance rites are critical in demarcating social cohesion and belonging in society. Same-sex couples are usually deprived of the chance to practice such cultural rituals, and thus their relationships are not validated and recognized. This deprives intergenerational cultural values and practice transmission of a significant boost, which eventually hampers the continuity of the family system (Lewis, 2023). For most Kenyan societies, marriage is more



than an individualized relationship; it is also a ritual that provides individuals with social standing and legitimacy. The cultural connotations ascribed to marriage by these societies add a strong reason to their priority, namely building kinship ties and promoting unity among community members. The marriage rites performed in heterosexual couples, being generally off-limits for lesbian couples, are consequently immense in challenging these lesbian couples' achievements towards acquiring social legitimacy. Withholding them from accompanying marriage benefits deepens their marginalization and can thin out current familial ties, precluding the possibility of robust supportive networks, something that has formerly characterized family environments (Misigo, 2022). However much these emergent forms of family receive coverage, the real challenge that stares Kenyan society in the face is balancing predominant culture and incidence of diverse family forms. The resistance to accepting same-sex marriages is an expression of a broader challenge to accept changing social norms without losing traditional beliefs. Efforts to incorporate these alternative family models into the dominant culture have to contend with entrenched homophobia and stigmatization, and hence the journey towards acceptance is arduous and fraught with hurdles (Lewis, 2023). In summary, the traditional family setup in Kenya is greatly destabilized by the increased incidence of same-sex marriages that battle culturally deep-rooted conventions of gender relations and reproduction. The marginalization and exclusion of LGBTQ+ from cultural ceremonies by society not only perpetuates societal stigma but also jeopardizes the continuation of cultural values transmitted through family systems (Misigo, 2022). In many African cultures, family values are closely tied to cultural and spiritual beliefs. These include expectations around gender roles, inheritance, fertility, and the raising of children. Such values have persisted despite modernization, forming a key aspect of African identity and community cohesion (Mugambi, 2015).

Same-Sex Marriage and the African Context

Same-sex marriage remains one of the most contentious issues in African sociopolitical discourse. In many African countries, including Kenya, same-sex relationships are criminalized and widely viewed as incompatible with cultural norms (Tamale, 2014). The idea of same-sex unions directly challenges the traditional definitions of marriage, often prompting resistance from religious institutions, political leaders, and community elders. Studies suggest that opposition to same-sex marriage in African societies is often framed around the perceived threat it poses to cultural authenticity and moral order (Epprecht, 2008). These reactions are frequently supported by appeals to tradition and the supposed “un-Africanness” of homosexuality, although historical evidence suggests that diverse sexualities existed in pre-colonial Africa (Amory, 1997).

Perceptions and Cultural Attitudes in Kenya

Scholarly articles on perceptions and cultural attitudes in Kenya towards LGBTQ individuals reveal a complex and often negative view, rooted in religious and cultural beliefs about sexuality and gender. While some studies indicate a minority of Kenyans hold positive views, a significant majority express negative attitudes, often linking LGBTQ issues to foreign influence and societal disruption. In Kenya, public opinion on same-sex marriage is largely conservative. Surveys by the Pew Research Center (2020) show that over 80% of Kenyans oppose same-sex relationships, often citing religious and cultural reasons. These attitudes are reinforced by media portrayals, political rhetoric, and religious teachings that frame homosexuality as deviant or Western-imposed (Ndungu, 2016). Research by Gecaga (2014) notes that Kenyan cultural resistance to same-sex marriage is rooted in a fear of moral decay



and a disruption of family continuity. Youth attitudes, however, appear to be more varied, with some segments of urban and educated populations expressing more tolerant views due to exposure to global human rights narratives (Mutua, 2011).

