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Child- and Youth-Headed Households: An Alternative Solution to Chaotic Family Situations in Post-genocide Rwandan Society

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Introduction

Estimations from 2005 concluded that 290,000 children younger than eighteen years in Rwanda were orphans, and this was one of the highest numbers worldwide of children who have lost both parents (UNICEF, 2006). In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of double orphans without any relatives is increasing (Barnett, 2005; UNICEF, 2006). East and Southern Africa has been confronted with a growing number of child- and youth-headed households since the 1980s, and this was linked to the impacts of the AIDS epidemic (Ayieko, 1997; Evans, 2005; Foster et al., 1997). The large number of orphans without any adult relatives in Rwanda (Boris et al., 2006; UNICEF, 2007) was due to the combined effects of the 1994 genocide and the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Ntaganira et al., 2012). AIDS orphans exhibited higher levels of mental distress

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than those who were orphaned by genocide or other causes (Caserta et al., 2016).

The dual impact of violent conflict and the HIV/AIDS epidemic has led to dramatic changes in family units and systems of care and created radical shifts in the composition of households (Barnett, 2005; Christiansen, 2005). This trend is seen as a symbol of the social safety net breaking down (Roalkvam, 2005). While the presence of an adult seems to protect children from abuse and facilitate access to resources (Ruiz-Casares, 2009), older siblings are generally the ones in charge of running the household as well as raising income in the settings of what is known as child- and youth-headed households (Ruiz-Casares, 2009).

Estimations state that the genocide has left 10% of children aged 0–18 years old as orphans (Pells, 2012; Thurman et al., 2008). Ten years after the genocide against the Tutsis, UNICEF (2004) estimated that 101,000 people were living in 42,000 YHH (youth-headed households) in Rwanda. UNICEF (2009) has stated that in the 1990s, for example, Rwanda had one of the highest proportions of youth-led families in the world and today, over 100,000 children are believed to live in such households. A study by Mirza (2006) has stated that about 10% (65,000 households) and over 300,000 children were living within youth-headed households in Rwanda; and that among those youth-headed households, 90% were headed by girls, placing young girls at a higher risk of sexual exploitation and transactional sex (Mirza, 2006). Orphans and YHH are particularly vulnerable to maltreatment because of marginalization from the community (Ntaganira et al., 2012).

With the decline in the traditional systems that included long-standing approaches to fostering orphans, a new phenomenon has emerged whereby young people are heading households as a "family" without parents. The phenomenon of leading the households by children or by youths is due to the fact that their parents died due to conflict, genocide, or disease. These child- and youth-headed households are seen by many as signaling a breakdown in social stability (Roalkvam, 2005). The naming of child-headed households (CHHs) or of youth-headed household (YHHs) depends on the definition of child and of youth in countries where the households are headed by orphans and occupied by younger siblings. A CHH phenomenon is defined as a family

unit headed by the oldest person who is under the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2010). While the YHH is similar to the CHH, the head of the youth-headed household is older than the child age. In child-headed households and in youth-headed households, the oldest sibling becomes the head of the household and fulfills the responsibility of caring for the younger siblings (Schaal & Elbert, 2006; Van Breda, 2010; Veale et al., 2001). The orphans take on adult roles they had not been prepared for (Ntuli et al., 2020).

Most African orphans have been absorbed into informal fostering systems (Masmas et al., 2004; Monasch & Boerma, 2004). Such systems, however, are increasingly overwhelmed, and many orphans head households (Deininger et al., 2003; Watts et al., 2005). The number of children heading households in sub-Saharan Africa is reported to be growing (Ayieko, 1997). A survey conducted in South Africa in 2006 showed that 122,000 (0.67%) of the country's children were living in child-headed households (Meintjes et al., 2009).

While the number of orphans in many countries of sub-Saharan Africa is increasing on the one hand, on the other hand, there is a move from community-oriented living towards a greater individualization of social organization (see, for example, Hertrich & Lesclinigand, 2001). In Rwanda this move is occurring despite the country's strong emphasis on community and consensual approaches to problem solving. Indeed, the traditional family and extended family structures suffered a grave blow as a consequence of the genocide against the Tutsi and its aftermath (MIGEPROF, 2011).

Youth-headed households are still a relatively new phenomenon about which little is known (Evans, 2010; Uwera et al., 2012). However, it is clear that these households share some principal characteristics: They form a "family" that provides support and continuity (McAdam-Crisp, 2006); they deal with the adult responsibilities of supporting themselves at an age when the care and the protection of an adult are normally needed (Schaal & Elbert, 2006); and they assume an anthropological and psychosocial position for which they were never prepared (Boris et al., 2006).

