

# Feminist Ethics, Single Motherhood and the Question of Child Development

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim and Objectives:** The contemporariness of single motherhood has been growing very and convincing as an emerging way of familyhood, and this is in relations with the challenging natures of child development, especially by educating the young as many of them are products of unplanned and planned single parenting, more notably, the single mothers. This is owing to the natures of the emerging divergent social values and ideological interests on marital relevance and continence and on the complexity of the willingness of the female folks to submit to the ontological authority of male folk in marriage. It recognized that the issues associated with moral state of living in terms of “mothers” rather than “wives” endeavour is based on the capacity to raise alone the children of such arrangement showed the level of individual responsiveness and resilience.

**Methodology:** Employing phenomenological method of analysis, the paper projects that importance of educating the human society on the values of feminist ethics as approaches in handling the societal perception of single motherhood and developmental conditions in educating the children independently of the “fathers:”

**Findings:** The raising of the young by single mothers has been more evaluated to be accidental than being pre-meditated or pre-planned. Such issues are contemporarily been hinged on the contexts of feminist ethics, where the female folks, especially as victims or planned vendors of single parenting, are ethically justified in advocating the societal values and acceptance to normalize such social conditions or situations, rather than being victimized or traumatized or demoralized, as a way sustaining their dignity and values.

**Conclusion:** It concluded that with proper education on the growing nature of single motherhood, the society will be readily understood the thrust values of feminist ethics on trying to justify the contemporary conditions of women as “only mothers rather than “wives” in our emerging society of divergent social and moral responsiveness.

**Keywords:** Child Development, Education, Feminist Ethics, Human Values, Parenting, Responsibility/Responsiveness, Single Motherhood.

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## **Introduction**

The world of values defines what we do as subjects of lived experiences. This conception of development is centred mostly on the kinds of education that we possessed over times and readily to change the society we live, owing that, we are products of families. Hence, it is most generally perceive that the courses of child development are the meaningfully seated on the responsibilities of both parents in collaboration with the teachers and the whole community of persons (cf, Izibili and Isanbor 2018: 159). The most important aspect of responsibility is seated on the availability of both parents. Meanwhile, in our recent times, we are witnessing one-sided parenting, which is heavily driven towards the responsibility of single mothers in most cases, and then, the society is now questions such educational socialization and development in references to the sustained human values in the future.

Observably put, the trending values of single parenting have been driving heavily towards the women folks and their natural hinged-tracking responsiveness to hold on to the care of the children (Kanu and Adidi 2022: 88). This is seen as against the men-folks as single fathers in the same society, and it has resiliently encouraged such social and societal stereotype, and then, pushing the societal pressure on the exercise of feminist ethics to defend such social conditioning as a way of living (Kanu and Ndubisi 2022: 196). This is the heavily dependable on the nature of child development. This questions the ethics for the evaluation of the education of the children and the nature of their future, as products of single parenting, especially the single mothers, with due family influences of their fathers. This is hinged on what the single mothers can offer as ‘first educators’ of the young alone, without the complete nuptial-emotional supports of the fathers.

For many thinkers project that the nuptial-emotional supports have indispensable influences on the authentic child development as products of the family (Isanbor 2020: 50). This nuptial-unity of the father and mothers projects the social-facial existentiality on the lives of the young. Hence, with the evaluation of the ethics of care on the values of human living, it has been greatly observed that the majority of single mothers are women and mothers who are mostly the primary caregivers in a single parenthood family as a result of divorce or unplanned pregnancy (See, Adidi and Uche 2022: 280). Single fathers have been the less common caregivers in the past, presumably due to the father working most of the day resulting in less bonding or intimacy with the innocent children, or possibly a young child needing to still nurse, or grandparents, if childcare was necessary (Cf, Irabor and Adidi 2022: 120). In this study we shall be looking critically about the nature of singing mothers in order to evaluate it, based on the cause and effect of single motherhood.