Globalization, Rights Discourses, and Cultural Tensions

The globalization of human rights norms has intensified debates over LGBTQ+ rights in Kenya. While international bodies advocate for the recognition of same-sex unions as a matter of equality and dignity, many African leaders interpret this as a form of cultural imperialism (Grossman, 2013). This has created friction between constitutional rights frameworks and the preservation of indigenous cultural norms. Some scholars argue that human rights advocacy in Africa must be localized and culturally sensitive in order to be effective (Oyowe, 2015). Others suggest that inclusive frameworks are possible if the discourse is reframed around shared values such as community, respect, and dignity (Nyanzi, 2013). The reviewed literature underscores a fundamental tension between the evolving discourse on same-sex marriage and the desire to preserve traditional African family values in Kenya. While dominant perceptions remain conservative, there is a growing need for balanced research that respects cultural heritage while critically engaging with global social changes. This study aims to contribute to that conversation by analyzing cultural attitudes and their implications for Kenya's evolving family landscape.

Implications

Family Structure

The introduction of same-sex marriage into public discourse has implications for how family is defined and understood in Kenya. While traditional family structures emphasize heteronormative roles and childbearing, same-sex unions present alternative models of kinship, caregiving, and social connection (Weston, 1991). This raises critical questions about how society adapts to or resists changes to the concept of family. Current research is limited in exploring how same-sex families (where they exist, even informally) function in African contexts and what kinds of cultural negotiations they engage in. This gap highlights the need for context-specific studies that address how family values can be preserved while also grappling with contemporary social realities (Wahome, 2020).

Social Implication

Same-sex marriages in Kenya face deep-rooted societal stigma that disrupts traditional family structures and undermines the cohesion central to the African family system. Rejection of LGBTQ+ individuals by their families often leads to emotional distress and isolation, which not only harms the individuals involved but also contributes to the weakening of kinship ties that form the foundation of the traditional African extended family (Lewis *et al.*, 2023). This stigma has intensified family fragmentation, particularly in rural areas where cultural norms and expectations around marriage, procreation, and lineage are most strongly held. In these settings, acceptance of same-sex unions is often seen as a threat to long-standing cultural values, leading to disputes, cleavages within kin networks, and erosion of family solidarity. Culturally, the African concept of family places heavy emphasis on continuity through procreation and the preservation of lineage. Same-sex unions are widely viewed as incompatible with these roles, causing shame, disappointment, and internal conflict within



families. These tensions discourage open conversations and reduce the ability of families to adapt to emerging social realities while maintaining their core identity. Furthermore, Kenya's legal framework, which does not recognize same-sex marriages, reinforces societal views that such unions are illegitimate. This legal non-recognition contributes to social alienation and denies same-sex couples access to protections and benefits that could support family stability. From a preservationist perspective, the rise of same-sex unions and the resulting stigma pose a serious challenge to the integrity and continuity of the traditional African family. The disintegration of kinship systems and the weakening of cultural norms around marriage and family threaten to destabilize the social fabric. As such, while calls for tolerance and inclusion are acknowledged, efforts should also emphasize the safeguarding of cultural heritage and the reinforcement of family models that align with African values of unity, lineage continuity, and societal cohesion.

Legal Impact—Lack of Recognition and Protection

The legal non-recognition of same-sex marriages in Kenya has significant implications for family stability, particularly for LGBTQ+ individuals seeking to form family units. While same-sex couples face exclusion from essential legal protections—such as inheritance rights, healthcare decision-making, and spousal benefits—the broader concern from a traditional African family perspective is how such legal gaps contribute to societal fragmentation and challenge long-standing norms of family life. The lack of legal recognition not only marginalizes same-sex couples but also disrupts the cohesion and continuity that traditional African families are built upon. In cultures where family success is often linked to heterosexual unions, same-sex partnerships are viewed as deviations that undermine lineage, inheritance structures, and intergenerational continuity. Legal limitations deepen this rift, especially when families are socially ostracized for supporting LGBTQ+ members, threatening the unity and role of the extended family in upholding moral and cultural values. Children in same-sex families are particularly vulnerable under current legal frameworks. Their access to healthcare, education, and parental protections is uncertain due to the state's failure to formally acknowledge their family structure. From a preservationist lens, this raises concerns about the stability of future generations, as children outside the traditional family model face institutional disadvantages that may affect their development and integration into society. Moreover, legal implications surrounding death, separation, and inheritance further erode the family structure. Without legal protections, surviving partners in same-sex unions are often denied rights, leading to emotional and financial instability. These challenges contradict the African family ideal, which emphasizes mutual support, legacy, and security within a recognized family unit (Reddit, 2023). In conclusion, while there are calls for inclusive legal reform to protect LGBTQ+ families, such changes must be carefully weighed against the imperative to preserve the cultural foundations of the traditional African family. The debate highlights a core tension: the desire for social justice and legal equity on one side and the need to maintain culturally rooted definitions of marriage and family on the other. Efforts to resolve this tension must prioritize the continuity, unity, and values of the African family system while navigating a changing social landscape.

