Single Parenting and Family Conflicts in Nigeria

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Annotation: This paper focuses on how single parenting could lead to family conflicts in Nigeria. It discusses conflict, family, family conflict, single parenting, causes of single parenting, effects of single parenting, the rate of single in some oversea countries, single parenting and family conflicts in Nigeria and steps that could be taken to prevent single parenting and family conflicts in Nigeria. The paper proffers steps that could be put in place to prevent single parenting and family conflicts in Nigeria such as husbands and wives would be ready to make sacrifices, be committed to each other, respect each other and obey hierarchy, be reasonable to each other, forgive and respect each other. The paper concludes that family conflicts would obviously arise, but when it does, should be handled wisely. Based on the conclusion, it was suggested among others that mutual understanding and respect be applied in all matters for peace to reign.
Key words: family conflict, single parenting

Conflict

Since the existence of man, there have been different kinds of conflict. In simple term, conflict means class or disagreement between two opposing people, groups or individuals. Conflict is a phenomenon that is common to human societies all over the world. Conflict can be said to occur when one person or one party or group perceives the action of another as blocking the opportunity for the attainment of a goal. For conflict to occur, two prerequisites must be satisfied, namely, perceived goal incompatibility and perceived opportunity for interference or blocking. Conflict can thus be considered as a social necessity and a normal, functional and indeed inevitable aspect of the healthy functioning of all societies (Best, 2016).

However, conflict can be an obstacle to progress, political stability, economic prosperity, overall socio-economic development and family peace. There are gender conflict, political conflicts, religious conflict, inheritance conflicts, clan conflicts, racial conflict, inter and intra family conflicts, among others.

The Family

Every individual belongs to a family. The family is the cornerstone of any society. The family is a person's biological or adopted origin. The family can be defined as a group of people who live together. It can further be said to be those who are related by blood to one another. The constituents of the family are the father, the mother and their children. The family has the force to shape the attitude, the hope, the ambitions and the values of its members. Family members are those persons that manage to construct something totally indestructible and unique in the life of young children.

The family is the smallest, most personal and most intimate of all social groups. It is also the smallest unit of every community (Amadi-Ali, 2011). Additionally, Oduolowu (2011) defines the family as a

major social, institution and a social unit created by blood, marriage or adoption. Within the above definitions, there are different kinds of family, namely, the nuclear family which consists of the father, the mother and the children. There is the extended family which includes other relations aside the father, mother and children, such as grand-parents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces, among others. The monogamous and the polygamous families also exist. In the monogamous family, there is only one husband and one wife, and their children; while in the polygamous family, there is one husband who is also the head of the family and more than one wife, and their children.

Be it the nuclear, extended, monogamous or polygamous family, the family first provides love, comfort and shelter for the children. The parents and other members of the family provide the first educational experiences to the child/children (Ekanem, 2013).

There is however another type of family called the single-parent family, where only one parent (the father or the mother) single handedly brings up the child/children. Generally today, the modern family has undergone significant transformations in its structure. In the past, the family was recognized as an element of a broader kinship network that linked ancestors and descendants of a person. The landscape of the family has shifted from generations of families living in close proximity to small pockets of relatives living at distances from each other. This has given rise to different family structures such as the single-parent family, not married family, guardian home family, double family, foster family, adoptive family, same-sex adoptive family, living apart together (swan dads or moms), network families, working parents and extended single family. However, many of these family structures are not common in African communities, Nigeria inclusive (Oduolowu, 2011).

The major concern and focus of this paper is single-parenting and family conflicts in Nigeria

Single-parenting and family conflict seems not to be a popular, even though it exists. Single-parenting is the type of parenting whereby either the father or the mother (i.e, one parent) shoulders the responsibilities of bringing up his/her child/children single handedly. Single parenting is either by choice or by necessity. Single parenting is a difficult and delicate issue. For a man or a woman to be a single parent is not easy.

In the case of the man (father), it might not be easy for him to substitute the mother's love, care, affection and responsibilities. Same is applicable also to the woman (mother); hence, being a single parent is a difficult task. The equation of intact family can simply not balance in single parenting (Amadi-Ali, 2011).

