

## **Challenges Faced by Women Single Parents in Nigeria, Implications for Sustainable Development**

**Dr. (Mrs). Asiyatu Abubakar Bagudo**  
*Department of Adult Education and Extension Services*  
*Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto*

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**Abstract:** In Nigerian traditional social set-up marriage is an important gate way for partnership, procreation and raising children. Parenting remains a dual complimentary role for both parents. But currently the wave of modernity, liberation and civilization is fast encroaching and eroding this cultural heritage of corporate partnership in parenting, resulting in single parenthood. This phenomenon has series of implications especially for sustainable development which much earned for globally. This paper highlights causes, effects and implications of women single parenting. Some causes are low regard for marriage and family system, disappointments and failures in marriages, unwanted pregnancies, improve capacity of women, lack of desire for partnership in marriage and feminism. Some of the effects on the woman are psychological, physical, emotional stress, financial burden and social stigma, to child it has negative effects on behavior, performances, stigmatization and long term effect on their life outcomes such as poverty, crime, drug addiction. On the implication, it can leads to disruption of family relationships and affiliations, and the destruction of social structure and impact negatively on sustainable development. The paper suggests the need for wide spread sensitization, enlightenment and counseling on importance of marriage so as to revert the trend through print and electronic media, dramatization talk shows in schools. Counselors and psychotherapists should provide professional help to victims to overcome the challenges. Government should have political will to provide funds for projects and programmes to empower families for sustainable development. The paper concludes the single parenthood in any form and for whatever reason is a menace that does no one any good and everybody must participate in wiping it out by being a responsible partner and helper in raising children for sustainable development.

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### **Introduction**

A man and woman are naturally, biologically and socially meant to be complimentary partners. Marriage is made of a union of man and a woman as reproductive partners with complimentary roles and functions. In Nigeria like most a child is accepted when it comes from such naturally assigned, biological prepared and socially approved relationship, and it is automatically link to both patrimonial and matrimonial family care for child's sense of belonging, wellbeing, education, training, development and sustainable growth. In contrast, a single parent is a person who has a dependent child or children and is solely responsible for their needs, as a result of widowhood, divorce or being unmarried and is also called solo parent, another new dimension is the single parent by choice.

There are several perspectives, and debates on the practice of single parent. In the opinion of Macionis, (2010) it is a situation in which a child is brought up by one parent without a partner (one parent family or household). Children growing up in such households become less likely to form bonds promoting the likely chance for another generation of single parent also called sole family. Though it practiced by both males and female but it is more common among females for obvious reasons. In the context of this paper woman single parent is regarded as a situation where the sole responsibility of raising children is shouldered by one parent, specifically woman, and the children stayed with only mother and raised in a set-up of no father figure or reasons such as of being unmarried, divorce, widowed or freewill and thus children are raised without partnership. Experts in Psychology, sociology and counseling attested to the importance of family system human growth and development (Andersen and Taylor 2004, Haralambus & Holborn 2008; Kotwaln and Prabhakar, 2009). The family as set up provides the head start for continuous sustainable growth and development in different capacities human being and society. World map report (2014) indicated that children's lives are influenced by the number of parents and siblings that they live with, as well as by whether their parents are married.

### **Dimension of Single Parenthood**

Single parenting practices exist in different forms, they vary in term of reason and circumstances that generate the practice. This account for the different dimension of single parent practices. They include

- a) Single mother: family headed by an unmarried mother.
- b) single father: family headed by unmarried father.

- c) single parent by custody: family headed by divorced biological father or mother.
- d) Single parent by adoption: family headed by non –biological single parent,
- e) posthumous single parent: in which a woman is married to a deceased man and will bear and raise children for the deceased.
- f) Widowed single parent: a family headed by a widowed father or mother.
- g) choice mom single parent: a family headed by a unmarried single mother who intentionally get pregnant through an anonymous or known sperm donor.

### **The Prevalence of Single Parenthood**

The prevalence of odd family headed by one parent is becoming a common phenomena across the globe. Winscolin (1994) indicated that about half of all children born are expected to spend some time in a single parent family before reaching age 18. Another demographic survey (Gingerbread 2010) showed a general increase in children living in single parent homes worldwide with the trend being more common in United State. The current trend of single parenthood is frightening, where about 16% of children born worldwide are said to live with single parent household involving more men than women with lots of intricacies and negative side effects. Record on prevalence in developed countries, shows that in 2010 about 40.7 % of births in United State were accounted to unmarried women, and in New Zealand 17.8 % of families were single-parents out of which 5/6 were females (single mothers). In United Kingdom 1/4 of families with dependent children were single parent families. Countries like Asia, and middle-east are noted to be less likely raise children in single parenthousehold.