## ***Research Purpose***

The research is directed to achieve the understanding of the social and moral characterization of the trending nature and the impending social stereotype of single motherhood in reference of its moralization by the some contemporary feminist ethicists, and then leading the evaluation of the training and educating of the young as products of such process of socialization and civilization. This demands that one’s personal desire or will to be freely independent or being ethically occasioned as not to be under the authority of the others (a man or a husband), should not becloud the original consciousness and values of natural law and order.

## ***Theoretical Framework***

The theoretical framework of analysis adopted the operational thought of feminism. This is in order to interrogate the reality of single motherhood as an emerging way of living by assessing its feminist-ethical biases or values, especially in relations with the education of the young as products of such development. This is by using the philosophical altercation of the employment of feminist ethics as a basis of valued-choices of the single mothers in the midst of other valued-choices which inform their quests for the exercises of independent freedom as individuals who desired and deserved to have children and then train them without due responsive references to the supposed fathers of the same children.

### ***Motivation of the Study***

It has been greatly observed that the education of the young have been very challenging and compromising. This is mainly due to the changing face of the values of marriage in the pavilion of many sexual unions and orientations. Such observation is hinged on the situational and self-imposing practice of single parenthood, especially the societal modeling of single motherhood. It is observed that the education of the young by both parents are becoming more challenging and tasking, not to consider the situation where such duties of parenting are being done by single parents, especially single mothers. This is by looking out for the possibility in checkmating the courses of single motherhood, as the society is more troubled about the integrality of the education of the young, the products of model of social orientation and development

### ***Research Questions***

Hinged on the motivation of the study, the following research questions were raised:

1. What is the basis understanding of feminism, feminist ethics and single motherhood?
2. What are the causes of single motherhood?
3. Of what relevance is feminist ethics trying to sustain the moral responsiveness of single mothers in the contemporary living?
4. How can the young be duly trained and educated in the civilization driving the sustainability of the culture of single motherhood?

### ***Research Objectives***

Owing to the research questions raised that will necessitate the understanding of the purpose of the paper, the following clauses are the objectives to be achieved:

1. To assess the contemporary perceptions and understanding of feminist ethics in relation to contemporary trending of the morality of single motherhood
2. To assess the causes of single motherhood?
3. To examine the indispensable relationship between the reality of single motherhood in reference to the educational development of the young as human persons.
4. To explicate the motive of feminist ethics to trying to sustain the dignity of women as single mothers in the midst of current societal criticisms and moral aversions.

### ***Relevance of the Study***

The study will be significantly useful to parents and policy makers on the nature of education of the young in relation to their parental upbringing and on the social status of the parents, especially as single mothers. It will further encourages the single mothers to seriously take into consideration the needs to long so reasonably the proper education of their young, in order to overcome some psychological imbalance of the young as being the products of incomplete parents, and as the agents of a more morally and socially challenging future. This is to create and sustain some sense of social order and harmony as it relates the education for character formation and reformation of the children, irrespective of the social status of their parents.

### ***Research Methodology***

The phenomenological method of enquiry was adopted. With it, the study was engendered to assess the effects of the feminist ethics on the social acceptability and reliability of single motherhood as one of the natures of single parenthood, just as the trending model of socialization and civilization, in relation to the

education of the young in our contemporary moral challenging society, especially in the very pace developing nations.

### ***Clarification of Terms:***

**Feminism:** Feminism has many different interpretations and meanings; it has no set definition. According to their respective social, political, religious, and cultural perspectives, feminists from many walks of life define feminism, and it has been seen as a movement designed to fight some existing protocols of socialization and civilization, especially against women rights (Kanu and Ndubisi, p. 197). Feminism can be observed, according to *Cambridge Dictionaries*, as the idea that women should have equal access to opportunities, power, and rights as men or the set of acts intended to create this state, and be treated in the same manner. Feminism, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, is the belief in the social, economic, and political conceptualization and operation of "gender equality", especially directed towards the liberation of the women in the patriarchal society. With the advocacies for gender equality, many social, cultural, and political movements have being in the operational in the lives of the fast growing civilizing and modernizing society, and these many international women organizations along different academic professions. With these, many ideologies and moral philosophies have been focusing on gender inequality and women's equal rights. Feminist (which can be a male or female) is a person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes. The feminist aims to terminate all forms of male domination. Feminist research focuses on gender and tries to establish gender equality in the world (Haradhan 2022). In a general sense, it could be seen as a theory that detests what is known to be sexism, misogyny and also patriarchy. Thus it is not just a mere word but a way of living, struggling against the normal societal conditioning (Finlayson 2016).

