

Single-parent Family Structure, Psychological, Social and Cognitive Development of Children in Ekiti State

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Received: July 31, 2012

Accepted: September 10, 2012

Online Published: October 29, 2012

doi:10.5539/jedp.v2n2p158

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jedp.v2n2p158>

Abstract

The study investigated the prevalence and influence of single parenthood on school children. It also investigated the influence of single parenthood on children emotional, intellectual development and sex role. 1,500 respondents were selected using simple and purposive sampling techniques. A self designed instrument titled Family Structure and Child Development Inventory (FSCDI) was used for collection of data. The instrument was validated by experts in Counseling Psychology. The test-retest reliability of the instrument was ensured using Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.76 and found significant at 0.05 level. The other instrument used for collection of data was the Psychosocial and Cognitive Development Scale (PCDS) which is a measure for the assessment of psychological social and cognitive development of children validated by test experts. The scale gives a score for each dimension and also a Total Development Score in a rating scale format from 1=lower development to 6=higher development. For the purpose of this study, it was only assessed the Total Development Score. It was found out that single parent family affected emotional and intellectual development of children. It was also found out that single parenthood influences sex roles of the respondents. It was recommended that couples should not consider divorce as solution to ripples in marriages. Parents should enhance harmony of their marriages to enhance social and cognitive well being of their children.

Keywords: single parenthood, FSCDI, PCDS, development

1. Introduction

Infants and young children are totally dependent on nurturance from parents or other care giver. Parenting is demanding because meeting the needs of children, let alone maximising their potential requires personal, social and economic resources. Thus becoming a parent too soon before adult abilities are attained and before the necessary resources are acquired usually possess problems for children and their young parents. Because of their need for assistance from others, early parenthood represents a drying on the resources of their extended families and the larger society. Concern arising daily on the rate of adolescent's birth in Ekiti State of Nigeria.

Adolescent child-bearing outside of marriage has been increasing for several decades and at a very rapid rate not only in secondary schools but also in the universities and polytechnics. There is also increasing concern about adolescent's sexual intercourse per se, not only because it leads to unintended pregnancy and parenthood but also because sex active adolescents may have extremely high rate of sexually transmitted infections and are at risk of exposure to Human Immuno Deficiency Virus (HIV). The first experience of the sexual intercourse may be coercive, none voluntary, it is also presumed to be associated with poor protection from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

Parents' mental disruption and living with a single-parent have been found to be associated with early onset of adolescent's sexual behaviour. This may reflect a number of other factors such as lower family income, disadvantaged neighbourhood, lesser supervising parental modelling, influence of sexually active friends, religion, family structure may all determine adolescent's sexual behaviour and their pregnancy. Abortion is a more likely outcome when a pregnant adolescent has a poor relationship with the male who impregnated her. Decision about abortion, adoption and parenthood are influenced not only by adolescent's perceptions of what their parents and peers think about their actions, but also by opportunities in their communities (Thumbelina, 2012).

Life option for opportunity cost theory suggests that adolescents engage in risky sexual behaviour because they believe that they have little to lose. Adolescents who experience educational and job success and perceive positive future opportunities for themselves should have stronger motivation for avoiding early pregnancy and parenthood. To some extent, intervention that focuses on enhancing educational achievement and providing apprenticeship and employment appear to be effective. Another limit of current intervention is their lack of attention to males but focuses on females, also it fails to consider the role of males in teen pregnancy at all. Parents are more likely to talk about sex with daughters than with sons, teens talk about sex more with their friends than with their parents (Albert & Flamingen, 2003).

Sexual content appears in two-thirds of all television programmes, 14% of programmes portray sexual intercourse. This encourages teens to become sexually active when it portrays sex as more central to daily life than it actually is, a process known as media cultivation. Social learning theory predicts that teens who watch portrayal of sex without consequence will be more likely to become sexually active. The probability of breast and gender touching is 50% higher among teens who watch large amount of television than among of those who do not. Older tends are more likely than younger teens to say that morals and values are more important at health information in preventing sexual activities. Hana Margaret teenage pregnancy can lead to negative psychological effects including depression and resentment, drop out of schools (Kunkel, Eyal & Biely, 2003).

In America, teenage pregnancy is increasing daily, approximately 750,000 teenage girls between the age of 15—19 become pregnant every year according to the Guthmacher Institute. Within this number, 82% of the pregnancy is unclaimed. The psychological effects, birth and post-birth issues. More than half of teenage pregnancy continue to birth. They are at greater risk of experiencing depression, birth complication, toxemia, anaemia and even death. Teenage girls are often not emotionally prepared for child birth. They experience feeling of failure, anxiety. Extreme issues because of the stigma that exists regarding teenage pregnancy in many society, pregnant teens may deal with feeling of guilt, shame, anger, denial and depression. Only one-third of teenage mothers completes high school and receives a diploma.