Demographic Impact – Challenges to Procreation and Lineage

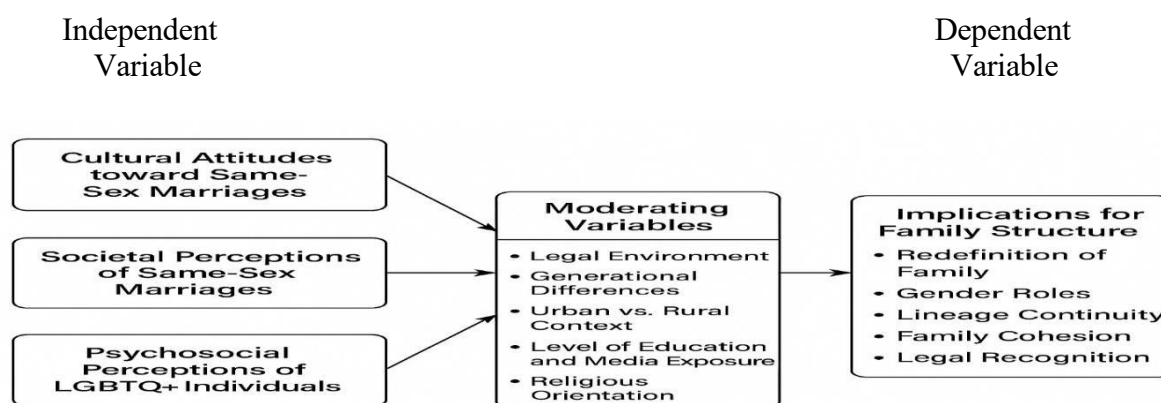
From the standpoint of preserving the traditional African family, same-sex marriages present significant demographic and cultural challenges, particularly in relation to procreation and lineage continuity. In Kenyan society—especially in rural and conservative communities—marriage is intrinsically tied to reproduction, which is viewed as essential for sustaining family



lines, preserving cultural heritage, and ensuring economic and social security across generations. Same-sex couples are unable to biologically reproduce together, making their unions appear incompatible with the procreative purpose of traditional marriage. While options such as adoption and assisted reproductive technologies exist, these alternatives are socially and legally constrained and often carry stigma. This inability to produce biological offspring is frequently perceived as a direct threat to lineage survival and generational continuity—values central to African family structures (Kipkorir, 2023; Omondi, 2022). Children are seen not only as heirs but also as sources of labor and future support in old age. Thus, the absence of children in same-sex unions leads to perceptions of familial failure and further marginalizes such relationships. The cultural premium placed on biological kinship also extends to children raised by same-sex parents, who often face identity challenges, social rejection, and legal ambiguity in matters of inheritance and recognition within the family unit. Legal exclusion compounds these demographic concerns. Without recognition of same-sex unions, issues such as custody, inheritance, and property rights become contentious, especially in cases of death or incapacitation of a partner. This legal and social vulnerability undermines the formation of stable, long-lasting family units and reinforces systemic discrimination. In essence, from a traditional African family preservation perspective, same-sex marriages are seen as disruptive to the continuity of kinship lines, reproduction-based family models, and community expectations. The demographic implications underscore a broader societal concern: that deviations from procreative marriage threaten not just individual families, but the stability, identity, and intergenerational sustainability of African society as a whole.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework visually and analytically illustrates the relationship between perceptions of same-sex marriages, the legal and socio-cultural environment, and their impact on the traditional African family structure, particularly in terms of lineage, continuity, and social cohesion. It also introduces the role of policy intervention as a potential mitigating or regulatory factor.