Available evidences revealed that trend is said to be escalating in various communities (Coger 2015) including Nigeria. Esseinand Bassey (2012) discovered that though the major religions in Nigeria did not appreciated it, single motherhood has come to stay. Nigeria demographic health survey(2013) indicated that 19% of Nigerian family are single household and 19% are headed by women. This revelation should be source of concern for a country that is interested in sustainable developmental goal yet, having its children to being raised by women as single parent where more than half of women population had no education, are illiterate and classified as vulnerable group. Literature and research reports have attested to the positive impact of dual partnership family system in well being of children. The World family map (2014) reported that

Although two-parent families are becoming less common in many parts of The world, they still constitute a majority of families around the globe. Children are particularly likely to live in two-parent families in Asia and the Middle East compared with other regions of the world. Children are more likely to live with one or no parent in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and sub-Saharan Africa than in other regions (The World Family Map 2014).

### **Causes of Single Parent among Women**

Literature available shows that women are more prone and indulge more in practice of single parenthood, list of probable causes were offered by different scholars which this paper categorizes the causes into five major groups

- a) Natural causes: These refers to naturally ordained happenings which are inevitable thus force women to adopt to the role of single parent. In this category are: death of a male partner in marriage. Then the woman becomes the sole breadwinner of the family. Another natural cause is accident and disease conditions, when male partner became incapacitated by either factor, the woman apparently assume the responsibility of bearing the burden to raise the children alone, unlike in the olden days, when family members join effort to raise such families.
- b) Situational causes: unbearable life experiences and encounters that are superficial in nature could lead to single parenthood such as lack of trust in marriages, troublesome marriage, women battering, crises, separation, divorce, unplanned pregnancy, late marriage, and unwedded cohabitation, absent father, custody and adoption issues. Scholars in psychology, Santrock 2007, and guidance and counseling warns couples that divorce once there are children leads to long years of pains, struggling, suffering and hardship especially to mother and children. So the best admonition is avoiding it as much as possible.
- c) Desire for procreation and progeny: some women are into single parenthood due to lack of marriageable suitor, after staying long and approaching menopause and could not get suitor for marriage will decide to take and bear and raise children on her own. Another cause identified by Agbo(2016) are the posthumous marriages practiced in Igbo land in south-eastern Nigeria. Where women are made to marry deceased

persons who have no offspring and she is expected to bear and raise children for a deceased man as a single parent.

- d) Conveniences: Another cause for single parent among women is personal interest, freewill, dislike for marriage, fear of disappointment, women sufficiency and buoyancy to practiced choice mum.
- e) shift in the social norms: This has caused some to decline marriage, issues such as individualism, personal interest above family's, being brother's keeper no more practiced, attitudes toward individual freedom, issues related to rise of women elites, equal right agitations, high education, employment and economic capacity lead to situation where women feel they can afford to live alone, declines in men responsibility toward family, such as disproportionate share of raising children, lukewarm attitude toward marriage.

The factors raised by this paper as causes are casual, controllable, except death, accident and diseases others are avoidable, preventable and condemnable, and since the consequences are found to be detrimental, then dealing with the causes may serve as a better way to eradicate the trend. The paper also acknowledges that the socio-cultural and religious values determine the prevalence rate of the practice in different parts of the country. For example in rural and religious communities where it is totally condemned and not tolerated the phenomena seem to be less than in cities and urban towns where most inhabitants are settlers from different backgrounds coupled with exposure to foreign alien culture which is blindly practiced in the name of civilization and modernity. The simple notion upheld in this paper is that phenomena of single parent is more of an alien culture and practiced and popularized by those seeking affinity and affiliation to so-called developed countries. Because marriage and family is a strong system in Nigerian society and in every culture values are attached to sustaining and preserving the recognized means of procreation of human kinds. Through which each child acquires a sense of belonging, social identity and pride. In Nigeria like other societies marriage is a form of acceptable bond that unites man and woman to live together, bear and raise children. Educate and train them to become acceptable and contributing members of the society. Any practice that contravenes this ideal will have so many effects.

