

# Assessing the Menace of Single Parenthood in South-West Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

Globally viewed, the idea of single parenthood has become a new trend in raising children. In Nigeria, most especially in the South-West, before now the issue of single parenthood was more or less an aberration, but it has presently become a norm in raising modern children. The study categorised those that can be referred to as single parents, identified various causes of single parenthood, analysed the effects and explored measures through which the menace of single parenthood can be stemmed most especially in South-West Nigeria. The study made use of systematic review and sourced secondary data from relevant books, journal articles, periodicals, newspapers and the internet. The study found that female parents are more involved in single parenthood than male parents. The findings also revealed that divorce, separation, death of a spouse, economic challenges, mental health, teenage pregnancy, rape, domestic violence and low level of education form the main causes of single parenthood in South-West Nigeria. The study also showed that financial challenges, undue love advances, strained relationship with family members and friends, social isolation, child low education performance, shame, stigma and guilt form parts of the effects of single parenthood in South-West Nigeria. The study concluded that there is presently high rate of single parenthood in South-West Nigeria than before and stemming the tide of single parenthood in the region will require the concerted efforts of the government, non- governmental institutions and other relevant stakeholders.

**Keywords:** Single Parenthood, Child, Single Parents Support Group, South-West Nigeria, Systematic Review

## INTRODUCTION

Universally perceived, raising a child into maturity by both parents is highly challenging, talk less of a single parent nurturing a child to become somebody in life. The travails of many single parents, most especially in Nigeria, is highly pathetic and seriously frustrating to the extent that wishing a child a single parenthood is like sending a curse to his/her socio-economic, cultural, religious, educational and political future. The study identified causes and effects of single parenthood, as well as explored measures of stemming the tide of single parenthood in South-West Nigeria.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptual Review

### Single Parenthood

Many scholars, organisations, countries, agencies and non-governmental organisations have viewed the concept of single parenthood differently. According to the Single Parent Support Network (SPSN, 2023), a single parent is simply that one parent raises a child in his/her household without a partner living together. Legally viewed, the concept refers to a parent raising a child or dependant on his/her own without another person giving or lending assistance. The concept also refers to a parent not living with a spouse or partner. The term also covers a widow or a widower raising child/children independently of each other. A single parent can also be described as a biological mother, father, foster or adoptive single parent that sole-handedly raises a child. The concept also covers a parent whose spouse has been ill for extended period of time. It covers a parent whose spouse has gone away for an extended period of time, e.g., military personnel or somebody in

captivity or somebody undergoing one form of incarceration or the other for a definite or indefinite period of time. It also extends to a woman who was a victim of rape and thereby has to find all means possible to raise the child, with or without assistance of any form. It is also applicable to a single parent by choice, who has chosen artificial insemination techniques to conceive. This includes a legally or illegally divorced or not married parent that are single by choice.

Weintraub and Kaufman (2019) view the concept of single parenthood as parents raising their children alone, be it unmarried, living alone or separated, divorced or widowed. A single parent is somebody with a child, but who does not have a spouse or a partner to assist in the raising, upbringing or support of the parent. Sociologically viewed, single parenthood refers to a family where a mother or a father takes care of dependent child/children without a partner. Single parenthood family comprises parent or caregiver and one or more dependent child/ children without the presence and support of any other person sharing the responsibility of raising such a child or children. Nwachukwu (2002) and Ogbo (2007) view single parenthood as a situation in which one of the two individuals (mother or father that are involved in the conception of a child becomes solely responsible for the upbringing of the child for the reasons best known to him/her). In the context of Nigeria, single parenthood refers to the act of training a child or children single-handedly and carrying out the duty of the child upbringing without the support of the other spouse. According to Nwachukwu (2002) and Ogbo (2007), research has confirmed that 35% of the Nigerian population is made up of single parents. In summary, a single parent is a parent/person with a child or children but without a spouse or live-in partner to assist in the upbringing and support of the child.

### **Nexus between Unplanned Marriage and Single Parenthood**

The concept of marriage has been viewed differently by many people, organisation, government and individuals globally, depending on the cultural diversions and beliefs of each society. Sociologically perceived it refers to a union between two individuals, or more, based on enduring, stable social functions predicated on forming family structure facilitating companionship and child reproduction. That is why Horton and Hunts (2004) defined the concept as the approved social pattern whereby two or more persons establish a family. In the context of African society, marriage is the union of a man and a woman who have resolved to be together with understanding for the rest of their lives such a union is normally carried out with the consent of both parties and in most cases also involve the consents of their parents. Marriage is an institution that should be carried out in a confidentially- planned dually consented manner, love is the basis of a true marriage. In the context of African society, it has always been organised to achieve three main objectives - Companionship, intercourse regulation/ satisfaction and procreation of children.

