

# Beyond One: Landscape of Single Parenting



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# The Implications of Grief & Loss on Future Marriage within the Single-Parent context



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# Current Grief Definitions

- “Keen mental suffering or distress over affliction or loss; sharp sorrow; painful regret. A cause or occasion of keen distress or sorrow.” (Dictionary)
- “Grief is the normal and natural emotional reaction to loss or change of any kind. Of itself, grief is neither a pathological condition nor a personality disorder.... Grief is the conflicting feelings caused by the end of or change in a familiar pattern of behavior.” (Friedman, 2013)

# Current Loss Definitions

- “Detriment, disadvantage, or deprivation from failure to keep, have, or get [something]. **Failure to preserve or maintain** [a certain thing]. Death, or the fact of being dead.” (Dictionary)
- “The loss **may be physical** (such as a death), **social** (such as divorce), or **occupational** (such as a job).” (Medicinenet, 2016)
- Loss may also be **financial or intangible** such as hopes, aspirations, trust, safety and security, power and control or future capabilities.

# General Reactions to Grief & Loss

- **Emotional reactions** are not limited to and can include anger, despair, guilt, sadness, anxiety, panic, shock, denial of loss, frequent mood changes, irritability and changes in regular behavior.
- **Physical reactions** may comprise of difficulty sleeping, restlessness or aches and pains manifested through headaches, chest pains, neck pains or backaches that could be of an unexplainable and / or recent nature. Changes in appetite (decreased or increased) are common as well as general fatigue and lack of energy. Individuals who are grieving are fairly susceptible to illness.

# General Reactions to Grief & Loss

- **Social reactions** are characterized by social withdrawal or avoidance of family, friends, social gatherings or large groups. There could be changes in the individual's level of personal activity and interests, sexual activity, sense of reality or beliefs and values.
- **Cognitive reactions** may involve preoccupation with the loss, confusion, a decreased ability to concentrate or make decisions, shortened or distracted attention span even short-term memory loss.

# Complicated Grief

- Complicated grief is **a chronic intensified reaction to loss** that may include heightened aspects of each of these. It is characterized by an inability to accept the loss with extreme focus on it or the reminders of it. Ex. building a shrine to the deceased or the loss becomes their new world where everything else is centered around it.
- Reactions to such grief might embrace: depression, substance abuse, addictions, risk-taking behaviors, destructive behaviors, isolation, withdrawal, suicidal thoughts, homicidal thoughts, or recurring flashbacks linked to the loss.

# Importance of Recognizing Symptoms

- It is of prime importance that we recognize the symptoms of grief and loss in the single-parent and the child(ren) **involved**. This fosters understanding and empathy in our interactions with both the parent and child(ren).
- Foremost, the single-parent needs to recognize these symptoms within themselves and their child. **Everyone grieves differently and responses can be variable mixed from one moment or stage of life to the other**. The parent that understands these symptoms can better adjust their approach to self and their child.

# Importance of Recognizing Symptoms

- Children must be made aware of the symptoms of grief in a way that is appropriate for their age or maturity. It is important to remember that they too are experiencing a tremendous shift in life that can be intensified through confusion. Explaining the reasons for these changes and their possible reactions to it helps to put their current and future emotions or thoughts into expressible words. The child will also begin to recognize and identify the grief process within their own parent which will foster understanding and empathy for their parent.

# Importance of Counseling

- Even youngest of children grieve, therefore, we must not think that they will forget about the lost or adjust on their own. Hence, **both the single-parent and the child are in need of grief counseling and / or discussion (recovery) groups.** The earlier it is sought out the more likely healing can begin and produce desirable outcomes for the future.
- In researching children of divorce, “Wallerstein’s long-term study shows that many children never have full “recovery” as each special event, holiday, or celebration reminds the child of his / her loss” (Anderson, 2014). Both parent and child(ren) require extra support during such times.

# Importance of Counseling

- **Parents and children must learn how to talk through their grief with one another and counseling aids this endeavor.** It can also identify and solve key issues or challenges within the parent-child relationship that needs addressing.
- “Both children and adolescents need permission from adults to grieve...which supports the idea that adolescents continue to rely upon adult direction” (Reed, 2008).
- **Parents and other adults should not attempt to stall or prevent this process but gently guide and support them through their grief.**

# Importance of Counseling

- “In the name of protecting our children, we keep information from them and deny them the opportunity to feel their grief. **Helping children through their loss experiences requires that we actually accept that children feel grief and are bright and capable enough to understand many aspects of loss.** There are serious consequences of overlooking or minimizing loss issues in children and adolescents. **Children who are given incomplete information are likely to fill in gaps of their knowledge by using their imaginations.** Very often, what children imagine is much worse and far scarier than the reality of the situation.” (Fiorini and Mullen, 2006)

# How does this relate to the good news about marriage?

- Grief affects how one handles their finances, decision-making skills, communication with the outside world and interpersonal relationships in general, etc.
- It determines how well a person is prepared for a new relationship and its success thereafter.