#### **Challenges Associated with Woman Single Parenting**

Marriage is a consensual unit based on intimacy, economic cooperation, mutual goals that is shared by partners as such single mothers who do not have a partner to help in raising their children become the sole provider for the family by default. It has a lot of consequences on development indices. According to Winscon (1994)

Children who live with only one of their parents do less well in school, obtain fewer years of education, and have trouble keeping a steady job as young adults. Children from single parent families are six times more likely to be poor. Daughters of single parents are more likely to bear a child out-of-wedlock, divorcee, and receive welfare benefits as young adults.

Psychological problems and behavior problems are more likely in offspring from single parent or remarried families. In the majority of families, single parenthood seriously disrupts the relationship between children and the non-custodial parent, usually the father. (winscon)

Whanau status report (2019) released by social policy valuation and research unit (SUPERU) New Zealand showed that most families are reasonably well when it came to measures such as income, housing, health but single parents were exceptions. They are more likely to suffer from mental health and faced with significant challenges in areas of income, education, employment and home ownership, faced with incapacities to perform their core family functions such as nurturing, supporting and providing sense of identity and belonging. Father's greatest role is to provide values to his children, followed by emotional support, discipline, and income support, social exclusion,

Several studies abroad with few within the country were able to reveal the devastating effects the various dimensions of single parenthood affect individual and society.

**Effects on the practicing mother:** The desire of every adult male is to have a spouse that will serve as partner in bearing and raising children together. When this is not obtained, then single parenting is opted for by default. This results in intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict and crises leading to psychological trauma especially by the divorcee and widower due to lack of supportive partner. Other effects are economic or financial hardship, loss of parental support and supervision, lack of community resources, life stress and instability. Lack of child support, conflict over custody, overwork, loss of family tie, communication gap, contravention of customary and established value system, disapproval from religious perspective. It is a life span encounter and transitive in nature.

**Effects on children and society:** On children teasing and stigmatization, unfilled gap, lack of father figure, disciplinary problems, inadequate value system, socialization problem, The children later became major source stress and displeasure for the parent and society. Recent evidence suggests that child from single parent families do less well, on average, than children who live with both of their parents. These mean is that single parenting increases the odds or the risk that children's well-being encounter in life.

**Implications for sustainable development:** At the United Nations summit on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2015, world leaders, Nigeria inclusive, adopted a set of 17 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by the year 2030. The goals are set to alleviate poverty, and to increase, education, health general well being and ensure prosperity for all. The implications of single women parent practices for sustainable development are diverse the consequences are not restricted to women but it extends to children and society in general. Kotwal and Prabhakar (2009) that single mothers are face with social, emotional, economic problems, and health problems which consequences.

**Educational Implications:** The policy on free basic education is yet to be realistic for every Nigerian child more especially from single parents especially those in rural areas, more especially children in families headed by women who are themselves part of the vulnerable group from poor background the and children from broken family are part of vulnerable group, who are likely to have miss schooling because the single mother cannot afford the cost. Equally important is the based on the current high statistic of illiterate women in Nigeria who cannot fend for themselves, then what more of their children. The Implication this is that as the number of divorcee and widows increase and they are left to fend for their children, so also will the number of illiterate. Many researches show that single parent affects academic performance of children growing into adults increase.

**Social implications:** The rise of family headed by women is perceived by some as representing a weakening of social values as depicted by growing independence of women to decide in raising children on their own, or the woman is left to bear the burden of raising children alone as a divorcee, unwedded mother, widowed, or out of free will. These create serious implications for sustainable development. A society cannot claim to be developed when all these are happening to its citizens. On the other hand allowing liberty for single 'choice mum' and 'choice dad' free cohabitation, non marital birth and rampant by some segment of people will lead to decline in marriage, create social disorientation, disintegration and chaos. Report shows children raised in house hold raised by women are prone to disciplinary problems, delinquency, dropout, poverty and recycling generation of single parent.

