

EMERGENCE OF SINGLE PARENTHOOD IN IBADAN, NIGERIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS TO CHILD REARING

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ABSTRACT

Single parenthood, a practice of rearing children without husband, was formerly unknown practice in Nigerian society. However, recent experiences have shown that the practice is now gaining ground like bushfire among women irrespective of their socioeconomic status. The study was conducted to survey the magnitude of single parenthood and how it affects the living standard of the practitioners. The study was conducted among single mothers in two contrasting settings in Ibadan – Beere and Challenge areas where there were people of low and high socioeconomic status respectively. Self developed questionnaire were administered to single mothers selected through purposive sampling. The psychometric property of the questionnaire using Chronbach's coefficient of alpha showed 0.85. A total of 220 questionnaires were administered and 85 and 95 recovered from Beere and Challenge respectively. The questionnaire was interpreted verbally to some illiterate respondents from Beere area and they were also assisted to complete the questionnaire. All respondents in Challenge area were literates and could read their questionnaire without any assistance. Data analysis was by descriptive statistics making use of tables, percentages, means and standard deviation. The results of the study revealed that respondents in Beere area were mainly petty traders, apprentice tailors, barbers and hairdressers while in Challenge, they were mainly clerical officers (36%), bankers (27%), teachers (16%) and sale girls (10%). The monthly income of the respondents varies; it ranged from N5,000 to 40,000 with a mean N15,000 ± N2,458.87. In challenge, the income ranged from N80,000 to N350,000 with a mean N190,000 ± N36,019.56. The respondents were discovered to have conceived the pregnancy of their babies through various ways. In Beere, 45% got unwanted pregnancy that resulted in births while in secondary school. In Challenge, 17% confessed they conceived through rape and 56% were abandoned by the men that impregnated them. The results also showed that the respondents adopted the singlehood lifestyle as a results of previous frustrations they had experienced in relationship with men. In Beere, it was due to husbands' desertion (44%), inability of the husband to take good care of them (52%) and monopoly of husband by new wives (46%); while in Challenge, it was because of the need for freedom from men to develop career (47%), detest for men's authority (60%) and undue lateness in getting desired suitor (34%) at marriageable age. In both settings, it was however generally agreed that training of children was difficult without the assistance of the father. It was concluded that health education to young girls should be tailored towards different causes of single parenthood among married couples. This is with a view to preventing occurrence of such problem in their future families

KEYWORDS: Single Mothers, Rape, Husband Desertion, Lifestyle

INTRODUCTION

Single parenthood is a social phenomenon that has always been in existence from time immemorial and it cut across all social strata, both the rich and the poor, the literate and illiterate alike (Pollit, 1994). It is a household in which only one parent lives with a child or children. Single parenthood as viewed by Achakpa (1999) is the taking of family responsibility, which includes caring for children without the father's or mother's contribution. Recently, the number of single parent families has increased drastically and it is gaining a global dimension. In Nigeria the existence of single parents is formerly unknown and where they existed, they were ignored as exceptional cases. However, nowadays, they are fast growing family pattern both inside and outside Nigeria. This wind of change, which has affected the Nigerian society, has turned to a situation where the idea of single parenthood now seems to be a norm, rather than an anomaly and children born to such families are legitimized if there had ever been a father in the scene. According to Harria (1993) and Pollit (1994), the percentage of white women with some level of education who has become mothers without marrying has more than doubled in the last decade. Among women with professional or managerial jobs, it has almost tripled. The suggestion therefore is that, may be marriage no longer serves women interest. If women can support themselves, they do not need to marry. They feel they are secured economically. If a single parent can have sex at will with any man she fancies, have her own house and gain the respect of friends and co-workers, she does not see any need to tie herself to the apron string of any man in a bondage called marriage. A significant proportion of adults in Nigerian society are unmarried. According to Linsel and Roth (1998), about 88 million American are single. In Nigeria there is dearth of information on the statistics of single parenthood. Kibel and Wagstaff (1991) affirmed that the prevalence of single parenting is increasing and the pool is a composite of unmarried mothers, including many teenagers, divorcees and families separated by migrant labour arrangement. Single parenthood is seen as a deviant form of the normal family. The family according to Young, Wolkowitz and Macullagh (1991) is an institution of principal importance in socialist society and is a primary target of reforming legislation. In official statements, it is conventionally referred to as the basic cell of society and functions as an agent of socialization. It is the main focus of the day-to-day responsibility for the welfare of children and the elderly. Therefore, the first approved step to starting a family is marriage, a secular contract which gives the couple signatories equal rights within marriage and equal rights to divorce and to commonly own property. Otite and Ogionwo (1998) stated that family is a vital unit in social organization and social control, and an important institution in many respects. It has also been described as a vital unit of social organization and social control.

