

SINGLE PARENTS' PSYCHO-SOCIAL CHALLENGES AND COUNSELLING NEEDS IN MINNA MUNICIPAL OF NIGER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study determined single parents' psycho-social challenges and counselling needs in Minna Municipal of Niger State. Four objectives and four research questions guided the study. The study adopted survey research design. A researchers-developed and validated instrument tagged "Single Parents Psycho-Social Challenges and Counselling Needs Questionnaire" (SPPSCNQ) was administered to 100 single parents (divorcees, widows and the never-married). Purposive sampling techniques were used to select the respondents in Minna Municipal. The instrument was face and content validated by 10 experts, three counselling psychologists, three school counsellors and four social workers. Reliability was obtained via split-half method with 0.95 index value. Research questions one, two and four were answered on the basis of Chi-square analysis, while research question three was answered on the basis of Page's L-trend test. The results revealed that widows felt more of the psycho-social challenges (social isolation; difficulties with family responsibilities; financial difficulties; psychological stress; coping with children's education and counselling needs) than the divorcees and the never-married single parents in Minna Municipal. The analysis also showed evidence that most single parents manifested that they do consultations with their relatives and confidants at higher levels rather than visit professional counsellors. The study therefore recommended that seminar and workshops were advocated for major stakeholders on the need to begin to pay more attention to mobilise greater support for the single mothers of all categories and lastly government should reach out to traditional rulers and communities to educate them on the need to provide recognition and support for single parents.

Keywords: Psycho-Social Challenges, Single Parents, and Counselling Needs

Introduction

The family is an important unit in the society. It is the first socialising agent the child interacts with and it has great influence on the child's physical, mental, moral and social development (Roska & Potter, 2011; Cavanagh & Fomby, 2012). The family's most outstanding responsibility is to train and bring up the child in the norms and values of the society. Hence, Davis (2011) observed that, the foundation of what the person becomes in the society is laid in the home at the initial stage of life. However, there are certain circumstances in families which require that the parenting role be left in the hands of single parents. These include divorce, unintended pregnancy, separation of various kinds, and deaths of one spouse (Nyakutse, 2006; Thwala, 2011; Falana, Bada & Ayodele, 2012). The society continues to grapple with the breaking down of family structures which adversely affect the development of children in particular. In Nigeria, divorce, poverty, urban migration, HIV and AIDS pandemics; all of these are contributing to the breakdown of the family system in Nigeria (Blessing 2004; Suleiman 2010; & Amaru, 2012). With regard to the rapidly growing population of single parents and its implications on the children raised in such families, an in-depth exploration of the phenomena was therefore necessary.

Adeloye (2008) for example, observed that single parenthood "seems to be on the increase in Nigeria due to increasing divorce rates, trial marriages, premature deaths of spouses as well as the biting economic hardship

which have made it difficult for couples to stay together till death separates them.” Maranville (2006) believes that “Even a married person may be a part-time single parent, if his or her spouse is physically disabled or behaviourally dysfunctional (from drug addiction or substance abuse, for example). The same is true when a spouse's work takes him or her away for extended periods.” Single parents may become so inadvertently or by design (Hertz, 2006; Gemelli, 2008; & Susan, 2016). When death of a spouse causes the other spouse to carry on the care of the family, this is inadvertent single parenting. Divorce and transfer of custody to one of the divorced is also inadvertent. Similarly, accidental teenage pregnancy may thrust single parenting on a woman. Also, biological infertility may result in adoption and single parenting. However, some single parents become so by design. This increasing tempo of unmarried single mothers can be attributed in the advanced countries and also in Nigeria to be “due to the current concept of women empowerment/emancipation, coupled with earlier bitter experience in their relationship with men, some of these unmarried single women appear to be satisfied with the task of bringing up their children singly since they can afford to do so with relative ease” (Adeloye, 2008). Parenthood or parenting implies providing care, nurturance and socialisation for a child or other dependent members of a family. A parent is one who provides upbringing, care and concern for a child. Ihediwa-Okoro (2008); Kotwal and Prabkhar (2009) observed that parenting is a role that requires substantial energy. A parent provides love, warmth, care and educational, physical, psychological, moral and emotional security and stability for children. Parenting thus requires expenditure of social, psychological, economic and emotional resources to bring up the children to be proper and responsible citizens of the nation.