It submits that cultural attitudes and societal percepts of same-sex marriage are critical in shaping how Kenyan communities interpret and react to challenges posed to traditional family structure. However, these relationships do not occur in isolation; they are moderated by factors such as the legal context, urbanization, education, and generational perspectives, which may either amplify or dampen the perceived threat to family values. For instance, in urban and more educated populations, increased exposure to inclusive discourses may weaken the link



between negative perceptions and resistance to evolving family structures, thereby fostering greater tolerance and openness to alternative family forms. On the other hand, in highly religious or rural areas, where exposure to progressive narratives is limited and traditional norms are more deeply entrenched, the same moderating variables may strengthen conservative responses and reinforce the rejection of same-sex unions, hence preserving rigid interpretations of the traditional family model.

The literature reveals that negative societal perceptions, lack of legal recognition, and persistent social stigma significantly shape the view of same-sex marriages as a threat to the traditional African family model. These factors disrupt essential elements such as lineage, inheritance systems, and cultural identity, contributing to the fragmentation and weakening of family structures. However, the introduction of policy as a moderating factor highlights the potential for culturally grounded regulations to balance the protection of LGBTQ+ rights with the preservation and continuity of traditional family values in Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

The method of analysis in this research is a systematic literature review that is used to analyze secondary data on same-sex marriage and their implications on the family system in Kenya. A systematic literature review is suitably applied here because it allows for an exhaustive and systematic exploration of accessible research so that the complex socio-cultural and legal dimensions of same-sex unions can be better understood (Denyer & Tranfield, 2009). Literature search was conducted using reputable academic databases such as JSTOR, PubMed, and Google Scholar, which are reputed to have extensive collections of peer-reviewed scholarly articles. Strategic keywords such as "same-sex marriages in Kenya," "continuity of family system," and "LGBTQ+ rights in Africa" were selected to capture the core themes of interest and optimize search efficiency, yielding a focused set of literature. The time frame of articles between 2010 and 2023 was chosen with the objective of capturing recent developments in legal and social attitudes towards same-sex marriages in Kenya. This ongoing change underscores the importance of including the most recent studies, as social norms and legislation can have a great influence on the family setting (Nzioka & Kombo, 2021). The inclusion criterion was specifically designed to focus on peer-reviewed journals, government reports, and case studies that specifically address the legal and socio-cultural concerns of same-sex marriages in Kenya. The strict methodological design is intended to ensure validity and reliability in the data since peer-reviewed documents tend to undergo stringent peer review by academics, with the added quality control of improving credibility in findings (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). Moreover, exclusion criteria involved the rejection of non-peer-reviewed journals and studies that were not specifically relevant to the Kenyan context. Such was carried out in an attempt to maintain the purity and relevance of the data because context is central in determining how cultural influences might impact family relationships with regard to same-sex marriages (Hernández, 2020). Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of recurring themes, such as societal stigma, legal problems, and the erosion of traditional family values, enabling deeper insight into the implications of these themes. This method is particularly effective in reducing rich qualitative data into meaningful conclusions, enabling researchers to make informed conclusions about social phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By employing a



systematic literature review grounded in sound methodology, this research ensures a critical and analytical examination of the topic, going beyond descriptive synthesis. It aims to provide new conceptual insight into how same-sex marriages affect the family system in Kenya, thereby contributing to the overall discourse of LGBTQ+ rights and family life in Africa. This method of methodology not only lends weight to the research but also shows the importance of evidence-based discussion in resolving contentious and typically delicate issues in society (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009). This understanding is critical for informing policy and creating a more inclusive environment for all types of families.

