

## **Entrepreneurial Empowerment of Single Mothers in Ekiti State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the constraints and motivating factors affecting their skills acquisitions by single mothers in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Results obtained revealed that their single parenthood status were mostly attributed to divorce and unprotected sex. 42% of the respondents were unemployed. Most of the employed respondents acquired skills after their first pregnancies and they claimed to have been engaged in diverse activities to earn wages used to acquire their skills. Most of the unemployed respondents expressed their readiness to acquire skills if enabling environment could be provided. Previous empowerments received by the employed respondents were mostly rendered by relations and co-operative societies. Other agents failed to empower the respondents sustainably. Strategies that would eliminate the identified constraints were recommended.*

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneur, empowerment, single mothers, Nigeria*

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### **I. Introduction**

Single parenthood is an act of raising children or building family without a spouse or partner. Study by Olson and Banyard (1993) revealed that 90% of single-parent families are headed by females. Recent initiatives revealed that a gross increase in single female parenthood abounds in Nigeria. Single female parenthood, otherwise referred to as single mother, may be borne out of natural cause, such as the death of a spouse, or accidental causes, such as divorce of couples, births of children out of unplanned pregnancies, rapes and unprotected sex activities. Single parenthood is now being observed to constitute risks to psychological development, social behaviour and sex-role identification. Its effects on children and parenting cannot be overemphasised. Studies have hypothesized that teenagers belonging to single-parent households are likely to be educationally disadvantaged than those from two-parent households (Taylor, Glynn and Marlow 1984, Samantha 2015). Also Peters (1985) found that differences existed in the way single mothers assign household tasks to their male and female children as single mothers tend to overwork their daughters and under work their sons.

Studies by DePaulo (2009) and Wilcox (2012) asserted that boys raised in single-parent households were more likely to engage in delinquent or illegal behavior, compared to those raised in an intact, married home. Similarly girls raised by single mothers are less likely to be supervised, more likely to engage in early sex, and to end up pregnant compared with girls raised by their own married parents. The children of single parents also spent more time with people in their extended families than did the children of married parents (Schmittroth 1994, DePaulo 2009). Single mothers have less time hence are less likely to be able to monitor their kids. They lacked partner who help in sharing household responsibilities. Single mothers experienced a variety of stressors most especially financial strains (McLoyd et. al. 1994, Karen et. al. 2010). Generally in Nigeria, females are mostly associated with lower earnings, poor access to loans, inadequate public assistance and cultural discrimination. Thus poor single mothers experience a cycle of hopelessness and despair that is detrimental to them and their children. Quite often, many of them are unemployed and live in poverty. Studies by Lindblad-Goldberg (1989), Amato and Keith (1991) revealed that lack of income has been identified as the single most important factor that account for the differences in children from various family forms.

Entrepreneurial empowerment is being considered as an antidote to the prevailing abject poverty in Nigeria. The Nigerian National Policy on Education of the year 2013 described entrepreneurial empowerment as an instrument to develop an individual and the nation. It is concerned with individual identifying an opportunity that is relating to satisfaction of needs and converting it to a product or service of value (Akinyemi 2016). Thus, this study aimed at the examination of the skills acquisition by single mothers in Ekiti State, Nigeria, as a mean of alleviating their economic constraints and improves their standard of living. It is expected that the study will identify the constraints in adopting entrepreneurial skills and the factors that would motivate their adoption.

**II. Methodology**

The study was conducted in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The state (Longitude 4<sup>0</sup> 50' and 5<sup>0</sup> 40' East, Latitude 7<sup>0</sup> 45' and 8<sup>0</sup> 50' North) is located in the south western part of Nigeria. The state is divided into sixteen (16) Local Government Areas (LGAs). Visits were made to each of the LGA of the state where five (5) single mothers were identified and interviewed, thus making a total of eighty (80) respondents. Primary data were obtained through the use of explorative technique, as stated in Akinyemi (2016). These methods included the information discussion, focus group discussion, observation, in-depth interview, case or pilot studies and project methods. The data obtained were analysed using content analysis and presented thematically.

**Findings**

The demographic classification of the respondents is shown in Table 1. They were mostly adults of over 20years old with most of them (83%) having one child that they have given birth to before the age of 18years (85% of the respondents). They were literates (100%) with most of them acquiring secondary education. Many of the respondents conceived when they were in the secondary schools hence they dropped out and were mostly neglected by parents and guardians who regarded their conceptions as shameful and thus resentful. 42% of the respondents were unemployed; most of the employed respondents (42% of the employed) were engaged in the private sector of the economy.