However, of all these challenges the most critical ones of concern for the sanity of the adult are the psycho-social challenges: challenges of relationships within and without the family, child needs and expectations (both emotional, moral, biological and logistical), parent needs and expectations, dealing with dysfunctional behaviour of children and enforcing discipline, coping with lost spouse, friends who drift away, prejudice, isolation and loneliness, and others. Counselling being a helping profession owes the single parent a duty to provide tools and techniques that empower him/her to cope with and successfully function as a sane, successful single parent while remaining functionally useful to society as a worker and citizen. Thus, single parenting can have negative effect on the child, the parent and the family as a whole. Scholarship and legislation especially in America and advanced countries has tended to focus on the children in single parent families.

Statement of the Problem

Internationally studies have shown that particular groups of single mothers are sometimes more vulnerable than others (Mathews, 2015). The issues that single mothers face differ significantly than those of single fathers. In this research, The focus is more on the issues of single mothers, partly because they are usually the custodial parent in the case of divorce, and partly because they are more likely than fathers to be poor (Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors, AIPC, 2014). Trivedi, Sareen and Dhyani (2009) eloquently contended that even with advances in standard of living of the population, the condition of widows and divorced women remains deplorable in society. They contend that the situation is worse in developing nations with their unique social, cultural and economic milieu, which at times ignores the basic human rights of this vulnerable section of society. Besides, “A gap exists in life expectancies of men and women in both developing and developed nations. This, coupled with greater remarriage rates in men, ensures that the number of widows continues to exceed that of widowers.” Furthermore, increasing education among women and their becoming more aware of their rights, increases divorce rates. Attention has not been given much to the fact that widowed/divorced women suffer from varying psychological stressors. It is now a proven fact those stressors could bring psychiatric illnesses (for example, depression, anxiety, and substance dependence). Thus, there is need for counsellors and social workers to pay more attention to the stressing effects of single parenthood. There is a need also to understand the effects of single parenthood on the single mothers and using this knowledge sensitize the society so that better understanding for these class of citizens will prevail. As Trivedi, Sareen and Dhyani (2009) argue that “A change in mindset of the society is required before these women get their rightful place, for which a strong will is needed in the minds of the people, and in law-governing bodies.”

By focusing on the psychosocial challenges of single parents therefore, this study will help provide additional insight into their stressors and other challenges. Such awareness will promote not only more sympathetic attitude from the society and authorities, it will reduce the negative, almost stigmatizing rejection and labeling of these women as being “loose” by other members of the society especially in countries like Nigeria. However, we have tended to forget the goose that lays the golden egg! The thrust of this study is to investigate the single parents’ psycho-social challenges and counselling needs in Minna Municipal of Niger State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study determine single parents’ psycho-social challenges and counseling needs in Minna Municipal of Niger State, Nigeria. More specifically, the specific objectives of this study will:

- i. Identify the most prevalent pressing psycho-social challenges of single parents in Minna Municipal.
- ii. Determine if there any association between the pressing psycho-social challenges as perceived by divorcees, widows and the never-married single parents in Minna Municipal.
- iii. Examine if there any differences between the counselling needs of divorcees, widows and the never-married single parents in Minna.
- iv. Identify the related key variables more directly attendant to the psycho-social challenges and counselling needs of target single parents in Minna?

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. What are the most prevalent pressing psycho-social challenges of single parents in Minna Municipal?
- ii. Are there any association between the pressing psycho-social challenges as perceived by divorcees, widows and the never-married single parents in Minna Municipal?
- iii. Are there any differences between the counselling needs of divorcees, widows and the never-married single parents in Minna?
- iv. What are the related key variables more directly attendant to the psycho-social challenges and counselling needs of target single parents in Minna?

