

A Phenomenology on the Dual Roles of Solo Parents in Public and Private Educational Institutions

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Abstract:- The emergence of non-traditional families changes the landscape of social roles in our society today. These social roles are products of families conceived through single parenthood, mixed marriage, foster family, and blended family among others. For this research venture, the main focus is to determine the dual role of single or solo parents in an educational institution and specifically determine their challenges, adjustment, parental role and acceptance, and the discrimination or stigma they encountered. Using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), five solo or single parents served as the co-researchers selected using a snowball sampling procedure based on set criteria. Data were gathered using unstructured questionnaires, interview protocol, and observation. The findings suggest that the financial aspect was the primary challenge encountered by solo parents. Additionally, implementation of the law for solo or single parents was not comprehensively undertaken, and there were limited programs to address the psychological challenges posed by being a single parent. Furthermore, discrimination was not an issue to contend with. The results of the study suggest that further looking into the government support and the implementation of the laws relative to single parenting to maximize the benefits provided for them, creation of peer group support, and establishing of a counseling program or helpline can be done to address the psychological issues confronting single parents. Future researchers can do validation research using single parents working in different institutions or living in a rural community and use other variables across different socioeconomic statuses, gender, and age with a larger sample.

Keywords:- Solo/Single Parents; Counseling; Solo Parent Act; Discrimination.

I. INTRODUCTION

Family is the basic unit of society. The foundation of a strong, reliable, and sustainable society lies primarily in the strength and cohesiveness of the family. The Philippine Constitution recognizes that family is the foundation of the nation while it fosters the solidarity and total development of Filipino families. Change is constant and the basic unit of society, the family, is not spared from it since it is composed of human beings who naturally adapt to the environment to survive. The environment is continually changing prompting people to change their interaction with it and one another also. To this, we are challenged as Filipinos to see if the changes we welcome in our homes are working to our advantage, do these promote better relationships and worthwhile companionship among family members and families in the society?

The structure of a family is drastically changing. Today, the commonly known "nuclear family" is no longer the dominant type of family. Presently, non-traditional types of families such as single-parent families, foster families, blended families, and others have become even more common than the so-called traditional family consisting of a mother, father, and children. One of the most common types of family today is the solo or single-parent family: headed by mothers, fathers, and even by a grandparent raising their grandchildren. Everything has a consequence. Notwithstanding the external forces affecting families, it is fundamental that the role of each family member is clearly defined.

Single parents are known to be solo parents separated from their partners and raise their children independently and also manage the household and carry the burden of supporting the child's development, (Garcia, Lim, Pascua, Santiago & Tus, 2021). The American Psychological Association (APA, 2019) describe single-parent families as consisting of mothers, husbands, and even grandparents bringing up their grandchildren. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) reported from a recent survey that the Philippines has around 15 million single parents, of whom 95% are women, or more than 14 million. The WHO (2020) report justifies the claim of

Cruz's paper that some 15% of the 100 million Filipino population are solo parents – close to the 20 million estimates given by the Federation of Solo Parents.

The Philippines as a predominantly conservative Roman Catholic country cannot change the structured perspective that society conforms to single parents' condition. Professor Grace Cruz (2014) of the University of the Philippines Population Institute, argued that the reality exists that "the Filipino family is in transition." Cruz (2014) stresses that family nowadays can be formed in various ways other than a heterosexual union. These include single parenthood, live-in arrangements, LGBTQ relationships, and blended families. This transforms the very essence of the governing laws that pertain to the sanctity of a traditional family. The Family Code of the Philippines concerns primarily the traditional setup of the family; thus, it will boil down to the question of the government's responsibilities to protect the welfare of the families outside of the traditional setup.

Single parenting becomes a challenge, specifically for a single mother because it takes a single parent to balance two individuals' roles with raising children and running the house simultaneously making these challenges contribute to solo parents' living experience that results in factors that describe and affect their way of living. These perspectives devalued solo parents' worth and changed the sense of purpose and responsibility in their household. The hardships that they do are less to be recognized and appear to be downgraded.

