Contemporary marital relationships are also increasingly being seen and defined as something *active*, meaning that one has to constantly work on the relationship to keep it alive, but perhaps much more importantly, to recognize that its success and sustainability ultimately depend on winning the trust of the other partner (Giddens, 2001). Respect for the rights of the individuals involved in a marriage is increasingly becoming central to a stable marital and family life. The traditional expectations in the roles of married couples can no longer be assumed, but are being challenged and tested. The traditional gender- based family roles that were usually clear-cut, and culturally well –defined, are being re-examined and re-evaluated. However, the intensity of these transformations also tends to vary with age, time, class and context. This is because men and women of different ages and backgrounds marry for different sets of considerations.

While some men are still seeking women who will bear them children, as well as attend to their many other needs, others seek a partner with at least an equivalent education who would be a wife, a friend and an intellectual companion. Similarly, while some married women still expect the man to be the main economic provider in the family and to function as the household head, the modern professional woman has little room for such, and would expect to be treated as an equal partner in a relationship.

The transformation in the mode of bride-wealth payments from cattle to cash for example, has not only made marriage a private affair but has also minimized the involvement of many family members in matrimonial arrangements and negotiations (Ngubane 1987). Increased social and physical mobility has also led to a great deal of freedom for the youth and the weakening of the moral authority of parents and the elders. The scenario is to be seen not only in the generational gap but also, in some instances, in the clash of values between the older and the younger generations. Nowadays there are many young people in Africa who are growing up or working in the urban areas, or in different parts of the world, away from the influence of their rural kin. Most of these people tend to organize their lives on the basis of the *practical realities* impinging

upon them, and are mostly unresponsive to the cultural imperatives of their traditional backgrounds.

Cohabitation and other new experimental alternatives to traditional marriage are prevalent in urban African families. And because modern marriages today break up quite easily, many young people are reluctant to commit themselves to a life-long Christian marriage. Others cannot marry because they cannot afford the high cost of bride- wealth. Many African Christians do not marry in Church even though they are still considered to be 'properly' married. The Christian idea of marriage, as a covenant for life, as a sacrament, and as an enduring relationship of love and fidelity, is becoming more difficult to uphold today in the context of delocalized moral values, and increased marital problems (Hastings 1973). The mutual commitment to enter into a marriage and make it work seems to be getting replaced by different options. Today, many young couples hastily enter into a marriage even as they consider options; and they are prepared to address the possibility of a break-up.

One of the things which is shown by this trend is that the notion of marriage as an *indissoluble union* is no longer widely upheld and, secondly, that many couples seem to anticipate marital problems and how to deal with them even before they get married. And when things go wrong with a relationship, as they often will, the partners quit rather than wait and try to work things out. While there is no moral basis for anyone to stay in a marriage which is deeply unhappy and riddled with violence, it is desirable for spouses to demonstrate a genuine commitment to remaining married. But this kind of commitment has become less common in modern marriages, than was the case in traditional society. Under conditions of weak 'moralnets', coupled with an emerging sense of individualism, there is usually little or no attempt by relatives and friends to reconcile the 'warring' partners. Moralnets encompass traditional values, moral responsibilities and ethical standards which not only defined socially- acceptable behaviour but, more importantly, also served to protect the interests of vulnerable groups in society. This moral delocalization accounts, in part, for the fragility of modern marriages.

In many modern African marriages, monogamous fidelity is a value which is no longer strongly upheld. A growing number of married people are now looking outside their marriages for sexual fulfillment. The number of 'outside wives' and 'outside children' is high and rising in contemporary Africa (Karanja wa Wambui, 1987). As consciousness occurs among well- educated and economically- independent African women, cultural practices such as polygyny are seen by many of them as oppressive structures,no longer respectable or appealing; but many African men, of all backgrounds, continue to marry more than one wife. The changing perceptions and expectations attached to marriage have contributed to the emergence of alternative family arrangements. However, it is the poor women, some of whom are single mothers heading their own households, who come out of this transition process worst affected and most vulnerable, particularly when they have to support their children alone, in the absence of any system of moral, social and economic obligations.

