



THE SUSTAINABILITY OF KINSHIP FOSTER CARE SYSTEM IN ZIMBABWE: A STUDY OF HOUSEHOLDS CARING FOR ORPHANS AND OTHER VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN BIKITA

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ABSTRACT

Most Zimbabweans, like other people in the Southern Africa region, have suffered in a number of ways as a result of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, persistent droughts and such environmental challenges. The death of parents has an impact on the survival strategies for orphans and other vulnerable children (OVCs). Without strong legislation and services for OVCs in Zimbabwe, services become influenced by Western values such as individualism. Such values are espoused in policy instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Zimbabwe ratified. Even the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Children's Act (Zimbabwe) demonstrate western values. However, these frameworks have all been proven to be ineffective in dealing with children's challenges in different environmental challenges for OVCs in Zimbabwe. The study wanted to establish the sustainability of kinship-based foster care in the care of orphans and other vulnerable children in rural areas. The study used a qualitative research design. The study therefore employed in-depth interviews to collect data from OVCs themselves on the sustainability of kinship based foster care under the current environmental challenges facing the country as a whole. Focus group discussions were used to gather information from household heads, community members and other people with the experience of caring of OVCs. Key informant interviews were used to collect information from community experts who normally provide valuable information on the sustainability of kinship based foster care in challenging environmental situations. The study realized that families are facing a number of challenges in meeting the health, education and social welfare needs of orphans under kinship-based foster care. The study came up with suggestions for improving OVC policies and intervention strategies. One of the recommendations was that of expanding domestic financing for child and social protection. Revival and supporting of Zunde raMambo projects through irrigation schemes as well as political will by the government to support orphans under kinship-based foster care.

KEY TERMS: Sustainability, foster care, kinship, policy

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Zimbabweans have endured the consequences of the AIDS pandemic. For example, the death of many parents and relatives has an impact on the survival strategies of orphans and other vulnerable children (Mupedziswa, 2006 and Mushunje, 2006). The majority of orphans end up being looked after by their kins. However, the journey in kinship foster care is replete with challenges and complexities that then propel scholars and researchers to question the sustainability of the practice.

The prevalence of kinship care in developing countries is still largely unknown (Roby, 2011) and evidence is still fragmented. George, Oudenhoven and Wazir (2003) note that foster care is best understood by examining a wide range and complex network of relationships that are social, cultural, economic and political.

A study carried out in 51 countries using nationally representative samples collected through the Demographic Health Survey (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) data instruments, found out that 90 percent of double orphans lived with relatives (Ainsworth and Filmer, 2006). The study demonstrated that in some cultures children could not be differentiated as non-biological children because of the good care they will be given.

In another study using national household surveys, collected through MICSs and DHS in 40 Sub-Saharan countries, it was shown that information was available on the relationship of children to the Head of the household in 13 of the countries (Monarsch and Boerma, 2004). In the 13 countries, the extended family was responsible for caring of approximately 90 percent of double orphans and those children not staying with a surviving parent (Roby, 2011). The main caretakers of such children were grand-parents and other relatives with grand-parents as the main care takers. This was common among approximately half of the orphans, ranging from 24 percent (Cameroon) to 64 percent (South Africa) (Roby, 2011). It was prevalent that double orphans were more likely to live in a female headed household. In some three countries, (Namibia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe), caring responsibilities shifted to grand-parents whilst in Kenya it shifted from grandparents to other relatives (Monarsch and Boerma, 2004).

Another study carried out in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria and Uganda revealed that 85 percent of the children who were not living with their extended families and grand-parents were more likely to stay with other caregivers.

In a mixed-methods study of 768 adults at 85 different sites carried out throughout Thailand, it was noted that of all the orphaned children, because of Aids, 47 percent were cared for by grandparents (Knodel and Sangthienchi, 2005). In the United States, more than 2.5 million grand-parents were caring for more than 4.6 million grand-children. The grand-parents were of ethnic minorities, poorer, less educated and single as compared to other grand-parents (Sazonov, 2010).

