

The rise of single parent families sociology essay



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Industrial revolution and development in the areas of information and communication technology, in Europe especially and in the world as general, had formed a major turning point in all aspects of human life. These changes have affected the family structure and its patterns (Maani, 1990).

Due to the rapid social changes, in light of domestic information and communication revolution within the context of globalization that included all aspects of life, and given the predominance of the individual, scientific interest began to focus on studying the ability of the individuals and the families to face their challenges (Lesthaeghe and surkyn, 1998).

Here appears, at the end of the twentieth century, the question that has faced many researchers in the field of family: Is the family still able to meet the emerging challenges faced while doing its functions? Efforts of researchers had continued to show that the family has become unable to meet these challenges, particularly in the area of upbringing of children. At the beginning, studies started focusing on the ability of families to carry out their functions. In addition to developing theoretical concepts in the field of upbringing, as one of the most important functions of the family (Luthar et al., 2000), these studies started to focus on the ability of the individual to face the challenges and adversities. Poor children were the initial primary subjects of the studies, but then the attention spread to examine the capacity of adolescents and then expanded the issue to the elderly (Johnson and wiechelt, 2004).

Freud and a large number of followers have given a major importance to childhood behavior, considering it the critical determinant in defining an

individual's personality. A personality is identified or proved at the age of five and at the beginning of six, and experiences undergone by the child in those years play a key role in the formation of the personality of an adult human being (Turki, 1988).

There has been an increased attention to the subject of single-parent families due to the importance of the role parent plays in childcare. The living and parenting arrangement of single parents diverse. When parents separate, one party usually parents for the majority of the time but most continue to share parenting to some extent with each other.

As some studies suggest, the subject of separation or divorce comes at the top of the reasons behind the increasing numbers of families with one breadwinner in the modern civil societies. There are some other causes such are wars and natural disasters, in which children are the first victims, which lead to the loss of a breadwinner.

In the case of the State of Kuwait, during the exposure of the Iraqi invasion on the 2nd of August 1990, the war left about one thousand and two hundred single-parent families due to death or prison, in a society that does not exceed a population of 650, 000 at the time of abuse (Information Systems Unit – Amiri Diwan -1997).

2. Definition:

What is a single parent?

A single parent (also lone parent and sole parent) is a parent who cares for one or more children without the assistance of another parent in the home.

Single parenthood may occur for a variety of reasons. It could be chosen by the parent (as in divorce, adoption, artificial insemination, surrogate motherhood, or extramarital pregnancy), or be the result of an unforeseeable occurrence (such as death or abandonment by one parent). (Paul and Birks, 2006).

3. Rates of high single-parent families in some communities:

While social phenomenon of single-parent families is invincible in any society, the number of these families has been continuously rising. Kareka (1988) reported that the number of single-parent families is increased throughout the world, especially families with childbearing single mothers.

A study by Myrna and Judith (1994) indicated that the number of single-parent families was doubled within the last two decades in the United States, and that approximately 59% of people live within one these families. According to the U. S. Census Bureau, the number of single mothers increased between 1970 and 2000, from 3 million to 10 million; over the same time frame, the number of single fathers increased also, from 393, 000 to 2 million.

In the UK, the proportion of families headed by a single parent has topped 25% for the first time, reflecting a huge growth in the number of never-married mothers and a significant rise in the divorce rate over the past 30 years (Jehovah`s witnesses Official web site, 2009)

In Australia, nearly 1 in 4 children live with only one of their biological parents. This is usually the result of a breakdown in the parents' marriage or

relationship. It has been projected that one-parent families will increase between 30% and 66% over a 25-year period (ibid).

4. Research Question:

What are the implications of the rise of single parent families?

Single-parent families suffer from multiple problems including the decline in income and educational level, which consequently lead to economical, social and psychological complications (Essa, 1995). According to Al-Zufairi (2000), children of single-parent families suffer from a decline in the level of educational achievement in 44% of the 180 total samples. This later study has also shown that children who live in an intact family are less likely to abandon school at the high school level when compared to children who live in single-parent family. In fact, it was shown in other studies that children of single-parent families are twice as likely to abandon their school at some level compared to other children (Waite, 1995).