The Solo Parents' Welfare Act or RA 8972 defines a single parent or solo parent as any individual who falls under any of the following categories: a) woman who gives birth as a result of rape and other crimes against chastity; b) parent left solo or alone with the responsibility of parenthood due to death of spouse; while the spouse is detained or is serving sentence for a criminal conviction for at least one (1) year; due to physical and/or mental incapacity of spouse as certified by a public medical practitioner; due to legal separation or *de facto* separation from spouse for at least one (1) year; due to declaration of nullity or annulment of marriage; abandonment of spouse for at least one (1) year; 3) unmarried mother/father who has preferred to keep and rear her/his child/children instead of having others care for them or give them up to a welfare institution; 4) any other person who solely provides parental care and support to a child or children; 5) any family member who assumes the responsibility of head of family as a result of the death, abandonment, disappearance or prolonged absence of the parents or solo parent. The benefits under RA 8972 are generic: livelihood and counseling services, flexible working hours, and additional leave credits at work. Concerned agencies are also required by law to give single parents opportunities for low-cost housing, medical assistance, and scholarships for their kids. The government and other civic organizations uphold the rights and privileges of solo parents, however, other facets of the life of solo parents need to be

addressed. The scenario mentioned above became the foundation of the researcher to venture into the research that will explore the dual responsibility of single parents to create programs or support groups that will address their challenges.

➤ *Purpose of the Research*

The study attempted to determine the lived experiences relating to the dual roles of single or solo parents in private and public educational institutions. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

- How do single or solo parents face challenges in their daily lives, and why do they consider those challenges?
- How do they provide for the needs of their child?
- How do they raise their children as single or solo parents?
- What are the benefits that the government provides as perceived by single or solo parents?
- What is the impact of single-parent families on the welfare of members?

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

Parenting manners play a major role in the development of children; however, it is difficult to isolate the specific mechanism of influence (Johnson, et. al., 2012). In its truest sense, parenting style affects the behavior of their children, especially, if children are raised singlehandedly by a parent. The idea of the dual role of single parenting is a very sensitive matter in our family system especially since we are predominantly a conservative Catholic country. The fundamental effects of these may bring risk factors for emotional and behavioral problems among children and adolescents. Solo parenting family may be comprised of a single mother or a single father having their dependent children and as such they are created in several ways, maybe the death of one parent, divorce, or separation due to the job or service condition of the spouse (Inatay, Lifestyle Domains of Single Parents, 2013). Singlehood is defined as an identity in which the individual is not coupled with another person nor is in a non-conventional coupled status (De Paulo, 2005).

Single parenthood is confronted with so many challenges, especially among female parents. Del Mundo, Macanlalay & Del Mundo, (2019) in their research said that female solo parents must possess a lot of strength and budgeting skills as they are most of the time financially challenged. Indeed, motherhood is a demanding role for a woman because she is left with the responsibility of raising her child alone, a responsibility normally shared by two people. Solo mothers become the primary caregiver to their children, the primary economic providers, and the sole decision maker in their family as such they are susceptible to encountering stressors, such as psychological stress, financial problems, and adjustment problem. The life experiences of solo parents are a worldwide trend, in the study conducted by Brawer (2018), she stated that single mothers face unique challenges that increase their risk of depression. The majority of the studies tackling depression in

mothers are quantitative and fail to discuss their lived experiences. In that case, the experiences of growing adult offspring are most of the time not taken into consideration. The said study is a phenomenological and constructivist approach that explored the lived experience of emerging adults from single-parent families who perceive their mothers as depressed. Fifteen women between the ages of 18 and 25 who grew up with a single mother as the primary parental figure were interviewed using a semi-structured interview. Interviews were transcribed and data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological approach. Eleven major themes emerged from the data. These themes include (a) Mothers' Lack of Engagement/Participation in Caregiving, (b) Feeling Responsible for/Protective of Mother, (c) Difficulty Living with/Unable to Live with Mother, (d) Emotion Focused Coping in Childhood and Adolescence, (e) Current Coping Mechanisms in Emerging Adulthood, (f) Social Support, (g) Forced Self-Reliance, (h) Negative Affect as Response to Maternal Depression (i) Negative Impact on Interpersonal Relationships (j) Negative Impact on Emerging Adults' Own Mental Health, and (k) Interview as a Self-Reflective Process. Additionally, in the research of Hong (2011), 6 relevant themes emerge including a). enduring the burdensome; b). survival means living day-by-day; c.) living in the shadows of insomnia, depression, and suicide; d). living with rejection and social isolation; e). living with uncertainty; and f). transcending difficult times through being resilient. The results are somehow relevant to the findings of several studies in the context of Filipino solo parents.

