THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS IMPACT OF SINGLE PARENTHOOD ON CHILDREN IN TIV SOCIETY OF BENUE STATE

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Abstract

A preliminary investigation shows that the incidence of single parenthood in Benue State is estimated to be higher than the national average, with many single mothers struggling to raise their children without the support of a partner. This rising trend of single parenthood has farreaching social and religious impacts for the Tiv people of Benue State. This paper therefore examines the socio-religious impact of single parenthood on the Tiv of Benue State. The paper adopted a qualitative research design. Data was obtained from secondary sources such as books, research documents, and the internet. Descriptive and analytical methods were used for appraisal. The descriptive method describes the phenomenon of single parenthood, while the analytical method examines the various socio-religious impacts of single parenthood among the Tiv of Benue State. Findings revealed that single parenthood has social and religious implications. Socially, single parenthood denies parents the social orientation of their children due to the inability of some parents to impart social skills to their children. It also denies the needed educational, psychological, and economic values to be imparted to the children. Religiously, a single parent denies most parents the opportunity to impart moral and religious values into children. The study recommends, among other things, that single parents should strive to live up to their responsibilities through good moral upbringing of children in order to have good moral values in society, churches, and religious bodies should exhort their members through sermons to live moral lifestyles as Christians and also help in inculcating moral values through various church or religious programs. The government, on its part, should make laws to guide against social insecurity. The society should also work out modalities of sensitization to the public on the implication of single parenting with the aim of dissuading members to avoid all acts that are capable of leading them into single parenting.

Key words: Benue, Children, Single, Socio-religious and Society

Introduction

The Tiv people of Benue State, Nigeria, are a significant ethnic group known for their rich cultural heritage and strong family values. Traditionally, the Tiv society has been characterized by a strong emphasis on family and community, with marriage and parenthood being highly valued and esteemed institutions. However, in recent years, the phenomenon of single parenthood has become increasingly common among the Tiv people, particularly among women. A preliminary investigation shows that the incidence of single parenthood in Benue State is estimated to be higher than the national average, with many single mothers struggling to raise their children without the support of a partner.

This rising trend of single parenthood has far-reaching socio-religious implications for the Tiv people of Benue State. On the one hand, it has led to an increase in the number of children living in poverty and deprivation, as single mothers often lack the financial resources to provide for their children's basic needs. This, in turn, can have negative impacts on the children's physical and emotional well-being, as well as their educational and social development.

On the other hand, single parenthood has also led to a decline in the traditional social and religious norms that governed family life among the Tiv people. For example, many single mothers are forced to seek alternative forms of childcare and support from extended family members or community organizations, which can erode traditional kinship ties and social networks. Furthermore, the stigma associated with single parenthood can lead to feelings of shame and isolation among affected women, which can negatively impact their mental health and overall well-being.

From a religious perspective, the rise of single parenthood has also raised concerns about the role of faith in shaping family values and relationships. While Christianity and Islam are major religions among the Tiv people, there is a growing trend towards secularization and individualization, which can lead to a weakening of traditional moral norms and values. This can result in a decline in marriage rates and an increase in premarital sex, divorce, and single parenthood.

Against this backdrop, this paper aims to explore the socio-religious impacts of single parenthood on the Tiv people of Benue State. Specifically, it seeks to investigate how single parenthood affects family relationships, childrearing practices, and community socialization among the Tiv people. The study will also examine the role of religion in shaping attitudes towards single parenthood and family values among the Tiv people. By shedding light on these issues, this study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the complex interplay between socio-cultural and religious factors that influence family dynamics and childrearing practices among the Tiv people of Benue State.

