

**MITIGATING THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS IMPACTS OF SINGLE PARENTHOOD ON
THE TIV PEOPLE OF BENUE STATE**

By

Benjamin Gowon Ahule, PhD

Department of Sociology
Benue State University, Makurdi
email: bgahule13@gmail.com
Phone: +2348065318770

And

Luper Joshua Mee

Department of Religion and Cultural Studies
Benue State University, Makurdi
email: joshuameeluper@gmail.com
Phone: +2348138119128

ABSTRACT

Single parenthood has emerged as a prominent social phenomenon among the Tiv people of Benue State. This phenomena has various socio-religious ramifications for both parents and children, encompassing psychological, educational, moral, religious, and economic dimensions. This study investigates methods to reduce the socio-religious impact of single parenthood among the Tiv of Benue State. The study employed a qualitative research design. Data was acquired from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources utilised oral interviews with resource individuals. The secondary sources were sourced from documented literature on the topic. Descriptive and analytical methodologies were employed for the analysis. The descriptive method delineates the problem of single parenthood, whilst the analytical method investigates the diverse strategies for alleviating the socio-religious repercussions of single parenthood among the Tiv of Benue State. Research indicated that the socio-religious consequences of single parenthood among the Tiv of Benue might be alleviated through pre-marital counselling, loyalty, mutual affection, patience, excellent manners, and ethical conduct. This study serves single parents, custodians of Tiv culture, policymakers, government entities, religious institutions, and academics by elucidating several strategies to alleviate the socio-religious ramifications of single parenthood on children. The report advises that married and prospective couples should seek pre-marital counselling and endeavour to maintain moral lives to strengthen their marital relationship and foster a harmonious family environment.

key words: Benue State, Mitigating, Single Parenthood, Socio-religious and Tiv

Introduction

In recent years, single parenthood has emerged as an increasing occurrence in Benue State, Nigeria, impacting not only the individuals concerned but also their families and

communities. The Tiv ethnic group is especially susceptible to the difficulties associated with single parenthood due to variables including poverty, inadequate education, unemployment, and social stigma. Single parenting within the Tiv community has been associated with heightened incidences of child neglect, abuse, and delinquency, alongside diminished economic stability and social cohesion. The Tiv people are primarily Christians, placing significant importance on family values and traditional customs. The increase in single parenthood has raised apprehensions regarding the deterioration of fundamental values and the possible disintegration of societal structures. The religious convictions and rituals of the Tiv people underscore the significance of family and community, with several spiritual leaders and elders serving a crucial function in mediating social interactions and settling disputes. Notwithstanding these cultural and religious beliefs, single parenthood persists as a significant challenge in Benue State, with numerous single parents grappling with the responsibilities of raising children independently. The socio-religious ramifications of single parenthood among the Tiv people are complex, encompassing heightened stress and anxiety for both parents and children, diminished family cohesion and support systems, and even estrangement from traditional cultural traditions. What measures may be implemented to alleviate the social and religious effects of single parenthood on the Tiv people of Benue State? This study intends to investigate methods to alleviate the social and religious consequences of single parenthood among the Tiv of Benue State, with the objective of supporting single parents and fostering favourable results for children.

The Concept of Single Parenthood

Single parenthood refers to a circumstance when one individual, from the two who conceived the kid, has responsibility for the child's upbringing. Achakpa elucidates that single motherhood is perceived as assuming familial responsibilities without the involvement of either parent (148). Polli defines a single-parent family as a home consisting of one parent residing with a child or children (318). Schaefer defined a single-parent family as one in which a solitary parent is responsible for the care of the children. He also clarified that, whether assessed economically or emotionally, the lives of single parents and their children are not necessarily more challenging than those in a regular nuclear family (88). Moreover, Henslin defines a single-parent family as one established through many circumstances: the dissolution of a marriage due

to death or divorce, or when a woman chooses to bear a child or children without marrying a male partner. In this scenario, the woman assumes the role of head of the family (62). Ortese characterises a single parent as an individual without a partner; a parent who does not cohabitate with a spouse or partner and assumes the majority of daily tasks in the upbringing of the child or children (50). Consequently, single parenthood refers to the responsibility of raising a kid or children independently, fulfilling the obligations of child-rearing alone. Single parenthood can arise from various factors, including the death of a partner, separation or divorce, teenage or undesired pregnancy, and adoption, among others. The initial seminar paper examined the determinants of single parenthood within the Tiv community of Benue State. The second analyses the effects of single parenthood on single parents within the Tiv community of Benue State. Consequently, this seminar will endeavour to address the socio-religious ramifications of single parenthood among the Tiv of Benue State.

