
Single Parent Families And Education Of Adolescents In Technical Colleges: Matters Arising

By

DR. DENNIS D. DURU

*Federal College of Education (Technical),
Omoku.*

And

DR. OKECHUKWU AMADIKE

*Federal College of Education (Technical),
Omoku.*

Abstract

This paper explored technical college education of adolescents from single parent families. It examined the concept of family and explained nuclear, polygamous and extended types of family. Single parenthood and single parenting: foreign experience was discussed citing some empirical studies to support the points. For clarity, the concept of adolescent, adolescence and the characteristic comparison of adolescent boys and girls were highlighted. Matters arising in technical college education of adolescents from single parents households in relation with lack of money, artificial gap between single parent and adolescents, problems of work and domestic duties, lack of attention to the education of adolescents, and lack of quality supervision were also discussed. The paper concluded by recommending proper education to people on the effects of single parenting on the education and life of adolescents.

The family can be described as the fundamental, biological, social institution into which a child is born and where the child's primary socialization takes place (Nnajieta, 2006). It is a place where the child first learns the necessary behavior of the society and develop vocational skill (informally), patterns, attitudes, values and norms which make him positive member of the society. The family finds its origin in marriage. The family is composed of husband, wife and their children, though other relations may find their place close to the nuclear family. The family members are united together by legal bond, economic, religious and other kinds of rights and obligations, sexual rights and prohibitions as well as feelings of love, affection, respect, care etc (Nnajieta, 2006).

The three types of family common in Nigeria are nuclear family, polygamous family and the extended family.

Nuclear Family

The nuclear family otherwise called monogamous, biological, primary or elementary family is made up of a man, his wife and their children. Nuclear family is the basic unit from which other forms of family develop. It offers the man the head of the family.

Polygamous Family

The polygamous family is the type of family in which a man legally marries more than one wife. It is made up a man, his wives and children.

Extended Family

The extended family may be a nuclear or polygamous family and consists of uncles, brothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, grand parents, wives of sons and their children as the members of the family. The oldest man in an extended family is the head of the family. The type of family is common in Nigeria. The extended family is a group of related kins linked by blood and marriage who occupy a common household and usually characterized by economic cooperation and solidarity (Nnaji, 2006).

Single Parenthood

A single parent can be referred to as either a mother or a father who takes the responsibilities of raising up the child or children alone without a spouse or partner or a parent who is not married (Deborah, 2010). When a man or woman whether married or not bears or adopts a child or children, he or she is a single parent. Single parenthood does not only concern a married father or a mother but also the unmarried parents. Put differently, a single parent is a biological, adoptive, or substitute parent of a dependent child who lives with only one parent. The concept includes the never-married, the divorced and the widowed. Macaulay (2009) added that single parent is a situation where a woman or a man gives birth to a child or children without being married. For a woman, the children can come from one man or different men, while a man can bear children with one or different women not married to him. This situation constitutes single parenthood when the child or the children so raised live with either the mother or the father who takes the sole responsibility of their training.

The family where two parents are married but one is away for a long period of time is also regarded as a single parent family. This practice is common in Nigeria where one of the married couples particularly men even women will leave the partner

and stay away in another town or country like United States, Germany, Holand, South Africa etc for a long time in search of greener pasture, while their children is raised by the partner alone.

