

Lived experiences of single parent families in a high density suburb in Masvingo province, Zimbabwe.

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated lived experiences of single parent families of a high density suburb in Masvingo province, Zimbabwe. The qualitative approach utilising a descriptive survey was employed to study the phenomena. The population of the study comprised of female headed households. Households and respondents were sampled using convenience and purposive sampling. Data was collected through questionnaires, semi structured interviews and non participant observation. The data was presented and analysed in narrative form basing on the research questions and the themes which emerged. The findings from the study revealed that the extended family was an important factor in single parent families. The findings also revealed that fulfilment of family functions; physical, emotional, and psychological is sometimes a challenge in single parent families. The study established that to a greater extent the absence of one parent may contribute towards poor emotional and social development of the children. The study also established that the population studied experienced work overload, economic hardships and loneliness, especially the parents. The study recommends that single parents should form support groups where they share ideas on addressing challenges they face. The study also recommends community and extended family involvement in child rearing to provide role models in the place of the absent parent. Replica studies be conducted on single parents in other contexts to provide a holistic picture of single parenting and measures to minimise negative effects on children and parents.

Key Words: Family, single parenthood, single parent family, lived experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The researcher noted that the number of single parents was on the increase. Gwirayi (2010) indicates that there is a high rate of single parents in Zimbabwe. This was also noted in the United Kingdom by Giddens (2009) who expressed that there is an increase in single parent households in the United Kingdom, with 29% in 2005 compared to 18% in 1970. Unlike in the past where single parenting was for females, single parenting now affects both males and females. The US Bureau of census (1991) states that woman are likely to be widowed than men. This may be due to woman's longevity and the fact that women have a lower likelihood of remarrying after the death of a spouse. Collins, Lincoln & Dietition (2010) say more people are living in single parent families than ever before. Most homes of single parents are of mothers who never married (Nichols and Schwartz, 2004).

Single parent families occur due to divorce, widowhood, separation, desertion or choice. Gordon (2008) says most of the single parents in the 21st century were widowed because death of one partner was the most predominant reason for ending the marriage.

The single parent status has a number of effects on the families. One of the negative effects of single parenting families is work overload of the custodian parent (Abankwa, 2013). Single

parents sometimes struggle to do everything by themselves with no one to blame if it is not done. Most single parent families face financial challenges as they survive on one income unlike two parent families (Thomas, 2001). This situation may result in a low standard of living affecting the quality of housing, clothing, food, education for the family.

The absence of one parent may affect the development of a child. The presence of both parents from infancy creates a secure environment for the socialisation of children (Stephen & Udisi, 2016). Children who grow up in families without a father face several challenges as they lack a strong male figure to hold them accountable. The absence of a father or mother may affect the development of both boys and girls. For most individuals, the family unit is where one is provided with comfort, love and companionship. Due to the above factors the researcher became interested in investigating on the lived experiences of single parent families in a high density suburb in Masvingo.

Research questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

- What is the impact of single parent families on the welfare of members?
- Which challenges are associated with single parent families?
- What support is given to single parent families?

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are different kinds of families in society. A family can be regarded as two or more people who consider themselves related by blood, marriage, adoption and sharing a common residence (Henslin, 2003). The definition of family may vary from culture to culture. Families have altered their structures due to changes in the wider society e.g. economic demands that people should move away from their relatives to find work in other countries.

Types of families

There are different types of families. These are nuclear, extended, foster, communal step, single parent (Haralambos & Holborn, 2013). The nuclear family consists of parents and their biological children (Ezewu, 1983). Berns (2007) refers to an extended family as relatives of a nuclear family who are economically and emotionally dependent on each other. The extended family is made up of a large group of people i.e. brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins living in the main family home (Gwirai, 2010). A closely connected extended family can provide help and support to its members e.g. raising children (Laman & Riedman, 1994). The African system of the extended family pattern has changed due to industrialisation and globalisation (Stephen & Udisi, 2016; Olaleye & Oladeji, 2010).