There are different types of single parenthood. Burge (1997) observed that the vast majority of single parent families are low income families consisting of a mother and her young children and are characterized by a high percentage of minority representation and relatively little formal education. Burge (1997) has also identified three major sub groups of one-parent families. These are displaced homemakers (divorcee), adolescent mothers and single fathers. There are two main routes of entry into single parenthood. These include relationship breakdown and birth of child outside marriage. There are some differentiating factors among single parents, which include: marital status, class and race (Kamerumau & Khan, 1988). Marital status is one of the differentiating factors between a male and female headed house. Class is clearly another important consideration. A higher socio economic status is likely to equip women with greater financial capacity to raise children alone or live independently. Also, a higher social class position may make this more difficult in social terms. This reason clearly points to why some Nigerian ladies indulge in single parenthood, especially when Nigerian government

increased the living wages of workers at the beginning of democratic rule in early part of year 2000s.

Race also contributed to single parenthood. The analysis of differences in lone parents on ground of race has been subjected to greater investigation especially in respect of minority groups in advanced economies. This is partly because single parents may be more common among ethnic minority groups than in the vast population. For example in United States of America, 56.7% of all black families with children were headed by women compared with only 17% among white (Nwachukwu, 2006).

Various reasons have been adduced as to why people get into single parenthood. Early marriage is associated with a higher probability of divorce and separation (Singh and Samara, 1996). It has also been revealed that several factors contribute to the growing number of single parents. Among these is the changing view of single-hood, which is increasingly being viewed as a legitimate alternative to marriage. High divorce rate means more singles and people who have experienced divorce in their families may have more negative attitude about marriage and more positive attitude about single-hood. The reasons commonly given by women for leaving their partners usually include: adultery, cruelty, battery, desertion, addiction to alcohol or drugs and husband imprisonment and the death of husband.

Several problems have been known to be associated with single parenthood. It has been pointed out that in addition to having fewer financial resources, a single mother may be less able to supervise her adolescent children. There is evidence that an adolescent in a single parent family is susceptible to delinquent behaviour and substance abuse as the situation is not conducive to successful child rearing. It has been observed that 55% of children living in female-headed families are poor and are five times poorer than children in other families (Hamberg, 1993). Unmarried fathers are also not without problems and generally receive more condemnation than help; although generally, they have more healthy economic status than their female counterparts. Single fathers are often confronted with serious career related problems as they find their sole child rearing role conflicting with work expectations. Myles (2004) emphasized that stress is inherent in the situation of the woman trying to bring up her children alone. A husband may do little, but that little helps, and it is a comfort to have someone with whom to discuss the problem that may arise concerning the health, school performance and other matter concerning the children. Insecurity, financial pressure, lack of companion in the home and the burden of bringing up children alone, all constitute stressful conditions which take their toll on the health of women who find themselves in the situation of being single parents. Single-parenthood has to do with loneliness, hence many single parents find themselves feeling isolated at one point or another. It was reported that single parents who get pregnant are not allowed the benefit of maternity leave simply because they are not married. But the Beijing conference of 1996 has solved this problem. Single parents commonly experience difficulty with role identity. Some form of social stigma is still attached to single-parent status regardless of how it was acquired. Many single parents are confused as to when a significant other should be introduced to their child/children. While it is never good to hide a growing relationship from the child, caution should be taken that the children do not become emotionally involved with someone their mother is dating unless the relationship is going to end in marriage.