3.4 Marriage Dissolution and Family Disintegration

Traditionally, the Christian doctrine describes marriage as an indissoluble and consensual, monogamous union. According to this doctrine, marriage is a highly valued institution which is regarded as a covenant and a life-long commitment that cannot be broken. This view of marriage recognizes a conjugal unit of father, mother and their children, and disallows polygyny (Denis, 2006:3). The Church's stand on polygyny and divorce remains puritanical. In the Roman Catholic Church, for example, polygynists, divorced and remarried people are not allowed to approach the sacrament; marriage is a sacrament; while for the Protestants it is viewed as a holy state. Christianity emphasizes the *holiness* of marriage, and condemns any sexual activity outside of it.

Throughout Africa, Church marriages are fewer than customary unions, but, they are relatively more stable. In the Mityana area of Uganda, for example, Shorter found that up to 25% of the Church marriages had ended in divorce, whereas in Tumbi village settlement in Tanzania he found that 15% of the Church marriages

had broken down. Divorces were also rare in cities and towns like Kampala and Kitwe in Zambia. Divorce is strongly discouraged among Christians, and no reasons for divorce can be accepted (Shorter 1977: 19). Divorce is rare in Church marriages because of the rituals and ceremonies which are involved, and which underwrite the commitment on the part of both partners to uphold the relationship. What is emphasized is *forgiveness* for the spouse who is wrong, and allowance is always given for human error. The partners are expected to have a moral obligation to be faithful to their marriage.

The findings of a recent demographic survey on marriage patterns in South Africa (Budlender et al 2004) show that men and women have different perceptions of what constitutes a marriage. For example, the survey shows that more women than men reported that they were married. The reason is that when a couple has been physically separated for a long period of time because the husband is a migrant worker elsewhere and engaged in other relationships, and the wife is left behind in the rural areas, she usually reports that she is married, while the husband may report that he is separated or divorced. This difference in reporting indicates that more women than men have the desire to be seen as married because, traditionally (and to some extent at present), it makes them feel respected. To this extent it is, indeed, a celebration *of the life of the marriage* and not *of the couple as partners*.

These days, many young people are reluctant to commit themselves to a life-long, Church marriage. In fact, most Christians do not marry in Church. Part of the reason is the change in the conception and perception of marriage, and the delocalization of the process – and these have contributed to the relative fragility and instability of modern marriages. For many young people in the urban areas, marriage has ceased to be the social norm, and is far from being a cultural universal, or even a priority. It has simply become one of the many options available to them. More significantly, even wedding vows such as---- "for better or for worse until death do us part---" are jokingly being proposed for revision to read something like --- "until love departs".

3.5 Grounds for Divorce

The reasons for seeking to end marriage vary across countries, cultures, partners and contexts and are, in many cases, gender-specific. Among the Agikuyu, for example, Skinner (1973:280-296) identified at least six culturally-recognized grounds for divorce, namely: barrenness; denial of conjugal rights by either partner without good reason, witchcraft; being a habitual thief; desertion; continual gross misconduct by the woman. In Uganda and Tanzania, Shorter (1977) found that the reasons for divorce also vary slightly with gender as shown on Table 1:

Table 1: *The Most Common Reasons for Divorce by Gender*

Most Common Reasons for Divorce		Men	Women
1	Incompatibility (inability to live together)	√	√
2	Infidelity/adultery	√	√
3	Desertion	√	√
4	Impotence		√
5	Laziness	√	-
6	Drunkenness	√	√
7	Chronic illness	√	-
8	Taking matrimonial property to her maiden home	√	-
9	Lack of respect	√	-
10	Witchcraft	√	-
11	Domestic violence (assault)	-	√
12	Neglect (lack of support)	-	√
13	Insanity	√	√

Source: Shorter, 1977

Table 1 shows that men and women tend to complain about different things in marriage. Sociological studies indicate that

women initiate most divorce proceedings even though many of them have more to lose than men when the marriage breaks down. However, Shorter's study shows that in order to win a divorce case against one's husband, a woman had to complain about and prove neglect, desertion, and assault. Neglect was found to be the most common ground for divorce in the two country case-studies. Where neglect, adultery and assault can be proven, many courts are likely to grant divorce.