Methodology

This study adopted a survey design. Survey research is defined as "the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions" (Check & Schutt, 2012). As Heppner, Wampold and Kivlin (2008) argue that “the basic aim of a survey research is to document the nature or frequency of a particular variable within a certain population”. The population of this study was 1000 widowed, divorced and the never-married parents (Niger State Ministry of Women Affairs, 2020). The sample size is 100 respondents selected from 1000 population of single parents in Minna Municipal, and 20% of which form the sample size of the target single parents in Minna Municipal. For this study, purposive sampling techniques were employed. Purposive sampling is necessitated when the researchers are interested in certain specified characteristics or individual. It ensures that only those that meet such required purpose, attributes or characteristics are reached for data sourcing. Purposive sampling starts with a purpose in mind and the sample is thus selected to include people of interest and exclude those who do not suit the purpose. It is a good method to use when you want to access or try to find out sensitive issues in a population. A researchers-designed questionnaire titled “Single Parents Psycho-Social Challenges and Counselling Needs Questionnaire” (SPPSCCNQ) with 24 items that sought to find out Psycho-Social Challenges and Counselling Needs, as felt by the target respondents and responses are weighted, 2 (most of the time); 1 (not often); and 0 (Not at all). It was face and content validated using three counselling psychologists, three school counsellors and four social workers relating with single parents. However, split-half reliability was done and it was administered on (17) respondents (widows/divorcees and never married single mothers) in Centre for Excellent Return Institute in Shango, Bosso Local Government Area of Niger State.

Hence, the scores of halves were correlated using Spear-Rank Order Correlation Coefficient and a reliability value of 0.95 was obtained, indicating a high correlation of reliability and was good for this study. Four Research

Assistants were employed to work with the researchers. The Assistants are to be co-opted from each of the organizations from which participants were sourced. The research assistants were given two sessions of training. The first was to familiarize them with the instrument and procedure of administration. Questions were entertained and answered to clarify issues for the assistants. The research assistants administered the copies of questionnaire to the respondents. This is predicated on the belief that the respondents will tend to be more comfortable with them and will thus be more cooperative if contacted by them.

The second session was done just before administration of the instrument; the assistants were briefed on issues of inadvertent introduction of bias by conduct and the need not to vary the questions. They were briefed also on matters of ethics such as maintaining strict confidentiality about the information gleaned from this study, not doing anything to put the respondents in the study to fear or distress (such as derogating on responses given), and also not creating issues with the Agency where study is being conducted. They were also briefed on avoiding judgmental comments or showing body language on responses given in order not to put the respondents on the defensive. Twenty five (25) instruments were given to each research assistant were administered to the respondents in a particular place and at a specific time agreed upon between the research assistants and the respondents, hence, the researchers did vicarious observation of the general activities day by day, to make sure things are done appropriately. The data obtained on the study was analysed using frequencies, rank order, Chi-square and page’s L-trend

Results

Data collected were analysed in accordance with research questions. Findings were presented with tables, indicating frequencies of the respondents as well as chi-square and page’s L- trend analysis of the responses of the respondents.

Research Question One: What are the most prevalent pressing psycho-social challenges of single parents in Minna Municipal?

Table 1: Showing Collated Frequencies of Indices Of Psycho-Social Challenges By Categories Of Single Parents and Rank Order Analysis Of Extents of the Pressing Challenges Manifested.