In other countries, it has been demonstrated that informal-kinship based foster care is shifting from paternal kin to maternal kin. In Uganda, it showed that mothers who were HIV positive were already receiving help from their maternal relatives mostly their sisters and mothers in the care of the orphans (Roby, Shaw, Chemangos & Hooley, 2008). The sufferers could prefer these relatives as guardians to their children as compared to paternal relatives in anticipation of their death.

Howard et al (2006) notes that the reasoning by the women was based on the high degree of distrust to their paternal kin as they cited indifference and lack of genuine trust on the part of the father's family.

Kinship based foster care in other parts of the world is largely paternal. A study by Shang (2007) in China demonstrated that as the state provided formal foster care in cases of double orphans, it could not intervene in the case of patriarchal orphans. That is, children whose fathers had died and whose mothers decided to remarry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Changes in family structure

One of the roles of the extended family network has been that of providing effective social security to orphans and other vulnerable children in traditional agricultural societies (Mushunje, 2017). During this period, communities comprised of extended family members who were largely self-sufficient economic units. The advantage was that families used to work for sustainability of its members as a unit of production, consumption, reproduction and accumulation (Bigombe and Khadiagala, 2007). These roles changed as the socio-economic environment changed as well. Zimmer and Dayton (2005) notes that living in large extended households was more pronounced in traditional agricultural societies but gradually became reduced as societies became more industrialized and changes in urbanization, labour migration and development of cash economies which were closely related to westernization of traditional socio-economic structures also became common. These brought in the weakening of family ties and the need to redefine the foundations of the African family (Ocholla-Ayoyo, 1997). There was a deliberate emphasis on solidarity and interdependence which as a key characteristic of African communities of affinity (Dziro and Rufurwokuda, 2013). The package included training of children the

African philosophy of *hunhu/ubuntu* which was literary translated into humanness 'I am because we are, I can only be a person through others' (Mbigi, 2004:3).

Ocholla-Ayoyo (1997) indicated that it would be an oversimplification of reality if we view the process and extent of the decline of extended kinship care ties as a uniform issue throughout Africa. He notes that the degree of erosion of the extended family network now depends on the level of industrialization and urbanization in a given country. The truth of the matter has been that an African family network system has gradually changed over time and its reliability and sustainability as an informal social security provider is weakening and can no longer be trusted any more. There have been some variations in the changes to the African family structure. There have been a number of factors leading to the changes in African family structure.

Modernization through industrialization which included westernized educational system has affected some communities and individuals in Africa making them embracing a lifestyle that was previously unknown to traditional African communities (Ocholla-Ayoyo 1997). This has a bearing on the care of orphans and other vulnerable children. Health problems like the spread of the HIV pandemic caused some changes to the structure of the African family. The impact of the epidemic on the structure of the African family has affected some African states as it limited the capability and sustainability of the extended family network in the performance of its proper functions as an informal social security provider.

Labour migration

Labour Migration has been common among Africans as a way of looking for opportunities and financial benefits to individual families (Bigombe and Khadiagala, 2007). As industrialization came affecting the African family, droughts and floods had already affected agricultural production as well and forced many people to leave their homes seeking for greener pastures in urban areas or neighbouring countries (Findley, 2008; Kaseke, 2010). It has been observed that there are differences in agricultural migration and the current labour migration involves the movement of individual households. The past demonstrated that extended families moved as teams together as they tried to find new areas to settle and in labour migration smaller groups of people are now involved as they break up from large groups forming small and new units of production (Apt, 2001). Therefore, the current labour migration is as well individualistic and not collective as people migrate to meet the needs of their individual families without considering members of the extended families.

The migration does not only involve rural-urban migration but as in the case of Zimbabweans, it includes intercountry migration (Chitereka, 2009). It also includes movement from poorer states to better off states like moving from Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe to more industrialized countries like South African mines and factories and the United Kingdom (Bigombe and Khadiagala, 2007). Such migrations are normally temporary but create challenges on the African family structure. The major challenge being that of reduced number of contacts with each member's family members as this would gradually weaken ties with other members of the extended family (Boada 2007; Foster 2000).