**Ethics:** This is about the evaluation of the activities expressed and choices made owing to one's level of responsibility and mental capability. It is about the accessibility of one's sense and value of freedom in reference to the lives of other persons in a society. Ethics or moral philosophy is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior (See, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2018). Ethics as we know have to do with 'what is', that is, the oughtness of the actions of the human person in reference to the values of the society which he or she belongs to. However, the human person as a conscious being has to be moral, because, it is morality and the sense of duty and responsibility that guide the wholeness and orderliness of any given society, constituted or otherwise. In contemporary time, the conception of ethics is known as virtues and vices representing good and bad actions or choices respectively.

**Feminist Ethics:** The issues of feminist ethics are of the general contents of gender ethics. Gender ethics can be broadly defined as the branch of ethics concerned with the moral and social implications of gender and its relationship to power and privilege (Stefano and Daiz 2018). It encompasses the examination of gender roles and expectations, gender-based discrimination and violence, and the intersections of gender with other social identities such as race, class, and sexuality (Kanu and Ndubisi 2022). At its core, gender ethics seeks to challenge and disrupt gendered power structures that contribute to inequality, oppression, and harm. This may involve critiquing traditional gender norms and hierarchies, promoting gender equity and justice, and advocating for the rights and dignity of individuals who are marginalized on the basis of their gender identity or expression (Irabor and Adidi 2022). Some key issues within the field of gender ethics include: Gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, assault, and domestic violence, and the ways in which social and cultural norms contribute to this violence. Following the thoughts of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Chimamanda Adichie, the ethics of gender identity and expression include the debates around the legitimacy of trans-identities, non-binary identities and the moral responsibilities of institutions and individuals towards those who identify outside of the gender binary. It specifies the role of gender recognition in political and economic systems that include the ways in which gendered power dynamics shape access to resources, opportunities, and representation (Kanu and Adidi 2022). Overall, gender ethics is concerned with promoting ethical and just practices that reflect an understanding of the complexities and nuances of gender and its impact on individuals and society as a whole.

**Single Motherhood:** The understanding of the single motherhood can be easily inferred from that of motherhood, as a mother is a female person who is pregnant with, or gives birth to a child. This is used as a form of address for such a woman as an up-bringer of another form of life (Osaghale 2023). While, a woman is also a female person who is extremely fond or lovingly devoted to a specified type of things in forming, raising and sustaining a family with a man as her husband, and to be under the authority of a man as a head and lord. Hence, single motherhood refers to the state or condition in which a woman raises a child or children without the presence or support of a partner or spouse. It is characterized by the absence of a co-parenting relationship and the primary responsibility of a mother in providing emotional, financial, and practical support to her child or children (Daly 2011). Single motherhood can occur due to various circumstances, such as divorce, separation, the death of a partner, or choosing to have a child as a single parent through methods such as adoption or assisted reproductive technologies. Single mothers often face unique challenges, including financial strain, limited social support, and the need to balance parenting responsibilities with work or education commitments.

### **The Causes of Single Motherhood**

**Partner Death:** The death of a partner was a common cause of single parenting. Maternal diseases and Death frequently resulted in widow caring for her children. At times, wars may deprive a significant number of families of a parent. Improvements in sanitation and material care have reduced mortality among women of reproductive age, making death a less common among women (Cf, Kanu and Adidi 2022: 88).

