Sociological Implications of Single-Parent Homes on Senior Secondary School Students Education

Evelyn Ofure OBOZOKHAE (Mrs.)

**Department of Educational Foundations,
Faculty of Education,
University of Benin, Benin City
Phone: 08026124155
email: evelyn.obozokhae@uniben.edu**

Abstract

The study shed light on the unique experiences and difficulties encountered by students from single-parent homes considering the intricacies of single parenthood in shaping their educational journey and overall well-being. Single-parent households have become increasingly prevalent in contemporary society, and Edo State in Nigeria is no exception. The absence of one of the parents in the house can pose various challenges for children, particularly during their formative years. This study focused specifically on public senior secondary school students, who are at a critical stage in their educational development. The challenges are crucial for developing targeted interventions and support systems. Policy makers, educators, and social workers can work collaboratively to mitigate the adverse consequences of financial, emotional, and behavioural needs of these students in order to promote educational equity and social inclusion. The sociological implications of these challenges are far-reaching. Students from single-parent homes may experience lower educational attainment, reduced opportunities for upward social mobility, and increased vulnerability to social exclusion. Furthermore, the perpetuation of these challenges can contribute to the intergenerational transmission of poverty, as students face difficulties in breaking the cycle of limited resources and opportunities.

Keywords: Single-parent homes, Challenges, Sociological implications

Introduction

A family can be regarded as a group of people (two or more) usually related by blood (and sometimes by adoption. Living together under this arrangement the adults care for the young. The family is expected to provide the primary requirements for the growth and development of the child and his security. In addition to the family, the neighbourhood and the school are part of the child's life. If they are caring and concerned for the wellbeing of the child, the sense of acceptance, worth and security may not be endangered. Family background is the foundation for children's development. It comprises of several variables such as family structure, its

composition, socio-economic status, educational attainment and parents' educational level. All these variables could play important roles in children's upbringing, social integration and possibly their school performance (Osagiobare, 2017).

The family structure appears to affect the individual since the family is the first agent of socialization for an individual. This is because the family structure of a child may sometimes in life determine his situations and his level of performance. According to Abioro, Oladejo and Aghogbun (2018), the family structure has a significant influence on students' academic performance and mental development. This is because providing a supportive learning environment at home requires parents' time as much as financial resources.

Structurally, families can be intact/monogamous; extended; single parent; polygamous; polyandrous or single. Other family structures that are not too popular in Nigeria include: adoptive family, bi-racial or multi-racial family; blended family, co-custody family; conditionally separated families, foster family; gay or lesbian family, immigrant family; migrant family, transnational family, and step family. The family structure requires skills and task responsibilities of raising children. In this case, the child's physical, emotional, social and intellectual development can be said to be promoted and supported by family structure. Family structure seems to determine the biological parents or adopted parents of the child in question, although in Edo State, as in many parts of Nigeria, the extended family, community and the society at large play a role in rearing children. Most times, the social class, wealth and income of the parents could have very strong influence on the upbringing of a child and one of the roles of family is the education of the child.

Single parent family structure is one of the recent occurences in the ecology of family structure in the society today (Ketheringham, 2017). It is a kind of family where a person: either male or female lives or raises a child/children in the absence of his/her spouse. Single parenting

according to Henslin, Possamai, Possamai-Inesedy, Marjoribanks and Elder (2013), is a situation in which one of the two individuals, involved in the conception of the child is responsible for the upbringing of the child.

In Nigeria, hitherto, single parenting was rare and unpopular. Nowadays it has become a fast-growing family pattern in the country (Nwachukwu, 2018). Many of such parents are employees in different organizations including educational institutions. This might pose a sort of double responsibilities that require personal time, attention and money together with the challenge of official work responsibilities. Perhaps, this explains why Osagiobare (2017) succinctly remarked that single parenthood is associated with varieties of stress. Striking a balance between family and work-life could be stressful. Buttressing this assertion, Coleman (2017) states that the challenges of single parenthood are economic, human and social. According to Casheena (2017), economic capital refers to the financial resources and asset available to single parent families; human capital is the supportive role other family members like a spouse should provide which they lack and the social capital is the relationship that ought to develop among single parent families.

