



SINGLE PARENTING IN KENYA: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Joshua N. Mbithi

PhD Fellow, Mount Kenya University,
Eldoret, Kenya

Abstract:

Family pattern and structure has in recent times changed in Kenya and other countries across the world as well. The issue of single parent has gathered momentum where children are raised by a single parent and not with both parents as expected in African traditional set up. In terms of comparisons, single parenting is higher in females compared to males. Parenting is more than giving but involves numerous activities performed by parent(s) or guardian to influence child outcomes in growth and development. This paper therefore looks at the status of single parenting in the Kenya context, predisposing factors to single parenting and the effects of single parenting on children growth and development. The paper also analyses the challenges that most single parents face when raising their families in recent times. The paper also reviews the biblical expectations required for those individuals in single parenting set up.

Keywords: single, parenting, women, children

1. Introduction

Single parenting is where children are born to parents who are not married to each other. Single parenting occurs where a child is born out of wedlock or the parents separate after the child is born (Eagan, 2011). Single parenting is where a mother father or partner is divorced, separated, widowed or a widower care for their children or family (Meda, 2013). In this article, I will mainly talk about parenting (process of parenting) and not parenthood (state of parenting). Parents are simply mothers or fathers.

The issues of single parent families are one of the most relevant topics in the contemporary family (Munanie, 2016). From the perspectives of the African culture, married women are like the spilt water, disconnected with their birth families. When the status of married women changed, how female single parents has experienced the process of becoming a single parent? How they interpret their stories of social inclusion or exclusion? Childcare is a crucial element in single parent's lives. For many, finding and sustaining paid work is dependent on the availability of good quality childcare that

is affordable and available at the times when they need it. These concerns are the main topics which this paper wants to explore. Individuals in these single relationships are often struggling financially, which adds to the difficulties of childrearing and co-parenting (Kagendo, 2017). These children in turn are at greater risk of poverty and problems with their health, behaviour, and academic performance. Children born to parents who are not married to each other have become increasingly common in our society.

2. A True Example of a Single Parent (Extract)

“As I write this article, my daughter shares that from work, a mother with her four years old boy entered a Matatu. The boy was crying, screaming, yelling kicking and rolling. The passengers asked her whether she had stolen the boy. She said they are separated with her husband and that the husband stays with the other twin. The mother and the boy had just left the husbands place and that is why the boy was crying. This example is one in many similar stories of the psychological, emotional and mental torture children go through in the event that their parents separate or divorce. The parents are also not at peace. Evidently, the mother of this young boy in the Matatu was not at peace.”

In single parenting, as is with parenting in a home where a mother and father are present, there are joys and pains in bringing up children. Single parents must be overwhelmed by the economic and social concerns that at times the church has to demonstrate biblical love. Lack of spiritual guidance will show itself at some point in life. The child’s upbringing should be the responsibility of the parent/s, family, church, society, community and the nation as a whole. Parents who find themselves singly bringing up their children for reasons they may have contributed or contributed by nature face enormous emotional and psychological uphill task. The Bible calls Christians the salt of the salt and light of the earth (Matthew 5:13-14). Christians ought to ‘taste’ to the single parents that may be in dire need of fellowship. Single parents need prayers, they should be visited and supported materially where and whenever possible. Some churches have started programs that involve single parents. Such exercises do bring a sense of belonging to single parents.

2.1 Kinds of Parents

- a) Faithful parents. An example is Abraham (Genesis 18:18, 19) It is the responsibility of the parent to faithfully command his or her children to observe and keep the way of the Lord. Single parents may need assistance from the pastoral team to enable them command their children to obey the Lord.
 - b) Neglectful parents - An example is Moses (Exodus 4:24-26)
 - c) Distressed parents, David is an example (2 Samuel 18:32, 33)
- May the Lord help you as a single parent to be a faithful parent.

Duties of Parents toward Children

- a) Protection (Hebrews 11:23)
- b) Training (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7; Proverbs 22:6)
- c) Correction (Deuteronomy 21:18-21)
- d) Provision (2 Corinthians 12:14)

Do your best in your daily duty and responsibility as a single parent to protect your children, train them in the way of the Lord. Correct them with the help of God.

2.2 Causes of Single Parenting

A. Poverty can contribute to single parenting

There is abundant historical evidence that poverty has been a contributing factor and influence on single parenthood because of its limiting effects on marital opportunity due to scarcity of men who were economically qualified for marriage. Even today, depressed economic conditions around the world, and high male unemployment, occur in nations that have high ratios of non-marital births. Historical evidence indicates that the reproductive practices of some young people in respect to non-marital childbearing were affected by economic circumstances.