In the study of Zabala (2016), it was found that the primary challenges encountered by solo parents include personality problems, behavior patterns, and social and emotional problems. In like manner, Del Mundo, Macanlalay & Del Mundo (2019) in the study found seven themes associated with solo parenting of mothers that include Absence of a Partner, Conflicting Responsibilities, Child Care, Social Support, Willing Endurance, Spiritual Guidance, and Self-Care. This is the picture of the challenges endured by a solo mother.

Another research conducted by Haudar, Guhao, Jr. & Rodriguez (2016) explored the live experienced of male solo parents and they found that as regards solo male parents' experiences in raising their children, the following themes emerges such as fears and insecurities, misery, fortitude, responsibility overload, setback and dividend of sacrifice, spending time together, staying in control, developing character, time management, and building support system. The research of Garcia, Lim, Pascua, Santiago & Tus, (2021) shows that financial problems and emotional support are the primary concerns of solo parents.

According to Frost (2019), the low-income single mother populations are commonly experiencing larger numbers of mental and physical illnesses and social isolation due to the cumulative effects of food insufficiency, lack of physical

safety, poor physical and/or mental health, financial distress, lack of daycare for full-time employment, social stigma, and discrimination. Tucker (2016), as cited in the work of Frost, stated that a much larger percentage of diverse female-headed families are poor. Their lived experience can further be burdensome due to different factors such as singlism, prejudice against low-income single mothers, and other forms of discrimination.

In the same manner that the solo parents are addressing these challenges, several coping mechanisms were identified to be employed such as s used both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, but the nature of the problem dictates the strategy to be employed (Del Mundo, Macanlalay, & Del Mundo, 2021); spending time together, staying in control, developing character, time management, and building support system (Haudar, Guhao, Jr & Rodriguez, 2016).

In terms of parenting, the study of Garcia, Lim, Pascua, Santiago & Tus, (2021) more likely to be non-restrictive, particularly in teaching their children; solo parents prioritize giving time for recreation/bonding with their children, the solo parents viewed bonding with the children as their one tool to battle sadness, they bring their children to church and allow their kids to engage in activities that they enjoy the most, took time to spend quality time in conversation as time permits, they taught them to be strong against life's adversities and to be always prayerful and close to God (Haudar, Guhao, Jr. and Rodriguez, 2016).

➤ *Significance of the Research*

The research will be of great help to solo or single parents in such a way that they will be given attention relative to the struggles, problems, and challenges they encounter. It will also provide empirical data for the policy-making body for them to draft policies or laws that will help solo or single parents.

➤ *Statement of Desired Outcomes*

The outcomes of this research are to provide empirical data that will help solo or single parents and improve their status as parents. Additionally, the results will facilitate the development of support systems such as the creation of a support group, counseling program, or activities that will enhance the status of solo parents.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive qualitative method specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), an approach that aims to provide a detailed study. This phenomenological research study explored the lived experiences of solo or single parents in private and public educational institutions It concerns primarily the personal lived experiences in the account of its period rather than one suggested from pre-existing theoretical presumptions and an interpretative attempt in making a conscious experience and

development. Additionally, the phenomenological approach is an effective instrument in getting comprehensible human experiences, piercing into their thoughts, feelings, and actions to obtain awareness from their experiences showing specific details of the experience and how they are seen by the subjects in the situation.