According to the old English common law which applies in Kenya today, there are only three basic grounds for divorce, namely: **adultery, desertion** and **cruelty**. These grounds must be established by evidence before the court can pronounce a decree to end the marriage. A careful consideration of these grounds is necessary because, as Lowe and Douglas point out, in some situations, infidelity may just be a symptom or a consequence, rather than a *cause* of marital breakdown. Each ground must therefore be proved to the required standard.

However, the British have since revised and simplified their divorce law, and, under the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973, there is only one ground for divorce, namely: "irretrievable breakdown" of marriage. According to the provisions of this clause:

> The petitioner may establish that the marriage has irretrievably broken down by showing that the respondent has behaved in such a way that the petitioner cannot reasonably be expected to live with him (Lowe and Douglas, 1998:228).

The principle of **irretrievable breakdown of marriage,** as the only valid ground for divorce, has been included in the Kenyan draft Marriage Bill, so that litigants don't have to struggle to prove a marriage offence and in the process 'wash their dirty linen in public'.

In Islamic law, marriage can be terminated by pronouncing the talaq three times. When the talaq is pronounced the first two times, it may be withdrawn, but the third time, the divorce is irrevocable. After the third talaq, the wife is usually required to wait for three

months before re-marrying (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talaq %28conflict%29).

Chart 1: No. of Divorce Cases filed and decided in the High Court of Kenya, Nairobi (2001-2006)
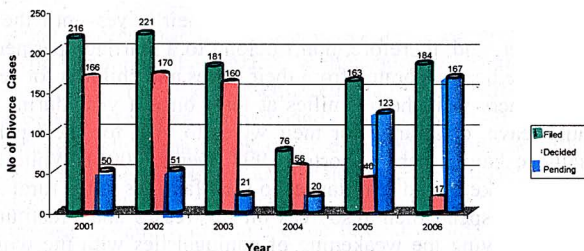
Source: Family Division, High Court of Kenya,

Divorce figures are often not exact because litigation in respect of customary marriages mainly take place in the Magistrate's Courts, scattered throughout the country, and there is no central recording system for these. As a result, the actual number of divorces is usually much higher than the official statistics.

In traditional African marriages, women took matrimonial disputes to the elders not so much to secure divorce, but to get the husband to change his behavior. In most cases, divorce could only be granted after several attempts at reconciliation and, in some communities in Kenya, it is argued that there is no divorce, particularly when children are present. For example, some Luo elders still insist that there are only *two* culturally and socially valid reasons for marital dissolution, namely: 'if the husband doesn't eat his wife's food and/or sleep in her house'. They argue that anything else is tolerable and negotiable.

Under customary marriage, grounds for divorce vary within and between countries and cultures. For example, in South Africa where there is a system of migrant labour, the socio-economic environment is the most important factor. The migrant- labour system is closely associated with the frequent movement of men and women from one partner to another.

There are several ways in which labour migration can bring about divorce. One of them relates to the fact that many labour migrants rarely return home to settle down with their wives until they are much older, and, therefore, don't belong to a marriage partnership. Some have been separated from their wives and children for several years. Others visit their families at least once a year during their annual leave, or arrange for their wives to visit for short periods, usually to have a baby (Shorter, 1998; Denis, 2006). While many migrant workers send remittances to their families in the rural areas, some often spend their resources on mistresses and prostitutes in town, signifying the weakening of conjugal ties with the wife left behind. On the other hand, the lonely woman left behind could be tempted to engage in extra-marital relationships, which could threaten the marriage. Separation and divorce in such marriages often occur as a result of loss of emotional connection between the partners, and lack of support for the wife and children left behind, usually in the rural home. The man, on the other hand, may complain that the wife left behind has been unfaithful. In the absence of their husbands, and due to minimal contact between spouses, many wives of migrant workers tend to develop a great deal of freedom and autonomy which they find difficult to relinquish, and which some men also find difficult to adapt to or cope with, when they return. Such a situation provides a framework for marital instability.