However, it is as yet unclear how these youth-headed households deal with conflict in the households. Since researches show that conflict is

a part of family life where adults are generally present in that conflict occurs between husband and wife, between parent and child (e.g., Canary & Canary, 2013; Malek, 2010), and between siblings (e.g., Canary & Canary, 2013; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Howe et al., 2002; Malek, 2010)—this begs the question: How do children acting as the head of a family of siblings deal with the inevitable family conflict? Not only are these family units made up of siblings, but they are also siblings living in a new form of alternative family (see Bartoszuk & Pittman, 2010), caring for younger siblings and fulfilling other adult responsibilities in the absence of adult supervision. Further, when there is conflict between siblings living in traditional families, parents can intervene; but in a youth-headed household the siblings are obliged to live together, as siblings and as "special" family members, in a lifestyle and pattern of authority initiated by their parents but continued in a non-traditional structure that has been arrived at with no choice in the matter. Spouses in traditional families choose freely to get married and live together, while the youth-headed household does not involve choice by all parties. The head of a youth-headed household lacks the moral authority that accompanies public support of the parental role: "you should obey your parents," but no one says you should obey your brother or your sister.

The research described here investigated conflict and dissension between siblings living in youth-headed households as a new kind of "alternative family" (Bartoszuk & Pittman, 2010). The research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the youth-headed households that participated in the present study?
2. Do members of such households believe that there is undue conflict and dissension in their youth-headed households?
3. What do household members perceive to be the causes of conflict or dissension?
4. What are the consequences of these conflicts?
5. How do youth-headed household members feel when conflict or dissension occurs?

6. What strategies do youth-headed household members use to deal with conflict and dissension? What can be done to help these families headed by young people to achieve a healthy life?

Methods

Field, Population of the Study, and Selection of Participants

This research was conducted in Huye District, in its four administrative sectors: Ngoma, Mbazi, Gishamvu, and Rwaniro. Huye is one of the Districts of the Southern Province in Rwanda. In Huye District, the population is estimated at 319,000 and, as in other Districts of Rwanda, that population is young, with 52% aged 19 or younger (NISR, 2012a). In Huye District, 3% of the population aged 0–20 years is composed of double orphans, the national rate being 2.7% (NISR, 2012a).

A qualitative method based on the "basic interpretative research" approach (Merriam, 2002) was selected. This approach is recommended for research when little is known on the topic to be explored (Grenier, 2005), such as the nature of conflict and dissension management among the members of a household headed by a youthful sibling examined in the present research. We gathered our data in focus group discussions because these interactions are known to help capture youth experiences more effectively than structured survey research (see, for example, Berg, 1995). Further, over time it has been shown that focus group discussion generates data that is extremely rich and of high quality (Ashar & Lane, 1991), and that this method has a unique ability to generate data based on the synergy and the stimulation of the group interaction (Catterall & Maclaran, 1997; Hess, 1968) because group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Seven focus group discussions were conducted. These groups were composed of double orphans who were heading households of siblings and who agreed freely and voluntarily to give information about conflict and dissension in their homes. Selection and recruitment of participants

was facilitated by the local administration in collaboration with two non-governmental organizations called, respectively, "Association Modest et Innocent (AMI)" and "*Igiti cy'Ubugingo Centre (IUC)*". These two NGOs work with double orphans living in youth-headed households in the four administrative sectors, which were in a rural area. The data collection was carried out between December 2011 and January 2012 at convenient locations in the four administrative sectors.

Research Approach

Two moderators including the principal investigator and two assistants were recruited from among our colleagues on the basis that they had experiences with the community and were therefore comfortable in engaging the youth participants. The moderators underwent two days of training on how to conduct focus group discussions and on the ethics of research with human being as participants. The moderators were provided with a guiding agenda of research questions in Kinyarwanda, the national local language, to use as the tool for the discussions. Keeping in mind the overall research objective of seeking to understand conflict and dissension between siblings living in youth-headed households, the research guide was constructed so that participants could answer open-ended questions pertaining to each to the following themes:

1. the participants' beliefs about the existence of undue conflict and dissension in their youth-headed households;
2. the perceptions of the participants as household members with respect to the causes of such conflict or dissension;
3. the consequences of conflict and dissension on the households;
4. the feelings of youth-headed household members when conflict or dissension occurs;
5. the strategies used by youth-headed household members to deal with conflict and dissension; and
6. recommendations from the participants on what can be done to assist these families achieve a healthy life.