The communal family is where children live in a commune where they are cared for by their parent and other people who share the home (Skolnic, 1987). Children can be part of shared care family. In this type of family, parents live in separate homes and the children spend part of their time living with each parent e.g. one week with one parent and the other week with another parent (McLanalan & Book, 1989). This usually occurs where there is divorce or separation.

Step families merge unrelated parents and children into a family (Encyclopaedia of Children's Health, nd). A stepfamily is a family that consists of a married couple and one or more children from a previous marriage or relationship. Step families are families in which children have one natural, biological parent in a marriage. These families are usually due to divorce or death of one parent. Children may need to adjust to living with a step parent and other children from the step parent.

Sometimes children live as part of a foster family. Horlorg, (2000) refers to a foster family as one which is temporarily caring for a child and may or may not have parental responsibilities. The children cared for in a foster family are not related to the family taking care of them.

Child headed families occur when a household has no adults and is headed by one of the children (Kellerman, 2014). A child headed family is one in which both parents have died and the children have not found alternative guardians within their extended family or community (Child headed families, nd). Child headed families are prevalent in communities which have been ravaged by HIV/AIDS. Migration of parents to other countries has contributed towards child headed households. Usually the eldest child takes responsibility of the household and his/her siblings.

A single parent family is a family where the children live with one parent. A single parent is a parent not living with spouse or partner and has the day to day responsibility in raising the children (Dowd, 1997). Haralambos & Holborn (2013) say single parenting is a result of death of one spouse, divorce, separation or desertion by one partner or from deliberate choice.

Functions of the family

The family is responsible for a number of functions for individuals especially children. One of the functions of the family is the socialisation of children (Berns, 2007). A family socialises an individual into the culture of the society they live in. It is through the family that children learn acceptable behaviour patterns (Olsam & Defrain, 1994). Parents help to instil inculcate basic moral, spiritual, social, physical and cognitive principles in their children (Santock, 2004). The other function of the family is provision of economic support (Berns, 2007). The family also provides the individual with basic needs like shelter security clothing, food.

The family aids in the development of a stable and emotionally secure individual. This is through children growing in an environment supported by loved ones. Berns, (2007) says through child rearing, the child is provided with support to develop into an emotionally balanced adult.

Causes of single parenting

There are different causes of single parenting. Divorce, widowhood, never married or choice, incapacitation through sickness or accident of one parent, single parent by adoption and imprisonment of the co-parent are some of the causes of single parenting (Amato, 2000).

Widowhood is a situation where one parent passes away in a two parent family (Perry & Perry, 1994). Death of one partner is a predominant reason for the end of a marriage. A widow or widower has to shoulder the emotional, social and economical responsibility for the family. HIV and AIDS, cancer, diabetes, coronary heart disease, car accidents are some of the common causes of death of parents.

The Merriam Dictionary (nd) defines divorce as the action of legally dissolving a marriage. Divorce refers to permanent separation of a married couple. Amato (2000) says divorce is one of the major causes of single parenting in advanced countries. The children of the marriage remain in the custody of one of the parents. The custodian parent may receive partial financial support. Perry and Perry (1994) are of the opinion that divorce in urban, industrial societies reflects the separating of marriage from religion, the emancipation of women and change of values emphasising individuality and personal happiness. Functionalists like Pearson and Fletcher say marital breakdown is on the increase because people now expect and demand more from marriage unlike in the past.