S/No	Psycho-Social Challenges	Parents	Cumulative Indices	Specific Order Rankings of Manifestation	Cumulative Order Rankings of Manifestation
1	Social Isolation	Divorcees	194	2 nd	3 rd
		Widows	218	1 st	1 st
		Never-Married	56	3 rd	13 th
2	Difficulties with Family Responsibilities	Divorcees	108	2 nd	10 th
		Widows	146	1 st	6 th
		Never-Married	34	3 rd	16 th
3	Financial Difficulties	Divorcees	64	1 st	12 th
		Widows	44	2 nd	14 th
		Never-Married	12	3 rd	18 th
4	Psychological Stress	Divorcees	154	2 nd	5 th
		Widows	208	1 st	2 nd
		Never-Married	76	3 rd	11 th
5	Coping with Children’s Education	Divorcees	120	1 st	7 th
		Widows	110	2 nd	9 th
		Never-Married	26	3 rd	17 th
6	Counselling Needs	Divorcees	112	2 nd	8 th
		Widows	158	1 st	4 th
		Never-Married	38	3 rd	15 th

Field Survey, (2021)

A cursory examination of the above table 1 showed that single mother’ responses in terms of the six types of psychosocial challenges manifested varied by their categories (divorcees, widows and the never-married). In terms of social isolation, widows (at a prevalence of 218) manifested the highest felt difficulty than Divorcees (194) and the never married (56). In respect of difficulties with family responsibilities, widows (146) manifested more difficulties than Divorcees (108) and the never married (34).With respect to financial difficulties, divorcees (64) manifested higher felt difficulties than widows (44) and never married (12). In the aspect of psychological stress, widows at a prevalence of (208) manifested the higher difficulties than the widows (154) and the never married (76). Furthermore, divorcees manifested (120) the higher difficulties in coping with children’s education, while widows (110) and the never married (26) manifested the lower difficulties. With respect to manifestation of counseling needs, widows (158) rated higher while divorcees (112) and never married (38) both rated lower.

On a general note, widows manifested higher psychosocial challenges (social isolation-1st, psychological stress – 2nd, counselling needs - 4th; difficulties with family responsibilities 6th;) than the two other categories of single mothers. They were followed by divorcees who manifested lower psychosocial challenges (social isolation – 3rd; psychological stress – 5th; coping with children’s education – 7th; manifestation of counseling needs – 8th). The never married single mothers manifested lower psychosocial challenges than the other two categories (psychological stress – 11th, social isolation 13th; manifestation of counseling needs – 15th; family responsibilities- 16th). On the average, therefore, widows (147) and divorcees (126) were more pressed in terms of psychosocial challenges faced than the never married (40) single mothers in Minna Municipal Area of Niger State.

Research Question Two: Are there any association between the pressing psycho-social challenges as perceived by divorcees, widows and never-married single parents in Minna Municipal?

Table 2: Showing Chi-Square Analysis Of Responses Regarding The Levels Of Experiences Of Association Between the Pressing Psycho-Social Challenges Among Single Parents

Levels of Experiences	Divorcees	Widows	Never-Married	Df	Cal.X ²	Cri.X ²
Minimum Levels	0	0	33			
Medium Levels	186	129	274			
High Levels	895	1049	189	4	80.23	9.49

Field Survey (2021)

Legend: D=Divorcees; W=Widows; NM=The Never Married.

Table 2 indicates that there is a difference between divorcees, widows and the never-married regarding the extents of their experiences of pressing psycho-social challenges. Results from the analysis showed that the calculated value of 80.23 was greater than the critical value of 9.49. This implies that the three categories of single mothers (Divorcees, Widows and Never-married) in the study area expressed their pressing psycho-social challenges at significantly varying levels. A cursory view of the table shows that Widows (1049) more than Divorcees (895) and the Never Married (189) single parents experienced the highest levels of psychosocial challenges. This trend signified a difference from the Never Married (274) compared to Divorcees (186) and Widows (129) at a medium level.

Research Question Three: Are there any significant differences between the counselling needs of divorcees, widows and the never-married single parents in Minna?

