

Assessing the Effects of Single Parenting on Child's Health in Mampong Municipality of Ghana

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Abstract

The study assessed the effects of single parenting on child's health in Mampong Municipality of Ghana. The study used a survey research and employed purposive and snowball sampling in selecting respondents. The sample size for the study was one hundred respondents limited to single parents with a child or children residing in various communities in Mampong Municipality. Questionnaire and unstructured interviews were the research instruments used for the study. Findings show that divorce is the major cause of single parenting which constituted 55 percent of the single parents interviewed, majority (85%) of the respondents stated that their children not often fall sick and almost all the respondents (95%) indicated the presence of health care facilities in their communities. The study concluded that due to the increased changes from the traditional ways of doing things single parents have increased and now widespread among the Ghanaian populace and single parenting does not affect child's health. The study recommended that proper counseling is needed for couples before they enter into marriage, Ghanaians should continue to promote and consolidate the practice of extended family system and there should be a social welfare system to help needy families through economic empowerment.

Keywords: Single parenting, Child's health, family structure, parenthood, parents

1.0 Introduction

Single parenthood is a situation where a single parent takes care of a single or many children without any assistance, mostly physically, from the other biological parent. Due to the increased changes from the traditional ways of doing things, over the years, single parents have increased. Over the past three decades single-parent families have become more widespread than the so-called "nuclear family" consisting of a mother, father and children. Nowadays, we observe and witness all types of single parent families: headed by mothers, headed by fathers, headed by a grandparent raising their grandchildren. Life in a single parent home while familiar can be reasonably nerve-racking for the adult and the children. The single parent may experience beleaguered by the task of caring for the children, maintaining a profession and keeping up with the bills and domestic responsibilities. The concept of single parenting referred to in some cases as single parenthood has, become one of the upsetting issues of societies. It is found everywhere around the world, in advanced and developing countries. Others suggest that single-parent families have been present in all societies over time and should not be viewed as deviant or problematic, but rather as an alternative family form (Coontz, 1997).

The general trend of single parenting in Ghana today is that more parents continue to neglect their children, with fathers being the worst offenders. In Ghana, the parental responsibilities are culturally indomitable and resolute. Maternal responsibility is that of child care and home making while the paternal role are the provision of economic responsibilities and discipline of children. Normally, it is the duty of the family, to guide and bring up the child in the norms and values of the community. They are to be responsible for the psychological and emotional welfare of the child. The parents are mainly answerable to the instructive and career development of their children. On the other hand, divorce or separation and death of one spouse may leave the roles in the hands of a single parent.

The family composition, supremely, offers a good judgment of security and steadiness that is indispensable for children. When there is a breakdown in the family composition, it may have a remarkable effect on children and their capacities to function usually including have good health. In most times, the children no longer have the biological father and mother to rely their up bring on. For that reason, children have to depend on the mother or the father to meet mainly, if not all their requirements in life. With inadequate finances, time and parents' accessibility, parents are less probable to offer the sufficient support that children require in all their undertakings including good health.

Single parenting is very common in Mampong Municipality of Ghana and it could be as a result of a

broken marriage, the death of a partner or individuals choosing to be single parents without getting into the bond of marriage. It is generally acknowledged that regardless of how single parenting is viewed, the increase in single parenting and incidence of families headed by one parent has a main influence on the social, economic, and political context of family life. Therefore, it is very critical to find out if single parenting has an effect on child's health.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Research on single parenting is astonishingly limited. Instead there is a tradition of studying female-headed households. Of course, in many instances female heads of households are practically identical with being a single mother, as many female household heads are unmarried women with young children. In spite of the limited research on single parenting, consensus seems to build around the main ways in which a woman may become a single mother. Most research has concentrated on the increasing causes of single parenting and the general impact of single parenting particularly on the mothers and children and there is a limited research on the effects of single parenting on child's health. Therefore, there is the need to research if single parenting has effect on child's health to fill research gap on single parenting.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to assessing the effects of single parenting on child's health in Mampong Municipality of Ghana.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. To examine the causes of single parenting in Mampong Municipality
2. To assess the effects of single parenting on child health in Mampong Municipality
3. To ascertain the child's care arrangements in single parent homes
4. Recommend solutions to improve child health in single parent homes in Mampong Municipality.