It should be noted that labour migration does not produce negative results for African families only but it also produced positive results. Sander and Maimbo (2007) notes that labour migration has an important function as shown by the Basotho Mine Workers' remittances from South African mines where they constituted 67 percent of Lesotho's GDP around the 1990s. Therefore, rural-urban migration does not necessarily lead to breakdown to ties between families in most of the time. It should be borne in mind that the traditional kinship based foster care system characterized by inter-generational reciprocal care and support is normally affected by moves by the younger generations from the extended family units to urban areas or to other countries. Which means remittances of cash from urban to rural areas and remittances of goods or food from rural-urban was seen to maintain family ties. The rural-urban migration remittances are a form fostering relationships (Bigombe and Khadiagala, 2007). Economic and political down turn have also an effect on remittances to either side (Bigombe and Khadiagala, 2010). Studies carried out on economic and political issues demonstrated that during eras of economic and political decline, rural-urban fosterage rates declined. This has an effect as well on relationships (Bigombe and Khadiagala, 2010). The geographical separation among family members reduces the frequency of contact with relatives resulting in the weakening of kinship-based bonds (Foster, 2004).

Adepoju (1997) advocates that labour migration, rapid urbanisation and the development of the cash economy have negatively affected the basic fundamental principles of socialization and solidarity among members of kinship network. Such developments have brought about changes in how family members relate to each other. Mann (2002) notes that in Malawi's urban areas, networks with relatives outside the immediate household have been observed to be weak. This weakness in kinship relationships reinforced the importance of relationships between siblings and support from friends (Mann, 2002). The study by Mann (2002), notes that in rural areas, networks with relatives outside of the immediate household were still strong and relatives played a major role in contributing financial and emotional support to children in need of care.

Kinship based foster care system has a lot to do with a respective country's policies as these have a bearing on the sustainability of the relationship (Foster, 2004). In Zimbabwe, for example, the policies adopted were

initially inherited from the colonial government where a lot of racism was initially experienced by the majority of blacks. Kaseke (1995) noted that services were distributed to blacks on racial grounds before independence.

Zimbabwe got its independence after a protracted war of liberation against the British on 18 April 1980. People were united during the war as they worked together in the provision of food the combatants during the war. The post-independence era saw some developmental goals which motivated the liberation struggle being achieved in part such as the exponential growth in Health and Education sectors. The economy of the country was seen to develop in three major phases. The first phase was based on economic policies of pre-independence era. These policies were introduced by the different regimes and were based on dualism from 1890-1979 (Mandaza, 1995). The policies promoted theories of separate development. Various pieces of legislations were promulgated during this period which was aimed at alienating the best land to the settler economy entrenching the policy of separate development of races in the process. The pieces of legislation included the Land Apportionment Act (1931), the Land Husbandry Act (1951) and the Land Tenure Act of 1969.

The policy on separate development became more pronounced when the Rhodesian Front Party (RFP) took control of power in 1965 with the declaration of independence. The RFP took most of its ideological inspiration from the Nationalist Party of South Africa (Mandaza, 1995). The rule by RFP put more emphasis on separate development promoting racial repression, creating black disenfranchisement on black majority. Social services like social welfare, education, health and housing were provided on colour lines with the white minority enjoying superior services to those of their black counterpart (Kaseke, 1995). During this period families were so united as they felt they were not considered as humans. The bonds to care for family members were very strong

The second phase was based on the development of socio-economic policies in the post-independence era. The period can further be divided into three phases namely the incremental first ten years of independence, the ESAP period and the post ESAP era. Soon after independence, economic policies in Zimbabwe were introduced based on the socialist and egalitarian philosophies. The Government introduced a policy document entitled "Growth with Equity: An Economic Policy Statement" (GOZ, 1981). The Government noted that the policies were to be directed towards the attainment of a socialist and egalitarian society indicating that it would envisage that to happen "in conditions of rapid economic growth, full employment, price stability, dynamic efficiency in resource allocation and equitable distribution of the ensuing benefits" (GOZ, 1981). The idea was to provide stability and sustainability among the masses and that family members could care for each other.