3.6 The Effects of Divorce on Children, Women and Men

It is often argued that divorce is a very painful experience, but a bad marriage is several times worse than a divorce. Like widowhood, divorce affects different people differently. It is also perceived

differently, depending on the context, and variously described as 'a new beginning, an adequate answer to marital problems, the end of a union between unhappy couples, or the death of a bad marriage but one which is worse than physical demise'. All these descriptions point to the differential impact of divorce on women, men and children. In some cases, the end of a marriage can be one of the most traumatic experiences in one's life. Part of the reason is that divorce usually has far-reaching short and long-term social, economic, psychological and health implications for those who are affected.

Noting that divorce may signify a new beginning for husbands and wives who are unhappily married, Whitehead (1993) indicates that this may not be the case for children many of whom only see separation and loss when the marriage breaks down. She concludes that, although adults may seek divorce as part of their search for freedom, happiness, choice and independence, most of their children are hoping for stability, permanence and social completeness in family life, and often have difficulty adjusting to new family arrangements. In her commentary in the *Daily Nation*: "*When the family disintegrates*", Esther Waithaka (September. 21, 2005:6) identifies some of the most common short-term negative effects of divorce as anger, sadness, feelings of abandonment, and suicidal thoughts or behaviour.

Although there is continuing debate on the extent to which divorce negatively affects children and, indeed, everyone else who is concerned, most studies show that some of the most significant long- term social costs of family disruption, for children, include withdrawal from family, friends and activities, substance-abuse, alcoholism, school drop-out juvenile delinquency, teenage pregnancies, and other self-destructive behaviour (Waite et al, 2006; Waithaka, 2005). In his *Plural Marriage for Our Time,* Kilbride refers to studies which have shown that:

> Family disruption affects school achievement in a negative way and contributes to poor relations with parents, negative self-image, and increased aggression and acting out behaviours among children, especially boys (Kilbride, 1994:8)

However, these effects and the level of their severity depend on the child's age, gender, level of maturity and personality. Although divorce and single- parenthood are frequently blamed in the analysis of children' welfare, their impact should be evaluated against a particular kind of social, cultural and economic environment because these arrangements *per se* are not inherently harmful. A lot depends on the context.

Several studies on street children in Africa have indicated that when there is sustained conflict in the home, some children run away to the streets in search for love, appreciation, freedom, childhood and livelihood (Suda, 1997; 2001; Kilbride, Suda and Njeru, 2000; Degbey, 2007). Some children of divorced parents also experience financial difficulties if their fathers do not contribute to their economic support after divorce. However, among those who do, there are some who feel that they only have an obligation to their children and not to their ex-wives, and are therefore unwilling to pay alimony (Wallerstein et al, 2000).

Some of the effects of divorce among children are short-lived but the long-term impact is usually felt much later when the children want to establish stable families themselves, signifying a higher chance of behavioural problems from children from broken homes than those in happy or unhappy non-divorced families. They are also more likely to suffer different forms of abuse and neglect than those in stable families.

Marital instability also has a positive impact on children. One of the most significant positive effects of divorce on children is the fact that many of them learn several lessons from it and try to avoid some common pitfalls and the mistakes of their parents, in their own relationships. One of the lessons include the recognition that good communication, mutual respect and the view of marriage as a dynamic partnership, are some of the pillars of marital stability which can be sustained by caring and sharing.