Single Parenting: Foreign Experience

Single Parenthood has been called the fastest growing family style in the United States of America (Watch Tower Bible and Track Society, 1999). This situation is also found in many other developed and developing nations, Nigeria inclusive. The high rate of divorce, separation, desertion, and illegitimate birth in the society in the recent time prove this assertion correct. Broken home, death of a spouse or partner, adoption and same sex marriage also result to single parenting. From records, death of a partner is the major cause of single parenting the world over. Single parent adoption is an option for adults who want children but do not have a partner. A mother is usually the primary care giver in a single parent family structure as a result of divorce or unplanned or illegitimate parenthood. Fathers are not commonly primary care givers due to the obvious reason that a child from two separated parents feels better with the mother than the father. This assumption is however, changing in the recent time since high socio-economic single fathers can employ nannies who take care of the children. A study in the United States show that 72.6 percent of single parents are mothers compared with 27.4 percent of single fathers, in this study, some factors are responsible for the high rate of motherhood. The analysis of the data showed that 45 percent of the single mothers are divorced or separated, 1.7 percents are widowed, 34 percent are not married but are single mothers that resulted from accidental pregnancy or child bearing outside wedlock (Benokraitis, 2012). These factors are also responsible for one parent families in developing nations like Nigeria where the incidence of single parenting as a result of divorce, separation, same sex marriage and pregnancy outside marriage seem to be on the increase. This situation might be the same in other developing nations. The study also revealed that one out of every two children in the United States lives in a single parent family. This ratio is greater than one fourth of all the children in the United States. In 2002 for example, about 20 million children lived in households with only their mother or their father (Benokraitis, 2012). Further analysis on the level of single parenting in the United States, and the number of children including adolescents in single parent families are also indicated. The number of children living in single parent families in United States in 1970 is 11 percent, 31 percent in 1996 and 28 percent in 2002. This was as a result of high rate of divorce which was very common (Benokraitis, 2012).

Other causes of single parent families also exist. In the mid hundred century, most single parent families were as a result of the death of a spouse. In 1970s and 1980s, most single parent families resulted from divorce, while in early 2000s many single parents are never married. Most of these single parents live with unmarried

fathers of their children (Deborah, 2010). Another study is Benokraitis (2012) shows that 16.5 million or 23 percent of all the children in the United States lived with their single mothers. This group included 45 percent all African – American children, 16 percent of all non-Hispanic white children, 13 percent of all Asian/Pacific Islander children and 25 percent of children of Hispanic origin. Benokraitis (2012) also found that 11 percent of all the children were actually living in homes their mothers shared with men who they were not married. This group includes 14 percent of white children, 6 percent of African – American children, 11 percent of Asia/Pacific Islander and 12 percent of Hispanic children. This situation might be applicable to other developed and developing nations of the world.

Concept of Adolescent and Adolescence

Adolescent is defined by Hornby (2010) as a young person who is developing from a child into an adult. The concept is also seen as a person growing up, between childhood and maturity. Adolescence ranges between the age of 13 and 18 years. Adolescence on the other hand, is the period when an individual is capable of bearing an offspring. It then means that when the capacity for human reproduction is attained, the individual is said to be an adolescent. An adolescent boy or girl is an individual passing through the adolescent period (Anyakoha and Eluwa, 1999). At this transition period of life, the individual is neither a child nor an adult but between childhood and adulthood, and marked by certain characteristics.

In adolescent boys and girls, puberty is a narrow span of time which marks the beginning of sexual maturation. Adolescence is the specific time when an individual becomes sexually matured. At puberty stage, the reproductive organs of the adolescents become ready to function for reproduction and the secondary characteristics emerge.

Characteristic Comparison of Adolescent Boys and Girls

Certain changes emerge in adolescents from the onset of puberty. The changes in body proportions and body chemistry take place in both boys and girls leading to growth spurt (Onyehalu, 1988). While growth is still conspicuous and active in both sexes, certain distinctions emerge. In girls, there is increased deposition of fats under the skin especially around the face, obvious enlargement of breast, bottom and thighs (Onyehalu 1988 & Iroegbu, 2002). That is, the breasts become larger and fuller than their earlier status as immature breast buds, the nipples become more prominent and the areolar area darker in colour. In boys, the breast remains rudimentary, small and unchanged. The bones of the pelvic girdle widen considerably in the females, hairs appear at the arm-pit and pubes, but no facial hair. Rather the face becomes fuller, softer and rounded in shape due to the presence of fat tissue beneath the skin. In boys, the onset of maturity is indicated by the appearance of hair on the pubic area, the arm-pit, and the growth of bears or facial hair. The voice deepens and cracks as a result of

the development of voice box. In girls, the voice remains relatively unchanged but softens. The male external genitals – the penis and scrotum enlarge in size. Similarly, the uterus and the vagina grow, widen and mature in the girls. The primary sex organs mature and become functional in both sexes (Iroegbu, 2002). The male testes can now produce active sperm cells while the female ovaries now release an egg or ovum every calendar month, known as menstruation. There is increased growth of skeletal framework especially in the chest area in boys just as the pelvic expansion in girls.