1.4 Research Question

The main research question for the study was what are effects of single parenting on child's health in Mampong Municipality of Ghana?

Specific research questions were the following:

1. What are the causes of single parenting in Mampong Municipality?
2. What are the effects of single parenting on child health in Mampong Municipality?
3. What are the child's care arrangements in single parent homes in Mampong Municipality?

1.5 Significance of the study

It is frequently said that the health of a nation is its wealth. It is acknowledged that one predicament leads to the other and single parenting may be affecting the health status of children. Therefore, if this problem of single parenthood is dealt with, many other health and social problems will be mitigated. If children grow up knowing how to value life, take good care, respect rules and regulations and be given enough protection and preventive health education, they will grow up with dignity and focus. The findings would also contribute to policy initiatives on issues relating to controlling single parenting. Finally, the study would form a basis for researchers who wish to undertake further studies on single parenting and child health.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study was limited to the Mampong Municipality of Ghana and focuses on how single parenting affects child's health status of child.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Meaning of Single parenting

Single parenting in this study refers families where a parent lives with dependent children, either alone or in a larger household, without a spouse or partner. Single parenting is implied as the taking of family's task which includes caring for children devoid of the father's or mother's involvement. Single-parenting can be defined as a situation in which one of the two individuals involved in the conception of the child is being responsible for the upbringing of the child. Hence, there is a terrific growth in the number of children of single parents. Single parenting is a major social problem on the rise among all communities. Single parenting is therefore viewed as the practice of raising children and building a family with either the biological mother or father.

Parenthood is difficult and demanding under the most excellent of circumstances. With one parent, the difficulties are multiplied. Coping with childrearing for single parents becomes more intricate because of task burden, when one parent makes and takes all the responsibilities and provides for all of the family requirements; chore over-load, when the demands for work, housework, and parenting can be devastating for one individual;

and emotional overload, when the single parent must for all time be accessible to meet both their own and their children's emotional needs. Single-handedly or in combination these result in problems for the single parent, including loneliness, anxiety, and depression.

2.2 Causes of Single Parenting

Single parenting may crop up as a result of the following factors:

When a couple separates after cohabitation or a marriage and one of the ex-spouses has physical custody of the children. Again single parenting occurs when a woman gives birth to a child and does not live with the child's father or any other partner, male or female. Thus single parenting resulting from non-conjugal births Single parenting may also occur when a father or a mother is widowed. In this case the parent assumes sole responsibility of nurturing a child. Further, it may happen when a single (divorced, never-married, or widowed) man or woman adopts a child. Single-parenthood may arise when either the male or the female decides to produce and rear a child or children outside wedlock (Ortese, 1998).

Single parenting also occurs due to adoption which is a possible option for single people who feel deficient in life. Studies also show that Single parenting has become very common due to donor insemination which is the most contentious preference for building a family in the present day. Donor insemination is the process of accomplishing pregnancy through injection of semen into the reproductive tract of a female. Single mothers who choose to conceive children through this option are becoming common particularly among the educated women. Teenage pregnancy also leads to single parenting and raising a child alone during teenage period is harsh. Teen single parents undergo stresses because of young age and inability to prepare for the future.

2.3 Effects of Single Parenting on Child Health

Single parenting can also be in the same way tormenting for the children as they depend on bonding and response to their needs in order to develop cognitively and socially. In a two-parent family, it is easier for one parent to respond to the child's needs in the absence of the other, but in a single-parent home, it can make bonding more hard. Without a lot of interaction elsewhere, this could hinder a child's social development.