Causes of Single-Parenting

As earlier posited, single parenting is either by choice or by necessity. It could be caused by the death of one of the parents; it could be caused by divorce; it could be caused by separation of one parent from the other as a result of moving away because of disagreement, or as a result of seeking for greener pasture, or as a result of furthering education.

Single-parenting could be caused by pressures of life such as inability to meet the needs of the whole family or much nagging by one of the parents. It can also be caused by one parent abandoning the other, leaving the child/children with the abandoned.

Self-sufficiency could be the reason for single-parenting in the sense that some well-to-do young women in recent times do not see the need of living with men to raise their children, believing that

they are financially comfortable to take care and bring up their children outside wedlock. Additionally, teenage pregnancy could cause single-parenting in that the boy and the girl involved are incapable of taking care of their child. In most cases, the boy denies ownership of the baby (child), living the teenage mother alone with the child.

Effects of Single-Parenting Generally

Be it single-parenting by death, divorce, separation, abandonment or personal decision, the ideal parenting is the one comprising both parents (the father and the mother), known as the intact parenting. When the father or the mother is not present, there is bound to be some inadequacies and adverse effects. Such effects include psychological, sociological, emotional and stress.

Psychologically, the single parent and the child/children will always be imbalanced because the single parent (father or mother) is unavoidably in the position to do things which he/she is not naturally supposed to do alone, such as thinking about the children's education, health, welfare and other aspects of their upbringing together. A single parent has to carry these responsibilities alone. This heavy task could make him/her easily irritated; easily withdrawn from people and could lead him/her to hating life.

Sociologically, the single parent is bound to suffer loss of humour as he/she struggles to make ends meet. He/she goes to work, takes care of the children (if they are still tender), goes out for shopping, wakes up at night for the children's sake, if required, among others.

Emotionally, the single parent could feel ashamed of what people may say in the case of early or teenage pregnancy, divorce, unreasonable separation and the loneliness attached. Stress could be enormous for a single parent. Stress could easily cause anger, feeling of low-esteem, and deep feelings of rejection.

Single parenting has some effects also on children. Single parents may have less time for each individual child than two parents would. Children who grow up in single-parent families are more likely to become a set of revolving adults. Additionally, children from single parent families are more likely to experience less healthy lives, on the average, than children from intact families (Amadi-Ali, 2011).

The Rate of Single-Parenting in some Oversea Countries

As earlier established, single-parenting is not a popular or common phenomenon in Nigeria. However, it has been in existence on the quiet side in Nigeria and has long existed in some oversea countries.

In the United States of America, the number of single mothers increased between 1970 and 2000 from 3 million to 10 million. Over the same time frame, the number of single fathers increased also from 393,000 t0 2million (U.S Census Bureau cited in Awake, 2002).

In Great Britain, the proportion of families headed by a single parent has topped 25 percent for the first time, reflecting a huge growth in the number of never-married mothers and significant rise in the divorce rate over the past 30 years (The Time, London, cited in Awake, 2002).

In Australia, nearly 1 in 4 children live with only one of their biological parents. This is usually the result of a break down in parents' marriage or relationship. It has been projected that one-parent families will increase between 30 percent and 66 percent over a 25 years period (Australian Bureau of Statistics, cited in Awake, 2002).

In Greece, since 1980, the number of unwed mothers has increased by 29.8 percent. According to data provided by the European Union in 1997, the percentage of children born out of wedlock was 3.3 percent, while in 1980, it was only 1.1 percent (Ta Nea Newspaper, Athens, cited in Awake, 2002).

In Germany, the number of single parents has doubled in the past two decades. Nearly all single-parent families are headed by the mother (single mothers in an international context, cited in Awake, 2002).

In France, since the late 1970's, the proportion of single-parent families has increased by more than 50 percent (single mothers in an international context, cited in Awake, 2002).

In Ireland, the rate of single-parent households increased from 5.7 percent in 1981 to 7.9 percent in 1991. Marital breakdown remains a very important route into single motherhood (single mothers in an International Context, cited in Awake, 2002).

Japan has a record of single parenting. Lone-mother families have been on the increase since the 1970's. In 1997, 17 percent of all households were afflicted with single parenting (The World Women, 2000; Trends and Statistics cited in Awake, 2002).