Apart from future financial and employment problems, this can be a contributing factor towards negative self-esteem. Teenagers are often afraid to tell friends, parents or other family members about the pregnancy which can lead to further anxiety, feeling of shame and withdrawal from society. Most of the pregnancy may not have any particular person to claim responsibility hence fear of having bastard-child may lead to abortion or death. The boy or man who perhaps is responsible for it may deny such. Teenager-mothers are at a higher risk of poverty, inability to maintain a stable job, ending up in abusive homes, having children who perform poorly in school and having daughters with the higher risk of also becoming pregnant during their teenage years and eventually become lone parents (Odu & Ayodele, 2007b).

Recently the number of single parent families has been rising at an alarming rate. Many children live in single-parent homes today more than ever before and more than half of all children born today will likely live in single parent homes before they reach adulthood (Odu & Ayodele 2007a). Although many single parent families are the outcome of broken marriages, many others are the result of out-of-marriage child bearing most notably by teenagers out of wedlock. In some societies, especially those with high death rate due to malnutrition, diseases and regional conflicts, the loss of a parent is hardly uncommon. Nevertheless, in the extended families characteristics of these regions, the slack is typically taken up by other family members, and replacement marriages may be quickly arranged to ensure family continuity. Everybody including the children of single-parent families constantly respond to demands.

Bilum (1992) observes that divorce is more likely for couples whose parents had been divorced. He reported that where neither of the parents was divorced, there was only a 15 per cent chance of a couple to divorce. The figure rose to 38 percent if both sets of parent were divorced. Brody and Forehard (1993) in their own view claim that divorce may be “contagious” in some families more because the parents and their married children share other factors that increase the likelihood of divorce, such as being of a lower social class, having less education, and marrying at an early age. Julie (2000) says that economy is one of the major problems of single parenthood, nearly half of all families headed by women fall below the poverty line. Again, many single mothers are under acute stress, and it affects their behaviour with their children with necessity of life.

Adeyemi (2004) however submits that some of the stress is noted to be overloaded, the single mother has to deal with all the tasks responsibilities and demands that would ordinarily be shared by two, some of the stress may come from social isolation. The single mother may be overwhelmed by responsibilities and poverty that she becomes a lovely captive in a child-centred world. These factors probably interact with the absence of the male parents to produce the effects on children’s development that researchers constantly find. Waite. and Gallagher,

(2000) say that today's single fathers are an unusual group because their assumption of child-rearing responsibilities requires them to reject traditional sex roles. This high involvement with their children, in which they perform the duties that traditionally fall to the modern way lead their sons and daughters to develop more flexible views of masculinity.

Travillion (2000) reports that single parent fathers encounter many problems ranging from work pressure and child care pose a good deal of difficulty, especially for fathers with pre-school children, many fathers then gravitate towards day care centers and nursery schools where they feel that the staff has a professional commitment to children. Dornbusch and Gray (1988) wrote that once the children start elementary school. Fathers usually allow them to stay alone after school, Many single fathers report that their greatest difficulty in making the transition to single parenthood is losing their wives help and companionship, they say that it is more difficult for them to become single than to become a single parent. Women heading a single parent family may typically experience greater stress than women in two parent families.

It may be that their lower income are sources of chronic strain, more so the responsibilities of the family fall entirely on one adult rather than two. Female heads report much lower self-esteem, a lower sense of effectiveness, and less optimism about the future than their counterparts in two-parent setting. Many single parent mothers complain of a lack of free time, spiraling child care costs, loneliness and unrelenting pressures associated with the dual demands of home and job. Zasnow, and Kirat Ashman (2001) argue that single parents are in need of a variety of services not currently available in most communities.

These services include day care facilities that are affordable and convenient to home and for work. Various forms of counseling, child care enrichment, after school programme and parent education. Consistent differences appear between groups of children who have father and those who do not, those who have mothers and those who do not have, and moreover those who spend part of their lives in a step-family (Odu & Ayodele, 2007b).

Many psychologists have studied the consequences of single-parenthood on children. For instance, the absence of the father may be felt as the lack of masculine influence. For optimum delinquent, a child may need the presence of a male role model, or the fathers' absence may be felt on the absence of another adult who would have enriched the child's environment. Akinyele and Onifade (1996) come out with the confluence theory which predicts that the subtraction of one adult from the family will depress a child's cognitive development, the level of cognitive and social simulation in single parent homes is lower than when both parents are present. Children in single parent homes also get less adult attention.