Nigerian will increase as they may not be able to pay for their educational needs. If this is responsibility and burden of feeding, clothing and attending to the daily needs of her children in her custody. In Nigerians scenario the implication are based on the kind some to with current high cost of education,

**Health perspective:** marriage is a union that metaphase into family where responsibilities are shared, both parents complement each other to provide the health needs and general well being for members of house hold. This include provision of healthy environment, nutritive and balance diet, medication and safety. Children specifically need exclusive breastfeeding, nourishment care, affection, protection along with domestic routines and provision of clean water, which demand time and energy and finance and source of daily stress. In most partnership families the male bear the cost while female does the domestic works. The implication is all these are too much for a single person more so, by a divorced or widowed single parent. These may also result in pathological problems, diseases and ailments. Studies revealed the demand on single motherhood has negative consequences on her health and children, (Scharte 2013). Also McIntost, (2015) analyzed data from 15 different countries and found that single motherhood is associated with an increased risk of multiple health problems including adverse cardiovascular episode, poor mental health and increased mortality.

**Economic implication:** Most single parents are saddle with economic problems. The economic capacities of single parents are such that they suffer higher poverty rate and experience severe economic problem. Lack of support for marriage and expensive nature of marriage today is also having negative impact on the rise of single parenthood especially among females who are often lured into relationship only to be jilted after. If appropriate actions is not taken the implication is that the proportion of families headed by women increased in Nigeria, these may create a more scenario single parents who are never married. unemployment also has its toll as more women are unemployed or earn low wages which is not enough to sustain their need, more so, when they head family.

**Psychological Implications:** the life of a single mother is stressful, struggling to meet up with varying demands along with so many provocations from those around her. Their hopes and expectations are dash away by support and assistance from relatives and friends, they become disappointed, mal adjusted which worsen their plight. Kotwal and Prabhakar (2009) reported that single mothers in his study reported that they felt,

lonely, helpless, hopeless, lack of identity, and lack of confidence. Single parents are found to experience series of emotional problems, crises associated with disappointment, quarrels that leads to divorce, bereavement over loss of spouse. studies conducted revealed single mother parent suffer psychological problems, trauma and depression that impede their psychological well being and even that of the children that ( White, 2004; Azuka-Obieke 2013). Willicox (2003) revealed that widowhood as a manifestation of singleparenthood have negative effects on physical, mental health, behavior and health outcomes. The implications for sustainable development is the dire need to attend to emerging needs of single mothers are not achievable where these negative manifestations

Due to single women parenting, family social tie and relationship is on the decline, as such widows are not getting extended family support which make their plight very hard , if the trend is not changed. In traditional system the extended family share the burden of raising deceased children with support from relatives, neighbours ,friends and well-wishers ,all these cultural heritages are fast fading out , if aloud to fade, then the fate of such women and families would be devastating. Implying that instead of sustainable development it will be sustainable suffering.

In addition, presently there is no adequate census figure on single parents, no accurate demographic and statistical data on the prevalence rate, couple with inadequate empirical research findings, to facilitate adoption of viable measures .The implication is that the menace it erode Nigeria from attainment of sustainable development goals

### **Conclusion**

The practice of single women parenthood seem to be fast growing phenomena, due to the current socio - political , security, and economic challenges, as the security issues in North east and Niger delta has increase the number of children are being raised in single mother . so also some of the celebrities in the countries who are suppose to serve as role models for our younger ones are single parents. The practice seem to be harbored by the so called claim for libration and freedom and high taste for so called civilization that is linked foreign cultures that are already engulf and trap by the menace and now raising crusade against single parenting.. The crucial issue and implication is sustainable development cannot be achieved without a strong social fabric (family union) that bound us together and strengthen our capacities to work as a team for personal and communal development and progress.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the issues raised in this paper the following recommendations are offered.

Every Nigerian should strive to intensify effort to preserve, maintain and sustain the family structure based on partnership, selfless service and commitment for the wellbeing of immediate, extended family members and society

The paper suggests the need for wide spread sensitization, enlightenment and counseling to revert the trend through print and electronic media, dramatization, talk shows in schools. Good role modeling that conform with positive social heritage by parents and adults

Those already suffering as a result of the phenomena need various support and assistance from individual and organized group to give them succor. Helping them to readjust and realign is an important function for counselors and psychotherapists.

To overcome the challenges the political will and funds from government for projects and programmes are imperatives. However, any service rendered to a single parent should help to restore the link partnership parenting role to reunite the child with both biological parents and family link.

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