



ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

Single Parenting and Adjustment Problems of Adolescents in Anambra State

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Abstract:

This study investigated single parenting and adolescents' adjustment problems. 3 research questions and 3 research hypotheses were designed and formulated for the purpose of the study. The research design for the study was descriptive survey. A sample size of one thousand (1000) respondents were drawn from adolescents who have single parents living in Awka and Idemili towns in Anambra State. Instrument for data collection was an adapted version of Reynolds's adolescent adjustment screening inventory. Mean, standard deviation and Independent samples t-test were used for the data analyses. The result of the study showed that irrespective of gender, location, and SES, there was no statistically significant influence of single parenting on adolescents adjustment problems. Conclusion and recommendations were made

1. Introduction

The challenges that go with single parenting and its resultant impacts on adolescent adjustment have attracted concern from many. A personal experience of one of the researchers is an instance of a female adolescent brought up by the father who could not cook because the father would buy food at eateries for her. In reality, if the girl had been brought up by her mother, cooking might not have been an issue. The single parent family is created in a number of ways: death of one parent, divorce, separation and desertion (Ifedigbo, 2007). In the 1970s and 1980s, most single-parent families were the result of divorce but in the 2000's more and more single parents never married and this was the primary contributor to single parent families in the world (Kotwal & Prabhakar, 2009).

In Nigeria and particularly in Anambra State, the traditional culture of the Igbo population does not condone pre-marital sex and its consequential adolescent pregnancies, hence most single parent families resulted from death of a spouse. Even at that, the traditional Igbo culture does not allow the single parent state to remain for long as the widow is often urged to marry an eligible next of kin and the widower persuade to remarry. However, with the onslaught of civilization and modernization, these traditional values were weakened in their implementation as indigenes relocated to urban centers where they were free to live as they pleased without the restriction posed by traditional norms in the villages. Segun (2006) asserts that traditional mechanisms for coping with and regulating adolescents' sexuality, especially marriage and norms of chastity before marriages are being eroded.

In every direction one observes the situation of single parenting and its relationship with adolescent adjustment; it seems obvious that the resultant changes in the family structure may leave permanent footprints in their young ones as they grow. Single parenthood is not an experience found only among adults, as it can be found among the youths as in cases where female adolescents who indulge in illicit sex or are victims of abuse could end up with pregnancy and subsequent childbirth. In such cases, when the partner is unidentifiable or as if sometimes happens when the partner in the act is another adolescent or an irresponsible adult who declines ownership of the newly born child, the adolescent mother is left to cater for the child as a single parent. Likewise, an adolescent male could through illicit sexual indulgence be responsible for impregnating and fathering a child from a partner who is unwilling to start a family, and thus end up as single (father) parent of the child. Furthermore, it would be unfair not to mention again that sudden or resultant death of one parent in a previously two-parent-family can create a single parent family situation. In such scenarios, it is of interest to learn the emerging factors that militate against healthy adolescent developmental adjustments and the challenging and sometimes extraordinary opportunities it also presents to the adolescent as he struggles to survive despite the obvious odds. Therefore comparing the dynamics of the latter to a single parent family situation that was created by divorce of the parents, presents interesting fields of research, and of particular interest is the relationship or impact of the enumerated single parent scenarios to the natural developmental adjustment process of the growing adolescent.

Adolescents can be broadly defined as the young population aged 10-19 years (Ngalinda, 2001). Adolescence is an important period in any human being's life as this is the time of rapid growth both physical and mental. It is characterized by high risk for early and unwanted sexual activity, forced marriage and early pregnancies (Salami, 1998). It is also a period of transition into adulthood, when the individual grapples with learning, self esteem, identity and vision. Barber and Eccles (2010) defined gender as the division of people into two categories: "men" and "women". Through interaction with caretakers, socialization in childhood, peer pressure in adolescence, gender work and family roles, women and men are socially constructed to be different in behavior, attitudes and emotions. The gendered social order is based on and maintains these differences.

According to Hetherington, Cox and Cox (2010), location is defined by geographers to mean a point in physical space, although they also include a dimension of relativity between points. The two specific points in this regard are rural and urban areas, which could be a person's area of residence. Socio-economic status can be defined as the grouping of people with similar occupational, educational and economic characteristics (Santrock, 2005). It is also defined as the unequal distribution among members of society of attributes, qualities, possessions that are regarded within the society as desirable (Kierkus and Bauer, 2002).