Mitigating the Socio -Religious Impacts of Single Parenthood ON the Tiv People of Benue State

The socio-religious implications of single parenthood on the Tiv people of Benue State can be mitigated through the following ways:

Pre-marital Counseling

Premarital Counseling is a form of therapy that helps prepare individuals for marriage by ensuring that the relationship is sound and rewarding (Bagarozzi, Bagarozzi, Anderson and Pollane 94). Premarital counseling gives a couple or prospective couple the opportunity to express their issues, needs and desires so that the counselor can help the partners create a stable marriage. Premarital counseling is important to single adults, couples and the engaged because it gives them an orientation on relationship and help to eliminate any issues that will arise during the marriage and create a mutual understanding that will help with individual goals and long-term desires.

Appelbaum and Karl maintain that, good communication skills may not be enough to keep a marriage healthy, but without it, the chance of success gets diminished. Since individual's process information in a unique way, it is important for both to understand how to interpret and express emotions (38). The study observes that there are discussions and potential disagreements

sometimes that might arise in marriage; just like they do with every other relationship. However, counseling will help navigate the tough talks and the outcome could be successful. Counseling is capable of guiding a couple through a relationship and use problem solving initiatives to resolve differences. Both learn skills that contribute toward mutual collaboration instead of one-sidedness. “By teaching them how to maintain an expressive tone, the couple come to appreciate one another and become more caring and affectionate” (Bell 298). Premarital counseling focuses on looking into current behaviours so as to determine emotional states and figure out how they can be eliminated for smooth relationship. As aptly captured by Benokraitis:

Premarital counseling helps couples to understand and define the issues bothering them, their marriage, and this makes them better prepared to overcome marriage challenges whenever they arises. Open and direct communication is key ingredient in any union, especially if both have different ways of communicating (99).

Premarital counseling is advantageous in helping discover each couple unique style and how it could affect marriage. Thorough premarital counseling and preparation can result in lifelong marriages that are fulfilling as well as a means to strengthen families.

Among the Tiv, premarital counseling is done at the family level; parents tries to give marriage instructions to their children by telling them their supposed roles to perform in marriage depending on the gender of such a child. The boys are nurtured to be protectors and providers for their homes while the girls are nurtured on home management skills. In his contribution on the subject matter reveal that premarital counseling in Tiv society is exercised officially during puberty rites where adolescent boys and girls are separated and nurtured into adulthood. Also the study observe that educational institutions and religious based organizations are doing their best in giving marital counseling to Tiv youth as regards their roles and responsibilities as husband and wife. Formal educational institutions too has fashion out courses on marriage where students are taught on how to perform their responsibilities as husband or wife in the home for a peaceful and happy marriage life.

i. Fidelity

Marital fidelity denotes unfailing fulfilment of responsibilities and the keeping of vows expressed through a love of complete devotion (Edward 47). According to Matheson, marital fidelity is an acquired quality that is developed intentionally. It means a choice of complete

commitment, trust, and respect between husband and wife (209). Furthermore, fidelity denotes unfailing fulfilment of one's responsibilities and the keeping of one's word or vows (Paulukonis 14) expressed through a love of complete devotion by couples (Benson 20).

Fidelity is a positive value in marriage and family relationship. The vice which is infidelity is destructive. "Inappropriate interactions with another person can erode fidelity" (Govern 6). *St. Kilian Marriage Enrichment Program* enumerates three components of marital fidelity; spiritual, emotional and physical fidelity. Spiritual fidelity requires both husband and wife to embrace their responsibility of helping each other and any children they have nurtured in faith to achieve their final destiny of eternal life with God. Emotional fidelity gives a sense of importance, of being someone the other cares for and cares about. Physical fidelity is the culmination of a lifelong fidelity "in sickness and in health" and of intimacy (20).