In mother-only families, children have a tendency to experience short-and long-term economic and psychological disadvantages; higher absentee rates at school, lower levels of education, and higher dropout rates (with boys more negatively affected than girls); and more antisocial activity, including alcohol and drug addiction. Adolescents, on the other hand, are more negatively affected by parental disagreement prior to divorce than by living in single-parent families and actually gain in responsibility as a result of altered family routines (Demo & Acock 1991). Children in single-mother homes are also more likely to experience health-related problems as a result of the decline in their living standard, including the lack of health insurance (Mauldin 1990). Later, as children from single-parent families become adults, they are more likely to marry early, have children early, and divorce. Girls are at greater risk of becoming single mothers as a result of non marital childbearing or divorce (McLanahan & Booth 1989). Although the research findings are mixed on long-term effects, the majorities of children adjusts and recover and do not experience severe problems over time (Coontz, 1997).

A regular clarification for the troubles found among the children of single parents has been the absence of a male adult in the family (Gongla, 1982). The relationship between children and non-custodial fathers can be difficult and strained. Fathers often become disinterested and detached from their children; in one study more than 60 percent of fathers either did not visit their children or had no contact with them for over a year. The loss of a father in the family can have implications beyond childhood (Wallerstein & Blakeslee 1989). However, the lack of a male presence may not be as critical as the lack of a male income to the family. The economic deprivation of single-parent family life, in combination with other sources of strain and stress, is a major source of the problems experienced by both parents and children.

2.4 Child's Care Arrangements in Single Parent Homes

Help and support from friends and relatives can reduce the effects of overload, with friends contributing a cushion against loneliness and relatives rendering more useful help (Gladow & Ray, 1986). One complexity of asking for help in a society that defines the family as an independent unit responsible for its own circumstances and well-being. However, few single parents can successfully raise children alone, despite the social expectation that noncustodial parents (usually the father) should only be responsible for supplemental financial support, while the custodial parent (usually the mother) takes on both parenting and economic roles (Goldscheider & Waite 1991). In Ghanaian society, extended families play key roles in supporting both nuclear family and single parenthood.

Some suggest that the ideal of an independent family head represents a Eurocentric view which is challenged by an African-American model of motherhood (Collins, 1994). In this model the importance of caring for and supporting children in the context of community development and social activism is emphasized. Children are cared for and raised by their own mothers (blood mothers), other women in the community (other

mothers), and relatives. African-American children are more likely to live with a grandmother than are white and Hispanic children.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study could be described as a survey research. The study would investigate the communities in Mampong Municipality through selecting samples of single parents to find out single parenting and the health challenges confronting the children. This envisaged cross-sectional survey strategy would help to generalize for the population, and allow inferences to be made about the whole population at one point in time.

3.2 Study Area

Mampong Municipal, which is one of the Thirty (30) Administrative Districts in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, is located on the northern part of the region, and shares boundary with Atebubu District, Sekyere East, Afigya-Sekyere, and Ejura-Sekyeredumasi to the north, east, south, and west respectively. The Municipal is located within longitudes 0.05 degrees and 1.30 degrees west and latitudes 6.55 degrees and 7.30 degrees north, covering a total land area of 2346km². It has about 220 settlements with about 70 percent being rural. The rural areas are mostly found in the Afram Plains portion of the municipality where Communities with less than fifty (50) people are scattered here and there.

3.3 Research Population

The study was limited to single parents with a child or children residing in the various communities in Mampong municipality of Ghana.

3.4 Sample Size

The sample size for the study was one hundred respondents. The one hundred respondents selected for the study were residing in the various communities in the Mampong Municipality for the past two years.

3.5 Sampling Procedure

This study employed purposive and snowball sampling in selecting respondents for interview and responding to the questionnaire. In this study, respondents were chosen based on their willingness and capacity to answer to the questionnaire.