Additionally, in order to generate further information, the moderators asked probing questions during the interview sessions to assist with the clarification of ideas. Each participant signed an informed consent form, and an authorization permitting the recording of the discussion was obtained at the start of each focus group session. With one exception where only female participants were available, separate and parallel sessions were conducted for each gender, to maximize the homogeneity of group members (Brown, 1999) and thus facilitate easy communication. The total number of focus group discussions was seven and included four to seven participants. To promote a relaxed environment during the sessions, participants were given a soft drink as refreshment. At the end of each session participants were financially compensated by receiving 1500 Rwandan francs (RWFs) or about $2 US for the day spent traveling to the location of the session and the time spent in the focus group discussion.

Data Analysis

The method of data analysis was based on the approach to content analysis developed by L'Écuyer (1989, 1990). This method shows the essential stages of content analysis by identifying themes and subthemes in what is expressed by participants on a given topic. All seven tapes from the seven focus group discussions were transcribed into seven transcripts, producing a total of ninety-four pages. These were translated from Kinyarwanda into English. The Kinyarwanda and English versions were then read repeatedly by the principal investigator to "absorb the content" of the discussions (Baribeau, 2009).

The narratives contained in the transcripts were analyzed in order to locate the points of view given by the participants in response to the questions posed in connection with the objective of the study (Duchesne & Haegel, 2005). The coding was carried out using NVIVO as software for qualitative data coding, which helped in the elaboration of the codes (Duchesne & Haegel, 2005). Every line, paragraph, and/or section of text was given a specific code. As the coding progressed, the code definitions continued to be challenged and new codes were developed

when properties were identified in the data that did not fit the existing codes. During the data analysis, there was constant movement between the raw data and the analysis (see Baribeau, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; L'Écuyer, 1989; Paillé, 1994) and constant comparison of categories and codes in each new transcript. The purpose was to fully develop overarching categories for each individual group code. The process was continued until no new code emerged.

Results and Discussion

Data of this qualitative and exploratory research are presented under the following broad headings relating to the semi-structured interview guide previously described: characteristics of the participants; the existence and signs of conflict and dissension in youth-headed households; the causes of conflict in youth-headed households; consequences which arise from conflict and dissension; the feelings of the heads of households when conflict and dissension occur; means used by youth-headed households to cope with conflict and dissension; the expressed needs of youth-headed households for coping with conflict; and measures that could be taken to help the youth-headed households mitigate the effects of serious conflict and dissension.

Characteristics and Structure of the Focus Group Discussion

Table 9.1 summarizes some basic information about the groups. See Column D for the total number of participants. In Column F, the acronym YHH stands for "youth-headed household."

Column A shows the number identifying the focus groups discussions from 1 to 7. The first focus group is identified as 11, the second as 21, the third as 31, the fourth as 41, the fifth as 51, the sixth as 61, and the seventh focus group is identified as 71. Column B pertains to the gender of the participants and shows that focus groups 11, 41, and 71 are composed of male participants, while focus groups 21, 31, 51, and 61

Table 9.1 Characteristics and structure of the focus group discussions (FGDs)

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Identi-fying # of the FGD[a]	Gender of the members of FGD[a]	Ages and age range of the participants in FGD[a]	Number of FGD members[a]	Smallest and largest size of households headed by the participants in the FGDs[a]	Period headed/lived in the current YHHs (years)[a]	Range of monthly income estimations in RWFs ($1USD = approx. 650 RWFs) < means less than[a]
11	Male	19; 20; 21; 24; 26; 17 (range: 17–26)	6	2–5	12; 4; 8; 4; 3; 4	<10,000; <0,000; <10,000; <10,000; <10,000
21	Female	28; 31; 22; 23; 17; 23; 21 (range: 17–31)	7	2–8	18; 17; 2; 2; 2; 4; 5	<10,000; <10,000; <10,000; <10,000; <10,000; <10,000
31	Female	24; 21; 21; 29; 24; one missing (range: 21–29)	6	2–4	2; 5; 4; 4; 3	Range 10,000–30,000; <10,000; <10,000; <10,000; <10,000
41	Male	17; 20; 21; 21 (range: 17–21)	4	2–3	3; 4; 1; 17	Range 10,000–30,000; Range 10,000–30,000; Range 10,000–30,000; Range 10,000–30,000
51	Female	24; 20; 20; 17; 23; 17 (range: 17–24)	6	2–5	2; 9; 9; 1; 6; 1	<10,000; <10,000; <10,000; <10,000; <10,000
61	Female	19; 30; 20; 20; 21; 18 (range: 18–30)	6	2–7	1; 17; 9; 3; 4; 4	Range 10,000–30,000; Range 10,000–30,000; <10,000; <10,000; Range 10,000–30,000; <10,000
71	Male	25; 28; 24; 22; 22; 27 (range: 22–28)	6	2–5	17; 15; 13; 4; 17; 6	<10,000; <10,000; <10,000; <10,000

Total: 41

[a]Explanation of the information contained in Table 9.1

are composed of female participants. Column C lists the ages of all the participants in the study and the age range of each of the focus groups. Participants who were 21 years of age at the time of the data collection constitute the largest single age group (7 out of a total of 41 participants), followed by participants aged 20 (6 out of 41), and those aged 17 and 24 (each age contributing 5 participants out of 41). Column D shows that the size of the focus groups varied from 4 to 7 participants.