Unplanned marriage refers to a form of marriage that is not planned by the parties involved. In essence, it is a marriage without planning that is not intentionally arranged. Unplanned marriage could arise from a forced marriage which refers to where either both partners do not have their full complete and free/ unhindered permission, irrespective of age. Normally arranged without the consent of either or neither of both parties. It could also be as a result of unplanned or unexpected pregnancy and the couple hurriedly decide to come together haphazardly to cover up the situation with unplanned marriage has many connections with single parenthood and has thus contributed greatly to the new trend in rearing children. Unplanned marriage can bring about anxiety worries and emotional challenges to either or both of the two involved partners. When a marriage is not planned before procreation of children, feelings of disappointment frustration and depression can set in. unplanned marriage can also heighten or increase the level of divorce such unrealistic expectations can result in divorce, since their marriage is not planned. Unplanned marriage can result in lack of support between couples or even forcing the couple's parents to distance themselves from giving the couple the needed support thereby catalysing single parenthood since the couple find it difficult to cope with the challenges of marriage. The child/ children in single parenting that arises from unplanned marriage always have higher risk of indiscipline, poor academic performance and criminal tendencies of Rape, drug abuse, cybercrime and others. From the foregoing analysis, unplanned marriage has also contributed greatly to higher risk of single parenthood globally specifically in Nigeria and particularly in Southwest Nigeria.

In Yorubaland of South-West Nigeria, it is a taboo for a woman to live her entire lifetime with her parents. The Yoruba marriage is traditionally and customarily predicated on high respect represented by ability to prostrate to the family of the bride whenever and wherever they meet old and young members of the bridal family. The

Fulani share marriage practices in Nigeria is always based on long period of endurance and resistance to pain test. This test makes the potential husband/grooms tougher and stronger personality as a normal. An average Fulani groom faces flogging to a required number of strokes of the cane. In Igboland traditional marriage system after the would-be husband and wife have agreed to marry, a day would be set aside by that we families involved for the groom family to visit the bride family with all the materials purchased following the particular given list among which are bags of salt, rice, crates of assorted alcohol and non-alcoholic drinks, local drinks textile materials and others. In Nigeria, the issue of single parenthood is alien to the country's forms different of marriage based on the cultural diversity of the country until recently when it has more or less become a societal norm.

## **Theoretical Review**

### **Resilience Learning Theory**

The theory was propounded by Dr. Norman Garmezy a chemical Psychologist in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The theory refers to how people are affected and how they can adapt to challenging situations such as loss of loved ones, change of environment, any form of risk of life, illness management and crisis management. The theory is highly relevant to single parenthood and lifestyle as it will influence single mothers' motivation towards living positively hard life. The theory is also relevant to single parenthood lifestyle as products of single parenthood who are resilient are able to cope with stressful socio economic, political, cultural and educational situations and circumstances

### **Social Learning Theory**

The theory was propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977. The American- Canadian proponent integrated the behaviour and cognitive to provide a comprehensive theory that would account for the wide range of having activities that could occur in the real world. The theory focuses and proposes how people lead new behaviour by observing and imitating others. The theory is highly relevant to this study as the child/children involved in single parenthood would learn mostly through observing and imitating the parent and others involved in the nurturing, because human beings learn from interaction with others as no man is an island.

### **Cultural and Sociological Theory**

Auguste Comte, the globally acclaimed father of Sociology propounded the theory between 1822 and 1854, the theory promotes cultural diversity assists in understanding social behaviour, focuses on how culture shapes individuals and collective behaviour. The theory also discusses social inequality in the society. The theory also throws light on different approaches to cultural interpretation, most especially those that have to do with technology, fashion, music and other related cultural values. the theory also emphasises the analysis of social reality from the perspective of sociology. This theory is relevant to the study as all the stakeholders of single parenthood are products of culture and society from which they are all involved in one activity or the other.