The Concept of Single Parenthood

Single parenthood connotes the idea that the duty of parenting is left in the hands of only the father or mother. Achakpa explains that single parenthood is seen as the taking of family responsibility (Which includes caring for Children) without the fathers or mothers' contribution (148). In the view of Calhoun, single parenthood is defined as a multifocal family composed of a mother, her dependent children one or more of her grown daughters and her children or sometimes other relative such as grandmother or aunt (97). According to Polli, single parent family is a household in which only one parent lives with a child or children (318). Schaefer viewed single parent family as a family in which there is only one parent present to care for the children. He further elucidated that whether judged in economic or emotional terms, the lives of single parent and their children are not inevitable more difficult than in a traditional nuclear family (88). Furthermore, Henslin sees single parent family as a family formed in the following ways: "whether there is a separation of spouses through death, divorce, or when a woman decides to produce a child or children without necessary getting married to the opposite part. In such case, the woman becomes head of the family" (62).

According to Ortese, single parent can be defined as a parent without a partner; a parent, not living with a spouse or partner, who has most of the day-to-day responsibilities in raising the child or children (50). In view of the above, single parenthood is the act of training a child or children single handedly, carrying out the duty of child up bringing alone. There are several causes of single parenthood, these include: death of partner, separation or divorce, teenage/unwanted pregnancy, adoption, among others. The first seminar paper addressed the factors responsible for single parenthood among the Tiv of Benue State. Therefore, in this seminar attempt is made to discuss the socio-religious impacts of single parenthood on the Tiv of Benue State.

Factors Responsible for Single Parenthood among the Tiv of Benue State

Various reasons have been adduced to why people get into single parenthood in Tiv. Herein, factors such as death of a partner, separation or divorce, unwanted pregnancy, moral decadence, and dissertation of spouse, are discussed as some of the factors responsible for single parenthood among the Tiv of Benue State.

1. Death of Partner

Death of one of the spouses is a major factor responsible for single parenthood. Amato and Keith assert that single parent families were historically as a result of parental death. In fact, death of a parent was a major cause of single parenting (29). They further stated that about one-fourth of children born around the turn of the nineteenth century experienced death of a parent before they reached age fifteen (31). This has been affirmed by the study since investigation revealed that some of the cases of single parenthood among the Tiv was due to the death of a partner.

2. Separation of Spouses/Divorce

Separation of spouses refers to a situation whereby a husband and a wife decide to live separately. Separation does not dissolve the marriage contract but alters it functions and responsibilities. Atimes separation could be as a result of persistent marital challenges which eventually made the couple not to be able to live together, thereby separating from each other for the sake of peace. It is also occasioned by challenges of work or occupation especially when both the husband and wife are career civil or public servants. In such a situation, the husband may be working in a place far away than that of the wife, this will make them to be living separate from each other.

Separation means that a person is living apart from his/her spouse but are still legally married until they get a judgment of divorce. According to Amato and Keith, the crucial event of a marital break down is the act of separation. This usually occurs when the relationship between both parents had gone cold (53). Divorce is a legal consequence that follows the emotional fact of separation, though not all separation leads to divorce. Although separation generally precedes divorce, some couples are able to sort out their misunderstanding and misgivings and are able to put the separation period behind them and move on with their lives (Olaleye and Oladeji 187). The changes that take place during separation, particularly the one that is caused by marital challenges is crucial because at this point a person's emotions are raw and most profound (Strong 112). Men and women react differently during this period. When separation takes place in the family, the other parent does not know what to do or expect; there are no divorce ceremonies or rituals to mark this major turning upon the children.

Closely related to separation is divorce which is the termination of a marriage relationship. Amato and Keith say that divorce is one of the main events that lead to single parenting in most societies all over the world (57). The paper observes that in Tiv society there are rising cases of divorce particularly among the youths, and this is a common cause for single parenthood. Reasons for divorce were commonly observed by the study to include; lost of love among couples, adultery, cruelty, desertion and addiction to alcohol or drug and husband imprisonment.

3. Unwanted Pregnancy

Due to lack of sex education among the youth and the general moral laxity, particularly among the adolescents, there is increase in the number of cases of unwanted and unintended pregnancies that usually results to out-of-wedlock births (Salami 247). The paper observed that in Tiv society this situation affects mostly young girls most of who are of school age. Mothers with unintended pregnancies, and their children, are subject to numerous adverse health effects, including increased risk of violence and death, and the children are less likely to succeed in school and are more likely to live in poverty and be involved in crime.