For each household headed by the participants in focus group discussions, Column E indicates the smallest and the largest number of household members. For example, the smallest size among the households headed by the participants in focus group discussion 11 is 2 people, while the largest household comprises 5 people. Similarly, the smallest number of members among the households headed by the participants in focus group discussion 21 is 2 while the largest is 8. Looking at the sizes of the households headed by the participants in general in Column E, the households ranged from 2 members to a high of 8 members. These household sizes limits are similar to the general size of households in Rwanda where 84% of households have between two and seven members (NISR, 2012b).

Column F shows respectively the period that the participants have been heading or living in the youth-headed households. The time spent without parents is ranged from 1 to 18 years. The presentation of the ages in Column C and the duration of time in Column F are done respectively. This means, for example, that the first participant in focus group 11 is aged 19 years (first in Column C) and has been living in his youth-headed household for 12 years (first in Column F). The next participant in focus group 11, who is aged 20 years (second in Column C), has been living in his youth-headed household during 4 years (same participant as second in Column F).

There are two observations here: Some participants lived in youth-headed households before they actually became the head of the household, for example, when the head left the family in order to marry. For this reason, in Table 9.1, some participants have the same age or almost the same age as the time they have spent in the current youth-headed household. One 21-year-old participant—the third participant in the Columns C and F for focus group 11—said that he had been living in his

youth-headed household for 8 years. Otherwise, this participant should have been heading his household at the age of 21 years minus 8 years, or at 13 years of age, which was not the case. However, there were also many participants who were less than 18 when their parents died and they had started to act as head of households. This accords with previous observations (see, for example, Thurman et al., 2006; Ward & Eyber, 2009).

Column G shows the monthly income of each participant as they mentioned it at the time of the data collection. The presentation of the mentioned monthly income is made in the same respective order as in Columns C and F. Even though there are difficulties with the concept of income in predominantly agricultural countries, and people living on subsistence agriculture may not be good at computing the value of their produce, the majority of participants said they have a household income of less than 10,000 Rwandan francs per month (less than $15 US per month); this means that participants are extremely poor. The average consumption per poor adult equivalent in real terms in 2011 was RWFs 123,891 at the national level (NISR, 2012b) and RWFs 106,754 in the Southern Province (NISR, 2012a). At the national level, 44.9% of the population are identified as poor, and 56.5% in the Southern Province (NISR, 2012a), where Huye District is located. The National Institute of Statistics report (NISR, 2012a, 2012b) does not clearly state if the average consumption reported is per year or per month. Still, overall, there is no doubt, based on the data, that the majority of youth-headed household members are very poor.

Existence and Signs of Conflict and Dissension in Youth-Headed Households

As was expected, conflict and dissension does exist in youth-headed households and tends to manifest in reclusiveness and a lack of positive interaction between members of the household. The experience can be summed up in the following example:

> [Y]ou prefer loneliness or directly you go to bed, whereas you should share the meal prepared by your brother who remained at home…we can spend all the night brawling; they are quarrelling unceasingly, it is always the brawl between them. (11)

Causes of Conflict in Youth-Headed Households

Drinking, the use of drugs, harassing others, young female family members becoming pregnant, the selfishness of the oldest (and some of the other household members), property and disagreement around the sharing of property (and income): These are said to be the causes of conflict in households headed by young people. Participants expressed the sources of conflict by saying:

> As far as I am concerned, I have got an unintended child, I have my little sister and she does not respect me and she always tells me that I have given birth to an illegal child and this always causes conflict. (21)

> When these children take or use drugs, they enter into perpetual/everlasting conflict and this may even lead them to kill each other. (41)

> Conflict among non-accompanied children may result from the fact that there is no one to teach them to behave, as for most of the time you see them in the same age range. (71)

> You may live for example with your young brothers and sisters and take care of them, but little by little when you become old enough and mature you become selfish and forget to look after them. (21).