Children from single-parent families are more likely later to take jobs at the bottom of the occupational grade with the lower income, and they have high rate unemployment. Some studies show that children raised in single parent families are more likely to live and grow in insolvent economic conditions. Also that these children not only suffer from deprivation at the economic level, but also suffer from a lack of parental care and high rate of change of address, which could negatively affect their development (Smock et al., 1999). Social science shows that the primary cause of poverty and income disparity correlates to the marriage status. Broken families earn less income, and suffer from low educational attainment. To worsen the situation, such

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families pass these conditions to their children, which would exuberate these effects through generations (Fagan, 1999).

In 1981, a study by Clay regarding single-parent families, which took place in 47 states in the US and included a sample of 1200 cases, had shown that 62% of parents believe that their children are not perceived as being normal by their teachers in school. Moreover, most single-parent families suffer from the inability to provide proper experienced guidance to their children to face and solve any social or psychological complications (Al-Zufairi, 2000).

Additionally, single-mother families can face some issues in the upbringing of male children, especially when some side-factors contribute to a decline in the educational success of children such as the emergence of tensions and conflicts within home, and the inability of the mother to manage the family. Such difficulties can be multiplied due to the presence of some external and internal factors such as the presence of young children, lack of good income, in addition to the negative community standing towards the family (Anthony, 1987).

A single care giver will usually develop a sense of loneliness and tension, especially when he/she needs to make important and decisive decisions to the family or one of its members. Certain conditions can increase the worry about raising the children, and the feeling of guilt due to the inability to meet all family demands. Examples of these conditions are the presence of children with special needs, such as disabilities, mental disorders, permanent physiological conditions, or children who are in critical stages of adolescence or at the age of marriage, or an increased number of children within the family (Al-Rashidi, 1994). Anthony, in 1987, has confirmed such facts in his <https://assignbuster.com/the-rise-of-single-parent-families-sociology-essay/>

study about stress and anxiety on 147 children, which estimated the existence of this tension and anxiety to about 65.5% compared to normal children. The Al-Zufairi (2000) also found that the widowed women live in a state of guilt toward their children being deprived of the presence of the father, and this feeling resulted in maternal care based on pampering treatment and provision, or sometimes the excess of cruel punishment as a reaction to the fear of loss of control.

The general systems theory is based on the idea that the system parts are related to each other organically in the sense that means if a change is considered in one part of the system, this change inevitably will affect the interaction between all other parts. This assumption can be applied to whether the system is family or the community as a whole. For the family as a social system, this means that the vulnerability of its members to any event will positively or negatively affect the rest of its members, since family members are closely linked to each other. Consequently, the problems faced by the family are also reflected on society, and with the increased number of single-parent families, we would expect to find an increased number of these problems in the community (Olson and DeFrain 2000).

Due to these facts, an important question arises: Since the family is part of the community, what are the implications upon society due to the problems experienced by single-parent families.

Because of these problems, crimes are produced, but what is a crime? The issue of determining what is a crime has received plenty of attention by scientists in various fields, particularly criminal sociology and criminology,

which resulted in more than one definition. These definitions can vary in their forms, but not in their core idea. Such differences in interests and approaches by scientists in the definition and interpretation of crime may be related to several factors, most importantly is the multiple dimensions of phenomenon of a crime. Crimes are a discharge of multiple factors, which affect and are affected by different social, cultural and legal aspects (Salem, 1991).

Different researchers and scientists addressed different concerns related to crime. Some gave care to the systems and institutions combating crimes, while others cared for the individual patterns of the crimes and the offenders. Different group of researchers focused on certain conducts such as the addiction of drugs, commitment of suicide or bribery. Some only looked at accused individuals, while others combined the accused and the convicted together. Recently, some took a direction into the understanding and interpretation of crimes. Some only looked at the criminality of males, others at the females, and some combined the two.

Such differences in interests resulted in variation of the results, differences of interpretations and views, and the branching of the subject. This article will deal with two types of definitions for the crime: the legal definition and the social definitions:

Legal definition:

Almost all bodies of law share the same ground in defining the crime as “ any act or omission of the behavior that is criminalized by the legislator, and is stated as a public law that penalize the outlaws” (Faraj, 1993, p. 48).