Kemp (1994) however upholds that for whatever reason, neither boys nor girls in mother-headed households do as well in school as children from intact families. Adegoke (2003) claims that boys intellectual development and academic performance suffer much more than that of girls and the deeper effects appear if the boys are younger than five at the time the father leaves. The absence of a father seems most harmful among children in working-class families and among very bright children in lower-class families. Sokan (1992) finds out that boys without father have trouble developing self-control. They tend to be more aggressive and may run the risk of becoming delinquents. The escalating cycle of aggressiveness that custodian mothers and their sons often fall into is sometimes due to the climate and tone of the homes and the kind of supervision the boy receives, and these are greater factors in the development of delinquency.

Organ (2001) observes that sex role development has received most attention in studies of single-parent families. Father seems to be a dominant influence on the acquisition of sex roles. What happens when the father is missing? in the case of boys, his early loss appear to weaken or show the acquisition of a male sex role-but doesn't. Akpan (1984) is of the opinion that the mother's behaviour may be important in this trend as the father's absence. Mothers in single-parent discourage their independence.

2. Method

2.1 Hypotheses

There is no significant relationship between single parent Family structure and children emotional development. There is no significant relationship between single-parent family structure and children intellectual capacity. There is no significant relationship between single-parent family structure and sex-role acquisition.

2.2 Research Design

The researcher employed the descriptive research design of the survey type. This plan of study is considered appropriate because it focuses on the observation and perception of the existing situation.

2.3 Population

The population for the study is made up of all children of school ages in 850,000 Ekiti State growing up in single-parent homes. The state is in South Western part of the country Nigeria. It has Ado - Ekiti as its capital. There are sixteen local government areas and three senatorial districts in Ekiti State.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

One thousand and five hundred children were selected for this study through the purposive sampling technique three Local Government Areas were randomly selected from the three Senatorial Districts of the State, one Local Government each from each of the Senatorial Districts using simple random Sampling Techniques. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling technique male and female children of between 10 and 15 years from three groups (male parents, female parents and step parents, either male or female) were assessed four times, using a longitudinal format during one year and a half with 6 months between each assessment. Participants completed the measures individually in a classroom setting, within a group format joining the three groups at the end of the study we had psychosocial and cognitive well-being evaluations and self-perception of problems with family structures from children between 10 and 16 years. Group 1 was assessed at 10 years, 10 years and 6 months, 11 years, 11 years and 6 months. Groups 2 was assessed at 12 years, 12 years and 6 months. Group 3 was assessed at 14 years, 14 years and 6 months, 15 years, 15 years and 6 months.

2.5 Research Instrument

The instrument used was a self-designed instrument titled "Family structure and Child's Development Inventory" (FSCDI) the instrument is divided into two major parts of A and B. The other instrument used was the Psychosocial and Cognitive Development Scale (PCDS) which is a measure for the assessment of psychosocial and cognitive development of children between 10 and 16 years old. It includes 28 items divided by 5 dimensions (anxiety, cognitive-emotional negative, cognitive-emotional positive, social support, perception of competencies), which represent factors contributing to a lower development (first-two) and factors contributing to a higher development (last three). The scale gives a score for each dimension and also a total development score in a rating scale format from 1=lower development to 6=higher development. For the purpose of this study, it was only assessed the Total Development Score. Part A is made up of the bio-data of the respondents. Part B of the instrument was made up of items designed to elicit responses from young children of single-parent experience and its challenges on their development. The instrument was validated by experts in Test and Measurement and other experts while the reliability index of 0.76 was obtained using a test-retest method, hence the suitability of the instrument for the study.

2.6 Administration of the Instrument

The researchers administered the instrument with the assistance of some research assistance who had earlier been taught the special skills of handling the instrument after identifying those children from one parent families.

3. Result

3.1 Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using inferential statistic technique. Pearson Product Moment Correlation. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

3.2 Hypotheses Testing

This section presents the results of the data analysis for this study. The results present hypotheses which guided the study as shown in table 1, 2 and 3.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between single-parent family structure and children emotional development

Table 1. Correlation between single-parent family structure and children emotional development

<i>Variables</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>r-cal</i>	<i>r-tab</i>
Single parent structure	1,500		
Children Intellectual Capacity	1,500	0.662	0.195

P < 0.05 significant

Table 1 shows r -cal to be 0.662 and r -tab to be 0.192. H_0 is rejected since r -cal is higher than r -tab. Therefore, there is significant relationship between single-parent family structure and children emotional development. The relation however reflects positive direction between Single Parent Family Structure and emotional development of children from such homes, also the R -value power is strong enough to conclude a positive relationship exist between Single Parent Family Structure and emotional development of children significantly.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between single-parent family structure and the intellectual capacity of children.