Limitations of the Study

This study has identified a number of limitations that may affect the extent to which the findings can be generalized. First, as the study used secondary data, the analysis is reliant on the scope, quality, and perspectives already available regarding literature, which may not capture the full extent of the controversy regarding same-sex marriages in Kenya. Gaps in published research, especially around sensitive cultural issues, will inevitably result in some viewpoints being under-represented. Second, while a systematic literature review allows the synthesis to be structured and comprehensive, systematic reviews cannot provide direct and contemporary insight from communities, policy makers, or custodians of culture, deferring immediacy of contextual interpretation. Third, the literature mostly reflects Kenya's socio-cultural and legal environment during the period 2010–2023, meaning that any legal or social developments, subsequent to this literature review, may weaken the relevance of some conclusions over time. Finally, the findings, being context-specific, to Kenya's cultural, legal, and social environment, cannot be readily generalized to other national or regional contexts with different socio-cultural dynamics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic literature review conducted in this research aimed to explore the implications of same-sex marriages on the continuity of the family system in Kenya, focusing on socio-cultural and legal dimensions. Drawing from an extensive set of peer-reviewed articles, government reports, and case studies from reputable academic databases, the following key findings and discussions emerged regarding the social, legal, and cultural dynamics surrounding same-sex unions in Kenya.

Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Same-Sex Marriages in Kenya

Findings: The review reveals that same-sex marriages remain highly controversial in Kenya, with deep-seated societal stigmas and cultural opposition rooted in long-standing heteronormative traditions. The traditional family system in Kenya is based on heterosexual marriage, with strict gender roles defining familial responsibilities. In the Kenyan context, the family unit is not just a private arrangement but a social and communal institution that is



integral to identity, socialization, and survival. As such, same-sex marriages challenge the very foundation of family systems as understood in Kenyan society. Social stigma is one of the most significant barriers that LGBTQ+ individuals face in Kenya. Studies show that societal views on same-sex relationships are overwhelmingly negative, with same-sex unions often perceived as unnatural and immoral (Mutunga, 2014). This societal rejection is not limited to public opinion but extends to families, leading to alienation, discrimination, and exclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals from social and familial support systems. Furthermore, Kenyan traditional values emphasize the importance of procreation, with marriage seen as the means through which families are extended and the community's future is secured. Same-sex unions, which do not traditionally align with reproductive roles, are seen as conflicting with the procreation-oriented nature of marriage in Kenya (Giddens, 2001). Therefore, from a cultural perspective, the introduction of same-sex marriages threatens the social function of marriage as a means of sustaining the family unit.

Discussion: The findings reveal a fundamental tension between the legal recognition of same-sex marriages and Kenya's deeply embedded cultural norms surrounding family. Given the widespread stigma and negative attitudes toward homosexuality in Kenyan society, the legal acceptance of same-sex marriages would not only face resistance but could also be perceived as an erosion of cultural values that uphold the traditional family system. This tension highlights the challenge of reconciling the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals with the preservation of traditional family structures, especially in societies where cultural identity is tightly interwoven with family norms (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Legal Challenges and the Impact of Same-Sex Marriages on Family Law in Kenya

Findings: The legal framework in Kenya has shown a marked resistance to recognizing same-sex marriages. Section 165 of the Penal Code criminalizes same-sex sexual conduct, and the 2010 Constitution of Kenya does not offer protections based on sexual orientation, making it difficult for LGBTQ+ individuals to form legally recognized unions. While there have been some court challenges to decriminalize homosexuality, the legal environment remains unfriendly towards LGBTQ+ rights (Hernández, 2020). The implications of same-sex marriage recognition on the family system in Kenya are also significant from a legal standpoint. The traditional family system in Kenya benefits from legal protections, such as inheritance laws, child custody, and property rights, which are exclusively tied to heterosexual marriages. The introduction of same-sex marriage could necessitate reforms to family law, challenging the definition of marriage and family in Kenyan law (Mutunga, 2014). Legalization of same-sex marriages would also introduce complex issues regarding the definition of family for legal purposes, such as custody rights for children in same-sex relationships, inheritance rights, and the legitimacy of same-sex parents. However, this transformation could provide greater legal security for LGBTQ+ families, who are often subjected to discrimination in matters of inheritance, property rights, and child custody (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Discussion: The findings underscore the significant legal challenges that same-sex marriages would present to Kenya's existing family law structure. While the country maintains a conservative stance on LGBTQ+ rights, the increasing international recognition of same-sex unions suggests that Kenya may eventually face pressure to reconsider its legal approach. Such a shift could result in legal reforms that both challenge and redefine the family system in Kenya. However, this process would likely be gradual and contentious, requiring careful consideration



of how to balance the protection of traditional family structures with the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals.

