

THE AGE OF SINGLE PARENTHOOD IS HERE TO STAY - LIVE WITH IT!

Dumisani Hlophe

The age of single parenthood is upon us. Single parenthood is here to stay. It is becoming a common feature of society. There is increasingly a growing number of young men and young women who are actively raising children on their own. Parallel to this growth, is the increasing number of young men and women who are abdicating their responsibility and obligations to raise their little children. In the midst of all this, are children who need to be raised in the manner that they develop and acquire good values so that they grow up to be decent adults.

Three issues are critical here: firstly, how do single parents find a peace of mind and live happily with this situation; and secondly; how should single parents raise their kids to be happy kids; and thirdly, how do we get society to accept that this is a new society phenomenon. That is, accept the situation without ostracizing those that are in the situation.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly sources of the emergence of single parenthood as a feature in society. However, a few assumptions can be made. The first is the decline of man's status as a sole provider in the family. Linked to this, is the growing independence, self assertion, and individual drive by young women. Most of the self assertion and individual drive by young women is as a result of girls accessing education as much as young boys do.

Whilst earlier in history, the inclination by many families was to educate boys, whilst girls were reared to be good wives, today both boys and girls access education with equal measure. Consequently, young women develop as much dreams to be themselves as boys do. Girls therefore, grow up with individualistic dreams, much as boys do: to go far in education; get a great job and earn big bucks; buy or build a big house; and have children. A man, marriage, and marriage to many a young women – is just an option! This is partly because young women now are self sustainable. They can provide for themselves, and in fact, provide for many men for that matter.

This situation does not necessarily drive young women to have children outside marriage, but rather it makes them less tolerant to men's misbehavior. Put more succinctly: it is much easier now for women to dump an errant boyfriend, who may also be the father of a woman's child, than may have been in the past. However, it is equally much easier now for an unmarried father to dump an errant girlfriend and even contest for the custody of a child.

In short, the growth in individualism, self consciousness, self awareness, and self dependency, has seriously led to the decline of the interdependency between men and women. This in turn, had led to marriage in its traditional form of husband and wife, and therefore kids, into decline.

Whilst the traditional marriage remains an important basic institution of society, in the eyes of many in the current young generation, its attractiveness is viewed with suspicion. And the growing attitude is that if one is not getting married, it is just "one of those things" – it is not a "train smash". Thus, the

existence, or even a potential existence of kids, is not a driving force for the youth to get married. Possibly because single parenthood is becoming a common feature of modern societies.

Another reason for the growth of single parenthood is that sex is no longer as sacred as was the case in the past. Sex is much easier to access and do. The values of no sex before marriage are literally out of the window. Unmarried pregnancies no longer attract so much frowns nor punishment by society. Unfortunately, such trend has even crept into High Schools – teenage pregnancies are also on the increase. The growth of commercialization of sex through mass commercial media the world over, has also demystified the sanctity of sex. The growth in partying and drinking in societies liberal in sexual practices has also increase acts of casual sex, and therefore single parenthood.

It needs to be indicated though, that the growth of single parenthood as a key phenomenon in society does not make it an ideal situation for our societies. The traditional family institution of a woman and man living with kids under the same roof remains the ideal situation. Much needs to be done to preserve it. It remains an essential institution to entrench essential family and society values, cultures and traditions. It is an essential institution to build a sense of cohesion, community and society values. These are crucial for the stability of family units and society at large. Thus, society's energies need to be directed to ensure the sustenance of the traditional family unit.

However, single parent headed family institutions are increasingly becoming a real feature of modern societies. They cannot be wished away. They are here to stay. The situation has its own internal dynamics that need to be addressed by those in it, the kids themselves, and society at large. Ultimately, those in this situation, and those affected by it, need to find a peace of mind to appreciate and live happily with this situation. In the next series of this column, we will attempt to address these dynamics and possible remedies.

- ***To book Dumisani to address your Conferences, Workshops, or MC, email: dumisani@kunjalo.co.za. Also catch him on Joburg based radio metrofm Tuesday's 13hrs40.***