### **Poverty and Economic Empowerment Theory**

Though no single individual was attributed as a proponent of the theory, John Friedman has always been recognised as a figure in poverty and economic empowerment theory as well as entrenched in his 1992 book titled "empowerment: the politics of Alternative Development which seriously advocate the need to address the imbalances in power and the social exclusion to reduce poverty. The theory advocates that individuals, groups and the entire community should participate more in their economic development rather than looking forward to multifarious aids and assistance to change their poverty state. The theory calls for other factors, such as access to active political participation, education, medical care and other related changes as being crucial to economic empowerment and poverty theory. The theory is highly germane to this study as the child/children and the parents involved in single parenthood would not only be looking forward to receiving aids from the people, NGOs and the government, but would also look to the direction of education, healthcare, political participation and other similar areas as solution to their single parenthood.

## Empirical Review

### Causes of Single Parenthood in South-West Nigeria

The rate at which cases of single parenthood occurs is becoming higher in South-West Nigeria and this is posing greater concern to all and sundry. This alarming rate of occurrences has become the talk of the town in all nooks and crannies. Several factors have been identified as the main causes of this societal malady (Ajiboye, 2021). This ranges from socio-economic to political and religious sources. Among these causes are death of a Spouse, divorce and separation, rape, spouse illness, spouse going away on official assignment, single mother by choice, urbanisation and migration, economic challenges, cultural practices, gender norms, teenage pregnancy, adoptive single parenthood, artificial insemination, domestic violence, mental health challenges, independence, never married spouse, ineffective communication, marital and lack of spouse commitment to marriage, unplanned pregnancy, foster care and surrogacy. Raising a child to maturity by both parents in the present socio-economic circumstances requires more commitments of the two spouses. In a situation whereby one of the spouses dies suddenly or after a protracted illness, it will become a huge burden for the parent alive, according to (Okeke, 2018). Such a tragedy will definitely cause/make the situation to become a single parenthood that's why NISER (2024) submitted that death of a spouse is a primary cause of a single parenthood in Nigeria.

Chavda and Vinyas (2023) pointed out that divorce and widowhood stand as the main cause of single parenthood. Once there is a death of one of the two spouses the living one of the two spouses become a widow(er) while divorce is also a major/ cause of single parenthood. Once the divorce comes in the child has to be forced to stay with one of the spouses and in most cases, the mother takes custody of the child and finds it difficult to single-handedly raise the child to maturity. In his study on mothers with children from genocide rape in Rwanda, Katengwa (2014) confirmed that rape during the genocide has forcefully made many women to become single parents. Victims of rape do not usually trace the men who rape them. In some cases, where the perpetrator is known, the victim usually feels ashamed to open up on the identity of who raped them. Thus, once such a child is born, the woman, in most cases, is forced to raise such a child as a single parent (Sam Etal, 2025). That is why Uche and Onovo (2024) identified rape as one of the causes of single parenthood in Nigeria. Those whose husbands have gone away on official assignment usually leave their spouses to become single parents while they are away on such official assignments. In such circumstances, the wife at home is forced to become a single parent until her husband comes back. In most cases, many of the men on official assignments usually get married to other women and even raise a child or children with them in a new primary station of official duty. Empirical studies have shown that men of the mobile police in Nigeria are always away on official assignments, leaving their wives to become single parents at home. There are also instances which a woman can become a single mother by choice. Single mother by choice do create new families, using different means of reproductive technology, pregnancy without a partner and in adoption from foster homes. Evidence has shown that many healthy and matured children have been raised through a process of single mother parenthood by capable women.

Urbanisation has also contributed more to single parenthood in the society and it has changed to family structure and economic challenges also serves as a causative factor for single parenthood. In South West Nigeria, Unemployment and high level of poverty can lead spouses to undue divorce and separation thereby putting the burden of raising the children on one of the spouses (Ajao, 2020). Cultural practices and gender norms also serve as a major cause of single parenthood. As we have among the Yoruba who predominantly inhabit the Southwest Nigeria, the culture places much of the burden of raising children on the father of the house. Corroborating this, Oladele (2019) opined that where traditional expectations clash with modern realities marital instability may arise and can lead to single parenthood.