Table 2. Correlation between single-parent family structure and children intellectual development

<i>Variables</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>r-cal</i>	<i>r-tab</i>
Single parent structure	1,500		
Children Intellectual Capacity	1,500	0.528	0.195

$P < 0.05$ significant

Table 2 shows r -cal 0.528 and r -tab 0.195. H_0 is rejected, since r -cal of 0.528 values is higher than r -tab of 0.195 values. Therefore there is significant relationship between single-parent family structure and children intellectual capacity. From the table above, the relation reflects positive direction between single-parent family structure and the intellectual development of children brought up in this setting. The result also indicate a strong R -value power to agree a positive association or relationship between single parent family structure and the intellectual functioning of children from such home as the absence of one adult from the family can depress the child's cognitive development. Boys intellectual development and academic performance suffer much more than that of girls and the deeper effects appear if the boys are younger at the time the father leaves.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between single-parent family structure and sex-role acquisition

Table 3. Correlation between single-parent family structure and sex- role acquisition

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>r-cal</i>	<i>r-tab</i>
Single parent structure	1,500		
Sex-role acquisition	1,500	0.408	0.195

$P < 0.05$ significant

Table 3 reveals that the value of r -cal (0.408) is greater than r -tab value (0.195) at a significant level of 0.05. Therefore, the H_0 is rejected as there is significant relationship between single-parent family structure and sex-role acquisition. The relation reflects positive direction between single parent structure and sex-role acquisition among children from such home, also the R -value power is moderate enough to argue that single parent family setting has a far reaching influence on the sex-role acquisition of children from such setting, for instance father seems to be a dominant influence on the acquisition of sex-role. When the father is missing, to the boys, this appears to weaken a male sex-role development. Also, the absence of the mother to the girls would also weaken a female sex-role development. The mother's behaviour is equally important as the fathers behaviour to balance the sex-role development of the children as they are both models important at home for socialisation.

The absence of the father may be felt as the lack of masculine influence in boys and the absence of the mother may be felt as the lack of feminine influence in girls. Also, the younger a child is the greater the influence of the absence of either of the parents on his or her sex-role development than the older children.

4. Results and Discussion

Hypothesis 1: The result of this study shows that there is significant relationship between single-parent family structure and children emotional development. This finding supports the earlier report of Ming (2009) who

asserted that the child brought up in a traditional family with both parents is always content with himself, self-reliant, self controlled and explorative while a child brought up by single-parent has the tendency to have poor self-esteem, little curiosity and exploratory behaviour, moodiness, lack of joy and happiness, emotional instability and little self-reliance.

The result in hypothesis 2 shows that there is a significant relationship between family structure and child's intellectual development. The study reveals a significant result in the relationship between the two variables; in essence the family type where a child grows is significant in the intellectual development of the child. This no doubt shows that single-parent family structure has an overwhelming effect on the intellectual development of the children from such home. Such children often suffer inadequate development of such body structures as the nervous system particularly the brain, the sensory apparatus and the structures of communication and the process through which they are used to make the individual aware of and understand the world around him. The finding is in agreement with Hughes and Waite (2002) who found out that the scores of children from single parent families, on achievement and Intelligent Quotient tests are lower, their grades are lower, they are more likely to repeat a grade and they tend to drop out of school earlier. The effect is especially marked on mathematical skills.

The result in hypothesis 3 reveals that there is a significant relationship between family structure and sex-role acquisition. This finding aligns with the work of Mar-Morstein, Naomi and William (2004) which found out those boys tend to prefer feminine activities and shun activities involving competition and physical contact, they make less masculine score on sex-role tests. Sometimes, however, they may show an exaggerated masculinity, as if to complement for the absence of their fathers.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Children from single-parent family are having their emotional development affected, also children that grow up with single parents develop similar sex role of the parents that brought them up. It was also concluded that single parenting has influence on children's intellectual capacity. Couples should endeavour to keep their marriages to serve as model to their children, as unstable emotion needs to be overcome in the early years.

In the situations where unavoidable single parenting exists, parents should enhance healthy emotional and intellectual development of their children. Parents should also know that as children take up their sex roles they should form good models for their children. However, parents should be encouraged to maintain stability of their marriage by living together to enhance proper emotional, intellectual and sex role formation of their children.

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