

Implications of Single Parent Families on Children in Gboko Town, Benue State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: The rate at which a mother or father nurtures a child or children who exhibit behavior impropriety around our communities today is alarming. This has broached the study to assess the implications of single parenting on children in Gboko town, Benue State, Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design, and employed the questionnaire and semi structured interview to collect data from 400 respondents which were drawn using Taro Yamen's formula. Data were presented and analyzed using simple percentage distributions. Having found single parent households increasing, the study also finds that poor home training, poor nutrition and unhealthy lifestyle, low academic achievement, poverty, and delinquent/antisocial behaviour are some of the challenges faced by children. The study therefore recommends serious campaign against having children outside wedlock, encouraging widow/widowers and the divorced to remarry, legislation against children before marriage and organizational support to singles who cannot remarry for convincing reasons, as measures to moderate single parenting and its implications on children.

Keywords: Single parent, children, family, upbringing, marriage.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gradually, many children are raised by one parent today. The rate of single parenting has already constituted a social concern in many parts of Nigeria, nay the world. The rate of indiscipline, immorality, anti-social and or delinquent behaviour exhibited by youths today might have stemmed from children that did not receive collective and proper training by both parents. However, this is contentious and remained to be seen.

According to Merriam Webster dictionary, single parent is one who lives with a child or children without the company of a husband or a wife or a partner. In another version, Chapman (2014) describe single parent as a Solo parent who

gives care for children with no support of an in-house spouse or partner. Chapman distinguishes single parent households to include at least two people, one parent and a child or children, from single person house holds, where only one person resides. What is apparent in both thoughts above, is the upbringing of a child or children by one parent be it the mother or the father. If not for changes in modern day family it does not really require only both biological parents to raise a child. Relations – grand parents, siblings, uncles, aunties, name it can bring up a child in a proper way. But the responsibility is more or less of biological parents today and the consequences are conspicuous on the child once raised by a lone parent. This is because one parent can never instill complete discipline in a child. It requires both parents to be living together such that if anyone of the parents is out, the other would take charge (Malachi, 2020).

Objectives of the study

- i. To find out the implications of what is conceived as single parenting on the child or children in Gboko Town.
- ii. To assess the prevalence of single parent families in Gboko Town.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The rate of single parent households are increasing here and there today about one-half of all children spend some time in their lives in a single parent households. Just like in other developed countries, there are increasing cases of single parent households in the United States today close to 12 million and the number surges (Giddens and Duneier, 2020). It is revealed that single parent household is determined by widows, unmarried and divorced partners who suffer social disapproval and economic insecurity and are on average the poorest groups in contemporary society (Giddens and Duneier, 2020). Statistics by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development - OECD (2017),

shows that between 2016/2017, the proportion of children living in a single-parent household varied between 6% and 28% in different countries; lowest in Turkey (6%), Greece (8%), Croatia (8%), and Poland (10%), while highest in France 23%, United Kingdom (23%), Belgium (25%), Lithuania (25%), and United States (27%).

Elsewhere Sub-Saharan Africa has recorded a large number of single mother parent families. This is due to increasing rates of out-of-wedlock motherhood, divorce and widowhood. It is observed that women are bereaved of their husbands due to wars, HIV/AIDS pandemic (Ntoimo and Odimegwu, 2014). Similarly, Sub-Saharan Africa is inundated with killings and insurgency and the novel Coronavirus pandemic leaving many children with single or no parents to look unto. Ntoimo and Odimegwu, reveal that, in Cameroon, the population of women who are single mothers through divorce/separation increased drastically from 78, 060 in 1976 to 129, 000 in 2005 that is a 65% increase and widows increased 58% which is from 299, 690 to 475, 930 within the same period. In Nigeria, close to one million women aged 10-85 years old were either divorced or separated and 1.7 million were widowed in 2006 while nurturing children (Ntoimo and Odimegwu, 2014).

Causes of Single Parenting

Death has left many children at the care of one parent in a family. Most especially, mothers, who also doubled as breadwinners of the families (Chapman, 2014). The rising divorce rates in more recent years is the cause of increasing number of single parent households (Giddens and Duneier, 2000).

Single parenting is also caused by women who give birth before marriage or who would never marry. Though some are single parents by choice, many are, not intentionally but unplanned pregnancies before or out of wedlock or possibly abandoned (Giddens and Duneier, 2000).

Implications on Children

Single parent households are vulnerable to food insecurity since the households mostly headed by mothers do not have enough resources to provide the amount of food needed to sustain an active and a healthy lifestyle of the children (Chapman 2000). A study carried out by Ntomimo and Odimegwu (2014), health of single motherhood on children in sub-Saharan Africa, shows that children in single motherhood are likely to be stunted and also experience under-5 mortality than children being nurtured by both parents. This

is obvious, since family requires the synergy of both parents in most cases to provide food needs of the children. Poverty is one of the features of single parent households, thus the likelihood of in-house children not being well fed resulting to physical and mental ill health abounds.