The never married or choice parent never establish a co-parental relationship. The person has children biological or adopted with no intention of marrying or raising children with a father. This kind of family is usually found among the mature working class women. These enter into single parenting through free choice. Sometimes single parenting can occur due to circumstances beyond one's control. Single parenting due to imprisonment for a long period, incapacitation due to illness or an accident can result in a single parent family. Although the other parent is alive they will be in no position to contribute to the well being of the family. They may end up draining the family's financial resources due to the medical care they require. The co-parent may just disappear abandoning the family and surface or not later. (<http://www.singleparentingcenter.net/single.parentingarticles.htm>)

Impact of single parenting

Single parenting has social, economical, physical and emotional effects on the children and custodian parent. According to Cherlin (2005), prior research has shown that children who have experienced family change have poorer behavioural outcomes compared to those in a stable two parent family. Parents provide an environment needed by children to develop into balanced individuals (Kendell, 2003; Laman & Riedman, 1994; Azuka-Obiele, 2013). The loss of one parent may affect the development of a child (Azuka-Obiele, 2013).

Rice (1996) points out that father absence affects the development of masculinity in sons. A similar view is presented by Young (1999) & (2004) in saying that father absence is one cause of maladjustment of children in relation to the opposite sex. In support Ellis et.al (2003) says both boys and girls who lack direct experience of appropriate male-father relationships may exhibit abnormal behaviour e.g boys interacting aggressively with their mothers, teachers and boys their age. Giddens (2004) is of the view that boys who grow up in single parent families without fathers struggle to be successful parents. Lamb (2004) considers the father's role in the socialisation of children as very important as it provides models and also helps in teaching gender roles and other societal values. Bitter, (1993) advocates for joint custody to enable children to relate to both male and female role models.

Campbell & Moen (1992) argue that single parents experience difficulties as they are likely to undergo severe work overload. In support, Danko (2010) noted that, poor performance of children from single parent families was due to their lack of supervision of their homework. This is so because single parents may be overwhelmed by the many responsibilities (Abankwa, 2013). This is due to that they will be attempting to provide for their children's financial support, emotional support and day to day care. Single parents usually have to deal with discipline problems own their own. All these factors may contribute towards the isolation of single parents from other people. Due to the challenges single parents face, Cairney et al. (2006) say, it has been established through related studies that there is a higher percentage of psychiatric disorders like depression, anxiety, mood disorders or alcoholism in single mothers.

The biggest problem of single parent families is lack of financial security as a result they suffer economic hardships (Gordon, 2008; Stephen & Udisi, 2016). This is the case because most single parent families are headed by women, most of these women have little education and few marketable skills (Henslin, 1997). A study conducted by Azuka-Obieke (2013) showed that single parent homes are more likely to be low-economic homes. Limited income is a militating factor against economic progress. Amater and Keith (1991) are of the view that financial hardship can lead single mothers into unsavoury activities like prostitution. The main concern with one parent families is less to do with children being raised by one parent but the fact that most single parent families are poor and headed by women (Henslin, 2003).

Children in single parent household are likely to suffer deprivation in terms of health care, education and money spent on food compared to children raised by two parents (Berns, 2007). This is mainly due to that there maybe only one source of income. Amater and Keith (1991) consider lack of income as the single most important factor in accounting for the differences in children in various family forms.

Children from single parent families are likely to face some challenges (Kelly, 2000). According to Collin et al (2010) & Hetherington & Arastedsh (2002), children from single parent families are more likely to drop out of high school, to get arrested and to have emotional problems. The female children from single parent households are likely to bear children out of wedlock (Wallerstain, Corbin, & Lewis, 1988). The absence of the mother and father contributes towards a higher incidence of poverty, poor academic performance, emotional or behaviour problems and substance abuse (Benokraitis, 2012; Hetherington & Stanely-Hogan, 2002; Wallersten, Corbin & Lewis, 1988; the US department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Single parent families are subjected to stressful conditions economically and emotionally (Berns, 2007; Thomas, 2001).

Children from single parent families may fail to get enough educational support in form of learning material and school fees. Sometimes the children from single parent families dropped out of school and sometimes exhibited behavioural problems because of lack of parental guidance (Kelly and Emery, 2003). Fortunately, Abankwa (2013) points out that children from single parent families who have a supported sense of self have developed into successful adults with good relationships.