In Mexico as recorded the newspaper La-Tornada, teenage mothers account for about 29 percent of total number of pregnancies in the country (Awake, 2002).

Family Conflict

Family conflict is a factor in all families (intact or single-parenting). Family conflict can be referred to as arguments, abusive behaviour, fights and violence between members of a family. Infidelity and divorce are seen to be the major causes of family conflict. It may increase the likelihood of children committing at-risk behaviours, have negative impacts on attachment style and may even influence the success of future relationships. Positive outcomes can also occur from family conflict such as leaving an abusive environment or gaining secure attachment figures such as stable stepparent.

As earlier posited, one of the primary causes of family conflict is divorce which leads to single parenting. About 50% of American marriages end in divorce (Platt, Nalbone, Casanova & Welchler, 2008). Family conflicts such as parental infidelity and divorce, often lead to unhealthy and risky behavours, interpersonal relationship struggles at the present time and in the future for children in these families (Sori, 2007).

It is more likely that children who experience a family conflict such as divorce will become divorced as adults. Also, distress from divorce may cause implications in the future as some adult children have stated they became a different person after their parents' divorce (Fish, Pavlov, Wetchler, & Berick, 2012).

Children who come from divorced families tend to have higher unemployment and lower educational achievement. They also have higher likelihood of being diagnosed with depression and anxiety (Bachman, 2008).

Children in divorced or single parent families may have less supervision, in most cases, since they are being supervised by only one parent, and have less parental regulation for emotional support. Children are in primary custody of one parent due to a family conflict such as divorce, imprisonment, or death may be more likely to experience parental separation, which may lead to health compromising (Fish, Pavlov, Wetchler & Bercik, 2012).

Family conflict can cause distress, anger, and anxiety. There is a possibility that children of these families are at an increased risk of developing poor coping strategies which includes using drugs, risky sexual behaviours, and acting out (Lansford, 2009). Not only can family conflict cause health

compromising and risk behaviours among children and adult children, it can lead to interpersonal relationship struggles (Thorson, 2009).

Consequently, it is worthy of note that the term 'family conflict' did not emerge until the 1960's as psychotherapy was emerging as an acceptable treatment option for individuals and families.

Single-Parent and Family Conflicts in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the emergence of single parenting was in silent mode for over a period of time. However, in present time, it is a fast growing family pattern. The paternal roles are those of economic responsibilities and disciplining of children; while the maternal roles are those of child rearing, home training, home keeping and playing of complimentary roles. The child is morally, mentally and emotionally balanced when the caring responsibilities are carried out by both parents.

The family is the first primary social group that the child belongs to, comes in contact with, and this group has a greater influence on the child's physical, mental and moral development. The family lays the foundation of education for the child before he/she goes to go school, and the personality that the child takes to school is determined by the home which is the family (Maduewesi cited in Okpara, 2016). The absence of one of the parents in the family affects the child/children's overall development, including school achievement and performance.

Conforming with the above, Myres cited in Okpara (2016) stresses that children born into single parent families go into the world of risk of neglect, abuse, poor health, poor education, poor housing and poverty. Aside the afore mentioned problems, single parenting also contributes to family conflicts among which are as follows:

Child's care conflict: Parents have the responsibility to take care of their child/children, and expected to provide their necessary needs. It is observed that in single parent families, in most cases, are of the child/children left in the hand of either the father or the mother. The mother suffers more, especially at divorce or separation or abandonment. There is often the conflict between disagreeing parents on the issue of child's/children's care. It is not easy-going for the father either. Whereas one parent is in constant struggle on how to care for the children, the other parent feels unconcern. The suffering parent may not bear it for long and could decide to sue the other or take him/her to welfare, leading to family conflict.

Custodian conflict: Children naturally have the right to live with both parents, biological or adopted. The issue of custody is of paramount importance in divorce or proceedings concerning the welfare of the child/children. In divorce, separation, abandonment, or nullity of marriage, disagreement usually arise on who takes custody of the child/children. Sometimes the father decides to deny the mother of the children the right of having the custody of them or conversely, the mother decides to do so. Sooner, disagreement erupts and family conflict sets in.