Table 3: Showing Page’s L-trend Analysis of Responses Regarding Counselling Needs of Divorcees, Widows and Never-Married Single Parents in Minna

Counselling Needs	Divorcees	Widows	Never-Married	Df	Cal. L	Cri. L
Consultation with confidants	32	45	10			
Informal Counselling with relatives	40	71	19			

Formal counselling with known person	48	78	25	4	0.60	0.54
Counselling with professionals	9	37	5			

Field Survey (2021)

Table 3 shows differences in the counselling needs of divorcees, widows and the never-married single parents in Minna. The table shows that majority of single parents preferred consultations with their confidants as well as their relatives and persons they know. The result from the analysis shows that calculated Page’s L-trend value of 0.60 was greater than the page’s L-trend critical value of 0.54. Hence, the indication was a difference in the responses of the respondents based on their counseling needs. Findings indicates that majority of the three categories of single mothers do have consultation with their relatives and confidants.

Research Question Four

What are the related key variables more directly attendant to the psycho-social challenges and counselling needs of target single parents in Minna Municipal? Data in respect to this Research Question was collated on three aspects of related key variables; age of the respondents, numbers of children and the occupational status of the three categories of single mothers (Divorcees, Widows and the Never married in Minna Municipal).

Table 4a: Showing Chi-Square Analysis of Responses Based on Age Range of Related Key Variables that are More Directly Attendant to the Psycho-Social Challenges and Counselling Needs of Target Single Parents in Minna

Age Range	Min.	Med.	High	Df	Cal.X ²	Cri. X ²
16-24	0	19	45			
25-30	0	1	22			
31-above	0	1	3	4	6.14	9.49

Field Survey (2021)

Table 4a indicates that the chi-square calculated value of 6.14 is less than the critical value of 9.49 which implies that age range had no bearing with levels of psycho-social and counselling needs of the target single parents in Minna Municipal.

Table 4b: Chi-Square Analysis Of Number Of Children as Related Key Variables in the Manifestation of the Psycho-Social Challenges and Counselling Needs of Target Single Parents in Minna

No of Children	Min	Med	High	Df	Cal.X ²	Cri. X ²
1-2	1	15	14			
3-4	0	2	56			
5-Above	0	0	3	4	31.86	9.49

Field Survey (2021)

Table 4b reveals that the chi-square calculated value of 31.86 is greater than the critical value of 9.49 and this implies that number of children had some bearing, on attendant psycho-social and counselling needs of target single parents in Minna Municipal.

Table 4c Chi-Square Analysis of Occupational Status as Related Key Variables More Attendant to the Psycho-Social Challenges and Counselling Needs of Single Parents in Minna Municipal

Occupation Status	Min	Med	High	Df	Cal.X ²	Cri. X ²
Working	0	2	19			
Student	0	2	58			
Not-Working	0	1	9	4	1.60	9.49

Field Survey, (2021)

Table 4c indicates that occupational status has no bearing on the psycho-social and counselling needs of the single parents in Minna Municipal. The indication is that no significant differences were established in the responses of the respondents based on their occupational status. The chi-square calculated value of 1.60 is less than the critical value of 9.49.

Discussion of Findings

The results of research question one indicated that an data evidences that the most prevalent psycho-social challenges among single parents' in Minna Municipal are social isolation, psychological stress, counselling needs and difficulties with family responsibilities which manifested at between 1st to 6th rank orders across all categories of single mothers. Coping with children's education and financial difficulties manifested less at rank orders of between 17th and 18th of this categories of single mothers in Minna Municipal. According to Mathews (2015), single parents face the most prevalent pressing psycho-social challenges in terms of social isolation and loneliness, emotional issues and financial difficulties. The present finding also corroborates the findings of Susan (2061) as well as Kotwal and Prabhakar (2009) who found that social isolation; stress and counselling needs are some of the prevalent pressing psycho-social challenges of some African divorcees and widows. The finding is also further in agreement with Gemelli (2008) who asserted that most of the never-married single parents do experience psycho-social challenges of catering for their children's education in addition to financial difficulties in coping with issues that often resulted into other psychological and health problems in the family of such single parents. The reasons for this patterns of manifestation of prevalence of psychosocial challenges among single mothers may not be far-fetched from possibilities of support by them from their significant others (relatives, close friends etc) enable them to cope with financial needs and demands of children's education as well as difficulties lives emanating of social and psychological isolation.

