

MOTHERHOOD AND PARENTING: EMERGING ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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Abstract

Universally, women play important roles in the homes, at work and in the society generally. In recent times, however women are at the receiving end of criticisms and countless blames over the break down in the family unit which has been fingered as the major reasons for the many problems in the society today. It is generally expected that with proper parenting, children will be better disciplined and useful to themselves and society, as such women who are custodians of moral and character development are expected to live up to expectation. This paper takes a look at some of the problems caused by poor parenting; contemporary challenges faced by women as they affect parenting and recommend the way forward which includes reviving family togetherness, paying full attention to formative years of children and improving themselves by getting educated.

Introduction

Events around us today, reveal that indeed the family unit is decaying and fast losing its influence on children. This is evidenced in the uncountable vices exhibited by children and youths globally. Moral decadence is at its highest level, crimes of various forms such as armed robbery, examination malpractice, cultism, fraud, drug taking and peddling, to mention a few, are sending youths to prisons and juvenile homes. Equally, pornography and premarital sex acts are on the increase producing many teenage pregnancies, drop outs from school or truncated academics as well as early marriages. Similarly, premarital sex acts have been viewed as the major factors in the rise of sexually transmitted diseases including the dreaded HIV/ AIDS epidemic. The receiving end of all these vices is education. Education is not spared as standards continue to dwindle yearly due to unserious attitude of children to studies and school generally.

The problems have been traced to faulty upbringing and lack of good parenting (Risman, Johnson - Sunmerford, 1998). At the end of the parenting continuum, in cases like these, all hands point to one end of the continuum - The woman - the mother. Everything bad in a child's life is blamed on the woman. This notion is not unconnected to the perceived universal role of women as mothers and custodian of good moral values in children. Van Pelt (2000), opined that the mother is the sole custodian of education moral character development, literacy, spiritual aspects of a child. It is believed that a woman moulds the child into whatever the child becomes. Parrot (2003), however, noted that irresponsible parenthood, as well as bad parenting on the part of the woman have proved to be extremely costly for parents and society in general. Also it seems many parents, especially young parents are unfit for parenthood and this produces devastating effects on everybody.

A former president of the United States of America, Theodore Roosevelt, maintained that the most important tasks of humanity is those traced to the home and that if a woman neglects or does not do her duty as it is expected at home and in parenting, the generational continuum will not exist anymore and in the case of existence, the products would be worse than none at all. Annan (2003) added that women play central role and are indispensable in any effective development strategy and when they are fully involved, the benefits would be seen- immediately. Much, thus, is expected from the woman. Women play important roles and one of these and the major testing ground is in (hat of parenting. Good parenting requires a great sense of commitment and responsibility. However, over the years, women have faced lots of problems and challenges that have continued conflicting with their expected roles in the home, family and in their children's training

Contemporary Challenges of Motherhood and Parenting

In the past, majority of women were full time housewives and thus had enough time for taking care of their family but over the years, due to drastic changes in global economy, women have

remained under pressure to work to support the family and supplement whatever the husband brings home. United Nations department of economic/social Affairs reports of 2003 stated that in many developing countries, more than half of mothers with children under the age 3 are employed in one way or the other.

Some women are forced to take up a job due to loss of their husbands through death, being abandoned and absconding or through leaving for the city to get better jobs. In most cases, in searching for jobs, these men go for years without any form of communication (Larson, 2005). Back home, the situation creates a major challenge and forces majority of women to carry burden of bringing up their children alone and consequently, propelled by harsh economic situation the women need jobs and attention is thus, divided between parenting and work (Olson and Defrain, 2000).

Larson (2005), noted that lack of education is another contemporary challenge facing women generally. UNESCO (2005), reported that two third (2/3) of the world's 876 million illiterates are women. According to United Nation's department of economic and social affairs, in Africa, Arab states and Asia, 60 % of women are illiterates (UN 2005). In most regions in India, it is widely believed that education for a woman is unnecessary and no man wants to marry an educated woman-. Melgosa and Melgosa (2006), believed that without proper education, most women are not equipped to handle some aspects of bringing children up as it is expected neither would most women be equipped to get better paid jobs to solve the deepening economic problems.