Social definition:

The socialists tend to criticize the legal definition of crime. This criticism is highlighted by: the neglectance of this definition to the social dimensions of crime, as they consider the crime as a social phenomenon, and that criminality is not limited to the legislator, but is also derived from the social reality with what it includes of values and standards (Jafar, 1993). And on this basis, schools of sociology had differences, as well as scholars, in the definition of the crime. These differences have led to the emergence of a number of definitions of crime with social trend. Most known of these is a definition by Sallin, where he says: Crime is a violation of social norms. The fame of this definition comes from being a collection of many of the social considerations since habits, traditions, customs and laws are all social norms (Mizwah, 2000).

5. Relationship between poverty and crime:

One of the Social phenomena that has a strong link with low economical status, and which in turn plays a major role in pushing the individual to exercise the crime is the phenomenon of poverty. Economists often classify poverty as a fundamental economic entry to the interpretation of crime. Poverty connection with crime is not a modern concept. For centuries ago, philosophers and social reformers stressed on that poverty plays an important role in pushing the individuals to the practice of crime. In the past, Socrates said that “ Poverty is the father of the revolution and crime.” Recently, Clark stated that the crimes of poor and deprived people are often empowered by the resentment and hatred towards the rich, and the poor may be carried to exercise crime in order to become rich and gain wealth.

This means that the inhuman conditions of poverty, as Clark says, are what drive the poor to practice crime (Mizwah, 2000).

Many recent studies try to show that poverty is the basic cause of crime. Of the most recent and highly recognized ones is William Bonger's study. It adopted and tried to support the idea, through scientific research and study, that the mental state of offenders can be linked to the economic decline on one hand, and to the disintegration of class on the other (Hasan, 1997).

Ray Jeffery shows the importance of economic factors in the motivation to commit a crime by stating " the main approach to control and prevent a crime has a strong connection to what is known today as the economic analysis of crime. There is also the belief that children of poor families face problems associated with health status, evasion of the school, possibility of drug abuse, theft and others (Hasan, 1981).

In the United States, 50% of children who are sponsored by a single-mother live under the line of poverty, compared to only 1% of children who live in an intact family that live under similar conditions (Craig, 1999). These single-parent families, suffering from a decline in the level of income, are forced to live in poor areas, and it is in those areas where high concentrations of criminals are expected to be found. Edwin Sutherland's theory of differential mixing sees that: the individuals become offenders through mixing with other members who carry values of crime. In areas of sub-cultures, some environments encourage illegal behavior, while is not encouraged in other environments (Almeharib, 2009).

According to Ackerman (1994), the family and through the process of upbringing, is orientating the children towards either a successful and fruitful future, or a vague and failed one. When the family fails to properly raise children, so their future will be marked with numbers of characteristics associated with crime, delinquency, and lack of values, and psychological and emotional deprivation.

Thornberry (1987) had introduced his interactive theory of delinquency. In his theory, he tried to unite multiple other theories to give a comprehensive explanation of delinquency. He designed a dynamic scheme to delinquency, which takes into consideration some factors that have different effects on adolescent behavior during different periods of life. Thornberry suggested three types of delinquency: one is for the early adolescence, a second one for middle adolescence, and a third type for late adolescence.

In Thornberry's first form, the model highlights three important factors that influence the behavior of adolescents in this stage of life (age 11-13):

First is the parental influence. Parents who have a strong influence on their children, whom are in a constant relation with them, and whom are exercising appropriate parental skills with them are more likely to lead their children to adopt the good values, faith, trust and to practice socially accepted behaviors, as the children are kept away from the delinquent friends and acts. While in the case of single-parent families, and in the absence of the father or the mother, an imbalance of the family is likely to happen, which therefore may reduce the positive impact on children.

Secondly is the faith in values and traditions, which has an impact on behavior, and this impact is more apparent in school through creativity. This factor influences the establishment of relationship between the child and other groups of offenders or criminals. The lack of attachment to school does not directly lead to the formation of the bad values of delinquency, but this will occur indirectly, as the non-attendance at school will bring the individual into a direct contact and association with delinquent environment and behavior. So, the adolescents who are attached to their parents, at regular attendance to school, and believe in values and social norms are less likely to be involved in delinquency than those who do not enjoy the relationship with their parents, do not continue to go to school, and do not have faith in these principles. According to Thornberry, attachment to parents, attendance at school and having faith certain beliefs and values are not permanent and fixed forever. These aspects may continuously interact with each other, and thus may either get weaker or stronger during the process growth of the individual. Thornberry also found that the various constraints could be the cause, when interacted and blended with other causes, to lead to delinquent behaviors.