**Divorce:** One of the most serious problems in family life that leads to single motherhood is marital breakdown. Today, divorce occurs for a variety of reasons, including adultery, cruelty, desertion, drunkenness, and failure to provide, vagrancy, criminal conviction, separation, bigamy, incompatibility, fraudulent representation, misconduct, and many others (Se, Alban 2016: 46). This is also one of the reasons why some people in society are not morally or socially stable. Divorce contradicts God's will and undermines God's plan for marriage and family life. In most cases, the psychological and financial trauma of divorce is worse than bereavement for women. All divorcees require open ears to hear their grievances and hopes. When there are no grandparents, single mothers must share their burdens with other families. Single mothers are made up of two major groups: one consists of mothers with children from a previous marriage, and the other consists of mothers who have never been married. There is also a small group of mothers who are married but whose spouses are not living in the household. In the past five decades, the share of never married mothers among all families with children has increased from less than 1% to 11%. The share of mothers who are divorced, separated or widowed increased in the 1960s and 1970s and has remained relatively stable since 1980, hovering around 12% to 13% in the past three decades.

**Unwanted Pregnancy:** Another reason for single parenting is unintended pregnancy. Some out-of-wedlock births are planned, but many are unplanned. Where society accepts out-of-wedlock birth, it could lead to single parenting (Isanbor and Ukagba 2023). When it is not acceptable, it may result in forced marriage; however, such marriages fail more frequently than the other (Irabor and Adidi 2022). Mothers who have unintended pregnancies and their children face a slew of adverse health consequences, including an increased risk of violence and death, and the children are less likely to be cared for, more likely to live in poverty, and more likely to be involved in crime (Brown 1995).

**Single Parent Adoption:** Adoption is the legal act in which at least one adult, who is not the biological parent of the child adopted, assumes the responsibilities of parenthood and is recognized as that child's parent. Traditionally, only married couples could adopt, though adoption by single parents or unmarried couples is not generally prohibited in many societies. Adoption by a couple is morally and emotionally superior to adoption by a single parent. On another feat, the adoption of special needs children and older children by a single parent is frequently preferable to institutionalization. In this case, many institutions and organizations are duly concerned for the legitimization of such adoption, but it is greatly encouraged, as permissible, by married couples, not by perceived or admissible single parents or gay unions.

## **Feminist Approach to Single Motherhood**

Feminism and motherhood have had a complex and in many ways troubled history. This history goes back at least as far as the late nineteenth century, when early feminists felt that as "mothers of the race" they could speak for all women, rich and poor, black and white, and could present solutions that would work for all women and for all mothers (Kanu and Ndubisi 2022). The feminist approach to single motherhood is one that is based on the fact that these group of women have the interest of relevance in the society which should not be thrown aside. It also seen that there are some challenges which seems to evident in the act of single parenting or motherhood which they, the Feminists detests. Thus, the Feminist approach to single parenting or motherhood is one that is based on these arguments and factors, as well as the following claims.

**Structural Factors:** Some feminists argue that the prevalence of single motherhood is not solely a result of individual choices, but also reflects broader structural factors and inequalities in society. They point to factors such as limited access to contraception and reproductive healthcare, gendered expectations and roles, and inadequate support systems for mothers. These feminists call for systemic changes to address these underlying factors and create more supportive environments for single mothers. It is important to note that feminist perspectives on single motherhood are not monolithic, and there are differing viewpoints within the movement. These themes provide a general overview of some key arguments found in feminist discussions on single motherhood, but they do not capture the full complexity and diversity of feminist perspectives on this topic.

**Challenging Stigmatization:** Feminists often emphasize the importance of challenging the social stigma and stereotypes associated with single motherhood. They argue that negative attitudes towards single mothers perpetuate gender inequality and contribute to the marginalization and discrimination faced by these women (Almeling 2017). The waves of the feminist ethics call for a shift in societal attitudes to recognize and support the diverse experiences of single mothers, emphasizing their resilience and strength in keeping and sustaining the values of the children as the products of such stigmatizing sexual activities.

**Economic Inequality:** Single motherhood is closely tied to economic factors, as many single mothers face financial challenges (Adin and Kafalas 2005). Feminists highlight the need for policies and social structures that address economic inequality and provide adequate support for single mothers (Hooks 2002). This includes advocating for accessible childcare, affordable housing, paid parental leave, and fair employment opportunities.