Trust and fidelity are the pillars of an unbreakable marriage. If couples trust each other, then their marital relationship blooms like anything. Once trust and fidelity fits in a marital relationship, then all other forms of marital companionship like love, affection, care, protection, respect and understanding among others falls into the perfect picture automatically. Therefore, this study observes that trust and fidelity have tremendous impacts on making a marital relationship peaceful and permanent. "The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honour marital vows with complete fidelity (Matheson 211).

Furthermore, fidelity is a cherished value among the Tiv. Women who are known to be faithful to their husbands are respected and honoured. The importance of fidelity in marriage among the Tiv has given rise to an adage which says; *mba kuran akura kwase man i woo nan bua game* meaning the woman must not be policed before a cow will be killed in her honour. This is because among the Tiv, fidelity to one's spouse was tested by a ritual called, *idugh*. *Idugh* is a kind of ceremony wherein a married man will organize and his wife will be asked to give some food items (Akase) the chaff from locally brewed drink to feed the horse. There is a belief that if the horse eats this chaff, then the woman is faithful to her husband, but when the reverse is the case, she is guilty of infidelity (Adega et al 193). When the woman is vindicated by this ritual for being faithful, she is celebrated and a cow is killed in her honour to celebrate her moral

outstanding. Therefore, the Tiv would say that such women are not policed around to ensure that they did not cheat before such honour is bestowed on them.

It is unfortunate that this process of testing fidelity of the couple does not provide a platform for the husband to be tested too. The reason is not far fetch from the fact that the Tiv society is a patriarchal one and cases of infidelity among the men were, and are still seen as normal, whereas infidelity from women are detested. Although, with the advent of Christianity, there is new orientation that made men to understand that in marriage, both the man and the woman are expected to be faithful to each other and infidelity from the woman and man are evils that destroys marriages.

However, this study observes that there are a lot of instances in which couples are seeing falling apart due to infidelity and breach of trust. This not only affects the married partners but also negatively influences their family, others and people related to them either directly or indirectly. So, what hampers or affects fidelity in marriage? Birchler and Webb reveal some of the causes to include:

Lack of mutual trust, mutual understanding and mutual respect, extramarital affairs, inability to cope with mutual differences in opinion, thoughts, mind-sets and personalities, lack of spending quality time with each other, inability to perform one's own marital roles and responsibilities, breaking of expectations couples have attached to one another, over-protective nature and over-possessive nature that leaves no space for the spouse to live life with freedom, conflicts and misunderstandings, effects of stress, tensions and day to day hazards and third-person influence" (494).

Thus, this study notes that marital fidelity is weakened when one devalues his or her spouse, minimize the time they have with each other and focus on meeting their personal needs and ignoring their partner's. More so, marital fidelity can also be weakened when one fantasizes about someone else other than their spouse, and by meeting one's deepest needs and desires with little or no concern to the desires of their spouse. Despite the fact that some couples experience weaknesses in their marital union, weaknesses in marital fidelity among couples could be strengthened when they affirm to each other, listen to each other and seek to meet their needs. It also strengthened when one set a healthy boundary for one's media consumption and for one's relationships outside of the home. Marital fidelity produces lifelong rewards.

In contrast, infidelity causes years of untold anguish. Fidelity to one's marriage vows is absolutely essential for love, trust, and peace in marriage. Fidelity is a virtue that is expected of couples to help build a strong foundation for their relationship. As a moral value, chastity before marriage and absolute fidelity to one's wife or husband after marriage are required of all couples owing to the fact that marriage can be placed in a precarious situation when one spouse forms a relationship with someone outside the marriage and begins to choose the company of that person or frequently shares personal information with that person rather than with a spouse. To checkmate these, the "*ikyoor* (snail shells) were hang on girls neck who were yet to be married to protect them against premarital sex, and the *idugh* rituals were performed on married women in Tiv society to test their fidelity" (Adega et al 195). Therefore, strict fidelity in marriage is essential in honoring the covenants couples have made to each other and the Lord.