From the reports highlighted above, there is evidence that many researchers have elucidated on single parenthood and its effect on adolescents, but not many have directed attention on adolescents' adjustment. Hence, this work attempts to look at the influence of single parenthood on adolescent adjustment in Anambra State of Nigeria.

Robert and Vancouver (1972) highlighted that case reports on single parent families demonstrated some unique problems with such a family situation. Several studies have looked at other problems of single parent family units such as socio-economic hardships, often leading to child labour, child delinquency; parent-adolescent relationships, parenting and impact on adolescent academic performance, but not much has been done to investigate in-depth, adolescent adjustment as a unique problem of single parenthood. This is the reason why this research was carried out, to investigate the issue of single parenthood as it affects adolescent adjustment in Anambra State of Nigeria.

2. Statement of the Problem

Single parenting has a myriad of problems that could emanate from it if not properly handled. In general, Nigeria and Anambra state in particular has not been spared as individuals raised by single parents have been instrumental to a lot of social vices. A female adolescent who does not have a mother-figure to counsel and groom her could be easily misled to join the group of girls who misbehave. Most of them could start living immoral lives that could result in unwanted pregnancy.

Secondly, the male adolescents could develop stronger will power above that of their mothers and become difficult to control (if they are living with their mother alone). They would want to assert themselves wrongly and since no male figure that is a father is around, they could take after behaviours of their male peers. This could lead them into wrong vices like drug abuse, smoking, stealing and so on. Again, the issue at hand is, if care is not taken the cycle may replicate itself. Most people who were given birth to in single parent homes may end up living a single parent, such that if this problem is not arrested, the marital future of this nation will be at stake. Hence the researchers' interest in studying the influence of single parenthood on adolescents' adjustment in Anambra State.

3. Purpose of the Study

The study sought to investigate single parenting and its impact on adolescent adjustment. In specific terms, the study intends to:

- Find out if there is an influence of single parenting by gender on adolescent adjustment.
- Find out to what extent single parenting by location influences the adjustment of adolescents.
- To determine to what extent single parenting by socio-economic status influences adjustment of adolescents.

4. Methodology

This study investigated the influence of single parenting on adjustment problem of adolescents. The design adopted was descriptive survey. The study was carried out in Awka and Idemili towns in Anambra State. The population of the study comprised 300,000 adolescents who were residents of Awka South, Awka North Idemili South and Idemih North local Government Areas of Anambra State in Nigeria.

The sample was 1000 adolescents from single parents drawn by purposive sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was an adapted version of Reynolds's adolescent adjustment screening inventory which was content validated by experts in psychological testing.

The reliability of the instrument was determined using the test-retest method. The first and the retest of the scores for the sample were correlated using Pearson Product Moment correlation (r). The result showed a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.77 for Antisocial Behaviour (AB); 0.73 for Anger Control Problems (AC); 0.83 for Emotional Distress (CED); 0.75 for Positive Self (PS) section of the inventory and 0.84 for the Total Adjustment score on the inventory. The researchers personally administered the instrument. The questionnaires were clearly explained to the adolescents and their questions adequately answered. The research questions were analyzed with mean and standard deviation while the null hypotheses generated were tested using t-test.

5. Research Questions

The following research questions were proposed to guide the study:

- To what extent does single parenting by gender influence adjustment of adolescents?
- To what extent does single parenting by location influence the adjustment of adolescents?
- To what extent does single parenting by socio-economic status influence adjustment of adolescents.

6. Hypotheses

- Ho 1: There is no significant influence of single parenting by gender on adjustment of adolescents.
- Ho 2: There is no significant influence of single parenting by location on adjustment of adolescents.
- Ho 3: There is no significant influence of single parenting by socio-economic status on adjustment of adolescents.

7. Results

- **Research Question One:** To what extent does single parenting by gender influence adjustment of adolescents?
- **Hypothesis One:** There is no significant influence of single parenting by gender on adjustment of adolescents.