**Intersectionality:** Feminist discussions on single motherhood often incorporate an intersectional lens, acknowledging the ways in which race, class, sexuality, and other social identities intersect with gender to shape women's experiences. Intersectional feminists argue that single mothers from marginalized backgrounds may face compounded disadvantages and systemic barriers. They advocate for an inclusive and intersectional approach to understanding and addressing the needs of single mothers.

**Choice and Urgency of Responsibility:** Feminist perspectives on single motherhood also recognize women's autonomy and reproductive choices. They argue that women have the right to decide whether to become single mothers and that society should respect and support their decisions. Feminists challenge the notion that single motherhood is inherently undesirable or a result of irresponsibility, highlighting the diverse reasons why women may choose or find themselves in this position.

## **Result and Discussion**

### ***Single Motherhood, Feminist Ethics and the Education of the Human Person***

Considering its effects from its causes of single motherhood, the study is directed towards the understanding of the fast emerging culture of single motherhood as a institutionalizing way of living, where the value of marriage normally and naturally between a man and a woman is gradually being undermined by very those who believed and then still believing on the exercise of the sexual freedom

outside the domestic and legalized bound of marriage. It is also hinged on the effort to see the possibility of reducing the valued-consciousness towards the social embrace of single parenthood by the faulting the feminist ethics which is devoted in promoting the culture of single motherhood specifically. We will understand that many marriages end in single parenting due to couples' inability to manage their marital causes (Isanbor and Ukagba). As a result, children of single mothers suffer primarily in terms of social, economic, and academic performance. Babies born to unmarried parents appear to be more prone to poor performance in school. Nwa-Chu emphasizes that children from single-mothers homes have frequently experienced great disruption and have witnessed bitterness and emotional tensions in their parents, which can leave them with feelings of insecurity that may affect their social life (Nwa-Chu 1994).

It is often more difficult for single parents to keep track of their children's activities. Children are subjected to stress in a variety of ways, including the enduring of neglect, and sexual, emotional and physical abuse. Children, regarded as precious in the sight of God, may be seen as, and sadly often are, innocent victims of irresponsible adult behavior (Francis 1995). Single mothers frequently experience feelings of isolation and loneliness; therefore, they require healthy friendship. Many people experience financial difficulties and require debt counseling. When left to raise children alone. They frequently lack practical support and are frequently cut off from any meaningful social life of their own. A single parent widow was missing her husband, the person who would protect and provide for her. Even at subsistence level, it is difficult for her to survive. She is vulnerable to exploitation and is being denied her most fundamental rights.

Hence, with the contemporary reasons, premarital sexual intercourse is strictly encouraged and promoted with our modes of socialization and civilization of values inference to the family development, and this has the major basis of single parenthood as many young adults are not preparing to the ready for marriage and family life (Griffiths 1995). From the social definitions, sexual relations between unmarried people are referred to as fornication, and the many social ethicists condemn such sexual behavioral pattern as a mode of civilization. The word *Porneia*, which is commonly translated as "fornication" in many religions literature, is an umbrella term for all forms of extramarital sex. Fornication is wrong, according to societal ethicists, but there are significant differences in interpretation of the realities of sexual promiscuity. Many people interpret the societal prohibition on fornication as a blanket condemnation of all extramarital relations, but, in most concerns, as indirect promotion of same sexual activities as a definitive mark of modern civilization based on the values of individual freedom. Others believe that the ethical veto does not apply to intercourse between committed but legally unmarried couples who are in a deep relationship, and the society functions to promote the dignity of marriage by reserving sexual activities only for the married.