The major feature showing the onset of puberty or sexual maturity in girls is menstruation. The first menstrual period is called the menarche. Both boys and girls normally experience acne or body pimples on the face, chest and back. Both sexes experience rapid maturation of the senses leading to sensory acuity and improved psychomotor co-ordination, but dental development is faster in girls than in the boys. The adolescents withdraw temporarily, displays unusual temper or highly irritable at one time, and highly elated and jubilant at the other time. For this reason, parents, teachers and social workers should understand and handle the adolescent properly rather than scolding, criticisms, in order to help them achieve normal psychological adjustment.

Comparative Effects of Single Parents and two Parents Families on Academic Achievement of Adolescents in Technical Colleges

The type of family a child belongs to, to a great extent, enhance or hinder his or her access and academic achievement in school. (Agada, 2004). The family background or socio-economic status of a child determines when he starts school, the type of school to attend whether secondary school or technical college, how far he can go in education, and his academic achievement. Academic achievement or ability implies correct performance of a student in tasks set up by the teacher in educational institution. The extents to which these tasks are achieved by students are determined by the attention and assistance given to the child's education (Deborah, 2010). The academic achievement of a child is automatically affected or even terminated by single parenthood (Nwaji, 2010).

A single parent plays the role of both father and mother, handles household duties and takes career decision of the adolescent's sons and draughts alone. To this end, Deborah (2010) observed that adolescents in single parent families are not well guided, perform poorly in school and twice likely to drop out of school than those living in two parent families. The effect of single parent families on adolescent education are not limited to making wrong vocational choices which might lead to poor interest and poor academic achievement. In a single parent home for example, an adolescent may not be given maximum attention, care and assistance especially in academic pursuit. The assistance in homework, payment of school fees and provision of

college materials and many more may not be convenient for single parents since they have to cater for many other needs of the family, Osunloya (2008) maintained.

In a study to determine how single and two parents adolescents feel about their parents, 61 percent of the adolescents from single parent families said that their parents do not take care of them adequately in school while the remaining 39 percent said otherwise. In a similar study, 67 percent, 59 percent and 70 percent of the respondents said that their two parents buy them textbooks, follow their academic progress and that they have free access to their mother and father because they lived together (Benokraitis, 2012). In another study, 56 percent of single parents responded that they find it difficult to train their children in school because of funds (Dwayne, 2012). This situation makes most adolescents to drop out of school for apprenticeship training. For adolescents from single parent household to succeed in life, they have to struggle which may be detrimental to their academic pursuit.

Most single parent household are catered by single mothers. The absence of a father coupled with lower income increases the risk of adolescent's poor achievement in school. Lack of financial support from a father often results in single mothers working more which in turn, affect adolescents because they receive less attention and guidance on their education. Dwayne (2012) therefore concluded that adolescents from single mothers who have contact and emotional support from their fathers tend to do better in school than those who have no contact with their fathers. It is obvious that the adolescents from two parent families are advantaged and well taken care of. They are well fed, attend good school and have all the necessary college materials. Their school fees are usually paid on time and their home environment is also stimulating. Their parents who may be educated provides them with the required books, discusses and helps them out in school work, therefore, they are physically sound and intellectually different from single parent adolescents from poor home backgrounds who lack most of what it takes to perform well in school.