The effect of divorce on women also varies. Women with lower incomes and education often suffer more economic hardship as a
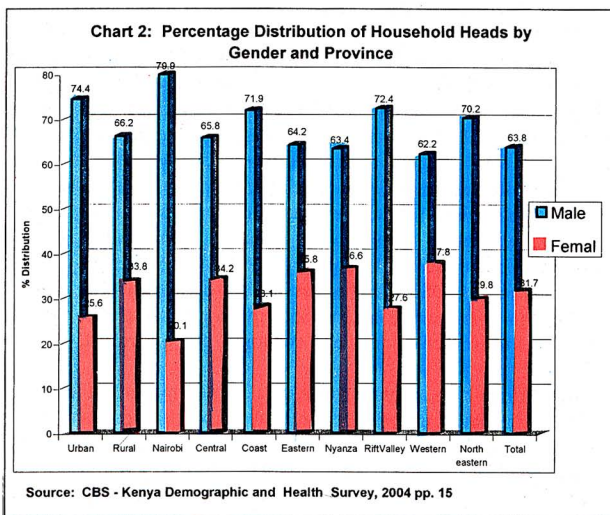
result of divorce, than those who are more advantaged, particularly when they have exclusive custody of children and have difficulty getting child support from their former husbands. Secondly, although women are the ones who initiate most of the divorce proceedings, paradoxically they suffer more than men because it is more difficult for a divorced African woman to remarry. While divorced African men and widowers may, and often do, remarry younger wives and lead a fulfilling family life, many divorced African women could remain single, or drift into casual relationships with married men, or become junior wives because they have little chance of finding a husband who is not married. This is a normative behaviour pattern in most patriarchal cultures, where gender-power imbalances constrain women's voices and choices. It reflects gender stereotypes, and social prejudices which continue to reinforce traditional gender roles and relations in contemporary Africa. In some patriarchal African cultures, for example, an older brother - in - law is still expected to inherit the wife of his deceased younger brother or cousin, as part of the traditional social support and welfare system. Traditionally, widow-inheritance was designed to provide care and support to the widow and her children. Today, in a classic case of role- reversal, most professional widow inheritors are looking for widows with adequate economic resources to support them. Although this patriarchal practice is declining, mainly because of its link with the spread of HIV/AIDS, and changes in the socio-economic, cultural and technological environment, such practices present continuing challenges to women's social and economic empowerment.

Many African men respond to divorce by getting into other social relationships fairly quickly. Some of them pay alimony and child-support resources if they are non-custodial parents, even though they may not have regular access to their children, particularly if the divorce was adversarial. Other effects include higher rates of alcoholism, heart problems, lower life expectancy, and the risk of HIV infection. Studies have shown that these and other problems are more common among divorced people, compared to those who are married, even though they record that married people are not always happy. Some of those who stay together are more likely to

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have learned how to cope or deal with the challenges of married life, while other may opt for single parenthood.

3.7 Single-Parent Families

A most significant trend in African family life and traditions, and one that may have far-reaching consequences for child welfare, is the increase in the number of single-parent families, particularly those headed by women. The Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (2004) shows that the distribution of male and female heads of household in Kenya varies with rural-urban residence, and by province.

Chart 2: Percentage Distribution of Household Heads by Gender and Province

Province	Male	Female
Urban	74.4	25.6
Rural	66.2	33.8
Nairobi	79.9	20.1
Central	65.8	34.2
Coast	71.9	29.1
Eastern	64.2	35.8
Nyanza	63.4	36.6
RiftValley	72.4	27.6
Western	62.2	37.8
North eastern	70.2	29.8
Total	63.8	31.7

Source: CBS - Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, 2004 pp. 15

The KDHS data on Chart 2 show that women head 25.6% of urban households compared to 33.8% in the rural areas. The survey also shows minor regional (provincial) variations in the prevalence of female headed households according to which Western (38%),

Nyanza (37%) and Eastern (36%) provinces were leading while Nairobi province (20%) had the lowest number of households headed by women (KDHS, 2004:15). This pattern is explained in part by massive male rural-urban migration from Western, Nyanza and Eastern provinces.

According to the Economic Survey (Republic of Kenya, 2007:9), the overall poverty level in Kenya is estimated at 49.1% in the rural areas compared to 33.7 % in the urban areas. Sessional Paper No. 2 on *Gender Equality and Development* (Republic of Kenya, 2006:9) indicates that the proportion of female-headed households in Kenya increased from 25% in 2000 to 31 % in 2006, out of which 80% live below the poverty line. Women in Africa represent the majority of the poor (over 70% in the rural areas), especially where migration, marital instability, male mortality and delayed marriages have left them as heads of household. Some of the households are headed by women alone who have no permanent relationship with a man. These *de facto* household heads are widows, single mothers, or women who are divorced or separated. However, most of the *de facto* female-headed households are attributed to widowhood. There are many factors which influence the rate of widowhood; one of them is the fact that women generally have a longer life expectancy than men, and another is the tendency for older men to marry extra wives who are several years younger. Almost invariably, the younger wives out-live their husbands and have to share whatever resources previously owned and controlled by the husband. Issues concerning property-inheritance often generate hostility among co-wives on the one hand, and between the widows and their deceased husband's adult kinsmen, on the other.