4. Moral Decadence

Generally, sex is an activity that is supposed to be carried out in love between couples. However, due to the moral decay as experienced in present times, many single men and ladies do engage in sexual escapades that usually results in pregnancies (Eshleman 205). Among the Tiv of Benue State, when issues of pregnancy arise, their sexual partners often than not fail to take up the responsibility for the pregnancy, thereby leaving the lady or woman in question to cater for the child alone. This results to single motherhood. In addition, most cases of single fatherhood in Tiv society are as a result of ladies having affairs with men when there are issues of pregnancy and the man is willing to take responsibility, such ladies prefer giving out these children to the families of the men they had affair with under the pretext that they are not ready for marriage, thereby leading to increase cases of single fatherhood.

5. Desertion of Spouse

Desertation is one of the causes of single parenthood in Tiv society. "Desertion is a situation whereby either the father or mother stays away from the marriage, leaving only one of the spouses' to take responsibility of the children" (Cake-Hanson 165). Desertion is different from separation and divorce in the sense that separation or divorce occur due to marital challenges or instability that pose threat to the end of the marriage. Desertion occurs due to social and economic factors such as occupation and business among others. The paper observed that challenges occasioned by globalization and industrialization have made many couples who are still living in marriage to live far away from each other due to working environment or business. Thus, Kendell further argues that "the process of socialization depends on both parents playing complementary roles in raising children" (49). When such responsibilities are left in the hands of one of the parents, even though the couples are in matrimony, it is single parenting. Thus, the desertation of one of the spouses makes the family a single parent family.

Single Parenthood and Its Socio-Religious Impacts on the Tiv of Benue State

Single parenthood is associated with social and religious impacts on the Tiv of Benue State. This section considers some of the social and religious impact:

1. Social Impact

From the social perspective, the family is the micro unit of the society. It is the first "socializing agent the child interacts with and it has great influence on the child's physical, mental, moral and social development" (Cavanagh and Fomby 12). Haralambos and Holborn define socialization as "the process by which individuals learn the culture of their society" (183). Socialization according to Scott and Marshall is vital in social development. It is the process by which human learn to become a member of the society, both by internalizing the norms and values of society and by learning to perform our social roles (284).

The family's most outstanding responsibility is to train and bring up the child in the norms and values of the society. Hence, Davies observed that the foundation of what the person becomes in the society is laid in the home at the initial stage of life (17). Therefore, single parenthood results to lack of socialization from single parent especially one that is not socially oriented. In some cases, single mothers lack the socialization role of the father while those also in the care of their father lack motherly socialization. Though, when the single parent has good social skills, he or she would impart this to the children. This therefore means that, in the absence of either the father or mother, the learning process of the child is incomplete, since children need to learn from both parents to acquire the social norms and values of the society necessary for social development.

Single parent children also experience psychological instability and this may lead to increased psychological problems. According to Saluun, widowhood experiences are generally a trauma but in some African societies, they are considered more as an experience of deprivation, subjugation and humiliation. Ironically, the disorganization and trauma that follow the death of a spouse seem to be greater on the women than on the men whenever either loses his or her spouse. In the case of the loss of the husband, the wife becomes the primary suspect as the cause of the husband's death and is thus treated accordingly. On the other hand, where a man loses his wife, the man is almost immediately offered a substitution to comfort him and douse the impact of the grief of bereavement (440). These women certainly struggle with passivity and anger at times. The passive and complaining widows tend to experience more complicated and prolonged grief. Thus, among the Tiv, widows suffer the feeling of frustration. For example a widow in whom the husband's properties are taken away from her feels frustrated as they are completely disregarded and ostracized from the family.

More so, the primary cause of low self-esteem in children from such homes stems from the fact that they do not get adequate attention and advice from their only parent, which can severely hinder their emotional and psychological growth. Also, the study observe that a child gets a sense of security from home, which affects how they interact with the outside world, therefore low expectations from people around children is another impact of being raised by a single parent. They may be unable to maintain a happy and healthy marriage life as they have not experienced living with both parents.