The pattern of public spending on social services such as health, education and other social infrastructure reflected the incremental model (GOZ, 1981). The government went on to destroy all inherent inequalities in order to satisfy the needs of the majority. As the government managed to make headway in all respects including the removal of discrimination on the basis of race, new forms of inequalities also emerged (Kanyenze et al, 2011). It became so apparent that while the government won political independence in 1980, economic power remained entrenched in the hands of the minority whites. This affected the way policies have been implemented in the country resulting in family disintegration.

The third phase was marked by the introduction of a neoliberal policy, the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) in 1990 (Muchacha, Dziro and Mtetwa, 2016). It was then apparent that after independence the economy could not continue to sustain the level of expenditure on social services and it required revamping. The signs of stagnation started to appear in the form of perennial shortages of foreign currency and shortage of skilled manpower (Kanyenze et al 2011). The export sector was also affected by low commodity prices on the international markets as drought affected yields in the country's main agricultural currency exchange earners such as cotton and tobacco. The shortage of foreign currency meant limited investment, low growth, less expansion and an increase in unemployment. The creation of nuclear families emerged.

This prompted the government to come up with new economic measures. The policies were then considered under the rubric of ESAP. It is important to note that some of the foremost enemies of ESAP were state-provided social services like health, education and social welfare. ESAP viewed such services as placing a heavy burden on the spirit of initiative (Kaseke, 1995). One of the trademarks of the reform programme was its insistence on mass retrenchment of workers which resulted in loss of income for the majority of workers and loss of earning capacity for their families. This led to cuts in public spending as there were introductions of cost recovery measures in health, education, and social welfare. Hardships were then experienced among the marginalized families. As a result of the removal of subsidies, removal of price controls, general inflation and high tax rates. The introduction of neoliberal policies created more challenges to the state and individual families. These had a bearing on the operation of the extended family network and worse off for orphaned children who relied heavily on kinship-based care through the extended family network (Muchacha et al, 2016).

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of this paper is to examine the sustainability of households in the care of orphans and other vulnerable children under kinship-based foster care. The paper focuses on answering the following questions: What are the

basic needs of orphans and other vulnerable children? How sustainable is the extended family network in caring for orphans and other vulnerable children? What challenges impede the sustainability of the care of such children under kinship-based foster care?

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research narrative study was used for this study. The narrative research method was chosen by the researcher for approaching the study's aim of examining the sustainability of kinship-based foster care in caring for orphans and other vulnerable children in a rural setting. The researcher chose the narrative method to enable him to find more information and learn on what works and what does not work in the protection of orphans under the kinship-based foster care system in Zimbabwe.

Study setting

In Zimbabwe, formal kinship-based foster care system falls under the Department of Social Welfare where foster parents are provided with foster fees for looking after orphans. Children are being looked after by relatives and non-relatives. Only a few children benefit from such an arrangement with the Department of Social Services. The majority of children are care of by relatives in the informal kinship based foster care. The government does not provide any foster fees to such families. The extended family is fast disintegrating where nuclear families are becoming the order of the day. This has seen in some cases the mushrooming of child headed households.

Sampling and recruitment

The study employed in-depth interviews where ten children (5 boys and 5 girls) were interviewed as these were the people who experienced the problem. The idea was to get their perception of the sustainability of kinship based foster care system in Zimbabwe. The study also employed focus group discussions where household heads were interviewed as a way of establishing their understanding of the sustainability of kinship based foster care in the care of orphans and other vulnerable children during changes in environment. Focus group discussion involved women and men. Key informant interviews were also utilized to find out from community experts on the sustainability of kinship based foster care and the breakdown of the extended family network in the care of orphans and other vulnerable children. Key informants who were interviewed were a Child Care Worker, Police Officer, Provincial Social Welfare Officer, School Headmaster, Church Pastor, Headman, Chief and District Education Officer. Other community members who were not caring for orphans but had stayed in the community for some time were consulted to solicit their views on the sustainability of kinship based foster care in caring for such children. Recommendations were sought from key informants for further research in the area.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Department of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Primary and secondary education in Zimbabwe. Confidentiality was observed and participants were allowed to voluntarily participate without any coercion. Written and oral consent was obtained before the study was conducted. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the interview at any stage of the process and refuse to answer questions they did not want to answer.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and shona words were translated into English. Mistakes were cleaned and identifiable words were removed. Ritchie and Spencer's 1994 thematic framework was used to explain the textual data from the transcripts, field notes and documents. The analysis process involved five distinct stages: familiarization, identification of a thematic framework, indexing, charting and mapping and interpretation

RESULTS

The aim of the study was to answer key questions to address a deficit in our knowledge relating to the sustainability of kinship-based foster in the care of orphans and other vulnerable children. The key issues were to identify the needs of the children, the sustainability of kinship-based foster care in the protection of orphans and the challenges that impede the sustainability of child care.