Female heads of households in both urban and rural environments are among the poorest segments of society. They face cultural and structural constraints which limit their access to productive resources and basic social services, and increase their vulnerability. The majority of single mothers in the urban areas live in high-density residential areas and work in the informal sector. The over-representation of women in the informal sector is variously explained by the inability of the formal sector to create enough jobs to absorb a large and increasing labour force; to allow for the use of

simple technologies: to accommodate women's inadequate education and skills training; ease of entry and exit; low capital investment —all having the effect that there is a relative compatibility between informal-sector employment, and women's reproductive work in the care economy, among other factors.

While some women may remain single because of a variety of social and cultural barriers, others are single by choice. Voluntary single-parenthood arises from changing expectations of marriage, women's economic empowerment, and increased freedom to choose a family lifestyle that suits individual needs, among other factors. As a result of these and other forces, an increasing number of professional men and women in many parts of Africa are choosing single life. Many of them had never married before and probably never will, while others are single but searching. I know many singles who would prefer marriage but have settled for single lifestyles because they have been unable to find suitable partners to admit them into heterosexual monogamy. Others pursue marriage in frustration, to validate the family ideology which is still predominantly pro-marriage. Commenting on this social trend and its inherent contradictions in the Kenyan context, Kilbride (1994:114) notes:

> A very definite pattern is visible in Kenya today: professional women are rejecting marriage altogether because many of them feel that men on the whole are unsympathetic to their attempts to have careers; to seek education beyond the bachelor's degree and to practise independent lifestyles frequently associated with modern, professional occupations. At the same time, many women feel that men too frequently involve themselves with other women – mistresses – while they expect their wives to remain at home caring for the children. Although many professional women may be opting against marriage, they have not given up their desire to have children. For this reason, such women frequently find themselves in a position of seeking out a man, married or single, to give them a child or to become a father to that child or one they already have.

Kilbride's book on plural marriage concretizes the reality of the ongoing reinvention of family options in contemporary Africa.

Many African men and women are now delaying marriage, and a growing number of well-educated and financially more secure women are opting to have children without getting married. Although such women are exercising their right to choose, many of them also recognize the importance of having a father (or a father-figure) for their children and therefore remain single mothers with male companions, but not husbands.

An article by Durazi (2005:7) in the *Daily Nation* reports the views of a cross-section of Kenyan professional women between the ages of 30 and 40 on marriage. Their views reflect fundamental changes in social and cultural values, as many of them no longer consider being a mother and a wife as the only valued achievements of womanhood. Some of them hold the view that today's marriages are no longer made to last because of their instability and the tendency to take women's reproductive roles in the care-economy for granted. This view was expressed by one of Durazi's female interviewees in the following words:

> I wouldn't mind cooking, cleaning or laundering for my husband, even after toiling in the office until evening, but I have seen many women do this and not get any acknowledgement for their efforts. The modern woman is against being taken for granted and that is what puts her off the whole marriage thing (2005:7).

Based on these kinds of perception and the concomitant behaviour change, some women in the contemporary urban environment feel that being a mother is a much more fulfilling experience and a better option than being a wife. From a sociological perspective, the emerging trends in new family configurations seem to indicate that many young, educated and upwardly mobile professional Africans in the urban settings are today constructing social and sexual relationships for themselves. Most of these "customized" social relationships are matters of personal choice, some are reported to be based on romantic love, commitment and loyalty while others are driven by convenience and expediency. In an urban environment, individual goals and interests have become more important than kinship obligations, and young people expect and express personal freedom in their choice of partners and places of residence. The

main reason for this trend is the increase in the freedom of courtship and mate-selection. These new forms of relationships are what Philip Kilbride (1994) refers to as *delocalized* arrangements which are established with little or no involvement of family members, and regulated outside the influence of the larger community moral nets.