Children raised in single parenthood do not perform well in academics compared to children in intact homes. Studies currently reject the claim that children raised by only one parent do just as well as children raised by both parents (Giddens and Duneier, 2000). It is unveiled that single mothers are younger, less educated, and poorer to take care of the educational needs of children than mothers in two parent homes (Chapman, 2000). The inconsistent mode of offsetting school needs and the lack of authority to encourage children to school activities by single parents at times occasions poor academic performances and dropout of school by children.

Findings on different occasions, David Blackenhorn, Patrick Fagan, Mitch Pearlstain, David Popenoe and Borbara Dafoe Whitehead, reveal single parent family is correlated with school failure and problems of delinquency, drug use, teenage pregnancies, poverty, and welfare dependency in the United States (Wikipedia, 2020). In the United Kingdom, office for national statistics has reported that children of single parents are more likely to suffer mental illness, anti-social behaviour, unhappiness, abuse of substance and indulgent in juvenile delinquency, as the case with America (Wikipedia, 2020). These problems stated above are also being experienced in Nigeria currently, which attention is drawn to expose it.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The structural functional and symbolic interactional theories are considered for this study.

Symbolic Interactionism

Interactionist view society in terms of symbols and the meanings assigned to them where family itself stands as a symbol (Lumen n.d). Interactionist perspective argue that the family is not an objective, concrete reality but a social construct. The theory view family as a group of role players or actors which does not attach importance to biological parents as guardians can assume the role of parents and the children through interaction will be socialized. Symbolic interactionism has been criticized for being unscientific and too relaxed on free consciousness (Ritzer, 2006).

Structural Functionalism

Functionalism is a traditional theory in sociology developed by Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer and refined by Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons. Structural functionalism as also called, view society as a social system that is made up of different parts or components which are interdependent and interrelated and produced various functions that maintain, stabilize and sustain the social system (Igbo, 2000). Functionalists argue that family is an important institution that plays vital roles in society. The family and its members perform certain functions that facilitate well being and stability of the society. Just like a biological organism that has various parts and functions to produce in connection with one another, a family has members that have different roles to play to ensure good development of the family and stability of the society. It is the duty of parents to train children produced for adult life in society. Parents teach children gender roles for better functioning and the absent of any one of the parents denies the child of such gender roles (Lumen n.d.). Child upbringing is seen by structural functionalist theory as a duty by both parents. It assumed that a child would not be properly trained into adult life by a single parent. Structural functionalism though criticized of being ahistorical, teleological and tautological still offers a better explanation of single parenting.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study area of this research was Gboko, a fast growing town in the Benue state of North central Nigeria. The population of this study comprised of all single parents found in households in Gboko area. However, the population was stupendous to cover given a short period of time therefore, 400 respondents were selected using Taro Yamen’s method of sampling. The respondents were realized at after applying the cluster sampling technique and generated four (4) clusters to include Gboko North, Gboko West, Gboko South and Gboko Central. The method of data collection was the questionnaire and semi structured interview. A close ended questionnaire designed into two sections, A: Which sought data on demographic variables and B: On prevalence and implications of single parent households on children, was administered by the researcher to the respondents and ensured 100% return of completed questionnaires.

The study holds an interview with 20 social welfare officers in Gboko who have affirmed to have vast knowledge about single parents and their children. This is based on the fact that they interact with families by providing assistance in terms of nutrition, healthcare, childcare assistance and resolution of conflicts. Data was analyzed using simple percentage distributions.

V. RESULTS.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic variables of respondents

Variable	Frequency	Parents
Gender		
Male	86	21.5
Female	314	78.5
Total	400	100
Age		
18- below	138	34.5
19-29	193	48.3
30 above	69	17.2
Total	400	100
Education		
No formal education	18	4.5
Primary	88	22
Secondary	246	61.5
Tertiary	48	12
Total	400	100
Occupation		
Homework	180	45
Business	178	44.5
Civic servant	42	10.5
Total	400	100

Source: Field survey, 2020

Data presented in table 1 is about the demographic characteristics of respondents. A predominant 314 (78.5%) of females participated in this study more than the male category with 86 (21.5%) representation. That is to say that, the single families are mostly parented by women inGboko Town than the men do. In the distribution, respondents who are below 18 were 138 (34.5%), those aged 9-29 were 193 (48.3%) and above 30 participated in a frequency of 69 (17.2%). Respondents of age 19 and 29 dominated the study implying that they are of child bearing age and more vulnerable to single parenting.