Therefore, children from single parent households may face many challenges throughout their development. According to Ferrell (2019), children from one parent families have poorer academic achievement; these children are likely to have higher absentee rates at school; and to drop out of school, which leads them to poverty. On the other hand, Wendy and Kathleen (2013) assert that children from single families are likely to be suspended or expelled from school, and are likely to have problems with their teachers in doing their homework or paying attention in class.

The effects of growing up in single parent households have been known to go beyond economics, and increasing the risk of children dropping out of school. This paper therefore examined the challenges of senior secondary school students from single parent homes.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is guided by Ludwig von Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory, which is often referred to as Bertalanffy's Systems Theory (1968). This theory provides a framework for understanding the organization, behaviour, and interactions of complex systems, including biological, social, and ecological systems.

Bertalanffy's theory emphasizes the importance of viewing systems as a whole, rather than focusing solely on individual components. When applying this to students from single-parent homes, it means considering the family system as a whole, taking into account the interactions, relationships, and dynamics between the single parent, the child, and other family members, if present. Understanding this holistic perspective helps us recognize that changes or challenges within the family system can have implications for the student's well-being and academic performance.

According to systems theory, the components within a system are interdependent, meaning that they influence and rely on each other. In the context of students from single-parent homes, this implies recognizing that the well-being and academic success of the student are influenced by the interactions and support they receive from their single parent, as well as other significant individuals in their lives, such as grandparents, relatives, or family friends. Understanding these interdependencies helps us identify the sources of support and potential challenges faced by the student.

At its core, Bertalanffy's Systems Theory emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of various components within a system. The application of Bertalanffy's

systems theory to challenges faced by students from single-parent homes can provide valuable insights into understanding the dynamics and interactions within the family systems.

The Systems Theory highlights the presence of feedback loops within systems, which involve the exchange of information and influence between the different components. Applying this to students from single-parent homes, it means recognizing that there are ongoing interactions and feedback between the single parent and a student. For example, positive feedback from the single parent, such as encouragement and support, can positively impact the student's motivation and academic performance. On the other hand, negative feedback or strained relationships can have adverse effects. Understanding these feedback loops helps in the identification of the factors that contribute to student's well-being and academic outcomes.

The Systems Theory emphasizes the adaptability and ability of systems to respond to changes and challenges. It means recognizing that both the single parent and the student may need to adapt to the unique circumstances and demands of their family structure. This adaptability can involve finding alternative support systems, developing coping strategies, and seeking external resources to address the challenges they face. Understanding the adaptability of the system helps us identify ways to support and enhance the student's resilience and well-being.

The Concept of Single Parenting

Single parenting refers to the situation in which one parent assumes the primary caregiving and parenting responsibilities for a child or children, without the presence or involvement of the other parent (Amato, 2005). It can result from various circumstances such as divorce, separation, death, or the choice to parent alone (McLanahan & Beck, 2010). The studies of McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) show that single parenting can present unique challenges for both the parent and the children. It is important to understand the impact of single parenting on various aspects of family life and children development. Single parents may face additional

responsibilities and pressures, which can influence their parenting styles and practices. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) also found that single mothers, in particular, may adopt a more authoritative parenting style (characterized by high expectations and warmth) or an authoritarian style (characterized by strict discipline and control). These parenting styles can be influenced by the need to balance work, household responsibilities, and children-rearing. Single parents may experience higher levels of stress, depression, and feelings of isolation compared to parents in two-parent households (Amato, 2005). The absence of a partner for emotional support and the challenges of sole decision-making can contribute to these emotional struggles.

Children raised in single-parent households may face various difficulties that can impact their well-being. Studies suggests that children from single-parent homes may be at a higher risk for behavioral problems, academic underachievement, and emotional difficulties (Amato, 2005; McLanahan & Beck, 2010). However, it is important to note that not all children from single-parent homes experience negative outcomes, as resilience and positive support systems can mitigate these risks (Hetherington, Bridges & Insabella, 1998).

Single-parent households are more likely to experience financial challenges compared to two-parent households (McLanahan & Beck, 2010). Limited financial resources can impact access to quality education, extracurricular activities, and other resources that support children's development. These socioeconomic factors can further contribute to the challenges faced by single-parent families.

Challenges Faced by Students from Single Parent Homes in Edo State

Students from single-parent homes can face various challenges that can impact their academic performance and overall well-being. The following are some common challenges faced by students from single-parent homes:

Obozokhae, E. O.