The literature review has shown that a family is an essential component of society for the nurturing of family members. The family provides social, emotional, psychological and physical support for its members. There are various types of families e.g. nuclear, extended, single parent. Single parent families occur through divorce widowhood, never married or choice, incapacitation through sickness or accident of one parent and imprisonment of the co-parent. Single parent families face a lot of challenges economically, socially, and emotionally.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative paradigm was used to conduct this research. A qualitative research was considered as an approach which facilitated exploration of respondents experiences, attitudes, views, opinions, beliefs and values on the matter under investigation (Cohen, et al, 2011; Leedy & Ormorod, 2010).

The descriptive survey design was used to study the lived experiences of single parent families. The descriptive survey was considered an effective approach to study the lived in experiences of single parent families in terms of the social, emotional, physical and psychological experiences they come across. Bell (1993) views the survey as an excellent design for studying attitudes, opinions and orientations of respondents.

Population and sampling

The study involved single parent family households headed by woman in a high density suburb in Masvingo city Zimbabwe. The study focused on women as most single parents are women. The women were considered the best sources of information on social, emotional, physical experiences faced by the families. These were be in a position to give a first hand account of what they have experienced as single parents. Children from single parent families were chosen because of their lived experiences as members of single parent families. They were considered to be in a better position to give an account of the life in such households.

The population is approximately 100 households of which approximately 30 are single parent households headed by woman.

Sample and Sampling

A sample is a sub group of the population which represents the population (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). The study made use of a sample of 10 single parents. The study made use of both purposive and convenience sampling. Creswell (2013) refers to purposive sampling as selecting subjects best suited to what is being researched on. Convenience sampling is sample selection based on availability and accessibility (Cohen et.al 2011). Purposive sampling was used to come up with a sample 10 woman. Purposive sampling was used to handpick the single parent The selection was done to cover different categories of single parents i.e. a) Divorced, b) widowed, c) never married, d) separated, deserted and e) incapacitated. The selection of the 10 children was based on convenience sampling. The child from the sampled household who was available or easily accessible during data collection became part of the sample.

Research instrument

Data in this study was collected through the questionnaire, interview and observation. Triangulation is important in qualitative research to check data consistency (Fraenkle & Walen, 2000; Punch, 2005; Cohen et al, 2010; Leedy & Armood, 2010; Shenton, 2004; Marshal & Rossman, 2008). This was facilitated through the use of the three data generation methods. The semi structured interview was used to collect data from the heads of the single parent families. The semi structured interviewer provided room for probing and also observing non verbal communication during the course of the interview (Berg, 2009, Punch, 2005). The questionnaire was filled in by the children. This was used because some of children could not be easily accessed so the researcher would leave the questionnaire to be filled at the convenience of the respondent. The observation method was used to take note of the living conditions of the families.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data were presented, analysed and discussed in narrative form basing on the themes which emerged.

Financial Challenges

Literature and research findings indicated that the greatest challenge faced by single parent families is financial (Azuka-Obieke, 2013; Stephen, Odisi, 2016). Some of the children indicated that their mothers struggled to see them through school as one respondent said, "I had to sell bags, wigs etc prepared by my mother to get pocket money and upkeep at university".

Single parent families lack financial security. Some of the parents indicated that the parents and children may engage in unsavoury relations to get financial aid. Single mothers may engage in prostitution to argument their incomes. Some single parent children and parents indicated that those in two parent families had a better quality of life as they were likely to have two sources of income (Bern, 2007). Motor and Keith, (1991) indicate that the poverty rate of single parent families is approximately 5 times higher than that for two parent families.

Research has shown that children from single parent families may not reach high levels in education due to economic reasons. One respondent said, "I was not able to go to 'A' Level even though I had passed very well in my 'O' levels and got an 'A' level place. My mother said I had to go for teachers training so that when I qualify I would help her financially". One of the

interviewed ladies could not go for further studies because the financial resources were not sufficient for her and the children. This is so because most single parent families are headed by woman, who might not have attained high levels of education (Collen, 2010; Amato & Keith, 1991).