The major grounds of the single parenthood status of the respondents (Table 2) were attributed to divorce (48%,) and unprotected sex with 'boyfriends' (38%). 38% of the respondents had been involved in entrepreneur by acquiring skills in various entrepreneurial enterprises (Table 3) that included dress making and tailoring services (40%, Table 4), hair platting and dressing (33%, Table 4), poultry keeping (13%, Table 4), cake baking (10%, Table 4), fish and snail keeping (3%, Table 4). Most of the respondents (80%, Table 3) acquired the skills after their first pregnancies; only 20% (Table 3) acquired the skills before their first pregnancies. Considerable proportion of respondents in this category claimed to have been engaged in diverse labouring activities to earn wages used in training themselves and/or pay for apprenticeship while acquiring skills in entrepreneur. Most of the unemployed respondents (95%, Table 2) expressed their readiness to acquire skills if enabling environment could be provided. Preferences for such skills were skewed towards dress making and tailoring services (38%, Table 4), hair platting and dressing (30%, Table 4). The enabling environment was identified by all the respondents as capital required for the purchase of relevant equipment, payment of rents for workshops and training /apprenticeship fees.

Table 5 shows the various agents that have motivated respondents already involved in entrepreneurial activities. Previous assistances were observed to have been mostly rendered

**Table 1: Demographic classification of the female single parents**

Feature	Description	Female Single Parents	
		Number	Proportion (%)
Age (Yrs)	< 20	4	5
	20-40	55	69
	> 40	21	26
No. of Child(ren)	1	66	83
	2	11	14
	>2	3	4
Age at First Pregnancy	< 18	68	85
	18-20	7	9
	>20	5	6
Literacy Status	Illiterate	0	0
	Literate	80	100
Educational Status of the Literates			
	Primary Education	0	0
	Junior Secondary Education	28	35
	Senior Secondary Education	46	58
	Tertiary Education	6	8
Employment status	Unemployed	42	53
	Employed	38	48
Classification of the Employed Participants			
	Private Sector	32	84% of the employed
	Public Sector	6	16% of the employed

**Table 2: Grounds of single parenthood among the female participants**

Ground	Respondents (Female Single Parents)	
	Number	Proportion (%)
Career	2	3
Death of partner	5	6
Divorce	38	48
Physical separation from partner	3	4

Rape	2	3
Unprotected sex	30	38

**Table 3:** Acquisition of - and attitude to entrepreneurship by the female single parents

Description	Female Single Parents	
	Number	Proportion (%)
(a) Single Female Parents that have acquired skills	30	38
(i) before first pregnancy	6	20% of (a) above
(ii) after first pregnancy	24	80% of (a) above
(b) Attitudes of the unemployed single parents to:		
(i) readiness to acquire a skill	40	95% of unemployed in Table 1
(ii) not prepared to acquire a skill	2	5% of unemployed in Table 1

**Table 4:** Entrepreneurial skills already acquired by some single female parents

Entrepreneur Skills	Respondents			
	Already acquired		Ready to acquire	
	Number	%	Number	%
Dress making and tailoring services	12	40	15	38
Hair plating and dressing	10	33	12	30
Poultry keeping	4	13	4	10
Cake baking	3	10	7	18
Fish and snail keeping	1	3	2	5

by relations of the respondents and their co-operative societies (57% and 20% respectively). Other agents included religious organisations, political parties, non-governmental organizations and the political parties in the state. The interventions from religious organisations and political parties were discriminatory as they cater for their members only. Past empowerments made by political parties included the distribution of grinding machines, hair drying equipment, sewing machines and cash. Quite often, the interventions from religious and non-governmental organizations were provision of non-formal education programme for youth, single female parents and widows. The interventions from governments and/or governmental institutions, mostly in the form of provision of micro-credit facilities, have been shelved. The programme was characterised with corruption, favouritism and nepotism. This micro-credit that was supposed to be a revolving loan, especially to the resource-poor, was being used as bait for political patronage and often diverted. Many who were privileged to secure the loan refused to pay back. Also, the policies on the micro-credit changes with changes in governments as successive governments were found of jettisoning the programmes of previous government.

### III. Discussion

The single mother examined were teenagers when they got married. Teenage pregnancy is now becoming a phenomenon in Nigeria as about one third of Nigeria teenage population are increasingly getting pregnant. The health, social and economic implications of this trend are enormous. Teenage pregnancy aggravates unemployment rate and poverty. Many of the single mothers in this study were unemployed and are without any meaningful means of sustenance livelihood. At present, over 70% of Nigerians live in abject poverty (Anyebe 2017). Thus entrepreneurship holds the potentials that could enable the single mothers contribute to the economic development in their community. Baba (2013) asserted that entrepreneurship education enables individuals to become capable of living in the society and contribute towards its economic development. This is specifically true of Nigeria where more than half of the population are youths and its economy is a youth economy. Study by Akinyemi (2016) stressed the need for everybody in the society to participate in its economic development. The unemployment of single mothers is therefore a threat to the economy of the country.