Educationally, no formal education participated 18 (4.5%), first school leavers 88 (22%), secondary school leavers predominated with 246 (61.5%) and higher education holders were 48 (12%). The implication of dominance of

secondary school leavers in the study is that more educated people avoid being solo parents except in cases of death of spouse when they are yet to remarry.

It was important to capture the occupation of respondents because it determined the outcome on children. Data in the table shows that 180 (45%) respondents does not have gainful employment but homework, 178 (44.5%) are into small scale businesses in Gboko and just 42 (10.5%) are civil servants who are believed to be those with higher qualifications. Domestic workers participated more in the study which is why the researcher was able to access them with observation that their children could bear negative implications on upbringing since the resources to carter for them would be minimal.

Table 2: Prevalence of single parent families

Item	Response	Frequency	Percent
How many children do you have?	1-2	152	38
	3-4	149	37.3
	5above	99	04.7
Why are you nurturing the child(ren) alone?	Bereaved	108	27
	Divorced	124	42
Total		400	100

Source: Field survey, 2020.

The distribution in table 2 shows that many children are raised by single parent families in GbokoCounty. Single families having at least one or two children predominated this study in a high frequency of 152 (38%), while single parent families nurturing three or four children came close with 149 (37.3%) and single families parenting 5 or more children came less just 99 (24.7%). This distribution indicates the prevalence of single parent children.

In a different perspective, single parent families who are never married and or abandoned

with children prevailed in this study representing 168 (42%). Close to this, 124 (31%) of the participants were either divorced or separated to live and care for the child(ren) in a home and 108 (27%) are parenting children lonely as widows or widowers. This data shows that the rate of single parenting in this township (Gboko) is alarming most especially young girls who have never married but are abandoned with children by their men lovers. This data is near to the one found in U.S in 2010 where about 47% of single motherhood families had never married (Chapman, 2014).

Table 3: Implications of single parent families on children.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Low academic achievement	72	18
Poor nutrition and unhealthy lifestyle	69	17.3
Poor upbringing	77	19.3
Delinquent/Anti-social behaviour	64	16
Poverty	63	15.7
Homelessness	55	13.7
Total	400	100

Source: Field survey, 2020

Data presented in table 3 show a melange of effects suffered by children brought up by single

parent families in Gboko. Majority of the respondents 77 (19.3%) affirmed that children from

solo parenting are not properly trained up or socialized. Respondents 72 (18%) stated that children of single parents do not perform very well in academics; others 69 (17.3%) responded that children of single parent homes do not feed very well and have frequent health challenges; furthermore, 64 (16%) respondents opined that children in single parent homes engage in delinquent and anti-social behaviour; while 63 (15.7%) respondents nodded that poverty is one of the characteristic of single parent household children, and 55 (13.7%) respondents confirmed that children from single parent families mostly do not have home or permanent place of residence.

VI. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study interviewed 20 workers of social welfare department, to back up information obtained from the primary respondents concerning the prevalence of single parent families and its implications on children in Gboko town. The study finds that single parenting is becoming the other of the day. Respondents 18 (90%) who were interviewed attest they were aware of families that are headed by one parent. More so, the primary respondents (400) of this study are single parents which alone signifies its high rate. This finding is similar to findings of Chapman (2014) concerning the rising trend in single parent households in the U.S from the 20th Century.

The study also finds an array of implications of raising a child in a single parent household in Gboko to include poor feeding and poor growth of the child(ren), poor performance in academics, poor home training, delinquent/antisocial behaviour, poverty and homelessness. These findings were affirmed to by the 20 (100%) of the social welfare officers and all the 400 (100%) primary respondents at varying statistics. Elsewhere, the findings are similar to those of Ntoimo and Odimegwu (2014), and Chapman (2014), who have revealed the implications of single parent families on children in Sub-Saharan Africa and the US respectively.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that single parent families are on the rise bearing unacceptable challenges not just on the families and their children but on society at large. Though it can never be eliminated completely, something has to be done to moderate single parenting and its effects on children and society.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. There should be an all-outenlighten campaign by governmental and non-governmental organizations to illuminate the burden of being a single parent, to deter unmarried youths of giving birth to children out of wedlock.
- ii. A legislation is suggested to be enacted against having children out of wedlock. If eventually occurs, the partners should be compelled to stay together and nurture the children.
- iii. Widow/widowers and the divorced should be encouraged to remarry and unite to take care of the child(ren).
- iv. Organizations should support parents who genuinely can no longer marry to take care of their children and nurture them appropriately.
- v. All hands should be on deck by religious, legal, and other related groups to instill marital bonds and vows to reduce incessant cases of divorce and separation by couples.

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