We should live to sustain the dignity of marriage (the union of a man and a woman) in the faces of the emerging sexual unions and orientations, of which, some of them have gained legitimization and many of them are seeking legitimization, as against the operation of the natural law principles. Some of them are development as a result of challenging factors that determine the values of the human family. Evidence does not show that family disruption is the principal cause of high school failure, poverty, and delinquency. If all children lived in two-parent families, teen motherhood and idleness would be less common. Some might suppose family disruption has a larger effect on black and Hispanic children since they come from less advantaged backgrounds. Average white child's dropout rate is 150 percent higher than the average Hispanic child's and 76 percent for the average black child. College graduation rate for white children from advantaged backgrounds is about 9 percentage points lower among children of disrupted families. At the other end of the continuum, children from disadvantaged backgrounds have a bleak future regardless of whether both parents graduated from high school.

The possibility of divorce remains in the domain of human actions and choices also strongly affect the education of the young. The contemporary consciousness for the realization of integral development of the human person projects that parents contemplating divorce need to be informed about the risks to their children when their marriage breaks up. They already knew the consequences of the actions and choices,

and should work to create social order in the married relations in reference to the education and development of their young. But, for many feminists, making divorce more difficult will only make marriage less attractive, relative to cohabitation. Poor and near poor two-parent families receive virtually nothing in the way of government-subsidized help with child care. In actions and in acting, the individual as a being of development and as a subject of lived experiences, sees or realize his or her very self as somebody, not as something or anybody. Something and anybody can be materially dehumanized as lacking some ontological dignity as irreducible entity. Somebody has irreducible dignity as a person who acts with all sense and qualities of transcendental valuing. Nobody is somebody, and somebody is very person, as he or she is integrally human and fully existential with all rights and dignity intact. With these distinctions of existence, the products of the single motherhood remain somebody and they have rights to be educated integrally in order to have a save and orderly society.

The feminist ethics, from all indications, have been trying to normalize or moralize the culture of single parenthood, especially single motherhood, as a way of living, with little or no societal pressure to see the single mothers as failure individual, in terms of not being married. This may not be the true consents to sustain the world though authentic companionship and procreation. Hence, the feminist ethics see the conditions that led and still leading to the culture of single mother as what the society in general should be blamed and long to correct, not by the individuals, especially women or mothers without social advantages or wills, rather than privileges, to be married. The ethics see the possibilities of the single mothers to be readily stable and psychologically welcoming to face the societal pressure, to be themselves as responsible individuals with the purposes of bringing up or training the young as duly expected.

In all, this paper recognized that many cultures behold that the proper training of the young is more visible and sustainable in well traditionally institutionalized families, which have the loyal influences of both parents, that is, the father and the mother. It also recognized that the parenting will be more challenging for the single mothers in the cultures where the institutionalized roles of the fathers in the training of their young are highly indispensable. But, the contemporary wave of feminist ethics, following the unrelentingly advocacies for the promotion, protection and respect of women rights, ethically project the social tolerance for the culture of single motherhood, and hopefully seek the collaboration of the society, by empowering the single mothers, in believing that they can duly and responsibly educate their young, considering the contemporary challenges associated with human development and authenticity, as many of them are already doing in the our patriarchal-driven society.

## **Conclusion**

The study recognized that the needs for the society should long for the restoration of the values of marriage in the minds and affairs of the youths, which is the union between a man and a woman. It should desire this development of the youths and their social consciousness through the re-orientation of the minds on the values of family and for the knowledge on the ways of nuptial freedom can be submitted in building a marital relationship. For this development, the voice of the feminist ethicists to sustain or socially and politically restore the values and dignity of women in the faces of social-moral challenges should be encouraged by policy-makers and administrators, but not to promote the ideas of socialization that might be undermining the values of marriage (a union of a man and a women), especially through the championing the values of single motherhood for the institutionalization of their independent freedom.

Therefore, the society should love to re-learn and then restore the understanding of the developmental consciousness which situate that the proper education of the young is better realized by the combine efforts, duties and responsibilities of both parents (a man as the husband and father and a woman as the wife and mother) who have lovely established a family, recognizing that the world is a product of the family. This is owing to the fact that the contemporary times are demanding heavily from every institution, especially the family, the courses of the restoration of true and integral humanism, for a world that has been besieged with many sexual unions and orientations, capable of leading the world to its



extinction, if humankind do not return to the valuation of the dictates of the natural law through the same education.

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