This study considers fidelity in marriage to be good for self-confidence. Self-confidence is important for any human being, regardless of age or relationship status. When couples deprived themselves of fidelity, it results in a lack of self-confidence. Then feelings of emotional insecurity set in. Lack of fidelity in marriage can be damaging to both spouses since it can have a negative impact on their day-to-day lives. Matheson argues that, "Christian marriage provides the best ground for fidelity since other forms of marriages which are not consummated within the dictates of Christianity are not given the right orientation on how to live a happy and successful married life" (214). This often leads such marriage relationships to troubles that deny them the opportunity of having an intimate relationship which could be made possible through fidelity.

ii. Love of Couple for each Other

Love is considered to be both positive and negative, with its [virtue](#) representing human [kindness](#), [compassion](#), and [affection](#), as the unselfish loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another and its [vice](#) representing human [moral flaw](#), akin to [vanity](#), [selfishness](#), [amour-propre](#), and [egotism](#), as potentially leading people into a type of [mania obsessiveness](#) or [co-dependency](#) (Oord185). It also describes compassionate and affectionate actions towards other humans, one's self, or animals. In its various forms, love acts as a major facilitator of [interpersonal relationship](#) and, owing to its central psychological importance, is one of the most desired in marriage. The love that the Bible teaches is founded to reflect in marriage is the

agape love which is life-giving, and has encompassed all the other two. Any marriage which is not anchored on the *agape* love is bound to doom (Ordue Usue 29). Nevertheless, for the purpose of romance, *eros* love is also considered necessary in marriage.

The *Eros* love or the romantic kind of love is the attraction that most couples feel in the initial stages of a relationship. While *eros* is not the whole picture, it is an important component of a thriving marriage and ought to be nurtured over the long term for the couples to have a stable marriage life. *Agape* (or divine) love is the love that holds a marriage and a family together through all kinds of seasons. It is the selfless, unconditional type of love that helps people to forgive one another, to respect one another, and to serve one another, day in and day out (Loye 332). Unfortunately, many couples think that when *eros* love is lagging, there is nothing left to bind a marriage together. But *agape* love is the glue that keeps the marriage relationship intact when the marriage institution is facing challenges.

Falling in love is only the beginning of a relationship that usually leads to marriage. At the beginning, it is an amazing experience where two people begin the journey of coming together to become one. But the extreme feeling of intimacy first felt soon fades away. At such a moment how can a husband and wife keep passions' fire burning? Being considerate and caring are the two things that can kindle the flames in marriage relationship. This is achieved through *agape* love. According to Mike, the importance of love in marriage is nearly endless; without love, one would never be able to have the drive, attention, selflessness, and patience it takes to make your relationship a lasting success (3). For love to continue in a relationship there must be mutual respect for each other. "Respect is the cornerstone of any [healthy relationship](#). Without respect, love and trust cannot grow. When a partner feels respected, such a partner knows that the words, thoughts and feelings are valued by his or her spouse"(Tavershima Abur oral interview). Tennov further explain the importance of respect and love in marriage thus: respect and love has to do with [emotional support](#) from both partners. When one has a partner who values one's opinions and treats one well, there is enhanced emotion which breeds intimacy that is capable of confiding in each other"(32). Therefore, love and respect has a [positive impact on a marriage](#) relationship leading to a happy and stable marriage.

In Tiv society, there are several avenues, behavioural traits which clearly indicate that a couple is in love. In the case of the woman, she will always think of what to do to please her

husband. This kind of love brings self control, discipline and patience in the life of the woman (Adega et al 194). Moreover, she will demonstrate her love for her husband by showing him kindness; for example in comforting him when he comes home from farm, hunting. She would cook tasty meals, satisfy him in bed and by being polite and respectful to him even when they disagreed. Furthermore, Iortyom explains that in Tiv society a person could tell that there is love in between a couple where there is no destructive quarrels between the husband and his wife (32). Other signs and indications of love by couples in Tiv society include cutting of each other's nails, washing of the husband's clothes, warming his water for bath when the season demanded. The couples could also express their love by bathing together, hugging and engaging in chase game when opportunities comes up (Adega et al 195).

