



Women Issues in Nigeria

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Impacts Of Female Single Parenthood On Self And Children

S. A. Famuyiwa

Abstract

Preparation for parenthood is a complex and challenging task as parental skills do not necessarily come easily and naturally. Parents partially behave the way they do because of their own childhood experiences. This paper examines the associated factors of emergence of female single parenthood and its implication to childrearing which is characterized by poor personality of the relationship, poverty, illness, mental/emotional instability, stress, character defects (wife abuse), marital disharmony and infidelity. Its effect on childhood experiences is negative as children from such homes have the following experiences: verbal abuse, child labour, sex abuse, child battery, street children, prostitution, forced marriage. It is therefore, recommended that premarital counselling and health education against family disintegration should be organized for adolescent and young couples. In addition, appropriate health workers e.g. midwives, social workers and medical officers with the support from government must be prepared always to render useful services in rehabilitating needy families in the community.

Introduction

Single parenthood is a new development in the sociology of the family and it is perhaps a result of the continual struggle

for equality of the sexes which reaches a focal point with the women's liberation struggle (Sarah and Pamela 2003).

The single parent family structure appears to be predicated on this assertion by Jette (1977) "the family is not a necessary social institution from the biological point of view since reproduction of the species does not demand such an organization". However, one cannot overlook the fact that female single parenthood are more common than before in many countries of the world including Nigeria. Visiting a court session in majority of customary court confirmed that 80% of the cases, attended to and awaiting final judgment are divorce cases, Young career men and women opt for parenthood without marriage and some times they enter into a mutual marriage i.e. cohabitation on mutual agreement. In the process they may become parents if cohabitation can no longer be sustained such parents separate and single parenthood results.

John and Wiltner (1982) observed that single parenthood is the dominant child-rearing unit in some sub-cultures, that it is a by-product of the family disintegration that characterizes the dominant culture. As such the single parent family is often born at a time of enormous chaos and turmoil for all its participants. The event is typically, the separation of husband and wife accompanied by emotional upheaval, anger and guilt for both parents and children.

Categories Of Female Single Parent And Its Psychosocial Causes

According to Obbo (1980), female single parents may be categorized into:

- i. Women who had never married but have children
- ii. Women including divorcees and widow who were irrevocably tired of marriage as an institution and relationship between men and women and preferred having their own houses and being self supporting.

- iii. Women who belong to the first two categories but lacked the resources to be self supporting
- iv. Women who had migrated to have a change of life and hoped to marry urban men or rich rural men who frequented the city (they spent most of their time looking for Mr. Right; marrying for period varying from two weeks to a years).
- v. Women who were caught up in the scramble for non-existing or underpaid jobs and often resorted to the skills that comes naturally-sex.

John and Weltner (1982) remarked that single parenthood can begin with the death of one parent, a situation hardly less traumatic. The trauma particularly in cases of divorce is not easily relegated to the past. The problem that beset marriage frequently also beset the divorce, maintaining a disturbing relationship as background noise in an already difficult situation.

Ross (1995), Susan and Ala (1996) concluded that there is a correlation in premarital cohabiting and later divorces. This is more pronounced among people who have cohabited with more than one partner.

In many customary court visited, divorce cases are being adjudicated, reasons given by complainants were physical abuse, inadequate financial support from husband, maltreatment, frequent alcohol drinking by husband and verbal abuse. Some men complained of communication misunderstanding, incompatibility of the wife, act of infidelity on the part of wife, changes in lifestyle and verbal abuse, not wanting to see husband in laws and lack of sexual satisfaction from the wife. Levinger (1996) stated that wives cited twice many complaints as husbands and supported the above observation that wife were far more likely to complain of physical abuse, financial problems, drinking, verbal abuse while husband were more likely to cite in-law trouble and sexual incompatibility.

He went further that result of divorced varied by socio-economic status: lower status couples seem more concerned with problem behaviors while middle-class concentrated on emotional issues. Wolcott and Jody (1999) also concluded that majority of men and women in their study mentioned affective dimension of their marriage relationship-encompassing communication problems. Incompatibility, changed lifestyle desires and instance of infidelity as the main reason for their divorce.