Data gathered through the interview showed that most single parents who were widowed or divorced had their own houses. Most who were not married rented or lived with relatives (extended family). The divorced or widowed were living in houses acquired before the single parent status. The others found it difficult to acquire property due to inadequate income as one interviewee said "The income I get is not enough for me to serve and buy a house. I suppose I will continue to live with my parents". Since the greatest challenge of single parents is financial acquiring one's own house becomes difficult (Gordon, 2008).

The results of research indicate that most of the single parents in the study relied on their salaries for their livelihood. The widowed also had widows pension. Some who were divorced or separated or never married received maintenance from the other parent and this made a difference in their financial situation. One respondent said "I did go to the courts to get maintenance for the children. I felt that the father had also to contribute towards the up keep of his children. The maintenance has made life easier". However some of the single parents were not receiving anything from the other parent. They felt it was too much of a hassle to go through the court processes, as one responded pointed out, "I did not feel like forcing my children's father to pay for the children's care through the courts. It required too much effort from me emotionally. He should know he has children who need food, clothes, school fees. I was not going to chase him for it".

Some of the single parents and children came up with a number of ways of overcoming financial challenges. One of the children indicated that it was important to hold discussions as a family on money matters, this was expressed by one child, "Discussing as a family on financial issues helps every member of the family to understand the financial situation. It helps to reduce conflict and unreasonable demands. This helps to cut down unnecessary expenses. We also decided to seriously engage in gardening, chicken rearing to augment our income and cut down on food expenses". Some of the parents with adult children explained that they had meetings to distribute the family's income. In the meetings there is sharing of ideas to find solutions to the financial challenges. In these meetings members were encouraged to listen to one another regardless of age.

The research highlighted a number of ways of supplementing family income. One single parent who happens to be a Home Economics specialist suggested taking into account what she referred to as real income available for the family. In explaining this real income she said "Real income refers to goods and services family members can provide to cut down on financial requirements. A family with teenage children can do without domestic help as children are old enough to do household chores. The family can make their own clothes and soft furnishings to reduce costs". The other measures of supplementing income suggested by the respondents were fund generating projects like chicken rearing for sale and family consumption, constructing clothes and soft furnishings for sale, opening tuck shops. Self help projects usually helped families who depended on one income for family sustenance.

Social

The findings showed that in most cases single parent families suffered isolation from family and the community. However one single parent showed that her case is different as she is quite involved in community and extended family activities. "I am involved in what goes on in my

community. I am informed of community functions. I am involved in the community garden where each one was allocated a vegetable portion". However, one of the respondents said it was not important to her whether she was accepted or not. "I am an introvert, I usually do not get out much, so I am not affected by acceptance or isolation from the community. I spend most of my time at work anyway. When I get home I am too busy with housework to socialise".

Most of the single parent families studied had strong links with extended the family especially the family of the custodian parent. The members of the extended family visited and members of the single parent families also visited. Children would spend their holidays at their grandparent's home. These links provided the single parent families with support (Laman & Riedman, 1994). Through this association children benefited from interaction with same sex or opposite sex members of the extended family. "We normally spent our school holidays at our grand parents. We met our cousins and other relatives from our mother's side. This helped us not to feel isolated". In some cases the single parent family and extended family had strong links because the extended family depended on the single parent for their livelihood. As one single parent said. "My extended family could not isolate me and my children because they depended on me for their livelihood. I actually stay with my mother, siblings and grandmother".

The findings indicated that sometimes single parents had problems associating with married couples or persons. In some cases friends one had before one acquired the single parent status withdrew from associating with the single parent as indicated by one respondent, "We had a couple who were close family friends. We used to spend weekends together as couples. They distanced themselves from me after my husband and I separated. I studied at university with the wife and we attended the same church. We are friendly but not close anymore. We no longer visit each other".