> As my friends mentioned, when children live alone, sometimes the eldest becomes impossible and feels that he/she can't get advice from his/her younger brothers/sisters, and thus acts like a dictator towards them. (61)

A major source of conflict reported across groups is a lack of agreement on issues related to property left by the parents, such as such the land and the cows—disagreement on the sharing out of property that was held

in common in the youth-headed households. These disagreements were described as follows:

> The dissensions can come from the possessions that your parents left you. If you are the elder one of the family, you may be guided by your own interests to the detriment of your brother. You can for example sell a field [land] without informing your brother. When he finds out, he will complain, wanting to know why you did it without him knowing. Thus, conflict may occur between you, because what you do, you do without consulting him, since your heritage is common and shared. (31)

> When one of the members gets married, it is also said to be a time of conflict/dissension.

> There were some cows at home and my elder brother got married and then he wanted to take them to his household and we refused and this created conflict among us. (71)

Siblings in youth-headed households are victims of poverty and hunger that make it difficult for them to get on well. The households are not able to satisfy the basic needs of their members and that situation may lead them into conflict and dissension. As the participants noted:

> Poverty problems may result in conflict…It happens that you lack something to eat and conflict may occur from this situation. (21)

> In concrete terms, it has been said that conflict often results from poverty, which prevent children in the family from getting on well with each other. Indeed, you can find children who have no parents but live together in harmony because they are never in need. So, you can't realize that they are orphans because they don't come into conflict, thanks to their well-being. (51)

In terms of the sharing of responsibility, youth-headed household members think that it is not only the head (who has to be playing the parental role) who is responsible for getting household needs met; each

sibling member of the household who is able to do so needs to make a contribution. As one of the participants said:

> For example, if they want to grow beans, they ask the eldest to buy the seed, but he/she has no means; so, when he/she suggests that everybody should contribute, they disagree with him/her and insist that it's up to the eldest to provide the seed. And thus the conflict starts. (51)

In the youth-headed households as well as in other kind of families, the failure to take and fulfill responsibilities is a source of discord and dissension.

Consequences that Arise from Conflict and Dissension in Youth-Headed Households

Consequences of dissension in youth-headed households, as in other families, may include members leaving home and the break-up of the family. Examples to illustrate these points are related by participants in the following examples:

> When there is conflict, a child can flee the family and go in the street to become a "street child." (11)

> The first consequence is to leave the family home and to go to wander in the street. (41)

> They can leave the house, each going his own way, and live a vagabond life. (61)

When there is conflict or dissension, some sibling members of youth-headed households do not try to deal with it but leave the home. Leaving home may be aimed at searching for better living conditions, but this may end in failure. This failure can be translated, for a girl, in the experience of an unwanted pregnancy:

If it is a girl, she may not go in the street but she may unintentionally fall pregnant because you do not get along suitably in your family…you may find, for example, some child who fails to live in the family and prefers to live and go to town and when she gets pregnant there she comes back and finds you there without any sufficient means to take care of her. (11)

The consequence of conflict/dissension in youth-headed households may be mental suffering and drug abuse, as in these examples:

You will understand that he/she has a mental disease like trauma, etc. (71)

Now, I have stomach pains. Very recently, I had a stomach attack…you may feel your heart subjugated by sadness…You may miss the sleep; you may have a generalized malaise, etc. (31)

Drug abuse as a refuge may lead to or itself constitute health problems expressed in mental suffering and in physical illness:

If there are problems in the family, they take refuge in the consumption of drugs and other narcotics. (31)

You may start taking drugs in order to soothe the pain and forget many things you meet in life. (71)

Besides, his/her younger brothers suffer from it enormously. (11)

In situations of conflict and dissension in youth-headed households, if members are not fully capable of work this lead to poverty:

From this situation, the families' members cease to work, become poor, and then conflicts increase…Because of living in disagreement and misunderstanding, you do not work, and you become poor. (21)

Another consequence may be extreme poverty because when there is conflict you cannot work in order to develop yourselves…A severe consequence, as I told you, from my experience, is poverty. (71).

There is the poverty which is due to the misunderstandings in general. (11)

The consequence I find is that they never achieve what they had planned, because of those conflicts. (51)

Feelings of Heads of Households When Conflict and Dissension Is Present in Their Families

The heads of household who participated in this research reported a variety of feelings and emotions. These are related to psychological distress, to social isolation from neighbors and from the support of the authorities, to neighbors who made the conflict between siblings worse, to lack of motivation, and to suicidal thoughts and negative sentiments about themselves as heads of household. One example follows:

[It] is the feeling of loneliness and lack of motivation to do something because you do not see any good coming from doing something…lack of people who show they care for you by talking to you, to such an extent that you feel you are hating all people…If you have a problem you lack a neighbor who can come and comfort you…When conflicts occur, frankly speaking, my experience is that no one cares about these orphan children. (71)