Due to problems such as divorce, separation, death, extended absence of a spouse, faulty relationships and personal choice of deciding to stay single while raising children, majority of women are single parents managing the affairs of a family alone According to Manahan and Sanefur (1994), single parenting is common and accepted but brings twice as much responsibility, twice and many demands on one's time and energy, and half the earning power (Melgosa and Melgosa, 2006). Equally, single parenthood has effects on the social and emotional state of women and with this challenge; most women seem to be saddled with more responsibilities than the actual upbringing of children.

Another major challenge is that of early marriage. Many young girls are being forced into early marriages and as young parents, it is believed that they lack the necessary expertise to bring up children as they themselves seem to be constantly hovering between children hood and late adolescence (Van Pelt, 2000). Most of them are unfit to bring up children. Culture has such profound effect on this issue hence many girls are handicapped and thus find themselves becoming parents at an early age.

Other challenges, depending on different culture could be seen in harmful customs and culturally induced practices such as female genital mutilations, debasing widowhood practices debasing social expectations.

In many ways, these challenges affect women and their roles at home. All these determine the way and manner a child is brought up. If the upbringing of a child is dependent upon women then solutions must be provided to preserve this generation as well as ensure that generations after, will be better.

The Way Forward for Women: Meeting Contemporary Challenges

❖ Resuscitating the Spirit of Togetherness

Togetherness has been described as one of the major ideals and requirement for a successful family living (Hurlock, 1987). Olson and Defrain (2000), opined that togetherness produces a good home climate especially when children are young. Equally research findings show that parents do not spend enough time with the children and thus do not know what children are doing neither can they assess developmental progress. Women, need to spend more time with children. Research also indicates that young children deprived of physical touch and displays of affections often, fail to thrive (Parrot, 2000, Melanahan and Sanefur 1994).

Stone (1990), opined that whatever a child will be, whatever values he/she would learn, depends on the training received between ages 1-7 year of a child's life hence the need for mothers to be present during the formative years of a child. In staying home more often, togetherness will be fostered and a lot of shaping and conditioning can be carried out to implant the right morals, discipline, and attitude to children.

❖ Getting Education

Women need to be equipped educationally so as to meet the challenge of teaching the it

children right values, spiritual values, and discipline during the crucial formative years-. Without education, a woman may lack necessary and needed skills to perform the role of an education in the home. As the primary protector of a child's health, education, intellect,, personality, character. And emotional stability, a woman needs to be educated (Larson, 2005). Limited education hinders progress.

❖ **Teaching proper values**

Children need a sense of purpose and direction in life, a set of values approved by parents and society at large. It is a woman's duty to instill discipline into children. Agali (2004), stated-that parents should strive from the beginning to instill in their children, the capacity to feel shame by letting them know that just as there are actions for which they can win praise so there are others, like lying stealing cheating [h;H ;irc unacceptable and for which they will be punished not only by parents but the law.

❖ **Single parenting**

As single parents, women can still inculcate good morals, facing reality, where necessary; explain the absence of the other parent and strengthening their relationship with their children by managing family activities together and keeping lines of communication open. Planning and setting realistic goals and shearing successes help mould children's character. Also, single parents should strive to leave responsible lives worthy o'f emulation regardless of the series of temptations which are likely to come as a result of the economic hardship in the nation.

❖ **Staying and Living Healthy Lives**

The women folks should practice good health habits and practice proper hygiene. Van Pelt (2000), stated that as a result of challenges, women go through stress and suffer from emotional problems. Women need to be realistic, considerate and remain healthy for the sake of the children, seeking help when it's needed. Take challenges in ones stride.

Conclusion

Globally, women (mothers) have been fingered as the reasons for moral upheavals amongst children. Due to many challenges, women seem to be lacking in their duties as wives and mothers. However, knowing the challenges is the first hurdle and meeting the challenges the second. A lot is expected from women and the success of any nation depends on women. It is a great load women carry. The turning point is now for all womenfolk. This present generation can still he helped and savaged but the next generation need women's renewed effort lo sustain and propel them lo the expected moral, spiritual, emotional, intellectual heights.

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