Besides that the couple could also have pet names. The man could call his wife pet names such as *udoo* (the beautiful one), *ngulianga* (unmistakeable), *teram sha ishima* (always on my mind), *ashekuma* (one with the beautiful eyes) and *Kasev kyundu* (one equated with twenty women) among others. On her part, the woman could base on the skin colour of her husband pet name him *nyian-or*, or *ii-or* (fair or ebony black man), *iase kuma* (one with a fitting diastema). She could also call him, *wondo kuma* (one with whom the trousers fit) (195).

Today, due to the influence of westernization, expression of love by a couple in Tiv society, especially the educated ones adopt western models such as kissing one another and calling of names such as darling, sweetheart, honey, baby, mummy and daddy. The irony however is that despite these sweet appellations, most of the women do not truly love or care very much for their husbands especially about whether they eat or not. Towards this, Adega and Apenda avow that improper feeding of a husband by his wife demonstrate absence of love between the spouses. They further argue that the absence of love in marriage clearly shows when spouses cannot embrace, kiss, eat together etc there is a destructive quarrel between spouses sometimes leading to full blown fights in which the woman may be battered (45).

iii. Patience

Patience could be described as the quality of being able calmly to endure suffering, toil, delay, vexation or the like; sufferance. "Patience (or [forbearance](#)) is the ability to endure difficult circumstances. Patience may involve perseverance in the face of delay; tolerance of provocation without responding in disrespect/[anger](#)" (Lawrence 31); or forbearance when under strain,

especially when faced with longer-term difficulties, or being able to wait for a long amount of time without getting irritated or bored. Patience is the level of endurance one can have before disrespect. Following the above, this study considers patience to be the ability to wait calmly for or through something. If it is a virtue, it seems likely that there must be some element of suffering in the waiting, even if the suffering is only boredom and not necessarily physical pain. Patience is a virtue and one of the elements of love. In the Book of I Corinthians (13:4), Apostle Paul extols patience as a cardinal virtue of love. Therefore, patience is fundamental to love in a relationship. Thus, patience in this context means, love does not lose heart while enduring misfortunes, bearing offenses and injuries of others.

Among the Tiv, patience (ishimawan) is encouraged through endurance and tolerance. There is an analogy in Tiv that, *orya ka igyungu mtwe* (the head of the house is a heap of ashes). This implies that the husband faces many challenges since many things are dependent upon him. Therefore, an enduring heart through patience could help sustain marriages and reduces the cases of divorce which usually lead to single parenting. Practicing patience is all about how one act. It involves internalizing ones emotions and interpreting the situation one has found his or herself in. When one is being patient, one will stop and take a moment to look around while thinking about the bigger picture; which is the sustenance of the relationship. This implies that, one will not just think about ones actions in the present moment but what they will mean down the road, too. Patience also throws [instant gratification](#) out the window. Staying mindful of one's emotions, behaviours and surroundings involves a lot of practice.

iv. **Good Manners**

Manners are something to be used every day to make a good impression on others and to feel good about oneself at work, home or with friends (Bruce 1). Thus, good manners entail the treatment of other people with courtesy and politeness, showing correct public behaviour. Good manners go beyond opening doors and writing thank you notes. "True courtesy goes deeper; being polite and courteous means considering how others are feeling. When one practices good manners, one is showing others that one is considerate of others feelings and that he or she is respectful. One is also setting standards for other's behaviour and encouraging them to treat him or her with similar respect" (Arthur 54).

In marriage relationship, couples need to practice good manners by being polite to each other and considering the feelings of their partners. When one notices that his or her actions have offended his or her spouse, there is need to appeal to the feelings of the partner that is offended. This will help prevent in feelings that could degenerate to misunderstanding that usually lead to crisis. Good manners help in building a peaceful and happy home. When a couple practices good manners they experience more love and intimacy as there are no grudges in their relationship. Good manners and polite behaviour are as important in a marriage as they are anywhere else, and they set the tone for one's relationship (Marilyn 2).