Living in conflict and dissension make the heads of households feel stressed, discouraged, and abandoned by a society that does not care about them. Some report feeling like abnormal people. Others remarked on an absence of anyone they could approach for comfort, be it neighbors or authorities. They reported that when they needed to talk to an authority figure, they were afraid to approach that person. They feel abandoned and socially isolated. In turn, because of this feeling of social isolation, they prefer to keep quiet and not tell anyone about their conflict-related problems:

There are moments when one is really in distress, moments when there is nobody who approaches you to comfort you and even the authorities

do not come to see you; you never see them…you feel lost. Even when you would need to talk to an authority, you are afraid to approach it…we live in extreme conflict…I did not understand, I even wanted to commit suicide…Sometimes, one decides to commit suicide. (31)

Participants reported that in cases of conflict and dissension in their family, the neighbors do not help to solve conflict but instead say things to the elder or younger brother of the head that are intended to worsen the situation and even harm the children's property:

As children living alone, we often face several problems. Neighbors despise us, and harm our property because we don't have any support-…With this, neighbors themselves make life difficult for you, because you don't have any friend among them who can take your defense…-Sometimes you find yourself in a bad neighborhood, but you can't do anything about it. You are aware that you live only thanks to God's will, and not others' will. (61)

This is consistent with the assertion that some neighbors act spitefully toward the young heads of households. Youth-headed households feel a lack of motivation to deal with their responsibilities. They have no motivation to work and may fall into depression, realizing that their previous actions are ineffective:

The consequence is the feeling of loneliness and lack of motivation to do something because you do not see any good coming from doing something…lack of people who care for you by talking to you to such an extent that you feel you are hating all people. (71)

Sometimes sibling members of youth-headed households living in discordant circumstances have suicidal thoughts. This may be due to conflict, but also may also be linked to situations of social isolation, negative emotionality, and depressive symptoms. Some household members may decide to move far away from their siblings when there is conflict and dissension in their families. The unhealthy situation can lead the heads of youth-headed households to regret being the eldest of the family, as they fear to approach the authorities to speak about their problems:

> Most of the time we first lose self-control and regret being the eldest in the family, because of the problems. So, we feel swamped by events but manage to support them, since there is no other solution; sometimes you ask yourself why you are still alive, and you wish you had died. (51)

The feelings of this YHH are consistent with those of double orphans who are heading households in Uganda who experienced their situation as a huge and complex problem for themselves as well as for people in their villages. However, these situations could improve if actions focused on practical and psychological issues as well as on sensitization about the children's situation could be initiated. In addition to the fact that these children need adult guidance to become citizens who act in accordance with the expectations in their communities, material aid is important in order to reduce the children's experiences of being "different" and constantly experiencing survival anxieties (Dalen et al., 2009).

Means or Strategies Employed by Youth-Headed Households to Face up to Family Conflict

In order to cope with conflict and dissension, participants reported sharing their concerns with peers and people of the same age enduring the same experience, their own friends or a parent's friends. Members of youth-headed households reported that they mainly prefer to talk to people with the same experience of conflict and dissension, preferably other young people, their peers, when discussing their experiences and seeking help in finding solutions, rather than having recourse to older people:

> Instead of making recourse to the old people…better is that young people of your age intervene in your problems (a girl or a boy), contrary to what adults can do…Another means is to invite another young person of your age to come to intervene in your problems in order to help you to reconcile. (11)

It is necessary to seek people who have the same problems as you to talk about it. One exposes his; the other does the same thing. After that, each one feels relieved; each one feels calm and less worried in his heart. (31)

When heads of sibling households encounter family discord, they can go to their own friends or the friends of their dead parents and ask them to intervene with their advice. In conflict and dissension situations, they would be willing to search for help in the extended family—an aunt or uncle—but in general such family members no longer exist:

I run to contact other family members like my aunt because the neighbors do nothing but telling my elder or younger brother things that are intended to worsen the situation…You try among the family members even though you sometimes lack them. You may lack an aunt or uncle. (71)

Needs in Relation to Conflict and Dissension Between Siblings in the Youth-Headed Households

Youth-headed households reported on what they think can be done in order to assist sibling-headed families to no longer exist in serious situations of conflict and dissension. They were clear that what they need most of all is economic assistance and psychosocial support:

Financial help for poverty reduction is helpful, because most of the time conflicts come from poverty. (21)

I think that there should be organizations which can deal with the studies of these children since they are intelligent. Those who cannot reach secondary studies can profit from vocational training which will help them to fend for themselves in their future like the others. (31)

For my part, I need assistance so that I can get my own home, because I'm about to be chased from where I'm living now…We need your help because, as the eldest of the family, we are like parents for our young brothers and sisters. When they need something you are unable to find,

such as lotion, soap or food, you are overtaken by problems. I think you should help us. (51)