Single parenting impact a child's thinking and mental mindset negatively. Psychologists and educationist have validated this over time. For instance, Mathu tests and observations have consistently found that single parenting makes school children from such homes more aggressive and rebellious; hence, these are transferred on their educational needs for survival in the society (19). The behaviour could be the outcome of the anger and limitation the child experiences while growing up. These are obvious reasons to make the child feel abnormal, different and unaccepted. Indeed, children raised by single parent face many limitations which influence their academic performance.

Sharing this sentiment, Usakli asserts that children with single parents are less assertive and more aggressive and submissive in schools which lead to poor academic performance than children with two parents (13). Similarly, Fadeiye argues that in two parent homes, both parents play various roles in child education. With regards to this, the father is to provide the necessary tools for the educational advancement, while the mother is supposed to supplement the father's efforts in this regard by supervising the academic performance of the child. Therefore, when the father is absent and the mother is not privileged enough to cater for all the basic needs as well as supervise the academic performance of the child, the child will experience academic backwardness (58).

As a result, Ortese is of the opinion that where both parents live ogether, due care and socialization with children is in most cases exercised in the best way possible (198). This is because the process of socialization that starts from the family depends on the effort of both parents playing a complimentary role in the child's upbringing. Such a child is likely to achieve self-actualization while the other from a single parent suffers deprivation and denial of some rights and opportunities. "This customarily affects the way the student socializes in school and seat with those who will help such a child to learn (Curran 91).

Furthermore, Battle notes that when the mother is absent and the father is not privileged enough, the education of the child faces some problems. A child from homes where the father and the mother are present will be well taken care of and socialized in the best way possible (82). This is because the process of socialization depends on both parents playing complimentary roles in bringing up the child. Such a child is likely to achieve selfactualization later in life but, children from single-parent families are likely to go through deprivation and denial of some rights and opportunities, which may have remarkable effects on their performance in real life situations (Cummings and Davis 94). As a matter of fact, a single parent faces doubled responsibilities requiring time, attention and money of the parent as children can be affected in their studies.

Akinsanye argues that the family structure, ideally, provides a sense of security and stability that is necessary for children. When there is a breakdown in the family structure, children and their ability to function ordinarily or achieve academically drops (71). The involvement of a parent on a child determines the future of such a child. One of the most common single parenthood issues is lack of finances. Single parents face the challenge of limited funds because they are the only source of income. A single parent might have to work more extended hours to meet the financial requirements of running a household singlehandedly. A shortage of money can mean that children might be forced to drop out of school, they are malnourished and lack clothing's as the single parent is unable to meet the additional expenses. According to Foster, in mother-only families, children tend to experience short-and long-term economic and psychological disadvantages; higher absentee rates at school, lower levels of education, and higher dropout rates (with boys more negatively affected than girls); and more delinquent activity, including alcohol and drug addiction (172). Children in singlemother homes are also

more likely to experience health-related problems as a result of the decline in their living standard, including the lack of health insurance (Mauldin 99).

Amato stresses that single fathers are also not without problems as they are often confronted with serious career related problems as they find their sole children rearing role conflicting with work expectation (78). Parenting is not by any means easy and it is important to know that one parent cannot fill the gap of both mother and father. Raising a child as a single parent can be challenging, in addition to taking care of home, the parent might be working or schooling and it is important to balance all these aspects of life. Thus, Adam and Isabell writes that "children in single-parent households have less family income and are more likely to be poor than are children in married-parent households" (68). In fact, the children of single teenage mothers spend more time in poverty than children in any other family structure (Joseph, Williams and Seth 168), and children in single-mother families are more likely than children in married or cohabiting families to receive any form of public assistance (Thomas and Leonard 38). Children of single-parent families have diminished economic mobility.