According to Ajiboye (2021), teenage pregnancy serves as a cause of single parenthood, since there is no husband to support or assist the single mother teenagers that has been abandoned by their partner. Changing social norms from what it was to modern form of practice is another factor influencing the structure of traditional family with the intention of normalising the old and modern tradition and exposure to modernity, separating can set in between the two couples. Migration and urbanisation causing long physical distance can also result to single parenthood. Once a long distance is created one of the two spouses has to care for the child/ children involved and the loose marital bond would put burden more on the partner saddled with the

responsibility of taking care of the child/children (Ekanem 2020). Unplanned pregnancy can also lead to single parenthood and whereby the mother/female/ spouse would be abandoned to become a single parent.

### Effects of Single Parenthood

Identifying with the travails of single parenthood Schaefer (2001) observed that a single parent family is only one parent present to care for the child(ren) being a single parent, there are always deficiencies arising from nurturing a child to maturity. Thus, among the multivarious negative effects of single parenthood are the following:

- i. Emotional distress always manifests in single parenthood as the single parent is faced with stresses and this always leads to behavioural problems resulting in aggression and transferred in the afflicted parent.
- ii. Single parent is also associated with financial stress. The parent nurturing the child(ren) always finds it difficult to meet up with the required finances especially in providing in the basic life of food, shelter, clothing, educational obligations of the child (ren).
- iii. Similarly, the state of single parenthood is also associated with socialisation reduction. The parent involved would have little or no time for socialisation.
- iv. According to Julius (2024), in most cases, we have more female single parents than men. The role of the father in instilling discipline unto the child at home is always left out, thus, making the child to be slack in taking discipline. Inability to have a father to serve as a catalyst for the child's discipline goes a long way in affecting the lives of the child and that of the single female parent.
- v. A woman without a known husband is likened to a king without a crown in Yoruba land, taking cognisance of the non-recognition and lack of respect for the single parent.
- vi. Another effect of single parenthood is loneliness, isolation and family neglect on the part of the single parent finds it difficult to interact freely with other members of the family, having been stigmatised, isolated, neglected and withdrawn from social interaction (Uche and Onovo, 2024). Thus, the single parent maintains a strained relationship in the community and within the husband's family and her own immediate family.
- vii. According to Wajim (2020), single parenthood has forced many women taking undue and unhealthy cuts, while looking for ways to make ends meet. Many have engaged in multiple keeping of man friends and engaging in tasks devoid of good face value.
- viii. Financial challenge has become a major effect on single parenthood. Taking care of the child/children involved and inability to take fullest care of the single parent.
- ix. Poor child academic performance arising from inability to adequately finance the school expenses is another major effect. A child of better finance could make a better grade in the school, whereas, any child lacking good finance is bound to end up with poor performance as there is no fund for purchase of relevant books, extra coaching and timely payment of school facts.
- x. There is always a tendency for a single parent, as well as the child to get involved in criminal activities such as a drug abuse, armed robbery, kidnapping, rape and other forms of crimes that would have been avoided if such a child has been co-parented.
- xi. Single parenthood can also result in teenage pregnancy since the child is not well co-parented. This could be as a result of being lured by some bad guys in the society.
- xii. Forming a new relationship with others in the society is always very difficult for a single parent. This is because her schedule of activities is always very tight, thereby finding it difficult to accommodate other programmes.
- xiii. A single parent has always found it difficult to be maximally productive in whatever tasks she engages in this lack of productivity usually arises from the stress, depression, and anxiety facing the single parents

In spite of its numerous negative effects some of which have been identified above, some scholars believe that there is a positive side to single parenthood. Calanthia (2023) has come up with certain positive effects of single parenthood, which are as follows:

- i. Single parenthood strengthens the mother-child relations, since the child is well tied to the mother due to a very tight closeness, the relationship between the mother and the child becomes more fortified, thus resulting in a very strong family tie.
- ii. Single parenthood often attracts undivided attention of the child/children involved in terms of loyalty to the single parent.
- iii. It also brings about high maturity and experience in facing life challenges.
- iv. In a similar vein, single parenthood enhances independence and resilience on the part of the children and fosters adaptability thereby making the child involved more adaptable to the circumstances in which the children find themselves.
- v. Single parenthood also allows children to assume greater responsibility in his/ her early life and thus making the child to contribute meaningfully and maximally to the society development from early stages of life.
- vi. Single parenthood has also exposed and improved the problem-solving skills of the mother and the child. It has more or less trained the single parent and the children involved in the art of how to solve the day-to-day challenges of the people involved
- vii. It has also assisted in bringing about strong communication skills and enhance the spirit of empathy, thereby assisting in making the child feels what others are feeling.
- viii. It has also brought about the spirit of prudence, increased responsibilities that lead to self-reliance and the confidence required in navigating the life activities.
- ix. Single parenthood has also assisted the child in living a less conflict relations more than those raised in a family of both parents.