Gender	N	X	SD	t-cal	t-crit	df	Result
Male	581	69.13	21.083	1.337	1.960	988	Not significant
Female	419	67.36	20.132				

Table 1: t-test analysis of the influence of single parenting by gender on adjustment of adolescents

Table 1 shows the t-test analysis of the influence of single parenting by gender on adjustment of adolescents. From their means on their total adjustment scores of the instrument, it was found that adolescents of male single parents had more adjustment problem than those of female single parents. The mean for those of the male ($\bar{x}=69.13$, $SD=21.083$) was higher than that of those of the females ($\bar{x}=67.36$, $SD=20.132$).

Hypothesis testing of their mean scores revealed a non-statistically significant influence of single parenthood by gender on adjustment of the adolescents as the calculated $t=1.337$, was less than the critical $t=1.960$ at 998 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level. Thus, the null hypothesis of no significant influence of single parenthood by sex on adjustment of adolescents was accepted.

- **Research Question Two:** To what extent does single parenting by location influence adjustment of adolescents?
- **Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant influence of single parenting by location on adjustment of adolescents.

Location	N	X	SD	t-cal	t-crit	df	Result
Urban	500	68.48	20.578	0.144	1.960	988	Not significant
Rural	500	68.29	20.838				

Table 2: t-test analysis of the influence of single parenting by location on adjustment of adolescents

Table 2 shows the t-test analysis of the influence of single parenting by location on adjustment of adolescents. From the adolescents means on their total adjustment scores on the instrument, it was discovered that those adolescents who had single parents that were residing in urban area had slightly more adjustment problem ($\bar{X}=68.48$, $SD=20.578$) than those adolescents having single parents and were residing in the rural area ($\bar{X}=68.29$, $SD=20.838$).

Hypothesis testing of their mean scores revealed a non-statistically significant influence of single parenthood by location on adjustment of the adolescents as the calculated $t=0.144$, was less than the critical $t=1.960$ at 998 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level. Thus, the null hypothesis of no significant influence of single parenting by location on adjustment of adolescent was accepted.

- **Research Question three:** To what extent does single parenting by socioeconomic status influence adjustment of adolescents?
- **Hypothesis Three:** There is no significant influence of single parenting by socioeconomic status on adjustment of adolescents.

SES	N	X	SD	t-cal	t-crit	DF	Result
Low	460	68.10	19.796	.403	1.960	988	Not significant
High	540	68.63	21.452				

Table 3: t-test analysis of the influence of single parenting by socio-economic status on adjustment of adolescents

Table 3 shows the t-test analysis of the influence of single parenting by socioeconomic status on adjustment of adolescents. From the mean scores of the adolescents on the total adjustment score of the instrument, adolescents of single parents who were of high socio-economic background had more adjustment problem ($\bar{X}=68.10$, $SD=19.796$) than those adolescents of low socio-economic background ($\bar{X}=68.10$, $SD=19.796$).

Hypothesis testing of their mean scores also shows a non statistically significant influence of single parenthood by socio-economic status on the adjustment of the adolescents.

Since the calculated $t = 0.403$, was less than the critical $t = 1.960$ at 998 degree of freedom and 0.05 alpha level, the null hypothesis of no significant influence of single parenting by socio-economic status on adjustment of adolescents was accepted.

8. Discussion

- *Influence of single parenting by gender on adjustment of adolescents.*

Finding on subjecting research question one to descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation showed that adolescents of male single parents had more adjustment problem than their counterparts who had female single parents. When subjected to test of hypothesis, a non-statistically significant influence of single parenting by gender on adjustment of adolescents was observed. This means that single parenting, whether male or female, influences the adolescent growing up in such family.

This finding is in agreement with that of McLanahan (2007) whose findings showed that lack of material affection and presence predicted involvement in property crimes by adolescents.

- *Influence of single parenting by location on adjustment of adolescents.*

From the finding of analysis of research question two concluded that adolescent of single parent residing in urban area had slightly more adjustment problem than those who had single parent but were in the rural area. Test of the null hypothesis showed a non-statistically significant influence of single parenting by location on adjustment of adolescents.

This is an indication that location alone cannot predict adolescent adjustment problems. Considering the fact that the whole wide world is a small global village, adolescents from urban location may not behave differently from those in the rural setting. However, the slightly different means showing slightly more adjustment problems by adolescents from the urban areas may not be unconnected with the fact that in the rural areas there are some social norms which are still strictly adhered to compare to the urban areas where adolescents are freer to do whatever they want or desire. This finding is contrary to the finding of Nidhi and Bharti (2009). They were of the view that environment may play significant role in adolescent delinquency.

