

Single Parenting and Spousal Mental Health: A Demographic Approach

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Abstract

The paper examines: Single parenting and spousal mental health: A Demographic approach. Single parenting is an aspect of parenting where the father or mother is practicing and taking responsibility of nurturing children in the absence of another parent. In every society, family is the key nucleus of the society. Parents are the principal actors in the development of family. Parents are life companion to their children, especially at the formative stage of the child. Single parent families have been on the increase globally which some schools of thought have linked the growing rate of single parenting to stress and falling economy. The effects of mental health on the parents manifest in forms of anxiety disorders, panic disorders, phobia, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, substance abuse and other psychotropic intake. The implications of single parenting affects the spouses and the children of the union. In most cases, the affected individual in single parenting are the children. The paper adopts attachment theory as a framework to the study. Based on the study, the following recommendations were reached: To promote family stability, governments of developing countries should establish Family Endowment Fund to support low income household. Spouses should develop skills and sustainable income to meet the basic needs of the family. Parents of single status should engage in savings such as local contribution, this will help the family to satisfy the required needs of family.

Keywords: *Single, Parenting, mental, health and adolescence*

INTRODUCTION

The rate of divorce and separations of marriages in recent times is becoming alarming in both Developed and Developing Countries of the world and this has given birth to the phenomenon of single parenting. Single parenting is seen as a social phenomenon that has always been in existence from of old. Schaefer, (2001) defined "single parenting" as a family which is only one parent to care for the children. Therefore, single parenting is a family with only one parent either as a father or a mother who serve as a caregiver to the offspring of the union.

Nwachukwu, (2007) asserted that from the demographics of Nigeria, 35% of the population constitutes single parents. This shows the rapid growing trend of single parenting in Nigeria and other African Countries. Because of the imbalance in parenting, children raised from such homes are poorly socialized into the larger society. Achakpa, (2017) asserted that single parenthood is seen as the taking of family responsibility without the fathers or mother's contribution to the process of child raising.

Single parent families have been on the increase globally which some schools of thought have linked the growing rate of single parenting to stress and falling economy of the families, communities and the government. Before the emerging socio-economic challenges of the world in the twentieth century, most single parent families were as a result of death of spouses, as compared with only about 10% today that is perpetuated by stress and failed economy {Chen, 2006}. The post-World War II, experience shows that more than 75% of single parent families are as a result of divorce and separation and this has caused mental health and psychiatric challenge to the victim spouse. Single parent children commonly experience difficulties in identifying the role strain and stigmatization regardless of how it was obtained.

According to John and Shimfe, {2020, the universality of marriage is attributed to the many basic social and personal functions it performs in the society, such as procreation, regulation of sexual behavior, care of children and their education and socialization, regulation of lines of descent, division of labor between the sexes, economic production and consumption, and satisfaction of personal needs for social status, affection, and companionship (John and Shimfe, 2020). Until modern times marriage was rarely a matter of free choice, and it was rarely motivated by romantic love. In societies in which the extended family remains the basic unit, marriages are usually arranged by the family. Marriage is the state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife. From another school of thought, marriage is seen as a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law. Legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners and accords status to their offspring.

Single Parenting and Spousal Mental Health

In many parts of Africa, including Nigeria, mental illness is ascribed to various causative dynamic. In African context, when there is mental illness, it is seen as an affliction on man from the spirit world. In some parts of the country, people suffering from mental illness are seen as being the originator of their own misfortune. They are seen as being serving the penalty of one evil or the other they have committed in the time past (Child, 2003). As such, when someone is mentally ill, it is unusual for his people to seek orthodox medical care. This is from the view of African Philosophy, but with the increasing rates of spousal single status, the level of spousal mental health has reduced leading to mental illness arising from the trauma of single parenthood and not from the spiritual causative.

Single parenting is an aspect of parenting where the father or mother is practicing and taking responsibility of nurturing children in the absence of another parent. The absence of one of the spouses has promoted spousal mental health (Dave, 2000). People's mental health is determined by social, psychological, and biological indexes. For example, divorce and separation leading to single parenthood. Single parenting is one of the leading causes of Poor mental health among. Single parenting account for an enormous global burden of mental health disease that is largely underestimated and underappreciated. According to WHO, mental health

is an important and essential component of health, a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Mental health problems affect society as a whole and female single parent. One of the most demographic challenges facing the Nigerian family and Africa in general is the increasing rate of single family heads. Maternal single status have been reported to increase the risk of mental health challenges of women. This has largely contributed to the mental health of the father, mother and the offspring of the “single union” (David, 2009).