Result of research question two showed that there are association between the pressing psycho-social challenges as perceived by widows at high levels than divorcees and the Never-Married. This finding is supported by Kotwal and Prabhakari (2009) who conducted a study on problems faced by single parents in Jammu and Kashmir, India which indicated that widows manifested substantially higher rates of depressed moods and poorer social functioning than divorcees and the never married single mothers. The finding of this study is in agreement with that of Sarah (2006) studied divorce leads to poor psychological and physical Health in Women in Iowa, on a sample of 416 rural mothers. The result revealed that divorced women have a higher susceptibility to chronic illness over a long period of time compared to Widows and the Never Married single mothers

The findings of research question three showed that the three categories of single mothers (Divorcees, Widows and the Never Married) manifested that they do consultations with their relatives and confidants at higher level, to them they feel very comfortable discussing their challenges with their relatives and confidants because they are directly close most often, they also feel their challenges are also save, only less numbers of single mothers of this categories usually visit a professional counsellors. This result is contrary to the findings of Suleiman (2010) and Amaru (2012), they conducted a research on counselling needs of widows and divorcees in Kwara State and River State respectively, in their findings, it was found that there is need for single mothers to visit or see a professional counsellors, to enable them resolve their challenges.

The result of research question four indicated that the chi-square calculated value of 6.14 is less than the critical value of 9.49 which implies that age range had no bearing with levels of psycho-social and counselling needs of the target single parents in Minna Municipal. This finding does not support earlier finding by Blessing (2004) who found out that age range had a significant influence on psycho-social and counseling needs of single mothers. The reason for the current finding may be attributed to the age group of her research, she found out about the age group of single mothers of 35 years and above.

Conclusion

The finding that there was significant differences between the different categories of single parents implies a disaggregated approach to providing interventions with more support going to the more vulnerable single parents (the widows). That the widows and the divorced are the most psycho-social challenged single parents implies they need the most attention from family, policy makers and the counselling professionals. Support by way of consultation, counselling, financial support from

government or charities and humanitarian services need to be provided more to the widows. Being abruptly thrust into the single motherhood status leaves widows with inadequate preparation and capacities for coping. Being full-time house wives originally with expected source of support, they come to single parenthood ill-equipped. Institutional support systems (government/family/community) may need to be increased to provide a safety net for this category of single parents. That number of children affected the psycho-social challenges and counselling needs of single mothers suggests that possible interventions need to consider the number of children single mothers looks after. Also, this has implications for the social services sector of Government should take serious the provision of population control measures such as family planning, in the unfortunate event of death of a spouse which leaves the surviving spouse with troubles of struggling to provide upkeep cope with, emotional stress, educational support requirement, and welfare of the dependents left behind by the departed spouse.

Recommendations

Based on findings from this study, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. Major stakeholders (family/community/government) need to begin to pay more attention to and mobilize greater support for the widowed single mothers who suffer the most psychosocial challenges of single parenting.
2. Social Welfare Departments/Ministry of Women Affairs in all States and Local Government Areas should develop systematic ways for identifying and profiling single parents and their children for relevant professional and related social support.
3. As part of their routine operations suggested in 2 above, social welfare departments and related agencies/NGOs should make available professional family and bereavement counselling and therapy. Specifically, such services can include; divorce counselling, support for widows and child behaviour management skills for all categories of single mothers. That way they would help reduce some of the dysfunctional outcomes from single parent parents.
4. Government should reach out to traditional rulers and communities to educate them on the need to provide recognition and support for single parents. Campaigns should be targeted against negative practices (e.g. widows being accused of witchcraft), stigma and negative attitude of the public towards single parents especially those of children born out of wedlock.

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