Data for this study were collected through face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Open-ended questions were asked; these questions centered on the participants' experiences challenges, problems, and adjustment of solo or single parents. Qualitative research studies seek to obtain in-depth information and report the voices of participants (Ambert et al., 1995; Creswell, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The current study uses a *phenomenological* approach. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that seeks to explore the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced a specific phenomenon (Jenkins, Roye, & Frederickson, 2017).

Data in this study were collected through the unstructured questionnaire, interview, and observation to perform a triangulation that is important in qualitative research to validate the consistency of the data (Frankle & Walen, 2000; Punch, 2005; Cohen et al, 2010; Leedy & Armood, 2010; Shenton, 2004; Marshal & Rossman, 2008). Interviews allow the researcher to acquire information that cannot necessarily be observed, like behaviors, feelings, and people's interpretations of past events (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, interviews give participants a voice, allowing them to tell their stories and share their experiences with the researcher (Ambert et al., 1995; Creswell, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The development of codes and themes will be the fundamental bases for concluding this phenomenological study.

The participants of this study were five (5) single parents working in a private and/or public higher educational institution in Lucena City, Province of Quezon. The co-researchers (participants) were determined by the following criteria (a) must be a single or solo parent for at least 5 years, (b) age 30 - 50 years old. (c) solo parents who raised their child alone, and (d) has at least one biological child who is 20 years old and below. The participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling; after considering the criteria, five (5) participants were qualified to be the co-researchers of this study. Snowball sampling allowed the co-researcher in this study to refer to other co-researcher who have experience with the phenomenon being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each participant will be given the option to refer other potential participants.

➤ Assumptions

Parenting is a lifelong vocation. The conventional family structure suggests that "family, as the basic unit of society, comprise husband, wife, and children." In a predominantly Catholic country such as the Philippines, the sanctity of family life is of paramount importance. However, conflict and other

challenges do not spare families from the problem. If a traditional family encounters problems, what more is it to Solo or Single Parenting?

IV. DISCUSSION

This study seeks to go into the dual role of solo or single parents. The study was founded on several key concepts such as societal bias and discrimination; government support; psychological adjustment; coping mechanisms; parental roles and acceptance; and perceived challenges. Conversely, the findings of the study were realized through in-depth interviews. The co-researchers' responses provide baseline data that relates to the themes of the study.

The co-researchers' experiences, challenges, and difficulties as single parents can be seen in their financial struggles in the early part of their being a single parent primarily because they are the only ones holding the responsibilities, living without their partners' presence to support their family's basic needs. They may be struggling to provide for their everyday needs, but they still find ways to provide for their child's needs by working on several income-generating activities and additional part-time jobs such as online selling, and online teaching to augment their minimum wage income and helping them to at least save for some other essentials. Additionally, some of their family members also extended help.

In terms of how the parental roles and acceptance, solo parenting as a result of the death of the spouse, constitute the exclusive dual role of the solo parents which is evident among the co-researchers who are widows. On the part of solo parents as a result of their separation, exclusive solo parenting exists and eventually into a co-parenting arrangement as time goes on parenting styles are evident. Parenting style is the representation of the standards and strategies that parents use in their child-rearing. As such the quality of time in terms of parenting is crucial because it influences how the child behaves and relates to the community. The co-researchers provide parenting styles that are appropriate in dealing with their children, they employ different styles depending on the ages of their children that range from non-restrictive to democratic styles of providing discipline to their child following the result. Some of the co-researchers are in the process of constructively letting the child accept and come to terms with the situations they are in right now.

Social bias and discrimination is an ongoing issue rooted in people's beliefs associated with their characteristics, principles, races, gender, groups, and norms they belong. Single parents are not exempted from the fact that they are experiencing unjust treatment by some people. Discrimination leaves a lasting effect on everyone regardless of their status. This study proves to be the opposite of this context as the co-researchers attest that they do not have any experiences where

they were discriminated against or encountering any social stigma. There might have been some indirect experiences or judgment by the community, but it has not been an issue to dwell with.