Economic determinism is not the only possible explanation for historically changing single parenthood ratios, of course. Many social historians believe that changes in single parenthood ratios are due to changing degrees of sexual liberation. Thus, the steady rise in single parenthood ratios for many European countries throughout much of the 19th century is attributed to increasing sexual liberation associated with industrialization of the economy and urbanization of the population.

B. Migrations to Urban Areas

The increase in single parenthood during the 19th-century period of industrialization may be illustrated by the case of France where single parenthood ratios rose from about 5% of all births at the beginning of the century to about 10% at its end. The largest increase in single parenthood occurred in cities, such as Paris and Bordeaux, where illegitimacy ratios surged above 30%, comparable to the level seen in many modern cities. Other European cities manifested a similar rise in single parenthood, partly reflecting an increase in the number of young single women who migrated to cities and towns in response to job opportunities associated with urban development following the Industrial Revolution. The sharp and widespread increase in single parenthood following the industrial revolution is apparently. The association between poverty and the development of relatively unrestricted sexual behaviour of both men and women helps to explain why single parenthood is more common in poor neighbourhoods. Meda (2013) study shows that the transition from rural to urban areas, from traditional to individualised setups implies a loss for the cultural patrimony of the Kenyan society but also a loss in terms of social cohesion and integration. In the course of this transition, marriage decisions for the youth – which once were a family practice – have become largely personal, thus leaving the youth exposed to the risk of multiple breakups and single parenthood.

Other factors, such as alcoholism, “serial partnering”, unfaithfulness, family disputes and deaths from HIV/AIDS, along with the continuation of practices such as widow inheritance, have led to multiple unions and the further spread of HIV infection, thus determining an increase in the number of single parent-headed households.

C. Changes in Traditional Roles and Practices due to Globalisation

The traditional role played by the extended families in socialising the youth and determining age at first marriage for a woman is fading in favour of a more powerful role being played by other agents, especially the peers, formal education institutions and the media. Traditional means of transferring sexual education are also disappearing, thus linking poverty and urbanisation to marital instability (Meda, 2013).

3. Effects of single parenting

The children born out of single parents face special challenges compared to normal children. Through no fault of their own, children are gaining more responsibility because their parents are working and the kids have to help in the house. They also lack sufficient emotional parental support. Children as young as twelve are making important decisions without an adult. Children are less prone to problems occurring in their lives when there are two loving parents around. Especially in single parent/low-income families, children may turn to the use of drugs and alcohol. Drug and alcohol abuse may occur when the child sees and feels the stress that welfare and debt can bring on, these substances can provide a quick release from the harsh reality. Of families that did not receive child support in 1995, 32% are considered poor families. It is the time after the child comes home from school, when juvenile crimes triple in number. This is the time when kids are most likely to abuse drugs and alcohol. According to Larry Axmaker at Vanderbilt University, children in single parent homes are more likely to have mental health problems and get depression. These kids are also more than twice as likely to commit suicide. Especially in divorce cases, children often blame themselves for their parents’ decision.

Meda (2013) found out that single mothers, in fact, not only are prone to physical and psychological abuse and exploitation, both within their households and outside – including beatings, prostitution, illicit brewing, overwork, etc. – they are also highly stigmatized by other community members. Women from the upper class are less likely to incur in such forms of physical mistreatments, yet they are as stigmatized as the women from poor backgrounds for the simple fact that they do not have a stable partner, which is simply unthinkable in traditional Africa.

Munanie (2016) research found out that children from single motherhood families engage in drug abuse, cases of teenage pregnancies are common in girls from single motherhood families and many school dropout children are from single motherhood families. In addition, boys from single motherhood families compared to those with both parents are more hostile and rebellious to rules than girls. Single parenting is strongly associated with negative outcome for children and these children are among the vulnerable category although not catered for by the government (Eagan,

2011). According to Eagan (2011), a boy child from this family may be hostile, hyperactive and aggressive in nature. The children in this family may be hostile towards their mother as they grow up and try to be independent and so if this anger and rebellion are directed towards one person, it may become worse.

3.1 Social Dimension

Children also gain more responsibilities in single parent homes. Their parents often refer to and consult with their children on major issues, which are usually made between husband and wife. The oldest child in the family is often expected to help assume the role of the absent mother or father. Children are made so responsible that when the time comes they may find it hard to leave home because they know their parents relied on them so heavily. One in three single parent families earn less than a dollar per day. This is a low income, and when coupled with a father who does not pay child support, financial constraints can be tight. Many children see that the kids at school have much more than they do, and they may feel left out because their parents do not provide enough material goods. The single parent often needs help. Sometimes children suffer because mother or father is too proud to ask. There are people who care about you. Talk to them. It will help you to talk. All kinds of advice will be given you. You may not take it all but you will not miss a piece of advice to boost your zeal in pushing on as a single parent. Take that part that sounds right to you. In a research, Kalumu (2016) concluded that most children of single mothers have more problems in their socio-emotional development than other families. The reason for this was stated as lack of adequate income and time for the mothers as they take care of their children. The researcher also concluded that the teachers and care givers have a very major role in socio-emotional development of children from single motherhood families.