The trend of mental health of single parenting substantially manifest on the single mother and children who bears the pains of the separation from the union. Single motherhood has consequences on the mental health and well-being of the victim social status. Some of the psycho-social effects of single parenting on the woman is the societal stigmatization, devaluation of status, low perception from suitors, family rejection and amongst others. The single parenting has predisposes women to mental stress because many single mothers shoulder the economic and general welfare of the children in the “defunct” union, this has heightened the poverty index of women (Durhei, 2001). The emotional life of the single mother is also affected by her single status. Single parenting is associated with poor mental health like: Anxiety Disorders, Panic Disorders, Phobia, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Substance Abuse and other psychotropic intake.

The severity of single parenthood is more on women and children’s mental health. The implication of single parenthood also relates to the Children of the union. Many researchers have been conducted that reveals that single parenting has many effects on social behavior, child’s academic performance, economic hardship, social interaction and it negatively influenced child’s health and social relationship (Eshleman, 2005).

Causes of Single Parenthood

Divorce is one of the leading causes of single parenthood in modern day society. The failed spousal compatibility. Divorce on its own makes the couples develop a downbeat attitude towards marriage and therefore, underpinning the status of single parenthood. Scholars have identified some of the predisposing factors of divorce to include: adultery, cruelty, and desertion, addiction to alcohol or drug, child sex preference, extended family interference and amongst others (Hawkers, 2001). The death of husband or wife also causes single parenthood. Furstenberg, (2004) posited that the rising rate of single parenthood was basically due to the rising rates of divorce, he said that about half of the marriages undertaken may end up in divorce leading to single parenthood. Another factor of single parenthood is the economic depression. Economic depression implies a long period of persistent down turn in the economy and related activities. Like the growing rate of unemployment. Economic depression is an overblown adaptation of economic recession. The difference between the two lies in the fact that during economic recession, economic related activities decline intermittently. However, economic depression is more extreme and long lasting that sometimes affects the stability of the family (Hayneman, 2001).

Financial responsibilities towards the family often lead to abandonment of families to avoid pressures, while some women even prefer mother-only households in order to avoid the burden of unemployed/under-employed husbands. Therefore, the economic status of the family has demographic implications on the family stability. This has been the case with the economy of Africa and Nigeria inclusive. Spousal mortality is another cause of single Parenting (Amato, 2007). Therefore, the death of one spouse has a natural tendency for single parenting.

Another factor of single parenting is the issue of Incompatibility. Incompatibility in marriage refers to the absence of mutual goals between the spouses. Incompatibility can cause a lot of heartburn which takes away all the happiness from the marital relationship and sometimes leads to separation with the end result of single parenting in a union involving offspring.

Some common push factors of incompatibility include: differences in ideas, priorities, abilities, capacities (Anjali, 2017). Others include: Age, Clash of views with husband: clash of views with in –laws, Consumption of Alcohol, consumption of Drugs, Involvement of Spouses in criminal activities, Cultural, Status and Rural/Urban Living differences, Differences in Physical appearance, Mental or Sexual differences, Occupational differences (Anjali, 2017). Educational differences: Educational gap amongst spouses has been identified as one of the leading causes of divorce in marriage. The gap is created as a result of differential thinking pattern. Education especially between the spouses does not seem a big issue that they have to involve in divorce cases (Anjali, 2017).

Gap of education between husband and wife has been identified as one of the causes of clash of views between spouses leading to single parenting. Incompatibility issue is also generated mostly by suppression of facts arising from educational gap existing between the couples and this has fueled single parenting in some society. Other causes of single parenting include: lack of mutual respect among spouses, absence of spousal submission amongst others.

Similarly, Ushie and Orisabiyi (2015) looked at the socio-cultural factors such as rights, mutual respect and understanding as a possible cause of single parenthood.

Demographic Implications of Single Parenting on Children.

The implications of single parenting affects the spouses and the children of the union. In most cases, the affected individual in single parenting are the children. Children of single parent may spend quite traumatic life as compared to those children that live with two parents. The traumatic effects of single parenthood on the children cut across academic performance, developing psycho-pathetic behavior, economic hardship, social interaction, low self-esteem and low health seeking behavior {Huber, 2005}. Spousal financial crisis resulting from single parenting hood has negative trickledown effects on the child developmental stages leading to unmet need and deprived opportunity. Children who are nurtured by single parents are usually inattentive or pay less concentration in schools and may often quit or leave schools because of inability of meeting financial obligations in meeting the social needs of the child. These often affect the child emotional and behavioral development.