Perhaps one of the most profound transformations of family life in contemporary Africa is a perceptible change in marital behaviour and family life which has significantly contributed to the prevalence of the mistress phenomenon or "informal polygyny". Thus, the pattern that is emerging in contemporary African urban settings is that of formal monogamy, which is frequently practised alongside delocalized, informal or clandestine *polygyny* according to which some married men keep mistresses whom they support.

However, given the high polygynous tendencies of many African men, more women will choose between marrying down, not marrying at all or entering into a quasi-polygynous relationship with a married man. Paradoxically, this option makes women get into the very same relationships which they resent, when it affects their own marriages.

In her article titled *Black Women's Desire for "Traditional" Marriages*, Adams (2007:26) notes that black American women use different strategies for dating and settling down. They may date or settle down with men who are on the same level as they are, or lower. The term "level" was used to refer to different financial, educational, intellectual or physical categories. Her study shows that a woman may date or marry someone who she was not initially interested in, because he was possibly "a good marriage material", or she just wanted to have a man in her life. Adams refers to this type of behaviour as *strategies of settling* and concludes that:

> Since women are not able to obtain everything that they want and need from relationships with men, they settle not for those qualities that are **most important** to them, but those qualities that are **easiest to obtain**. Consequently, black women who settle often find themselves in relationships that

are less than ideal, and often are not healthy for themselves or their children (Adams 2007:26).

3.8   Remarriage and the Blended Families

One of the consequences of divorce and single-parenthood is the opportunity to remarry and establish a blended family. For most African men, being single is usually a temporary status. They usually remarry after divorce, widowhood or separation and, in remarriage, one or both partners usually already had children while others may wish to have children in the new marriage. Studies show that divorced African men are more likely to remarry than divorced African women. Blended or reconstituted families are therefore formed from the "broken pieces" of previous relationships. They are an example of a re-invented and modern extended family network, but one which is not built around kinship ties. One of the defining features of a blended family is the presence of what Ann Crytser (1990) refers to as the wife-in-law. This term describes the relationship between former and current wives. A collorary to this is the husband-in-law relationship. Both of them are usually adversarial and considered a nuisance. But because they have been married to the same man or woman, the spouses-in-law are connected to one another and occasionally interact, even if reluctantly. Kilbride (1994:21) reports Crytser's research findings which revealed that the wife-in-law relationship is "unwanted, unchosen, without rules or traditions, volatile, ever-changing, and permanent."

Other studies on reconstituted families have also shown that they experience unique challenges which are rare in conventional relationships. For example, they lack social boundaries which ordinary families have. Secondly, many children in blended families are still linked to their biological parents who may have a strong influence on them, thereby disrupting or delaying their adjustments to a new family setup. Children from broken homes tend to have identity problems especially when they have different fathers and live in reconstituted or blended families. Some children in blended families do not even consider their step-parents and step-

siblings to be part of their families, a situation that often leads to social dislocation and isolation (Kilbride, 1994; Suda, 1999).

3.9 Cohabitation: Families outside Marriage

One of the emerging trends in contemporary Africa and indeed, other cultures of the world is the increasing acceptance of cohabitation as an alternative family arrangement. Live-in relationships were not popular in tradition-bound African societies, but, today, cohabitation is becoming an increasingly common type of domestic and sexual arrangement, particularly among young urban residents – leading to a phenomenon commonly referred to by the youth as 'come-we-stay' or 'coupling and uncoupling'. The number of young men and women who are living together without being married and, often, having children is rising steadily.

Cohabitation has been defined as "an emotional, physical and intellectually intimate relationship which includes a common living place and which exists without the benefit of legal, cultural or religious sanction" (http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/cohabitation). In an article titled *Cohabitation, marriage and entry into motherhood*, Manning (1995: 197) notes that cohabitation among black and white women in North America is not always considered as a union in which to start families, although women who cohabited before marriage were found to be at least 34% more likely to have premarital births than those who had not. One of the conclusions of Manning's study is that the transition from cohabitation to marriage does not seem to be the primary motive for having children. Rather, the main factors affecting the timing of marital motherhood are the duration of cohabitation and the couple's experience during the time of living together.