3.2 Challenges

Single parents face specific challenges around finding the right type of childcare to fit in with their hours of work. Most (88.0%) of children whose mothers work full time are taken care of by somebody else after school. They are more likely to work in jobs that are part-time and low paid and as a result are less likely to be able to be flexible around their childcare arrangements. Childcare is still too expensive for many single parents. Childcare costs have gone up year in year out ahead of inflation, and despite the complicated array of means-tested help, childcare still remains beyond the reach of some families. Affordable childcare is one of the most important issues for single parents as they are supporting a family with one wage. Some of the challenges faced may be because there is no father figure or mother figure.

Interviews with street children and their parents revealed that the majority of street children are males aged 6-15 years who for the most part are illiterate, of varied ethnic and religious background and migrant to the urban centres. Most came from single-parent large families and chose street life because of socio-economic factors. Most of the children desired education and a better life, but they generally had a pessimistic

attitude towards their future. Conditions for the minority but growing number of female street children are especially deplorable.

When it comes to families splitting up, children often think that they are supposed to pick a parent to side with. A child will often see raging custody battles that decide which parent they will live with. Children are sometimes even pressured inadvertently by parents when children overhear what their mother thinks of their father. Their parents often refer to and consult with their children on major issues, which are usually made between husband and wife. Children are made so responsible that when the time comes they may find it hard to leave home because they know their parents relied on them so heavily.

4. Conclusion

In many single parent families, children grow very close to their single parent. Moreover, both the parent and the child will probably become more mature, responsible, self-reliant, and confident. Separation from fathers (which occurs more commonly in low-income homes) may engender a sense of emotional deprivation for which early sexual relationships seem to provide an answer. The likelihood of young women being sexually active at an early age, and becoming pregnant in teenage years, is increased by a perceived lack of emotional closeness to their mothers. Therefore, whether one is a single parent or not, the ingredients needed to raise a child are always the same. A child needs enough money to be fed and cared for. A child needs somebody who loves them to come home to after school. Both the roles of a loving male and female should be present in a child's life. No family is without stress, but if both parents and children do their best, it is my belief that all obstacles can be overcome. The presence of father and/or mother, loving each other and demonstrating the love of Christ to their children is a great asset and cushions many shocks children go through. 2 Corinthians 4:8-16. Only God can carry the heavy burdens (Matthew 11:28) single parents go through.

4.1 There is hope

In single parenting, as is with parenting in a home where a mother and father are present, there are joys and pains in bringing up children.

Single parents must be overwhelmed by the economic and social concerns that at times the church has to demonstrate biblical love.

Lack of spiritual guidance will show itself at some point in life. The child's upbringing should be the responsibility of the parent/s, family, church, society, community and the nation as a whole.

Parents who find themselves singly bringing up their children for reasons they may have contributed or contributed by nature face enormous emotional and psychological uphill task.

The Bible calls Christians the salt of the salt and light of the earth (Matthew 5:13-14). Christians ought to 'taste' to the single parents that may be in dire need of

fellowship. Single parents need prayers, they should be visited and supported materially where and whenever possible.

Some churches have started programs that involve single parents. Such exercises do bring a sense of belonging to single parents.

Bibliography

- Eagan, O. (2011). *Problems that accompany single –parenthood Reasons for so many family problems*. Colombia University.
- Hiton, J. & Devall, E. (2012). Comparison of Role Demands, relationships and child functioning in single mother, father and intact families. *“Journal of Divorce and Re-marriage, 35, 29-56.*
- Kagendo, N.P. (2017). *Single Mothers and Parenting in Kenya: The Case of Zimmerman, Nairobi County*. MA Project, University of Nairobi, Kenya.
- Kalumu, J. P. (2016). *An Investigation into the Effects of Single Motherhood on Socio-Emotional Development of Children in Kalundu Zone Primary Schools, Kitui County*. MED Project, South Eastern Kenya University.
- Meda S.G. (2013). African rural-urban migration and the transformation of gender roles and family relations: the lone mothers of Nairobi. *Urban People / Lidé Mesta, 15(2), 279-307.*
- Munanie, F. K. (2016). *Single Motherhood Family Structure And Its Effects On Moral Development Of Primary School Children In Kalundu Zone, Kitui County*. MED Project, South Eastern Kenya University.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Social Sciences Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).