3.6 Research Instruments

Questionnaire and unstructured interviews were the research instruments used for the study. A self-designed questionnaire consisting of open-ended and close-ended questions was used. The reason for using the questionnaire was that, it was a quick way of collecting data and also known to be quite valid and reliable if well-constructed. The unstructured interview helped to obtain an in-depth response from the respondents.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Socio-economic Characteristics of the Respondents

The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents in this study are presented in this section. Table 1 depicts the age distribution of the respondents. Half (50%) of the respondents were between the ages of 31-40. The lowering of the percentage of single parents with age might be due to the fact that as people age they become more matured in handling family issue that are likely to cause single parents.

Table 1: Age distribution of respondents

Response	Frequency	Percentage
21-30	20	20
31-40	50	45
41-50	20	25
51-60	10	10
total	100	100

Source: Field survey, 2013

4.2 Educational Level of Respondents

As indicated in Table 2, out of the total of 100 who responded to the questionnaire, 25 percent had no formal education, 65 percent basic education and 10 percent senior high school education.

Table 2: Educational level of respondents

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Non- formal education	25	25
Basic Education	65	65
SHS	10	10
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, 2013

4.3 Employment status of Respondents

Table 3 presents responses of the employment status of respondents. Most (65%) of the respondents are self-employed. The percentage of unemployed (10%) single parents will have influence on the ability of the single parent to cater for the children most especially for the health of their wards.

Table 3: Employment Status of Respondents

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Unemployed	10	10
Self Employed	65	65
Private	25	25
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, 2013

4.4 Causes of Single Parenting

Table 4 presents responses of the causes of single parenting of respondents. Divorce as a cause of single parent which constituted 55 percent of the single parents interviewed. Teenage pregnancy, death of spouse and others constitute 10 percent, 25 percent and 10 percent respectively.

Table 4: Causes of Single Parenting

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Teenage Pregnancy	10	10
Death Of Spouse	25	25
Divorce	55	55
Others	10	10
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, 2013

4.5 Effect of Single Parenting on Child Health

Table 5 reveals the frequency at which children of single parents fall sick. The majority (85%) of the respondents responded that their children fall sick not often whiles 10 percent and 5 percent fall sick monthly and weekly respectively.

Table 5: Frequency at which your child fall sick

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Weekly	5	5
Monthly	10	10
Not Often	85	85
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, 2013

4.6 Presence of Health Care Facilities in Respondents' Community

As indicated in Table 6, almost all (95%) the respondents indicated the presence of health care facilities in their communities. The presence of health care facilities will influence their access to health care.

Table 6: Presence of health care facilities in your community

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	95	95
No	5	5
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, 2013

4.7 Child Care Arrangement in Single Parent Homes

Results from table 7 indicates that majority(80%) of the single parents care and cater for their children alone without any help with few (20%) people having assistance from other sources. The availability of assistance for the single parent will have an effect on the health status of their children.

Table 7: Care for your child alone

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	80	80
No	20	20
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, 2013

4.8 Nutrition Status of Children

Table 8 shows whether children have access to balance diet. The majority (90%) of the respondents said they do give their children balanced diet while 10 percent do not give their wards balanced diet. These assertions must be subjective with respect to what constitute a balanced diet.

Table 8: Children eat a balance diet

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	90	90
No	10	10
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, 2013

5.1 Conclusion

From the study, it can be concluded that due to the increased changes from the traditional ways of doing things, over the years, single parents have increased and now widespread among the Ghanaian populace and single parenting does not affect child's health. The results of the study show that divorce is the major cause of single parent in Mampong Municipality and almost all the single parent cares for their children alone.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, these are the recommendations.

1. Parents should tolerate, accommodate, appreciate and understand each other in marriage. Forces of disunity should be ignored, de-emphasized.
2. Proper counseling is needed for couples before they enter in marriage.
3. Both parents should try to stay together for the sake of good upbringing of their children.
4. Whenever there is problem in the home, the couples should try and see the counselor for a help and settle the troubles themselves harmoniously.
5. Ghanaians should continue to promote and consolidate the practice of extended family system as the practice plays critical role to deal with single parenting challenges.
6. There should be a social welfare system to help needy families through economic empowerment.

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