The Solo Parents' Welfare Act or RA 8972 recognizes the essence of single parents as the government initiative for a special group of people in the country. The law enumerates several benefits that are provided to them. This study shows that most of the participants are aware that there exists a law intended for them, however, they do not exercise those government benefits exclusive to single parents. Some of the benefits that the co-researchers are trying to avail themselves of do not exist in several establishments and these benefits could help them in addressing these challenges specifically in terms of their finances. On the part of the implementing government agency, this is evidence of how the government lacks ways and strategies to disseminate information about the single parents' benefits and these issues must be addressed especially since the number of single parents in the country is continuously and rapidly increasing.

One of the crucial aspects of life that is affected in any dysfunctional relationship is the psychological well-being of the person. In this study, it is evident that the co-researcher experiences limited emotional support. According to them, there were no strong services provided to address their psychological well-being as they are the only ones addressing the responsibilities, living without their partners' presence although emotional concern does not determine how people live and overcome challenges, yet, there are still people who provided help and support and go through with their experiences.

The study portrays the challenges posed by the dual roles of Filipino single or solo parents. The different aspects show how they address concepts of providing for the needs of the family, how to raise their children, maximizing available government benefits, social biases and discrimination, and psychological adjustment. Even so, it was observed that single parents do not differ much from other parents in their partners' presence. The findings also put forward that single parents do experience challenges in terms of finances and psychological support. Because they prioritize the needs of their children they venture into other income-generating activities that will add to their regular salary aside from what they received from the family's support system. Conversely, the government has its fundamental role in supporting its citizens especially those that belong to special groups of a person such as single parents in terms of finances, benefits, and other basic needs, consequently, most of them are not aware of the benefits that are extended to them or have not been implemented by the establishment for them to use. Finally, the study shows that social bias or discrimination is seen least likely by single parents' lived experience, however, psychological support such as counseling or psychoeducation program has not been present based on the

stories of the co-researchers. This research on the dual role of single parents provides essential insight into a significant description of how they live as single parents. Furthermore, their identity, struggle, challenges, and strengths as single parents were given emphasis and a deeper meaning.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The study attempted to determine the lived experiences relating to dual roles of single or solo parents in educational institutions resolving the different significant concepts of *societal bias and discrimination; government support; psychological adjustment; coping mechanism; parental roles and acceptance; and perceived challenges*. Upon interviewing five solo or single parents, the necessary data were collected and analyzed to provide meaningful answers to the questions related to their dual roles. The co-researchers in the study talked about their experience as single parents. The findings suggested that in terms of challenges, they struggled mainly in the financial aspect in the early part of their situation, however, support from family members and the presence of some income-generating activities are evident to some of the co-researchers, as such work, a part-time job and family's support are the sources for providing the needs of the family. In terms of their parental role, solo parents as a result of separation come to terms with co-parenting set-up while solo parenting for those whose spouse had died leaving them with the full responsibility with their children. The co-researchers have different manners of disciplining their children to be more responsible members of their household. There is a law that provides individual assistance from the government, however, based on the result, the co-researchers admitted that they do not enjoy government benefits even though they are aware of it. As such, the government has the responsibility and accountability to let these special groups of people enjoy the benefits as provided by the law. Intensive information drive and religious implementation of the law should be done for them to use the benefits provided by the law. Equal treatment should be extended to all people regardless of their race, gender, religion, age, and status. In terms of social bias and discrimination, the study found that single parents do not experience being discriminated against since they are working professionals. Additionally, the study also found out that related services such as counseling, psychoeducation programs, and group support have limited existence in their workplace especially those that are in public school.

Furthermore, the researcher recommends further looking into the government support and the implementation of the laws relative to single parenting to maximize the benefits provided for them. Likewise, the creation of peer group support and the establishment of a counseling program or helpline can be done to address the psychological issues confronting single parents. Future researchers can do validation research using single parents working in different institutions or living in a rural community and use other variables not explored in the current

study or single parents across different socioeconomic statuses, gender, and age with a larger sample. It is also interesting to note the single parents' children in their psychological state and gender development. Further, future researchers can explore government benefits extended to single parents to promote awareness of the condition of single parents in the country.

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