Impact of Same-Sex Marriages on the Continuity of the Traditional Family System

Findings: The continuity of the traditional family system in Kenya, based on heterosexual marriage, is arguably threatened by the recognition of same-sex marriages. Family systems in Kenya are often framed within the context of kinship networks, gender roles, and community expectations. These roles define the responsibilities and expectations of family members, where marriage is seen as a mechanism for economic support, emotional stability, and social cohesion (Giddens, 2001). The review found that the legal and social acceptance of same-sex marriages in Kenya could lead to a reconfiguration of these traditional roles, particularly in the areas of inheritance, family lineage, and child-rearing. As same-sex couples seek recognition, these traditional roles would be challenged, particularly concerning family lineage and succession practices, which heavily depend on the assumption of marriage being between a man and a woman (Parsons, 1951). In contrast, some studies suggest that introducing more inclusive definitions of marriage could lead to a broader understanding of family, where non-reproductive relationships are valued equally and the emphasis on procreation is diminished. This, however, would require a major shift in societal attitudes, which remains unlikely in the short term given the strong cultural resistance to same-sex marriages in Kenya (Mutunga, 2014).

Discussion: The findings indicate that same-sex marriages could result in significant changes to the traditional family system, potentially leading to a more inclusive family structure that includes various forms of partnership beyond the heterosexual norm. However, this shift is met with considerable resistance and poses a fundamental challenge to the continuity of the traditional family system in Kenya. This situation highlights the need for gradual cultural and legal adaptation, taking into account both the preservation of family structures and the recognition of emerging family forms.

Themes of Stigma, Legal Protection, and Family Dynamics

Findings: The review identified several recurring themes within the literature, including societal stigma, legal barriers, and the erosion of traditional family values. Stigma associated with same-sex relationships in Kenya is pervasive and is deeply intertwined with religious and cultural beliefs that view homosexuality as immoral and unnatural. LGBTQ+ individuals face significant challenges in both public and private spheres, particularly when it comes to family relationships. Families often shun LGBTQ+ members, leading to a breakdown in familial support and social cohesion (Mutunga, 2014). Additionally, legal barriers continue to be a major impediment to the acceptance of same-sex marriages, contributing to the societal stigma that further isolates LGBTQ+ individuals. These legal challenges are coupled with the fear that the recognition of same-sex marriages would undermine the traditional family system by destabilizing gender roles, marital norms, and the assumption of heterosexuality as the default.

Discussion: The themes of stigma, legal exclusion, and cultural resistance are central to understanding the implications of same-sex marriages for the continuity of the family system in Kenya. The legal and social exclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals creates a hostile environment for same-sex relationships and contributes to the marginalization of LGBTQ+ families. While