Clearly, the participants in this study need economic assistance to be helped out of poverty. Youth-headed households need to be approached by counselors and advisers and they need advocacy. Heads of household said that they needed advice, counseling, advocacy, and adult guidance:

In these problems especially lies the conflict that is found in children-led households…their lack of willingness to solve those problems because these children do not have anyone to advocate for them…frankly speaking, my experience is that no one cares about these orphan children. Orphans, as they lack means, should have people who advocate for them in law, in the courts, because there are many people who have problems in courts and lack advocacy because they do not know the laws and are victimized in front of the law. (71)

Youth-headed households need to be approached regularly and specifically by community leaders, neighbors, and friends. This can help them, especially those who are very young, to overcome the lack of role models, as they put it. It would also help them to deal with the feeling of being marginalized within community structures and give them guidance. As they noted:

Sometimes, children-headed families lack proper education…Beside this, when one takes drugs, this worsens the situation and makes you live in disagreement or conflict. (41)

Conflict among children without parents may result from the fact that there is no one to help them in how to behave, as for most of the time you are with people in the same age range. You notice that some of them drink beer or take drugs whereas other do not, which is seen as a problem which has the potential to separate them or generate misunderstanding among them. (71)

Actions to Be Taken

There is an urgent need for siblings in youth-headed households to be specifically approached in a helpful and supportive way by leaders, counselors, and advisers. There is also an urgent need for advocacy:

I find that it is good that there is an adviser with whom to exchange ideas; but a mature person, who is capable, not a child as we are, so that we can develop. (11)

To have counselors and advisers for everyday life…There should be people who can train and advise children-headed families about their everyday life and show them how they can handle their problems when they occur…Neighbors, friends, people to be near them and advise them to live in peace. (21)

We also need advocacy. (71)

Youth-headed households also need the community leaders to approach them in order to help them in solving their problems:

Leaders should approach orphans to know their problems in order to solve them properly…There should be a meeting of children who live together where they discuss their problems. Even one meeting in three months may be sufficient. (21)

They [the authorities] should set up a secure place where they can find these children…One wonders how he will live; when you do not have somebody, an authority to listen to you, to look into your problems, you feel lost. Thus we would like them to approach us where we are, in our villages, our cells, and our sectors…strongly encourage all the basic authorities to take care of the survival of these children, to know how they live from day to day. (31)

They should schedule a day when we can meet and discuss our problems. This is how they can be informed about the problems each child has…I have never seen any intervention of the authorities when it comes to

children to live alone or care for other children. When we are called in general you do not have ways to give your ideas. If you are an authority who cannot take at least one day a year to visit those children, you cannot know their problems. What I am telling you is true…You cannot know what the child thinks or that there are people who want to harm him in different ways if you don't talk to him. (71)

Mentoring interventions cost little, and have been shown to be effective in a variety of settings (Dubois et al., 2002). Successful mentoring programs may also help to renew social interconnectedness in Rwanda (Boris et al., 2006). Specific structures may need to be put in place to deal with the issues of daily life and regulation confronting youth-headed households. The findings of this study suggest that it is very important to pass laws that specifically recognize the existence of youth-headed households and regulate and support their rights and duties in the same way as the laws that govern other kinds of families. These laws should also deal with the property of such households.

In a country that has a high number of youth-headed households (Lee, 2012) that is likely to increase because traditional foster care is declining, such special measures are clearly necessary. As the older members of these households take over the parental role at an early age and in an unusual way, following the death of their parents, they face challenges that sometimes cause them to regret their seniority in the family. Specific strategies should be put in place to support them in order to preserve their mental health. One such strategy would be to set up a specific and clear structure for their material and psychosocial support.

Because so many members of the youth-headed households that participated in this study stated that they feel a lack of motivation to action, a sense of isolation, and a lack of administrative and social support, this research suggests that it is important to set up a specific national structure to employ strategies dealing with all of the daily life issues experienced in such households. Included in these policies and approaches should be a special channel of effective advocacy for youth-headed households. Our data shows that there is currently no specific institution that supports youth-headed households; they have nowhere to go where they can find advocacy specific to their needs.

This chapter focuses on the resilience of children facing extreme hardship and adversity. It is based on participatory research with children living in child-headed households in Rwanda. It emphasizes the importance of listening to children's voices and recognizing their capacities when designing interventions to strengthen their psychosocial well-being. This study shows that children have developed innovative and profitable coping strategies and some have even developed the capacity to thrive through their situation of extreme hardship. The study of these coping strategies suggests that the children displayed resourcefulness, responsibility, and a sense of morality. However, when the stressors in a child's life became too great, they tended to employ negative, and potentially harmful, strategies to cope. A community-based approach should focus on strengthening overall community well-being, and should aim to build on the capacities of children, such as their positive coping mechanisms and resilient characteristics. At the same time, it should appropriately address their areas of vulnerability. Existing protective factors should also be identified and further developed in interventions (Ward & Eyber, 2009).