Matters Arising

Single parents in most societies have difficulties in the upbringing and training of adolescents. Lack of time to attend to them due to the problems of work, domestic duties and search for money are among the numerous challenges facing single parents. Other challenges faced by single parents which affect the education of adolescent in technical colleges are not limited to:

Lack of Money due to Poverty

Poverty of single parents is one of the major problems facing the education of adolescents in technical institutions in Nigeria and other developing nations. In Nigeria, most families live below poverty level and lack the funds to finance their children in

school. Poverty causes hunger, starvation and in most cases, expose members of such families especially the adolescents to other careers of less interest and illegal means of making money such as stealing, prostitution, among others to meet peer group standards and college demands since technical college programme is cost intensive to both government and parents. As many single parent families are headed by single mothers, their economic burden is greater than that of single fathers because they usually have less income than single men (Benokraitis, 2010).

Though, some single fathers still have low income and experience hard times than some single mothers, single mothers finds it difficult to meet their financial needs and that of training their adolescents in school. The young unmarried mothers for example, have hard times in their children education. Widows and divorcees also face similar problems. Many are forced to seek for employment if not working previously just to make ends meet. Some may try to improve their lots by petty trading, farming, apprenticeship, sandwich programmes or short term school courses, even prostitution as a last resort (Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1996).

Artificial Gap between Single Parents and Adolescents

Parents are duty bound to be very close to their children, monitor their education regularly, and assist them in school. The absence of most single parents at home most times create artificial boundary between them and their adolescents. When parent-child interaction is lacking in a child's education in adolescent period, when adequate directives, control, assistance and sponsorship should be given, the academics and vocational achievement of the child is adversely affected.

On the other hand, discipline is training that corrects the mind, and heart. It involves training and instruction to make children to be of good behavior and shun evil doing. Children, particularly adolescents, need to be disciplined in order to make them feel the unpleasant consequences of wrong behavior so as to deviate from it. It is obvious that single parents face the problem of disciplining their adolescent children. A man may have little problem in disciplining adolescents but a woman may have much problem in handing the same task. An undisciplined child does not take his education serious. This affects technical college programmes drastically.

Problem of Work and Domestic Duties

Single parents usually work over-time to make ends meet and by so doing, stay away from their adolescent children most of the time. This causes the adolescents to be staying alone without the mother or father's care and supervision. Social scientists found that adolescents in single parent families are disadvantaged when compared with those from two parent biological families. To this end, Nwaji (2010) observed that many of these problems are directly related to the poor economic condition of single

parents which keep them away in search of money. Consequently, the adolescents may interact with bad peers that cause them to develop deviant behaviours that could lead them to lower level of academic achievement, cultism armed robbery, prostitution, teenage pregnancy among other anti-social behaviours which can cause them their education.

Lack of Attention on the Education of Adolescents

Single parents have inadequate time to stay with the adolescent sons and daughters. Since they stay away most of the time in search of money, the adolescents miss their presence in the house, thereby lack the positive values that parents teach. Adolescents require attention and direction but if the parents are not present; they may associate with someone else who might misdirect and expose them to delinquent behaviours. Misdirection causes adolescents to loose focus and interest in education.

Lack of Quality Supervision

Parents generally owe it as responsibility to help their children develop good moral judgment, self-control and socially approved behaviours (Okafor and Ugwuegbulam, 2002). This requires adequate supervision and monitoring for good performance in school. Single parents should monitor the activities of their children as adolescent period is a stage when peer influence and desire for independence are stronger and likely to have adverse effect on the behavior of children. The adolescents have unlimited freedom to do whatever they like especially if not monitored or supervised and by so doing, may turn to delinquents in the society (Nnajieta, 2006), and may derail in school.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Family is the cradle of education and civilization. It is fundamental, biological, social institution where the child first, learns the necessary behavior patterns, attitudes, values and norms which make him positive member of the society (Nnajieta, 2006). It is the joint responsibility of husband and wife to transmit these values and train them in school. Separated, divorced or widowed, and unmarried couples have many social and financial challenges in child's upbringing. The challenges include lack of money, artificial gap between single parents and adolescents, problems of work and domestic duties among others. These, in no small measure, affect the technical college education of such adolescents. It is therefore recommended that the generality of the public should be properly educated on the effects of single parenting on the education and life of adolescents to reduce the rate in the society.

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