Mackay and Ross (2005) opined that marital separation commonly involves major emotional distress for child relationship. Single parents try, as they will tend to diminish parenting for several years after the break up. Mackay and Ross (2005) observed that children aged six to eight react with grief, fear and intense longing for reconciliation. Those aged nine to twelve (9-12) tend to be openly angry. They are inclined to reject a step parent. At all age groups, the children

behaviour at home and school often deteriorates. Bad companies and the existence of drug, rebelling, idleness and marginalization are some of the fears and concerns that distress these mothers on their own. Kibel and Wagstaff, (1991) went on to suggest that social contacts by the single parent with members of the opposite sex may be a catalyst for unacceptable behaviour. The child perceive the mother's friend as an interloper who attracts attention seeking behaviour and even to aggressive act directed at the visitor. Stolcken (1992) found that about twice as many children from one parent families compare to two parent families drop out of high school. Very high rates of poverty have also been discovered among single parent families (Odumous 1997). Lye et al (1995), concluded that children who spend part of their childhood in a step family, either because they were born to an unmarried mother or because their parents divorced, report significantly lower quality relationships with their parents as adults and have less frequent contact with them. Levitin (1999) and Duncan (1994) also observed that a child from a single parent family in some cases became delinquent, failing in school, developing inappropriate sex role attitudes and behaviour, or exhibiting other types of pathological conditions. Teachers commonly describe children from single parents as more hostile, aggressive, anxious, fearful, hyperactive and distractible than children from intact families (Nwachukwu, 2006). This novel way of life is now gaining ground in Ibadan, Nigeria. The purpose of this study is to survey the magnitude of single parenthood and how it affects the living standard of the practitioners and children born to such families.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The study settings were Beere and Challenge areas of Ibadan, Oyo State. Beere is located in the centre part of Ibadan and there are about 320 houses which are mainly made with mud. Most buildings house extended family members. The inhabitants of the area consist of people of low socio-economic status, low educational background and are of various religious beliefs. There were about 250 houses in Challenge area, most of which were storey buildings. Challenge is located in the southern axis of Ibadan and it is the home for the elite class who are of high socio-economic status. The target population was women who live alone with at least one child. In the study, purposive sampling was used to select the study sample. Therefore, in each of the two settings, the first 110 women the researchers met in their respective houses were selected after seeking their consent. A structured questionnaire with open and close ended questions was used to gather information from the respondents. Questionnaire comprised two sections: questions on demographic variables were asked in section one, while section two asked questions on issues pertaining to single parenting. The psychometric property of the questionnaire using Chronbach's coefficient of alpha showed 0.85. A total of 220 questionnaires were administered and 85 and 95 recovered from Beere and Challenge respectively. The questionnaire was interpreted verbally to some illiterate respondents from Beere area and they were also assisted to complete the questionnaire. All respondents in Challenge area were literates and could read their questionnaire without any assistance. Data analysis was by descriptive statistics making use of tables, percentages, means and standard deviation.

RESULTS

Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents shows that majority (92%) are mainly Yorubas in both settings and 65% were within 31-40 year age group; 5% were just literate in Beere and 66% at Challenge area had university education. The work distribution of respondents reveals that majority engaged in petty trading, apprentice tailors, barbers and hairdressers; while in Challenge, they are mainly 36% clerical officers, 27% bankers, 16% teachers and 10% sale girls

to some medium scale industries. The monthly income of the respondents varies; in Beere, it ranged from N5, 000 to 40,000 with a mean N15,000 \pm N2,458.87. In challenge, the income ranged from N80, 000 to N350, 000 with a mean N190,000 \pm N36,019.56

The results of the study shows that 78% and 86% of the respondents in Beere and Challenge respectively never married while the mean number of children to a mother in both settings are 4 ± 0.5 and 1 ± 0.7 respectively. The respondents, who never married conceived their children through different means. Table 1 shows this.