Single parenthood can be lonely. It's difficult to form friendships when one acquires the single status. Old friendships are sometimes not sustainable after divorce, separation or widowhood. The general consensus among the respondents was that married people felt threatened by single parents. They feared losing their spouses to single persons. This contributed to isolation of the single parent family. One interviewee said, "Married women feel threatened by single parents (women). They no longer invite them to their homes as they used to do when they were with your husband. They suspect that they were now husband snatchers".

The study showed that sometimes the society treated single parents in a disrespectful manner. This was sometimes due to the cause of the single parent status. This was reflected through the interview where one single parent said: "Single parents can be labelled as prostitutes especially if they were never married, divorced or separated. A widow is usually viewed in better light. Society feels sympathy for the widow. A divorced person or separated or never married are associated with ills e.g. she was left because she was loose. Other persons might not allow them near their husbands. Man of different status and age can approach you because they think you are available". The study showed that a young married women was respected more than a much older single women. Findings show that some mature single parents would wear rings on the ring finger giving the impression that they were married. They would also sometimes not correct people who address them as "Mrs".

Characteristics of single parent family children

The findings indicated that children from single parent families did not necessarily differ in characteristics from those of two parent families. In terms of school achievement, the sentiments were that they can also achieve as well as children from two parent families. If they

have resources to support their education they can also go to great heights. The limiting factor in their education sometimes was resources.

With reference to the social aspect, sometimes children from single parent families faced challenges (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Collins et al, 2010; Hetherington, 2002). One parent interviewed said, "Some children from single parent families have social problems. This is usually due to the environment they live in. They learn what they live in the home. If the mother has a stream of men coming to the house, the children are likely to become promiscuous. I have a morally upright life so my children developed good morals". However the respondent indicated that it was not normative that children from single parent families had social problems. What is found in single parent families is not different from other families. Child behaviour depended on child rearing practices.

Challenges of work overload

The study has shown that single parents face some challenges in their work load (Campbell and Moen, 1992). They need to provide for the family and at the same time spend time with their children and also have time for leisure. From the respondents it was noted that multi-responsibilities were quite heavy and resulted in a hectic life style like one mother said: "Sometimes you are busy at work and are not able to take time off when your child needs your support at school. Sometimes you get home too tired to spend time with your children or check their school work".

However in some households parents tried to spend time with their children despite the many responsibilities. The family would watch television together have talks and go to functions together. In such families the parent tried to have quality time with her children. In some families, leisure time as a family ended when the father died or left. They were no finances for leisure as one child lamented, "Leisure time was out when father left this was due to financial constraints. With father we would go to the hotel for Christmas celebrations, have braai during month ends. Father would honour our birthdays. When he left, funds were tight".

The results of the study has shown that the single parent has hardly anytime to herself. Its either she is working to provide for the family through formal employment or self help projects. She has to juggle between work and child rearing. One parent interviewed had this to say: "I do not have much time for leisure because I also have responsibilities of the absent parent. There is work overload which deny me time for leisure. Besides finances are tight and so after work I have to sew to supplement my income, this eliminates leisure time".

Challenges faced

The findings established that children from single parent families lack love, guidance and contact with the absent parent. It is difficult at times for the custodian parent to replace the absent parent. The study revealed that there are certain things which boys would learn from their fathers e.g. playing soccer, preparing a necktie. One interviewee had this to say, "Sometimes I wish my husband was still with us. When my son started school, we did not know how to tie his school uniform tie. This is something his father could have demonstrated to him. We had to ask a high school boy from the neighbourhood to teach him. As he grew older I would go and watch him play cricket although I had no clue what was happening. I was not able to play cricket with him at home".