During middle adolescence, Thornberry's second form of delinquency concentrates more on the relationship between the child and the parents, which might reach a relatively excessive and overstated degree of the strength. At this point of the life cycle, the middle period of adolescence, a person may take somewhat delinquent acts for the purpose of expansion beyond home. This is usually observed through the involvement in some certain youth activities in school or at the surrounding of the peers. At this

stage, the ties between the child and the parents, which were once strong, begins to weaken as the child starts to discover new boundaries and additional attractions.

According to Thornberry, another basic change is in the growing seriousness of the delinquent values, and when the delinquency is at its peak, those values become more pronounced and have a stronger influence than any other variables. Such values promote additional delinquent acts.

Furthermore, there are some indicators suggesting that young people, who hold those values, are less likely to be any more connected or attached to their parents, and are less likely to care to study for school.

During late adolescence, Thornberry points to new variables that begin to enter his model. Most important of these variables are: participating at ordinary activities including the jobs, attending collage, or military service. Parallel to the transition to one of these new atmospheres, there is also a similar shift from the original family to a new family that a person starts to establish of his own. Thornberry states that during this stage, circumstances of a person's life will usually change, and the person will encounter some milestone events. It is also likely that the person will take responsibility of new social roles, and will start to establish new interests and new communication networks.

Finally, Thornberry noted the important role of social classes, as he believes that children who come from a lower social class are less attached to the healthy community, more exposed to the values of delinquent friends, and more prone to practice delinquent behaviors. This is in turn related to the

fact that children of weak social background (as is the case of single-parent families) are more likely to have torn-apart families. They are inactive at school, and the environment where they come from influences their traditional beliefs, resulting in the prevalence of high crime rate among this group.

Conclusion:

As it was shown, the world is witnessing a rise in the number of single-parent families, and that there are complications experienced by these families. These complications are parts of other problems that greatly affect the society, which result into an imbalance of its structure and function. It was also demonstrated that crimes are one of the end results that we expect to get as an outcome from these families. With the increasing proportion of these families, would also predict an increasing rate of crimes in the society. This is unless attempts are made to correct these behaviors, and reduce the rate of formation of single-parent families, especially through limiting the rate of divorce.

Results of longitudinal studies on broken families due to divorce, abandonment, desertion, or separation for whatever reason indicate that such homes are more likely to produce delinquency when compared to uni-parent families due by death. Wadsworth suggests that this negative effect is at its peak when children are young. It is likely however that the age at the time of the destruction of the family is irrelevant, since the effect of divorce could probably be a direct cause any way in the creation of delinquencies and crimes.

To the complete contrary, a study by Eisenstadt et al (1989) suggests the exact opposite results; as the deprivation of maternal affection, warmth of family and the surrounding social environment can sometimes translate into bigger ambitions in some individuals, making them more distinct than their peers who were privileged to enjoy living within a normal family. The study also shows that a considerable number of pioneered scientists, engineers, writers and prominent politicians who placed a significant impact in changing the face humanity and the history of relations between cultures, were among those who suffered from family problems focused mostly on the loss of one or both parents. This fact does not advocate for family disintegration as a motive for achievement, but it clearly indicates the existence of hope for the reformers to convert the senses of fear, hesitation, loneliness, introversion, asceticism, hatred and revenge against the society, as a consequence of deprivation, into positive courage that awakens the motivation for becoming overwhelming forces, opening the doors widely for the systematic and methodological interventions to put the appropriate solutions.

In 1981, Atlas reviewed the results of his study on 768 parents and 483 children single parenthood, and he reported that 75% of these families managed to overcome the difficulties as a result of their efforts to cope with their conditions.

Despite the previous discussion, it is clear that the structure of a normal intact family has a positive impact on all components of the welfare of the child, which means greater educational opportunities, and better emotional and physical health.

In short, as stated by McLanahan & Sandefur (1994, p. 190) “ Children who live with both parents do better, on average, than children who live with only one parent.”

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