- *Influence of single parenting by socio-economic status on adjustment of adolescents.*

Analysis of influence of single parenting by socio-economic status on adjustment of adolescents showed that those of high socioeconomic status had more adjustment problem than their peers of low socioeconomic status. Though, hypothesis testing of their mean scores showed no statistically significant influence of single parenting by socio-economic status on adjustment of adolescents, the fact that adolescents from low income, single parent families actually have less adjustment problems than those from high income single-parent homes suggests the possibility that their parents teach their children coping strategies that limit the impact of the risk factors. Furthermore, compared to their colleagues from the upper social class, lower class adolescents from single parent families seem to be more careful because of the realities of their background. This idea is shared by Mulkey, Lynn, Crain, Robert, Alexander and Harrington (1992) who found out that because of the realities of their background lower class adolescents aspire higher in order to change their lot. According to them, adolescents of low socioeconomic status are intrinsically motivated and humbly believe in challenging themselves academically and socially.

9. Implications

By implication, an adolescent's social adjustment is influenced by many people, processes and institutions. Parents, the broader family, peer group, neighbourhood, school and other bodies (e. g. churches and clubs) are all implicated in shaping children's progress toward their self fulfillment and citizenship. The children themselves, of course with their unique abilities, temperament, propensities and choices play major roles in forming and reforming their behavior, aspiration and achievements. All these notwithstanding, the presence of both parents is very critical to the total development of the young person.

Children who grow up apart from their mother are prone to adjustment problems than children who grow up apart from their fathers. They are less likely to finish high school and attend college, less likely to find and keep a steady job, and more likely for the females to become teen mothers. Fathers most of the time tends to adopt a laissez faire attitude and the children lacking adequate love and affection may become agents of anarchy and strife in the society. (Izibenfein, 2007).

Non-creation of suitable environment for child rearing and provision of the child's needs may encourage adolescent delinquency as much as parental over reaction to issues, harsh environment and parental aggression may make adolescent take to the streets and lead adolescents into delinquent behaviors. Boisterous environment that is not enriching or prone to violence could imprint on the individual at his early age and influence his thoughts and processes. (Nwachukwu, 2002).

Noteworthy is the role that one's religion bears in influencing his or her psychological and social makeup. Religion that the adherent most of the time, practice violence rubs on the mentality of the young ones, such that they later become misfit and socially maladjusted. An adolescent's religious inclination should at school be tempered with sound moral instruction to erode any indoctrination that might be detrimental to his or her psychosocial makeup. It is only with this in mind and necessary provision for these lapses due to disrupted family situation could our society get the better of its citizens.

10. Conclusion

Growing up with a single parent may affect children for three primary reasons: A disrupted family usually has fewer financial resources to devote to children's upbringing and education, less time and energy to nurture and supervise children, and reduced access to community resources that can supplement and support parents' efforts. Fortunately, none of these factors are beyond the control of parents and society. Thus, to the extent that parents and government can address these risk factors, the effect of father or mother absence on children's wellbeing could be significantly softened. Despite the gender, location or socio-economic background of a single parent, efforts should be made to help the affected adolescent ameliorate the attendant limitations of growing up in such a home setting.

11. Recommendations

The research finding has thrown open some important points. First, counselors should utilize every opportunity to sensitize parents on the importance of creating a cohesive home environment, one in which parents and children share affection, where children are sufficiently supervised, and where there is discipline and not Punishment.

Secondly, given every opportunity, counselors should encourage parent especially single ones to effectively socialize their wards, teaching them to eschew unacceptable behavior, to delay gratification and to respect the right of others. Parent should be intimated that children learn best from what they see them do. In other words, parents should provide good example in conduct and speech for their children to emulate.

Finally teachers and counselors should let the parent appreciate the need to create a peaceful home, one with relative harmony conducive enough for the development of pro-social behaviors on the part of the children.

From the finding of this study, in spite of the fact that the single parent seem to relate well with his or her adolescent child, they (adolescents) experience adjustment problems. It is, therefore, recommended that each adolescent problem should be handled by guidance counselors with full understanding of the family structure and parental background. They should not only relate with parent of adolescent with psychological problem but equally organize family seminars on this issue to reduce the social and emotional problems of the adolescents.

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