The study indicated that children from single parent families sometimes missed out on activities and talks they would normally have from same sex parent or parent of the opposite sex (Ellis et al, 2003; Young, 1999). The respondents felt it was difficult for a mother to talk to

her son about his development into manhood, dating etc. It was also difficult for the mother to present to her daughter a man's point of view on dating and marriage. The general feeling was that children from one parent families might not develop as well as they could have emotionally, socially and this could result in emotional or behavioural problems (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001; McLanahan, 1994; Rice, 1996; Young, 1999; Keller, 2000; Lamb, 2004). Some of the respondents felt that joint custody as advocated by Biller (1993), McLanahan & Book (1989) would be a good idea as it exposed children to both parents in the case of divorce or separation.

The children in the study indicated that sometimes they had problems interacting with other children at school or in the community because of their status. When other children talked about family life, their parents, they felt uncomfortable and at a loss as for what to say. One interviewed child said, "Sometimes I wished my parents were still together. When I got into conversation with people at school and they started talking about their parents what they do as families, I got embarrassed because I didn't know what to say. I didn't even know what my father liked or who his friends were".

The study revealed that at times children from single parent family faced stigmatisation. This was especially the case when the parent was divorced or never married. One parent interviewed said sometimes unusual comments are given by adults or children about single parent children, "When my son who was at university was staying with my sister and husband, my sister and her husband attributed his difficult behaviour to lack of a father's influence in his life. They expressed that one would not expect good behaviour from children who only lived with their mother". From the study it was noted that children from single parent families were stereotyped as having social problems (being non achievers, promiscuous (loose) and lacking in confidence.

Absent Parent, Custodian Parent

The research showed mixed feelings towards the absent parent by the children. Some were negative and some were positive towards the parent who left. The parent who departed through death was viewed in a better light than those who are still in existence. This was reflected through the interview, one interviewee said, "I feel rejected, abandoned unloved by my father. If he loved me he would not have left. I feel hurt, the fact that I was not given a chance to get to know him well". The feelings expressed were different for dead parent, "My father passed on to be with the lord. I am happy that he died a Christian. I wish he had lived longer though so that he would guide me in my life. Any where it was God's will".

Some children in the study expressed bitterness, hatred towards the parent who left. They also had a lot of unanswered questions. Some times children were wondering who was to blame for the break up. Some children appeared to have a lot of bottled hurt inside them and appeared tearful at times.

Generally the view towards custodian parent was favourable. Most of the children were grateful and respected the parent who remained. The general feeling was that she was there for them and did not abandon or depart from them as was expressed by one of the respondents. "I am grateful to my mother for sacrificing her life for us. She has always been there for us. She works very hard to provide for us. We went to school and we had enough food and good clothes. We hardly saw our father".

However, some children although they were grateful to the custodian parent they felt she might have contributed towards their father's leaving as was indicated by one of the

respondents, "My mother is hard working and at times worked hard to provide for us. But I feel that my father might not have left if it were not for mother's quarrelsome nature. She was always shouting at him and quarrelling with him".

The respondents indicated that sometimes it is better to be in a single parent household where there is no strife. The respondents indicated that in some families there is a lot of abuse going on emotional, psychological, physical that its better sometimes to separate. This was expressed by one respondent who said, "I think it's better to have one good parent and a happy peaceful family life than two parents who are always fighting. My father would sometimes go away for days and when he came back it was all fighting about where he had been and money".

Benefits of Single Parent Status

The single parent status was considered to have some benefits. Among these being freedom in decision making as there is no need to consult the spouse. One has autonomy there is no interference and blockage to what one wants to do. There is independent decision making. One would decide on what to do and plan how to do it and execute the plan. This was supported by one respondent who said, "Being a single parent is hard but there are some benefits you decide everything on your own no need for consultation. When I was married my husband would block what I thought were good ideas. I have progressed a lot since my husband passed on. I have 2 cars, educated my brothers and sisters. I look after my parents without consulting anyone".