**Table 5:** Motivation of the female single parents engaged in entrepreneurship

Motivating Agent	Female Single Parent Beneficiaries	
	Number	Proportion (%)
(a) Single Female Parents engaged in entrepreneurship	30	38
Government(s) / Governmental Agency (ies)	1	3% of (a) above
Non-Governmental Organization(s)	2	7% of (a) above
Co-operative Societies	6	20% of (a) above
Religious Organization(s)	3	10% of (a) above
Political Parties / Individuals	1	3% of (a) above
Relatives	17	57% of (a) above

Divorce was observed to be a major cause of single parenthood in this study. It is the ending of a valid marriage by law. It is usually brought about by lack of trust due to infidelity, extra marital affairs and lying by either spouse to their spouse. The acts of allowing past relationship into a marriage, pride, lack of intimacy,

interference by third parties and nurturing high but unreasonable expectations are other factors responsible for the attainment of divorce. In this study, divorce is complemented by the unprotected sexual intercourse among youths thus resulting to early pregnancy. This act is considered unacceptable and resentful to the society. When such occur, the male participant is often left unpunished while the female bears the brunt. The female is often neglected and ostracized, thus resulting to single parenthood.

Other factors ascribed to single motherhood include rape and widowhood. Rape refers to having forceful canal knowledge of a partner. This act is often practised by men in the study area. Also in this case, the male culprit often escapes justice while the female bears the consequences of the action when such result in pregnancy. Widow, according to Dodo (2010), is a woman who survives her husband. Such woman, according to Nwadinobi (2001) is left in altered life circumstances unprepared and abandoned to brood over her husband's death. Saba (1997) asserted that widowhood could result to the decline of family income and lead to lower self-esteem, insecurity and feelings of inadequacy among the children of the widow. Similarly, Chen (2000) asserts that widowhood could result to social stigma, chaste system, austerity and assertive life pattern and thus make already poor women poorer. In all these situations, entrepreneurial empowerment, especially the acquisition of skills, holds the potentials to alleviating poverty and enhance sustainability of the resulting single mother. Table 3 revealed that only 38% of the respondents acquired entrepreneurial skills prior to the study. Only few of these respondents acquired the skills before they became pregnant. These acquisitions were attributed to inheritance from parents, relations and guardians. They learnt the skills by growing with the skills which were mostly tailoring and hair dressing. The **urge to** make a living need forced majority of the respondents who acquired the skills after pregnancy to do so. 95% of the unemployed respondents were willing to acquire entrepreneurial skills, believing that the acquisition will enhance their income generation and improve their economic status.

Skills preferences (Table 4) were skewed toward dress making and tailoring services as well as hair plating and dressing by both respondents that had acquired entrepreneurial skills and those that were willing to acquire the skills. Preference for tailoring could be attributed to the economic prospect offered by the profession. Okoro (2003) observed that tailoring as a vocation has been practised with remarkable success in Nigeria as cloth wearing is a basic necessity for any sane person. The potential of the skill is further brightened by the increasing preference of Nigerian populace for local attires. Hair plating and dressing is a cultural norm among women in Africa. Thus vocational skill in hair dressing enjoys readily available pool of customers. The skill is easily acquired within a relatively short period of time hence the willingness to acquire this important skill. Also, the levels of education attained by these respondents were adequate enough to practise these skills. However, the need for an enabling environment was stressed by the respondents, that is, the capital required to practise these vocations. Akinyemi (2016) had earlier stressed that capital is a major barrier to entrepreneur in Nigeria.

Capital is required for effective setting up of practising units in these professions. Previous interventions on this were grossly inadequate. Interventions previously enjoyed were dominated by those provided by respondents' relatives and cooperative societies. Rananavare (1964) opines that cooperatives are formed to secure low cost credit, to purchase supplies and equipment for household needs, to market products, even to secure many services, like electric power, irrigation, health, and insurance. Thus cooperatives societies possessed the potentials to benefit people in the everyday needs of life. He contended further that the potentials of cooperative societies can be summed as aiming to provide goods and services, eliminate the unnecessary profits of middlemen in trade and commerce, seek to prevent the exploitation of the weaker members of society, protect the rights of people both as producers and consumers, promote mutual understanding and education among their members and people in general. The religious and non-governmental organizations were reportedly known for the provision of non-formal education to youths, single mothers and widows. This is seen as positive incentive that has contributed to the willingness to adopt entrepreneur skills by the unemployed respondents. A number of studies, such as Omolewa (2000) and Akintayo (2003) have asserted that non-formal education programmes foster participation of recipients in investing in income generation activities that would improve their standard of living.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Entrepreneurial empowerment of single mothers will enable them to identify opportunities that would alleviate their socio-economic and psychological trauma brought on them by natural or accidental circumstances that they did not prepare or prayed for. Thus, they would not only become capable of living in the society but will also contribute to its economic development.

## V. Recommendations

It should be noted that not all single motherhood were borne out of careless sexual activities hence the stigma that the society attached to single parenting should be eliminated. Single motherhood should not be condemned rather they should be supported and **assisted.Policies** that would lessen the economic problems of single mothers should be evolved by the three tiers of governments in **Nigeria.Family** life educators should endeavour to be more involved in promoting strong, stable, two-parent families through provision of public enlightenment campaigns especially in the electronic media such as **radio.Premarital** education programmes should be embarked upon by religious and non-governmental organisations for youths and teenagers. This will prepare them for challenges involved in marriage. Parenting education should be embarked upon in all primary secondary and tertiary education schools, churches, mosques and **communities.Single** mothers should be organised into cooperative societies for effective dissemination of economic incentives, subsidies and micro-credits.

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