these issues are deeply rooted in societal and cultural beliefs, they also offer an opportunity for a broader discussion about the nature of family, marriage, and equality in Kenya. Moving forward, these discussions must focus on how to reconcile traditional family structures with the evolving rights of LGBTQ+ individuals in a way that does not lead to social fracture.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study reveal the profound negative impact of same-sex marriages on the continuity of the family system in Kenya. These marriages culturally disrupt customary values and norms, which lead to tensions in families and society. The inability of same-sex unions to perform traditional gender roles, such as giving birth or maintaining patrilineal descent, undermines the cultural fabric of the family system (Omondi, 2022). This loss of cultural values creates conflict within families and communities, leading to the marginalization of LGBTQ+ individuals and their partners (Maina, 2021). The withholding of same-sex couples from accessing cultural ceremonies and rituals further disintegrates the intergenerational transmission of cultural values, delegitimizing the continuity of the family system (Lewis, 2023). Socially, stigmatization of same-sex marriages has led to family fragmentation as LGBTQ+ individuals are rejected or disowned by their families (Nyambura, 2021). The fragmentation disrupts the social support systems that are essential for continuity of the family, making the same-sex couples and their children vulnerable and stigmatized (Otieno, 2021). Children from same-sex families tend to experience discrimination and bullying, inhibiting their socialization and integration into the wider society (Mutua, 2022). Stigma also generates divisions and conflicts among kinship groups, further derailing the family system (Kipkorir, 2023). Legally, not recognizing same-sex marriages has exacerbated challenges for LGBTQ+ people and families. Same-sex couples are often disadvantaged when it comes to inheritance, access to health care, and spousal benefits that are among the determinants of maintaining stability and sustainability of families (Ochieng, 2021). The absence of laws supporting same-sex marriages creates uncertainty for children who are raised in such families since they may find it difficult to access education, medical services, and other essential services (Mwangi, 2023). This disenfranchisement by the law also derails the family structure, causing fragmentation and conflict within kinship groups (Mutua, 2022). Demographically, the inability of same-sex couples to have children biologically is a concern in the perpetuation of the family system, particularly in rural areas where the traditional forms of the family are more traditional and there is a higher pressure to have children (Misigo, 2022). The inability of gay couples to fulfill traditional expectations regarding procreation and ancestry undermines the continuity of the family system, particularly in societies where children are considered crucial to maintaining cultural and economic resources (Omondi, 2022). While other methods of having children are sought by some same-sex couples, such as adoption or assisted reproductive technologies, these options are often unavailable due to legal and social barriers (Gitau, 2019). This study has identified several key strategies through which Kenya can achieve the continuity of its traditional family system and values, ensuring that societal progress is balanced with respect for cultural heritage.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The preservation of the traditional family system in Kenya, where marriage is often seen as a union between a man and a woman, is an important concern amidst the evolving dynamics brought by same-sex marriages. The following recommendations are aimed at preserving the traditional family system while ensuring that the rights and dignity of all individuals, including those in same-sex relationships, are respected. These recommendations seek to balance respect for cultural and societal norms with a progressive, inclusive approach that maintains the stability and continuity of the family system:

1. **Boost Awareness Through Cultural Dialogue:** Develop inclusive education and awareness programs that address same-sex marriage through respectful dialogue rooted in African cultural values. This can foster understanding while acknowledging traditional beliefs, thus reducing stigma and promoting coexistence.
2. **Promote Family-Centered Policy Reforms:** Advocate for policy frameworks that uphold the rights of all citizens while preserving the continuity of the traditional African family. Legal guidelines could be crafted to distinguish between cultural preservation and discrimination, ensuring societal stability without marginalization.
3. **Integrate Inclusive LGBTQ+ Topics in Schools:** Introduce age-appropriate discussions on diversity, family structures, and human rights in educational settings to shape open-minded future generations while respecting community values and norms.
4. **Equip Leaders to Promote Diversity and Inclusion:** Provide targeted training and capacity building for elders, faith leaders, and community influencers to foster constructive leadership in navigating changing social dynamics without undermining cultural identity.
5. **Improve Legal and Social Support Systems:** Establish confidential and accessible support systems—legal, psychological, and social—for individuals in same-sex relationships to reduce vulnerability and promote mental and emotional well-being without disrupting social harmony.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. **Comparative Study of Rural vs. Urban Perceptions toward Same-Sex Marriages in Kenya:** Investigate how geographic, economic, and educational differences influence attitudes toward same-sex unions and family dynamics.
2. **Impact of Media Representation on Public Perceptions of LGBTQ+ Families in Kenya:** Explore how local media, social media, and international content shape public discourse and perceptions of non-traditional family models.
3. **Children in Same-Sex Households: Social Integration and Identity Formation:** Examine the psychological, educational, and social experiences of children raised in same-sex families within Kenyan society.
4. **Role of African Customary Law in Shaping National Policy on Family and Marriage:** Analyze how customary legal systems interact with constitutional law in matters of marriage and family rights, with implications for LGBTQ+ inclusion.



5. **Evolving Definitions of Family in Contemporary African Societies:** Conduct regional studies that investigate how modern African communities redefine “family” amidst global cultural shifts, migration, and changing values.

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