Support for Single Parent Families

The study came up with a number of suggestions to assist single parent families such as support groups, family support, church support. The idea of support groups was supported by respondents. Some of the respondents indicated that in some church denominations like the reformed church in Zimbabwe, the women's organisation has a sub group for single mothers. This group meets from time to time. In the group the single mothers address issues which affect them as a group like finance. The group has formed a grocery club where they contribute cash and groceries are purchased and distributed half yearly. One respondent in the social group said: "I find our support group very helpful. The groceries we share cover basics like rice, cooking oil, sugar, soap. They sustain me through the six months. I also give some to my mother and sister. Besides the groceries, we give each other emotional support, moral support you don't feel alone. We share ideas on how to raise our children. We pray together and for one another".

The respondents supported the idea of the support groups as they provide a forum for them to discuss matters affecting them and their families. The general feeling from the respondents was that the support groups provided them with strategies to overcome social problems. The support groups empower them to stand on their own and help to raise their self esteem. They also provided them with leisure activities as they sometimes go away as a group. One of the respondents had this to say, "I suppose support groups help. As single parents we tell each other our experiences and problems and help each other to find solutions to the problems we face. This brings about a sense of belonging and oneness, being there for each other".

The single parent families felt they could also get more support from the extended family. The family could assist in child rearing (Berns, 2007). Males in the extended family could provide a father, figure and females a mother figure to the children. The extended family could also support financially and provide other forms of support e.g. accommodation. One respondent expressed appreciation of the extended family support by saying, "If it were not for my family I do not know how I would have managed. My parents, welcomed me and my children into their

home when my husband died because I could not afford to pay rent. They assisted me as I was trying to find my feet, financially and taking care of my young children as I was going to work". However due to industrialisation and globalisation the visibility of the extended family has been eroded (Stephen & Udisi, 2016; Olayele, 2010) Findings from literature and data collected from the subjects indicate that the extended family is an important factor in single parent families. They can provide material, financial and emotional support. The family can provide opposite sex role models for the children (Berns, 2007).

The area under study had single parent families due to different causes. Some single parent families were due to divorce and separation, some due to widowhood, never married, spouse incarcerated (Perry & Perry, 1994). The findings from the study indicated that the role of the family is to provide for the physical emotional and social needs of the family. Family functions noted through research and literature are socialisation, economic support and nurturing of children (Berns, 2007; Olsan and Defrain 1994). However, the findings show that fulfilment of the above roles was sometimes a problem in single parent families. Providing physical needs for the family like adequate shelter is a challenge since income can be limited or reduced due to status.

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings it may be concluded that single parent families were facing challenges in terms of the physical, social, emotional and psychological aspects of their lives. The study has established that to a greater extent single parent families status has a negative impact on family members welfare. Members are affected in their physical requirements because of limited resources. The study has shown that resource limitations may result in a poor standard of living and quality of life. The family may have problems providing good housing, food, clothing and education for members.

It may be concluded from the study that single parent families face a number of challenges. Among these challenges are work, overload, economic hardships, loneliness especially for the parents. The study also established that children from single parent families lacked love and support from the absent parent. The conclusion is that the absence of the parent contributed towards poor emotional and social development and psychological development of the children.

Although single parent families face a number of challenges, the study established that single parent family status has some benefits. Respondents felt that it was better sometimes to be in a single parent household than a two parent family where there is strife. For the parent, there are also benefits of freedom in decision making.

It may also be concluded from the study that society needs to support the single parent family to reduce the negative impact of family status on family members. When the community is involved in parenting with the single parent, work overload is reduced and children do not lack role models and emotional support. Establishment of support groups provides single parents with a forum to discuss common issues and give one another with emotional and social support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends:

- Involvement of single parent families in community activities to reduce isolation and stigmatisation.

- Community involvement in child rearing to provide role models in place of absent parent and also relieve role overload on single parent.
- Single parent families to engage in fund generating projects to ease economic burden.
- Single parents to provide for quality time with their children.
- Provision for educational requirements by the state for children in single parent household with low income.
- Education for members of the community on the negative effects of single parenting on members and measures of minimising these.
- Replica studies on single parents families in other contexts to provide a clearer picture on the impact of single parenting and measures of minimising the effects on children and adults.

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