Table1: Ways by which Children of Single Mothers Were Conceived

Ways of conception	Beere %	Challenge %
I got pregnant by mistake while in secondary school, and I couldn't get good man to marry later	45	1
I have gotten pregnant and delivered before I discovered my man had his own wife and children; and I refused to be a second wife	-	34
The man responsible for my pregnancy refused to accept the baby; and since then, I refuse to have anything with men	2	56
When my man proposed to me, I accepted and I got pregnant for him, but he refused to take me as second wife	-	45
I was raped by a man who ran away; I got pregnant, deliver and I hate men generally since then	1	17

On the reasons for living alone without husband, the following table reveals the respondents' explanations:

Table 2: Reasons for Living without Husband

Reasons	Beere %	Challenge %
My husband died unexpectedly	34	2
My husband desert me for another woman	44	14
I need time and freedom to develop myself in my career	2	47
I just decide since my early life that I don't want any man to control my life for me	2	43
I chose the lifestyle since my adolescent stage due to nasty experience I had about men maltreating women	5	57
I hate the authoritative behavior of men generally	5	60
I didn't get my dream man on time, hence I decided not to worry myself about getting married again	12	34
I was once married, but my husband died	18	6
I was once married, but the man misbehaved on several occasions, hence I divorced him	69	18
I was once married, but my man get another wife who was too monopolistic and diabolical, hence I divorced for safety of my dear life and that of my children	46	12
My parents asked me to divorce my husband because he was not taking good care of me, my children and did do his responsibilities to my parents as son in-law.	52	-

On the issue of support for the maintenance of home, 12% of respondents in Challenge area are receiving that from the father of their children but nothing of such among the respondents in Beere area. Among those who received the support, 8% were getting financial support as child upkeep monthly allowance, and 4% were getting moral support through occasional visit of the father to see his child and allowance of the child to visit his father during school holidays. Also, majority (66%) of the respondents in Beere area affirmed that they were satisfied being single parents and were not ready to go into marriage with any man in future. Table 3 shows the advantages they derived from being single parents.

Table 3: Freedom Associated with Single Parenthood

Freedom	Respondents' %
Freedom from the authoritative behavior of men	40
Freedom to live one's life as deem fit without interference from 'husband'	28
Freedom to choose one's friends without any interference	44
Freedom to face one's career and record progress without any hindrance from men	56
Freedom to start and quit relationship with any man at any time	33

However, as much as 39% of respondents in Challenge area were no more enjoying being single parents, and were planning to remarry, and they listed the following in table 5 as the recurrent problems associated with single parenthood.

Table 4: Problems Inherent in Single Parenthood

Problems in Single parenthood	Respondents' %
Financial problem	10
Difficulty in training the children alone the acceptable moral standard as they can sometimes be obstinately incorrigible	30
Continual harassment from men who are desperate to start relationship with me	77
Continual disturbance from my family members and friends on unsolicited advice to remarry	56
I do not command social respect as responsible person from neighbour simply because I am living alone without husband	12
No true friend to share the occasional domestic problems with	30
It is sometimes embarrassing begging my boyfriend to come over when I need him and he keeps make excuses	8

When emotionally depressed, the respondents gave various people that share their problems with them to get relieve. As much as 33% said their parents were always for them, 23% get consolation from close female friends while 12% were made happy by the affection shown by their boyfriends. Judging by the advantages and occasional problems associated with single parenthood, 45% of the respondents still believe it is a good lifestyle to be recommended to their younger love ones. Some (43%) however answered in the negative and 11% of them said they would join their estranged husband or remarry in the near future. On advice for spinsters about marriage, as much as 76% of the respondents' advice that spinsters should be allowed to decide for self whatever form of lifestyle fancied.

DISCUSSIONS

Single parenthood as observed by Pollit (1994) is a social phenomenon that has been in existence from time immemorial which cut across all social strata in the society. The results of the present study is in line with this observation. The two settings for the study could be viewed as the two faces of a coin. Beere is a poor area where people of poor socioeconomic status live while Challenge is a sophisticated area with modern houses and standardised social amenities for the comfort of the people living in the area. The results of the study showed the existence of single parent mothers in both settings. It shows that level of education and socio-economic status have no influence on the practice of single parenthood among people. The reasons for choosing that way of life however differ between the two communities. While the respondents in Beere were forced into single parenthood by death of spouse, adolescent pregnancy and husband desertion,

their counterparts in Challenge mainly choose single parenthood for various reasons based on need for freedom from the perceived men's domineering attitude. Respondents in Challenge choose to remain single as a result of their previous bitter experience with men ranging from rape, men's deceit before contract marriage and inability to get a suitor at desired age.