In Tiv society, maidens with good manners often get the recommendations of others to potential suitors. In fact, this was one of the ways that people find ways in Tiv society. Moreover, the researcher observed that in a polygamous family setting, or even nuclear family, the courteous woman with good manners often gets the attention of the husband better than those who nag. Therefore, the researcher is of the opinion that good social etiquette demands that you one displays good manners wherever one have find himself or herself and irrespective of who one is with. Good manners show the courteous, more pleasant side of one's person. Through good manners, one's relationship with others takes a better and healthier turn one if one shows that one have good manners. Today, many friendships have gone sour simply because of a lack of manners, good manners. Sometimes, it seem like the world does not care about courtesy and etiquette until one's bad manners create a terrible impression about one's personality at work or with friends. Thanking people who fulfills your request is also a way to go as far as good manners are concerned. A 'Thank you' once a while will do you a lot of good. Even when people offer to render small help or friendly gestures, it is best to show your appreciation. This will not only show that you have manners, it can also leave open doors for future help.

v. **MoralLiving**

Moral living is embedded in [character](#) or proper behaviour; it is the differentiation of [intentions](#), decisions and [actions](#) between those that are distinguished as proper (right) and those that are improper (wrong) (Stanford 389). Moral living is a character or behaviour that is in line with a body of standards or principles derived from a [code of conduct](#) from a particular [philosophy](#), [religion](#) or [culture](#). Moralliving is specifically [synonymous](#) with [good character](#) or right behaviour. This includes doing what the society has approved and avoiding that

which the society has disapproves of. In Tiv society, there is prescriptive behaviour which entails among other things, exception from premarital and extra marital sex. According to Dinah Sende, “in those days, girls were protected from premarital sex by tying shells of snails around their neck. This was to prevent men from having sexual affairs with them; thereby protecting their virginity”(Oral Interview). As a result, there were rare cases of single parenting, since sexual intercourse was experience mostly in marriage.

However, this study observe with dismay that today, the practice is different as both ladies and guys, boys and girls do experience sexual intercourse out of wedlock; this most atimes end up in unwanted or teenage pregnancy which eventually results to single parenting. Thus, living a moral life of abstaining from premarital sex would go a long way in mitigating cases of single parenting in Tivland. Immoral living is the cause of most of the problems people have in Tiv society today. In the yesteryears, people, mostly the youth respects societal norms, but the reverse is the case. Youths of nowadays try to go against every prescriptive form of behaviour in Tiv society. This has resulted in several challenges one of which is the rise in single parenthood. Nevertheless, cases of such can be lowered if the people embraced moral living.

Most atimes, issues that lead to failed marriages when carefully examined shows that either one of the spouse or all of them decides to live immoral lives. When people have made it as a choice to live moral lives, there will be less problems that will lead to divorce which results to single parenthood. Moreso, cases of single parenting that usually originate out of the immoral lifestyle exhibited by some adolescents such as teenage pregnancy and unwanted pregnancy that are the basis of single parenthood will be highly minimized in Tiv society.

4. Recommendations

This paper made the following recommendations:

1. Couples should endeavour to express their love for each other in order to strengthen their marital relationship.
2. Both married and intending couples should attend Pre-marital counseling sessions as this helps in building a vigorous marriage relationship and edify the essence of fidelity in their marriage relationship, as infidelity is destructive to any relationship particularly marriage.

3. Couples must endeavour to love each other and not to be in love with each other. This is because true love never fails. By loving each other, they will be able to overcome trying moments in their marriage and have a long lasting relationship.
4. Patience is a virtue that must be imbibed by all couples irrespective of the circumstances they have found themselves in. It is also a sign of love and therefore must be practiced.
5. Good manners and moral living should be practiced by both couples and singles in society. This is because good manners and polite behaviour are as important in a marriage as they are anywhere else, and they set the tone for ones relationship.

Conclusion

This paper discussed various means of mitigating the socio-religious impact of single parenthood on the Tiv people of Benue State, Nigeria. From the discussion, the social and religious impact of single parenthood could be mitigated through premarital counseling, fidelity, expression of love for each other, being patient with ones partner, showing good manners and above all living a moral lifestyle. This paper submits that though single parenthood has several socio-religious implication in Tiv society, these impacts could be mitigated when the above recommendations are taken into consideration by couples.

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