Dissertation: Dissertation means to abandon give up, depart, forsake, leave or run away. In marriage, both parents (husband and wife) are entitled to legally co-habit with each other. Dissertation is a matrimonial offence. It comes to play when one of the parents abandons home. Conflict could arise when the run-away parent later decides to interfere into the affairs of the deserted unruly.

Inheritance conflict: Inheritance means to receive property, rank, title by decent or succession. Inheritance in Nigeria is governed by Native Law and Custom, Administration for Estates Law, or Shariah law. In an instance where a father dies and leaves valid properties, both the legitimate and illegitimate children have right to inherit the property. However, in some Nigerian cultures, children

born outside wedlock are referred to as illegitimate and are denied the right to inheritance of their father's properties based on the fact that their mother was not married to the deceased (the man). The woman who was not married to the deceased man but had children for him is also not allowed any inheritance on this occasion. The struggle by the woman and her illegitimate children to the man often times leads to family conflict.

Maintenance conflict: Maintenance refers to the provision of enough to support the livelihood of a child/children or spouse. After divorce, maintenance of spouse and children is paramount. Maintenance of a spouse now becomes a single parent after divorce or separation is called alimony. A man can be sued for failure to provide maintenance for his children or spouse. In the process of seeking this maintenance in the court, there could be family conflict.

Matrimonial property conflict: This implies to the property acquired by a man and a woman (husband and wife) in the course of a marriage. Each party is entitled exclusively in their names. All the same, property in joint names are shared at divorce. Denial of matrimonial property by one of the spouses leads to family conflict.

Naming conflict: Name is the descriptive appellation of an individual;w ord by which an individual is known or called. It is the practice that a child takes the surname of his father (real or adopted) or of the mother (real or adopted). However, where the mother is deserted or abandoned by the father of her child/children during pregnancy or after birth, this mother may decide to give her child the name of her father. When eventually the father of the child alter decides to give his name (surname) to the child, this decision could lead to family conflict (FIDA, 1998).

Steps that could be taken to prevent single parenting and family conflict

In the beginning God instituted marriage and approved it by joining Adam and Eve together as husband and wife, and as one flesh (Genesis 2:20-25). As years passed by the good intensions of God concerning marriage began to erode away. With civilization also, divorce, separation and other family problems began to take over families thereby, giving rise to single-parenting or single parenthood.

Marriage is a divine institution that should be highly respected and guarded with utmost care. No marriage is problem free anyway, so there are steps that could be taken to minimize family problems, among which are stated below:

- Spouses should each be ready and willing to make sacrifices in the interest of their family and children. Couples must be prepared to talk or listen to one another

- Couples must be committed, hence, marriage should not be viewed as a contract or temporal relationship.

- Husbands and wives, and even other members of the family should respect hierarchy and work hierarchically. The man should be the head of the family and answer to his responsibilities; while the woman remains his help-meet, and should be accorded her due rights and respect. This will encourage team work, love and mutual respect.

- Husbands and wives should be reasonable to each other's mistakes, bearing in mind that no one is above mistake. Immediate apology is very essential whenever a wrong is done against the other.

- Forgiveness is imperative and a requisite in every marriage. Old grievances should be left to rest with the past and must not be left to stay overnight. Discussion on each other's grievance will be an asset and a suiting balm.

Conclusion

Obviously, odd times do come in marriages, but must be handled with wisdom and care. At divorce or separation, all matters affecting the children, maintenance, care, custody, the name (surname) the children will bear, inheritance must be handled with care and peaceably. At judicial separation, all issues should also be discussed and treated peacefully to prevent family conflict.

Suggestions

More often than not, people misunderstand themselves and disagree; marriage relationships are not exceptional. Couples often times disagree and end up in separation or divorce. At such times as this, it is suggested that:

1.   Mutual understand and wisdom be applied for peace to reign in all matters.

2.   Interpersonal interactions between the parties involved are advocated and all issues handled with love.

3.   The emotional and psychological conditions of the children and the parties involved should be put into consideration so as to prevent family conflict.

4.   Where death is the cause of single-parenting, in-laws should limit their interference, especially on the widows' rights.

5.   The judiciary should be consulted so that every individual's right is spelt out and granted lawfully.

The church (pastors) and elders could also be involved.

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