These youth-headed households constitute a new kind of alternative family with a unique structure and social and demographical characteristics that need official recognition and the rights associated with that recognition. These youth-headed households require specific regulations that give them the same rights that are enjoyed by traditional adult-headed households. These rights would enable siblings in youth-headed families to have the same entitlement to socio-economic support—(e.g., the V2020 *Umurenge* program, one of the strategic programs for fighting poverty in Rwanda)—as adult-headed families, and thus to emerge from the poverty that is one of the causes of conflict and dissension. Further, youth-headed households should be provided with training in family responsibilities, responsibilities like parenting and family management. As one focus group participant explained:

> Counselors can also help these children by teaching and training them. The government has a role to play as well…we want people who can come closer to us and advise us. (71)

The main aspects—signs, causes, and consequences—of conflict and dissension are present even in traditional families and in other types of alternative families (Malek, 2010; Mukashema & Sapsford, 2013; Slegh & Kimonoyo, 2010). The youth-headed households in general and those living in conflict and dissension are unique, however, in that no adult member of any other family can say that he or she needs "adult support" to solve family problems. This means that youth-headed households are constantly aware of their vulnerabilities and lack of resources. On the other hand, they have demonstrated their capacity to cope with life events and, through that, their resilience in the face of the most unfavorable situation that of being orphans without an adult presence in their family lives.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed youth-headed households (YHHs) in postgenocide Rwanda. It informed about the signs of conflict and dissension in youth-headed households, its causes, its consequences, and the feelings of the heads of these households when conflict and dissension are present. The chapter also described the means used to face these situations, the needs of the household heads in relation to such conflict and dissension between siblings, and their expressed needs so that they can be helped to no longer live with such serious discord.

Conflict does exist in youth-headed households. The most common post-conflict responses of family members are withdrawal and lack of positive interaction between members of the household. Dissension and conflict are most often triggered by behaviors such as drinking, the use of drugs, harassing others, engaging in sexual activity that leads to unintended pregnancy, the perceived selfishness of the oldest (and some other household members), different views about property and property-sharing, and disagreement around the property (and income) sharing. Additionally, siblings in youth-headed households are often the victims of poverty and hunger that compound the difficulty in getting on well with each other. These young people are unable to satisfy the basic

needs of their household members and so these privations and conditions of daily life almost inevitably lead to conflict and dissension. The consequences of conflict and dissension in youth-headed households, as in other families, are that family members leave home, endure mental suffering and drug abuse, and that some families completely break apart. Likewise, if members are not fully capable of work, the family suffers from poverty, underlining and reinforcing the cycle of conflict in the family.

The young people who live in youth-headed households where there is conflict and dissension experience psychological distress, social isolation from neighbors, lack of support from authorities, disengagement from neighbors who often make the conflict between siblings worse, and they also show lack of motivation, suicidal thoughts, and negative sentiments about themselves as heads of household. Young heads of households often lack motivation to deal with their responsibilities. In order to face conflict and dissension, participants reported sharing their experience with peers and people of the same age and same experience, including their own friends or a parent's friends.

Implications

This chapter showed that youth-headed households are distressed households whose members need economic assistance and psychosocial support. These households require outreach from counselors and advisers and they need advocacy and guidance. It is therefore recommended that specific structures be put in place to deal with all issues in their daily life for regulation. Judging by the research outputs presented in this research chapter, it seems to be of the utmost importance for the Rwandan Government to write legislation that recognizes the existence of youth-headed households (YHHs) and enshrines their rights and responsibilities in the same way as is done with the existing laws governing other kinds of families. Mental health and psychosocial interventions should be designed to reduce psychological distress among youth-headed households' members.

Not all child-headed households (CHHs) and youth-headed households (YHHs) are made of orphans today in Rwanda. From observation and from various media reports in Rwanda, there is an emerging phenomenon of adolescent pregnancy that leads to child-headed households (CHHs) and youth-headed households (YHHs). The vulnerable girl, the child-mother, whose rights are violated, may be obliged to create her own household to live in with her child and this happens in obviously inappropriate normal living conditions. Yet adolescent pregnancies are a global problem and 777,000 girls under 15 years give birth each year in developing regions around the world (UNFPA, 2015; UNICEF, 2013; WHO, 2020). A research is necessary (1) to understand the psychosocial and economic living conditions of that category of female children and adolescents; (2) to make updates on estimations of child and youth-headed households in post-genocide Rwanda.

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