According to Burge (1997), single parent mothers are found mainly in the poverty ridden area of our society. The results of the present study revealed that majority of single parents in Beere were found in the interior of the area, the real poor segment of Beere. Many of the respondents who were raped, cajoled into sex which later resulted in unwanted pregnancy and delivery were discovered in poverty ridden area of Beere. Though, poverty might not be the major reason for single parenthood way of life, the results of this study corroborate the influence of poverty as one of the reasons for choosing single parenthood among women.

In the work of Kamerumau and Khan (1988), it was discovered that high socioeconomic status enhanced by high status at work is a strong factor which discourages women from marriage institution. Many women of high status want a child or children, to prove the potency of their fertility to the families and friends, but are not interested to live in the same roof with men; they detest the men authority and some unchallengeable characters of men. In Challenge area, this category of single parents was found. For instance, as much as 87% of the respondents in challenge said they choose singlehood as a way of life from childhood because they detest the domineering attitude of men and they have vowed to remain single as long as they have financial capacity to face their life. Judging by the standard of the buildings and the environment where the buildings were found, as much as 57% of the respondents in Challenge choose singlehood in fulfilment of their childhood dream. In raising their children, to further corroborate their high status, up to 55% of the respondents affirmed that they did not need any support, financial or moral from the father of their children. Their counterparts in Beere area however were in dire need of the fathers' financial support in raising their children to responsible adults. Majority of them complain bitterly about the fathers' neglect of the children in payment of school fees and general upkeep.

Results of several studies revealed sour relationship between the children of single mother and their would-be step fathers. Odumous (1997), Kibel and Wagstaff (1991) and Hamburg (1993) carried out extensive studies on the relationship of the children of single women with their men friends. They discovered that children aged nine to twelve tend to be openly angry, and all children, no matter the age reject step fathers. The authors advised that single mother should be cautious in their relationship with men unless they are sure such relationship will end in marriage. The children of single mothers at Beere were noticed to be indifferent with the male partners of their mothers. This might be because polygamy was the normal marital practice in the area. The situation is different in Challenge because polygamy is alien to most families in the area. Children were used to knowing marriage to be a relationship between man and only one woman; it never occurs to them that a man would marry two wives. This view was confirmed by the results of the present study. As much as 45% of the respondents who desired to remarry confessed they hid their relationship with men from their children as they had discovered their children did not want to see any man other than their biological fathers. In the work of Levitin (1999) and Duncan (1994), it was observed that children from single parent family in some cases became delinquent, failing in school, developing inappropriate sex role attitudes and behavior. The behavioural attitude of children of single mothers in Challenge area corroborate the authors' discovery. Up to 32% of the respondents said that their children were becoming difficult to control in terms of moral training as they were getting bad moral reports from their schools.

Generally, respondents from challenge area were happier in their chosen way of life than those in Beere area and would recommend the practice to their love ones.

CONCLUSIONS

Single parenthood is a very sensitive issue in Nigeria. The study has attempted a discussion on some of the type of single motherhood that exists as well as some of the reasons why women become single parents.

Recommendation and the Role of Health Education in Control of Simple Parenthood

For the purpose of this study, emotional well-being is a necessity for a holistic health status. Health education should be tailored towards the different types and causes of single parenthood among which are teenager pregnancy, married but separated or divorced and never married parents. Health education in the case of teenage pregnancy should concentrate on reproductive health with more emphasis on family planning and abstinence from sexual intercourse among adolescents. Divorced parents should be made to see the need for reunion and stability for companionship and for children upbringing. Religious group should be made to take active role in this regard. The government too should formulate policy on the care of children coming from single parent. This will drastically reduce crime rate in Nigeria society.

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