- *Limited financial resources:* Single-parent households often face financial constraints due to the sole income earner supporting the family. This can result in limited access to educational resources, such as home tutoring, extracurricular activities, and educational materials, which can impact academic opportunities and achievement (Amato, 2005).

- *Time management and supervision*: Single parents often have multiple responsibilities and limited time. Balancing work, household chores, and parenting can make it challenging for single parents to provide adequate supervision and support for their children's education. This may result in less oversight of homework, reduced involvement in school activities, and limited time for academic assistance (Harknett & McLanahan, 2004).

- *Emotional and psychological impact*: The absence of a second spouse can have emotional and psychological effects on students. They may experience feelings of loss, loneliness, or abandonment, which can negatively or positivelyimpact their self-esteem, motivation, and overall well-being. Emotional support and counseling may be beneficial for addressing these challenges (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002).

- *Lack of role models*: Single-parent households may lack positive role models of both genders. The absence of a parent of the opposite gender can sometimes affect children's understanding of gender roles and relationships. It can be beneficial for students to have access to diverse role models and mentors to foster balanced healthy development (Jeynes, 2002).

- *Increased responsibilities*: Students from single-parent homes often take on additional responsibilities, such as household chores, caring for younger siblings, or contributing to family income. These added responsibilities can create additional stress and time constraints, making it challenging for students to focus on their academics (Jeynes, 2002).

Sociological Implications of Challenges Encountered by Students from Single Parent Homes

Single parenting in Nigeria has various sociological implications that can impact both parents and children. These includes:

- *Stigmatization and Discrimination*: Students from single-parent families may face social stigma and discrimination due to cultural norms and expectations surrounding family structures (Ebigbo, 2016). This can lead to labelling, exclusion, and limited support from the community. Society may hold negative perceptions about single-parent households, considering them as deviating from the traditional family structure. This stigma can lead to negative judgments, exclusion, and limited support from the community.

- *Economic Challenges and Poverty*: Students from single-parent households may face economic hardships, as their parents may have limited financial resources to provide for their children's needs (Adegoke, 2015). The absence of a complementary income can contribute to higher poverty rates thereby affecting their overall well-being and opportunities.

- *Limited Social Support*: Students from single parent homes may have limited access to social support networks, which may affect their emotional and practical well-being (Oyefuga & Adekeye, 2017). The lack of support systems can negatively or positively impact their ability to cope with the challenges of their homes and may lead to increased stress levels in the child/children's schooling.

- *Parent-Child Relationship and Well-being*: The absence or strained relationship with the other parent can impact the emotional well-being of the child and children (Oyefuga & Adekeye, 2017). Single-parent households may require additional efforts to maintain a strong parent-child bond and provide emotional support.

Obozokhae, E. O.

Conclusion

To address the challenges encountered by students from single parent homes, it is crucial to provide comprehensive support systems that recognize the unique circumstances of these students. This may involve fostering strong partnerships between schools and single-parent households, offering counseling and support services, providing financial aids and scholarships, and establishing mentorship programmes and support groups.

Suggestions and Recommendations

1. School authorities should be encouraged to foster strong partnerships between schools and single-parent households. This can involve regular communication, parent-teacher conferences, and involvement in school activities. By creating an open line of communication, schools can better understand the unique needs of these students and provide appropriate support.

2. Counseling services should be offered within the school setting to address the emotional well-being of students from single-parent homes. This can provide a safe space for them to discuss their feelings, build resilience, and develop coping strategies. Additionally, support groups can be created to provide a sense of community and connection with peers facing similar challenges.

3. Financial assistance and scholarships should be provided to ensure that students from single-parent homes have equal access to educational resources and opportunities. This can include funding for extracurricular activities, tutoring services, or college application fees. Financial aid programmes can alleviate the financial burden and help level the playing field for these students.

4. Mentorship programmes should be encouraged and provided; this is where students from single-parent homes are paired with positive role models. Mentors can provide guidance, support, and encouragement, helping these students develop essential life

skills and navigate challenges successfully. This mentorship can extend beyond the school environment to provide ongoing support throughout their academic journey.

5. Workshops, resources, and support groups for single parents should be provided to avail the students with the tools and knowledge to better navigate their parenting responsibilities. This support can help alleviate stress and enable parents to create a nurturing environment for their children.

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