Presland and Glucksten (1993) affirmed that a husband affair was a main contributing reason for initiating separation by their wife. Macken (1999) observed that the more a man buys into masculine stereotypes the worst it will be for his wife, because this kind of relationship puts a huge amount of strains on women. As she is the one feeling the stress. They also asserted that in Britain in 1995, 26% of divorce were granted on ground of adultery, 44% for unreasonable behaviour, 23% a two year separation by mutual consent: 6% after a five year separation and fewer than 1% on the ground of desertion. Identifying the point of irretrievable break down's is difficult.

Implication of Female Single Parenthood on Child Upbringing

John and Weltner (1982) observed that there are lot of problems implicit in the structure of any family unit in which there is only one parent and one or more children. These problems are both emotional, physical and financial i.e. the female who is the mother is beset by such a lots of problems that helplessness become a way of life. The single female parent is often forced into a work situation that absorbs so much of her energy that there is little left for home making or parenting. If on the other and she does not work, poverty often makes all family functions difficult and tenuous. Against this background there are meals to prepare, shopping to do, discipline and providing support for children whose emotional has been weakened by the event leading to single parenthood. There may be fighting with in-

laws or ex-spouses, stresses in extended family relationship, the search for a new home, sub-standard housing. The number and magnitude of demands upon the single parent often dictate that some of these demands will be met poorly. They concluded that single mothers have higher poverty rates than other families and a substantial portion of their poverty is a consequence of marital disruption.

Jennifer, Thomas and John (2007), stated that stress negatively impacts single female parenting as well as other kinds of functioning. Stress factors that are more likely to be presents and to affect single mothers than happily married mothers include: financial problems: living in a bad neighborhood, increased outside employment and child care demands, post break up domestic violence and harassment, divorce and custody litigation.

John and Weltner (1987) stressed further that female single parents lack the validation which normally is available from another adult in the house. Issue arise when children directly attack a mother's definition of reality, normally which would have been dealt with, by a husband's support. Disagreement as whether children should be forced to do homework every evening can lead to childs disobedience unless mother's position as the superior authority is confirmed. In the absence of such definition, single female parents often compromise their definition of reality with a child whose basic reality orientation may be quite faulty. Validation also implies feed back, both positive and negative, even with a fairly poor relationship, parents can give each other useful feedback about behavior within the family. This enhance the supportive of a parents determination to follow certain policies as well as provide a kind of feedback that helps a parent to prevent child relationship with bad peer groups. Lack of validation leaves the female single parent a less effective and less powerful leader of the family.

Generational distance and its maintenance are a major default in most single parent families, such essential parenting function as setting limits and providing advice and nurturance to a child often are compromised because a parent simply not have the emotional reserves to maintain a parental position. There has been a case of single parents making a virtue out of necessity by extolling the sense of independence and maturity that their children develop, very obvious problem, these children may be having such as excessive drug use, school difficulties or behavioral eccentricity are often denied under the guise of children's 'finding themselves' or 'doing their own thing' generational distance is particularly hard for the oldest child especially the oldest son of a female headed single family. This son is often called to act as the man of the house, sometimes overtly and sometimes in a more subtle ways with his contributions welcomed by his beleaguered mother. The oldest son find it especially confusing when the mother stops acting like is almost spouse and being to act like a parent ordering him around.

Compounding the problem of maintaining generational boundaries is the single parent's difficult in finding the time or energy needed to establish appropriate outside contacts relationship with peers, dates and membership in organizations and small communities which would have anchor her more firmly in the adult world. Similarly, she may fail to provide the emotional, financial and transformational resources that would support her child movement into an appropriate peer system, thus separated from their peers, mother and child any move toward egalitarian closeness.

Another endemic problem of single parenthood is the symbiosis, which is a consequence of the failure of generation boundaries. The overtly enmeshed relationship between a parent and a child can best be understood in terms of the anger that normally helps parent and child to distance themselves becomes too frightening within this vulnerable unit.

The mother is always weak as she is overworked, overstresses often, so depressed that decency and good sense dictate that a child avoid confronting her as the child may not be willing to risk abandonment again. For the mother, there is a similar worry. If she gets angry with her child to whom can that child turn? In the nuclear family, there is always the father who will take up the slack when she unleashes and detaches from the child. With no adult around however, a mother may well hesitate to abandon her emotionally much as it might feel relieving. In addition the single parent is often confronted with the problem "if I get mad at this child and we experience some estrangement, to whom can I turn" the problem of managing anger between parent and child dictates a relationship in which there is a loss of separateness, and in which clinging and separation problems abound.