In single parenting, quality of time is usually not provided to the children. Hence, there is no understanding their emotional and psychological needs. The act of single parenting lack adequate psychological well-being of the children and leads to the feeling of violence, anxiety, depression, anger, isolation, lack of social interaction, negative perception for self-resulting to alcoholic use, smoking, substance abuse, violation, harming others and sometimes leads to suicidal thought. These amongst others bare the socio-demographic effects of single parenting on the child psycho-social development.

Theoretical Justification

Attachment Theory

The paper adopted attachment theory as a theoretical framework to the study. The theory was propounded by John Bowlby. Based on the theorist, attachment is a basic human need for

secure relationship between children and parents. The basic assumption of the theory is that children and parent relationship emerges and how it influences the emotional and social development of child. Theory identified four stages of attachment of children to their caregiver. These stages begin from infancy. These stages are pre-attachment, attachment in making, clear cut attachment, and formation of reciprocal relationship. All these stages build a bond and this bond binds parents and children emotionally. Another three stages were described by the colleague of John Bowlby that are experienced when children are being separated from their care givers. These stages are detachment, protest, and despair. The theory is applicable in explaining single parenting. Based on the theory, single Parents are not able to build stronger relationship with their children because of spousal divorce and separation. The shortfall of the theory is that the thrust of the paper focuses on the children alone thereby ignoring the spouses. However, the strength of the theory is a justification for the study. Hence, the theory is useful and adopted as a framework to the study.

The Functionalist Theory

The functionalist perspective, also called functionalism, is one of the major theoretical perspectives in sociology. It has its origin in the works of Emile Durkheim, who was especially interested in how social order is possible or how society remains relatively stable. The functionalist perspective achieved its greatest popularity among American sociologists in the 1940s and 1950s. While European functionalists originally focused on explaining the inner workings of social order, American functionalists focused on discovering the fractions of human behavior. Among these American functionalist sociologists is Robert K. Merton. Functionalism interprets each part of society in terms of how it contributes to the stability of the whole society. The different parts or components primarily work collectively for the survival of the entire society and when one part of the system is dysfunctional it causes other parts of the system to become abnormal. The other parts depends on each other for the effective functioning of the society as a whole.

Functionalism emphasizes the consensus and order that exist in society, focusing on social stability and shared public values. From this perspective, disorganization in the system, such as deviant behavior, leads to change because societal components must adjust to achieve stability. When one part of the system is not working or is dysfunctional, it affects all other parts which leads to social change.

Another proponent of the theory is the Coser, (1997), from his view, the structural functionalisms do not see the single family as a family, but rather they ignore it and believe that kind of institution to be dysfunctional. He further noted that, “the family is the most elementary social unit and the prototype of all other human association, for these evolves from family and kinship group”. Functionalists believe that power is the background of the whole theory; power demonstrates authority but no one group.

The relevance of the theory is that single parent families do not practice cultural integration but relies on ideal culture, which is “what people should do, according to group norms and values”. Also, based on the theory, single parenting is an abnormal practice within the social system. According to Merton, (1996) functionalists regard the parents as having interdependent and interrelated functions. Each of these functions has its expected and allowed roles to play for the maintenance and socialization of the children in the union. However, functionalism has been critiqued by many sociologists for its neglect of the often negative implications of social order in the system. Some critics, like Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci, claimed that the

perspective justifies the status quo, and the process of cultural hegemony which maintains it. Also, the shortfall of the theory is that the theory de-emphasizes conflict in the society. It was equally observed that functionalism does not encourage people to take an active role in changing their social environment, even when such change may benefit them. Instead, functionalism sees active social change as undesirable because the various parts of society will compensate in a seemingly natural way for any problems that may arise. However, the theory remained relevant and has been adopted for the paper.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Single parent and spousal mental health of the families have been on the increase all over the world. The issue of single parenthood is dated back to the period of antiquity, but in contemporary Nigeria is traced to the beginning of the twentieth century, most single parent families were as a result of death of spouses, divorce, poverty, forced marriages and amongst others. Some of the psycho-pathetic behaviors of spouses are linked to family instability which result to single parenting.

Based on the paper, the following recommendations were reached:

- Early marriage and forced marriages as a cultural practices should be discouraged and spousal consent on the choice of life partners should be encouraged.
- To promote family stability, governments of the developing countries should establish Family Endowment Fund to support low income household.
- Spouses should develop skills and sustainable income to meet the basic needs of the family.

Parents of single status should engage in savings such as local contribution, this will help the family to satisfy the required needs of family.

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