In South Africa, for example, Debbie Budlender, Ntebaleng Chobokoane and Sandile Simelane (2004) used a series of household surveys conducted between 1995 and 1999 to show that, during that period, 58-60 percent of women between the ages of 15-49 were never married and 4-7 percent were cohabiting (Denis, 2006:3). In some cases, the cohabiting couple may have known each other for a very short period of time, often as little as 6 months

or less. Sometimes the parents may not be aware of nor would have given consent to the relationship, and may only be informed after the couple has started living together and, in some cases, already have children.

These tentative and sometimes uncommitted relationships often arise out of romantic love, or may be based on some practical economic considerations, or both. Some of the reasons why cohabitation is becoming a more common alternative to marriage, particularly among younger and more educated people in the urban areas, include: (a) the desire for emotional, social and economic support; (b) sexual intimacy and exclusivity without the obligations of marriage; (c) the couple's need to test their compatibility before making a formal commitment to marry; (d) an opportunity to know each other better; (e) attitudinal changes towards the practice often expressed in the form of more tolerance and, in some cases, social acceptance; (f) the high cost of bridewealth; (g) the current crisis in marriage; (h) and the general tendency to postpone or reject marriage outright. Other factors which contribute to cohabitation include the declining social pressure to marry, the rising rate of marital instability, increased rural-urban migration which predisposes male labour-migrants to cohabit with women in the urban areas, and women's lack of economic empowerment which leads them to live with men who may not even be prepared to marry them.

A case study by Muchoki (2004:51-52) on how students at the University of Nairobi are responding to the HIV/AIDS pandemic has shown that cohabitation is widespread in the male halls of residence. This pattern of social relationship among college students is, however, not unique to the University of Nairobi or other institutions of higher learning in Africa, but is a cross-cultural phenomenon whose growing popularity in the United States of America is succinctly stated by Robertson (1981: 369) as follows:

> Cohabitation is particularly popular among college students. Surveys have shown that about a quarter of undergraduates have tried this arrangement and that under suitable conditions the great majority of college students would be willing to live together with someone of the opposite sex.

This cross-cultural comparison with the North American experience shows that the behaviour patterns of Kenyan college students are converging towards those of their counterparts in other parts of the world, due to the combined impact of education, urbanization, migration, information technology and globalization. In Muchoki's study, the most common reasons given by the surveyed students for living together in the men's halls of residence were: (1) cost-reduction; (2) peer pressure; (3) the need to have more time with each other; (5) the need for companionship; and (4) the need to monitor each other's movement to avoid unfaithfulness. This last reason is often based on real or perceived threat to the relationship which makes it necessary for the couple to live together to safeguard it. However, Muchoki's study does not indicate whether the cohabiting students had expressed their intention to marry. This indicates that many of the cohabiting university students may simply be motivated by short-term social, emotional and economic interests, rather than long-term commitment to marry.

Cohabiting students are sometimes engaged in a delicate balancing act of living together without the knowledge of their parents. For example, at the University of Nairobi, some female students cohabit with their boyfriends in the male halls of residents but still keep their rooms in the women's hall, just incase they have visitors from home who should not know that they are cohabiting. In other cases, the lady gives up her room and moves in with the man in his room. He pays for accommodation and she buys and prepares food.

Although cohabitation was very rare in traditional Africa, where it was regarded as a scandal, it is now gradually being accepted, or tolerated, or simply ignored in most urban areas. One of the female postgraduate students at the University of Nairobi whom I interviewed expressed strong support for cohabitation, which she refers to as an intergenerational issue. She explained that:

> More and more teenagers in the African urban areas are viewing marriage just as one of those relationships in which sexual encounter is acceptable. Cohabitation has therefore become more acceptable in contemporary Africa than it was in the past. This is partly because marriage has ceased to be