2. Religious Impact

Peoples' beliefs have a powerful influence on their thought patterns and behaviours. Therefore, religion tends to become more important to people after they have children. There are different reasons for this. According to Sullivan, one reason is having a religious institution to help in the upbringing of the child. As a result, mothers or fathers attending church services and religious programmes more frequently and being more involved in religious activities are exposing not only their children to the religious teachings but also themselves. Relatedly, they may internalize these teachings and use them in their parenting (102). Parents look to these institutions for help in teaching traditions, morals, and values to their children (Edgell 89). The religious institutions also help to provide a sense of community for children (Sullivan 105). Other benefits parents seek are passing down beliefs from one generation to the next and teaching children how to cope with stress.

When parenting is done by two parents, even when of the parent fails to attend mass/church service, the other will do and the child or children will be taken along. But when it becomes the task of a single parent and such a parent is not so committed to church or any faith-based organization, the child or children are deprived of religious instruction which is instrumental for moral and spiritual development of the child. Children whose parents participate in religion are believed to have better behavioural, emotional and social development compared to children whose parents did not participate in religion. Sullivan argues that mothers use religion to help build their children's self-esteem and give them "a sense of self-efficacy stemming from religious beliefs and prayer" (170). This implies that parents with highly religiosity also use high authoritative parenting tend to have children with higher levels of religiosity (Abar, Carter and Winsler 9).

The moral upbringing of a child requires parents to have a close relationship and interaction with the children to know where they have shortcomings and advice and correct them appropriately as the case may be. However, due to the inability of the single parent to have long hours with their children, it is difficult for them to inculcate moral values into their children. According to Calhoun, single parents oftentimes receive less effective parenting and discipline. The number of single parents working full-time has increased. Some single mothers or fathers even work two jobs. When one individual is working and balancing the requirements of overseeing the household, it seems reasonable that he/she will have less time and energy to monitor his/her children and act as a disciplinarian (111). However, when there are two parents in the household, even when one is working so hard, the other would have more time and energy to be with the children and give moral education to the children. Similarly, Idoko explained that single mothers are less effective disciplinarian, lessauthoritative and sure of themselves than two-parent families. According to Idoko, whatever their capabilities for managing their children, a couple can gang up on a child which single parent cannot (179).

The paper observes that, children from single parent families whether it is single motherhood or single fatherhood faces moral challenges as many of them are involved in delinquent behaviours. Single mothers tend to be less strict on disciplinary issues which are not good for moral impartation thereby making their offspring to have wayward behaviours. Similarly, single fathers are in most cases too strict which is also not a good tendency for moral impartation and this has made some children to run away from their homes and join bad gangs and indulge in delinquent behaviour. Therefore, for children to be of good moral conduct, it is important for the two parents to play their various roles of advice and encouragement which is usually from the mother and of correcting and punishing the child which is usually from the father. It is through these combined efforts that children acquire moral values, a deviation of this normal family pattern through single parent therefore has moral implications for the child.

Recommendations

Having examined the impacts of single parenthood on children in Tiv society of Benue State, the following recommendations are made:

1. Churches/Religious institutions should exhort their members through sermons to live moral lifestyles and also help in inculcating moral values through various religious programmes.
2. The legislature should make laws assented to by the government (executive) to guide against social insecurity
3. Social and Religious organizations are encouraged to carry out sensitization programmes to educate the public on the implication of single parenting with the aim of dissuading members to avoid all acts that are capable of leading them into single parenting.
4. Single parents' families should strive to improve on their economic status and also guide their children/ wards in a manner that they will avoid mistakes of their parents. This can

be done through proper orientation to the children on the challenges of single parenthood and the need to avoid it will all strength and might.

5. Single parents are to impart their children with good morals and be beneficial to themselves and the society.

6. Single parents are encouraged to engage their children in religious institutions/programmes to help them in the upbringing of their children.

Conclusion

This paper examined the socio-religious impact of single parenthood on the Tiv society of Benue State. From the discussion above, it is apparent that single parenthood is a situation whereby taking care of a child or children becomes the responsibility of a parent without a partner. The discussion also reveals several social and religious impacts of single parenthood on the Tiv of Benue State. The paper submits that the various impacts of single parenthood could be overcome if parents take up the challenge of solo parenting and live up to their responsibilities by performing their parenting roles effectively.

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