Southal (1978) opined that provision of meals maintenance, of family routine, protection for the family, management of the budget, discipline and guidance of the children are all functions single parenthood can lead the child in the family setting to become a parental child and it is often problematic. However, often for both parents and child, it is a preferable alternative to the disorganization that would result if that child's service were not marshaled. The parental child certainly can be an abused child, he or she may be overworked, undervalued and unsupported in dealings with siblings.

The parental child can be also become a scapegoat; the one that parent blames for everything that is going wrong in the family life. The parental child is also from the recipient of unfinished relationship business between mother and her parents.

The psychological stability and security/ safety needs provided by father is lacking in the emergence of mother single parent. According to Bamisaye (1990) children feel more secure in their father house than elsewhere. The child's situation where a child's parents were never married or divorced, the children

feel insecure if he stays with his mother. The mother will also feel insecure as there is nobody for her to discuss and share her problems with and she will be regarded as an irresponsible woman by the people in the environment as any little annoyance or quarrel with neighbors who even steps on her toes will be reference to as bad attitude which drove her out of her husband's home.

Hacker (1976) observed that single women merit the status of a minority group, because they are subject to discrimination, prejudice and segregation on the basis of their physical and social characteristics.

Female single parenthood has a negative effect on child rearing as the upbringing of such children is characterized with academic disadvantage, verbal abuse, child labour, sex abuse, child battery, prostitution, forced marriage, e.t.c. Just as poverty is usually a hindrance to the performance of paternal responsibilities, it also hinders the performance of many maternal responsibilities towards children. Children of the poor illiterate female single parents are the worst hit, their mothers usually have to leave home very early either for farms or trades leaving nothing for the young children. Many times, these young children have to follow their parents to trade in the market at a very tender age thus indirectly or knowingly exposed them to the risk of imitating and mangle with garage boys and girls, peer bad influence and also the danger of been knocked down by a moving vehicle. If they combine street trading with schooling, this may affect their academic performance negatively. If they do not go to school at all, or drop out, they grow up into cycle of poverty and need, hence there need for self actualization would not be fulfill, as Udoh and Ajala (1991), stated that Maslow hierarchical of human needs believed that the need for self actualization is the highest of all human needs.

Adams (1972) also opined that the principle of man's aspirations and desire which its satisfactory lead to ultimate

happiness. Happiness comes not through leading a life of leisure but rather through a life of achievements.

Youngmain (2001) observed that children from female single parent exhibit more academic, psychological and behavioural problems as a result of less parental commitment to children education and fewer economic and human resources than children whose parents remained married. Arendell (1999) affirmed that it is inter parental conflict that most adversely affect children in divorce as many children are adversely affected economically because only few of divorced fathers comply fully and regularly with child support orders. Wilson (2001) remarked that sociologists have found that the factor most decisive to a girl's increased sexual vulnerability was living in a household with adult male after her parents separation, hence they are sexually abuse. He also concluded that increase in single mother household over the past 25-30 years has contributed to increase violent crime among children and adolescents. Hyunjoon (2007) opined that children growing up in a single mother's household is at academic risk.

Conclusion And Recommendations

To prevent or reduce the increase rate of divorce leading to single female parenthood and its negative implications as well as social welfare unit on child rearing, the health education unit of ministry of health both a federal and state level should organized family life education and premarital counselling for the adolescents and young couple to acquaint them with the factors that could lead to divorce and its consequence on the children. Ministry of education both at federal and state levels should also make family life education an integral part of the school curriculum at all level and the subject should be taught by trained health education teachers. Seminars can be also be organized by religious organisation by inviting nurses and midwives to educate the students on the subject at a regular interval to educate the public and members of their

congregations about negative social/physical effects of family disintegration on the children. Government can also design programmes through the Ministry of social welfare services to rehabilitate the disintegrated families in the communities.

In addition, appropriate health workers like midwives, social workers and medical officers with the support from government must be prepared always to render useful services in rehabilitating needy families in the communities.

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