Inadequate and or lack of food provisions

The children demonstrated a number of challenges they faced to meet their basic needs. One of the respondents, a girl, indicated the lack of food as one of the challenges she faced.

Nhamodzenyika noted that the sustainability of kinship based foster care was a big challenge in times of need. She noted that at times when she came from school, she could find no food left behind for her. She notes

'ndinowana mamwe mazuva ndisina kusiirwa sadza ndichibva kuchikoro' (I find some days no food left behind for me from school). This was confirmed in a focus group discussion where all members of the group concurred that some families find it difficult to leave food behind for the child as the family would also have struggled to get their own food. As a result, the child would scrounge for such food from other homes. This group dramatized on how children end up getting food from a bin from a boarding school nearby.

The child care workers noted also that some children even fail to go to school because of failure to find food as they could not go to school hungry. One child care worker noted that: *The majority of these orphans have challenges of getting enough food.*

School heads had also realized the challenges faced by orphaned children under kinship-based foster care. One headmaster from one of the local school noted that schools were given grain to provide food to children from zero grade to grade two. The challenges which schools were now facing were that schools were not given money to pound the maize into mealie-meal. Parents were then given the authority to pump up money to save the purpose. Orphaned children whose relatives could not afford to pay fees were disallowed to eat the food. One boy, Kurauone, also noted *"tanzi tinde kumba panguva iyo vamwe vange vonzi vaende kundodya sadza"* (we were asked by the headmaster to leave when others were about to eat *sadza*)

Child neglect

Girl children had the worst experience as most of the time they were asked to do household chores when biological children seated doing nothing. One girl, Tambaoga, noted that *'there were times when I could be asked to go and fetch water when other children of my guardian were feeding'*.

This was a common practice as the majority of households find it difficult to take care of children from the other family. One old woman felt she relied heavily on the orphans who could take care of her family needs. Some of the children were employed by the family to do domestic chores but without payment. One was employed as a domestic worker and the other as a cattle herdboy. The children acted as sources of security for the elderly woman.

Lack of funds for education

The majorities of children were going to school but could not write examinations especially those in secondary schools. There were cases where guardians could actually indicate that they could not afford to find fees for another child when their own children were not being paid for as well. Zvipange narrated her ordeal situation indicating that:

"Ndakazoorwa ndashaya mari yechikoro. Asi vatezvara vangu vakazondibvumira kuenda kuchikoro" (I later on decided to get married but my in-laws allowed me to go to school despite being a married someone).

On establishing if BEAM was still available for poor families one child noted *"hakusisina chinonzi BEAM yakapera"* (there is no more BEAM anymore). The Social Welfare Officer indicated that BEAM was still available but only that there were delays in the payment of the money. The NGOs which are available in the community were only paying for a few children. One local Councillor noted *"maNGO acho haasi kubhadharira vana vakawanda vachiti kunobva mari yavo kwave kunetsavo"* (The local NGOs are only paying fees for a few children indicating that their sources of incomes were dwindling as well). The Councillor also noted the need to have child friendly policies which safeguards the interest of children. The Provincial Social Welfare officer felt efforts were under way to make sure vulnerable children were kept in school as they continue negotiating with Headmasters to allow the children to continue with their education as their fees were being paid for. He noted that *'critical areas to be considered were for those children in examination classes like form four and forms six. Such children's examination fees were to be paid immediately.'*

A police officer noted that most young children of school going age were found to commit minor crimes as they were seen to be loitering at home when others were at school. The police officer gave an example of a boy who was found intimate with a goat.