### **Measures in Decimating Single Parenthood in South-West Nigeria**

With the high level of havoc and trauma inherent in raising a child to maturity by a single parent, globally viewed and specifically assessed with close reference to South-West Nigeria, wishing a child a single parenthood is like cursing his/her socio-economic, political, religious and cultural future (Wajim, 2020). In view of this, certain measures need to be put in place to reduce the universal high rate of single parenthood, most especially as it is applicable to South-West Nigeria. These measures cut across the parent's government, communities, family, support group and other relevant stakeholder support group.

- i. The government has a major role to play in decimating a single parenthood. Firstly, the state governments in the South-West Nigeria (Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti States) should join hands in sponsoring programmes that would address societal attitudes towards single parenthood. This could be done in each of the states through conferences, seminars and workshops. Both print and electronic media could also be utilised to sensitise the public.
- ii. The government should grant single parents job opportunities in order to enable them take care of the family.
- iii. Government should assist them in giving scholarship children with single parents.
- iv. There should also be public awareness on recognising children raised through single parents.
- v. Single parents and their children should be provided free medical and mental health to enhance their welfare. Social services in form of reimbursed housing assistance and food aids should be provided for the single parents to relieve them of their financial burden (Ayeni, 2024).
- vi. Governments at the Federal, State and Local levels should provide policies that would enhance lifestyles of the single parents and their children.
- vii. Regular awareness programmes should be organised to promote family values as well as shed light on the challenges associated with single parenthood in the society Adebayo (2022).
- viii. Family counselling should also be provided to enhance family relationships and curb breakups in family relationship. This will also enhance job creation and support aids for single parents.
- ix. Micro-finance schemes providing credits facilities for single parents should be provided by communities and non-governmental organizations to enlarge their business opportunities.
- x. There should also be vocational training for the single parents in form of hair-dressing, fashion-designing, weaving and other related vocational trainings to enhance their rate of employability and labour mobility that will facilitate highly-paying employment.

- xi. The Ministry of Women and Children Welfare should be ready to cooperate with the mother in floating empowerment programmes of different types from time to time.
- xii. WhatsApp, Instagram, and other similar media platforms should be opened to take care of the single mothers in Nigeria to interact with people of similar challenges and marriage groups. According to Ayeni (2024), there are about 12,000 members on Facebook groups in Nigeria as at March 27, 2024, involving single parents in Nigeria. From there, they could meet prospective suitors of their choice.
- xiii. The parent should give model lifestyle standard to the child. The parent should find all means possible to raise more funds to train the child educationally and vocationally. Serious monitoring should be given to the educational pursuit of the child involved to cover the lapses that could arise from the training.
- xiv. Discipline should be well meted on the child involved in a manner that such a child does not become wayward and engage in criminal activities, such as drug abuse, rape, armed robbery and other vices.
- xv. In order to strengthen training ability, exposure and empowerment, a single parent should join single parent support groups and other similar ones that can assist him/her in training the child to maturity. The parent in charge should build strong relationship in the community to enable community members come to her aid and most especially in matters of financial assistance and discipline the worshipping centres, mostly the church and the mosque should give the parent involved sense of belonging.

## METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

The study made use of systematic review and sourced its main secondary data from relevant books, journal articles, newspapers and the internet. To elicit information on single parenthood. The results of the findings revealed that more female parents are involved in single parenthood than male. The study also found that divorce, death of a spouse, economic challenges and lack of understanding between the couple, poverty, lack of education, teenage pregnancy and mental health with domestic violence form the main causes of single parenthood. The findings further revealed that financial challenges, social isolation, strained relationships with family and friends, stigma, guilt and shame form the main effects of single parenthood in South-West Nigeria.

### Conclusion

Presently in South-West Nigeria, there is a higher prevalence of single parenthood than before, mostly dominated by the female gender and raising the children affected to maturity always involve many challenges and traumatic experience. Stemming the tide of the menace would involve strengthening governmental and non-governmental organisations, vocational training, economic programmes, as well as the continuous intervention of other relevant stakeholders.

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