The Chief and even one focus group discussion raised the issue of moral decadency in the society. They indicated that *'girl children got impregnated by one man after the other and they leave their children under the care of their mothers as they go to South Africa in search of employment. When they get there, they remit money home for the first month but fail to do so in the subsequent months. The failure to remit money home led to parents failing to send children to school.'*

Health needs

The provision of health services among orphans appeared to be difficulty for them. One orphan, Dambudzo, complained about finding it difficulty in accessing health services each time he got ill *"zvakaoma kana ndarwara uye mushonga usingawaniki paclinic yepadhuze namba. Vekuchipatara vanoda mari unoita seuchafa vaunogara navo vachiti havana mari yekukurapisa"* (it is always difficult for me to get treatment when the local clinic does not have the necessary drugs and referred to the hospital. Those at the hospital will need money but my guardians would say they cannot afford). Ruvimbo also raised concerns as she would be on her mensural

periods that she could avoid going to school until the period was over. She noted that: “*ndinenge ndisina zvokudzivirira kana uri panguva yako*” (I faced challenges in accessing pads).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations made by key informants

Revival of Zunde raMambo projects

Key informants provided a number of issues to sustain the care of orphans in the communities they live. A pastor with a local church noted the need for churches to raise funds for their local church orphans such that they could pay fees for the children. The Chief recommended for the resuscitation of *Zunde raMambo* programmes which he said were key in times of drought where orphans and other vulnerable groups could benefit from the proceeds. The chief noted that it was also going to be beneficial where there are irrigation schemes for chiefs to be allocated such projects solely for the benefits of orphans and other vulnerable groups.

Resource mobilisation to sustain educational provision

A local Headmaster recommended for local NGOs to raise funds for food and educational support for orphans and other vulnerable children in communities and refrain from politicizing their resources.

Household economic strengthening initiatives

A Provincial Social Welfare officer recommended that efforts should be made by both government and local and international NGOs for economic household status where vulnerable groups should be registered and supported in health, education and welfare assistance.

Researchers' recommendations from the study findings

Adoption of a new domestic funding architecture

Efforts should be meant for the expansion of domestic financing for child and social protection by government. This is an ideal situation that promotes sustainability of child protection interventions. While the current financing model has somehow assisted many children, it is also replete with gaps as it is not sustainable. More often than not it is cosmetic and upon the exit of donors communities fall back to abject poverty. It is therefore, paramount to come up with a domestic financing model that sustain on the local resources.

Need for political will by the government

Government should demonstrate a political will through the provision of policies which are child friendly especially vulnerable children. It is therefore important to have a strengthened economic capacity for most vulnerable households including those affected by HIV and AIDS. This allows the government to protect children from practices that expose them to early marriages, early child sexual activities and exploitation by society. As if that is not enough, there is need to put proper policies and programmes in place to ensure that whenever food distribution is offered to communities it also benefits children in schools.

Provision of harmonised cash transfers

There is need to roll out harmonised cash transfers throughout the whole country and make sure there is linkages of social protection and child protection. The cash transfers should be defined by or meet the following: consistency, predictability, transparent and sustainability. By so doing they will be empowering and can therefore remove orphans and other vulnerable children from the doldrums of poverty and depravity.

CONCLUSION

While kinship-based foster care system in Zimbabwe has for a long time provided orphans and other vulnerable children with a family environment, it is also important to point out that it has not lived up to expectations. The traditional family system has been severely affected by urbanisation, poverty, HIV and AIDS to an extent that it has been left threadbare. This has therefore exposed orphans and other vulnerable children to poverty and depravity thereby leaving them more vulnerable. It is apt therefore to conclude that kinship based foster care can only be sustainable if resources for the wellbeing of children are availed. To that end, this article recommends the need to revive the *Zunde raMambo* projects, promulgation of child friendly and consistent policies as well as the need to support domestic financing for social protection policies to ensure sustainability of kinship based

foster care in Zimbabwe. Many children from institutional care are re-integrated into the community where they are expected to stay with their kins. The assumption is that the extended family is still intact as it used to be. Unless if resources are provided to support orphaned children by the state, kinship-based foster care will remain a pipe dream as families continue to disintegrate forming nuclear families.

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