# How does this relate to the good news about marriage?

- Allowing children to work through their grief also prepares them for their parent's potentially new relationship and / or marriage. It can guard against the extremes of inappropriate attachment or rejection of the new individual in the parent's life. Moreover, the child's future marital attachment in adulthood can be affected by how their grief is handled and processed now. Remember that both the parent and child are carriers of emotional baggage that must be worked through in order for healthy future marriages to be established and maintained.

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# Beyond One: Resource Scarcity



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# Define Single-Parent?

- *Tell me the story?*
- *What kind of house?*
- *What kind of car?*
- *Rich or poor?*
- *Educated or not educated?*

# Politics

*“We find negligible differences in the parenting behaviors of those living in lone and couple households, and lone parents (who are mainly mothers) actually cut back on their own expenditure to a greater extent than other parents in order to provide for children. **These findings undermine the viability of links made between ‘poor’ parenting and family living arrangements;** such claims are grounded in erroneous individualized accounts of disadvantage.”*

**Are these prevalent ideas of single parents in our ministries?**

# Statistics

- According to the US Census Bureau (2016), **about 4 out of 10 children** were born to unwed mothers. This is 80% of single-parent families as Mom-only
- Nearly 2/3 of the mothers are under the **age of 30**.
- **40% of Mom-only** households are **below poverty line** compared with 22% Father-only households and 11% with both parents

# These numbers mean...?

Single parents disproportionately face a triple bind of inadequacies in **resources**, **employment**, and **policy** which **combined together further complicate** the lives of single parents and their families. Single parents' resources, their socioeconomic background - as well as having only one earner and carer in the household - make it difficult to provide for their families. The majority of single parents are mothers and work in full-time employment, yet for many their employment is inadequate. Single parents are often in jobs with low wages, without employment protections, and with little flexibility to balance work and family responsibilities. Policy such as an inadequate cash transfers, unaffordable child care, unpaid parental leave, or lacking safety net can fail to protect families from poverty.

Maldonado, L. C. (2017).

# Poverty

**Poverty** is general **scarcity** or the state of one who lacks a certain amount of **material possessions or money** (people with \$1.25 a day). It is a **multifaceted** concept, which includes social, economic, and political elements. **Absolute** poverty or destitution refers to the lack of means necessary to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter...**Relative** poverty occurs when people in a country do not enjoy a certain minimum level of living standards as compared to the rest of the population and so would vary from country to country, sometimes within the same country.

(Wikipedia Definition)

# Income/Gender Disparity

Research “reveals that **single mothers were more likely to be in poverty** at far greater rates than single fathers, after controlling for a host of demographic, human capital, and work related variables. We also found that a **contributing factor to this disparity** is that **single mothers were penalized for having more children while single fathers were not**. We find that gendered poverty and the gender pay gap narrowed between 1990 and 2000, but have stayed stable since.”

Dermott, E., & Pomati, M. (2015).

# Time Poverty

Time poverty concerns itself with individuals who have insufficient time for rest and leisure, after time spent working (paid or unpaid) is taken into account...single mothers who reside with another adult who is employed engage in **more interactive care activities than single mothers who live alone.**

Thus, given economic constraints, single mothers may choose to make important tradeoffs with their time in order to protect time with their children.

(Dermott, E., & Pomati, M. (2015).

# Non-Residential Poverty

We find that racial/ethnic and immigrant disparities in perceptions of support, financial support, and receiving advice from parents about education or employment are **explained by family socioeconomic resources**.

Hardie, J. H., & Seltzer, J. A. (2016).

# Our Success = Their Success

In a study done in Finland (published in 2017), a country that is the forerunners in family dynamics, **socioeconomic attainments of parents** in intact two-parent families, non-residential parents, single parents, and parents in stepfamilies **affect children's attainments**

# Our Success = Their Success

**“Endowments (or attainments) are anything that parents have from which their children can potentially benefit.** In addition to economic resources, endowments include cultural and social capital, which contribute to tastes, values, family ties, and other social connections, and genes, which affect cognitive ability, personality traits, and physical characteristics.

**Investments refer to intentional parental behavior that aims to influence child outcomes, in most cases positively.**

Investments include the money that parents spend on children's education and living conditions, and the amount of time and effort that they put into the supervision and support of their offspring.”

Erola, J. & Jalovaara, M. (2017).

# In Other Words...?

- Single Parents are a growing, but multifaceted group with
- The problems of resource, employment and policy promote impoverishment of Moms-only homes
- Poverty entails more than money. Time, education, culture, support groups are needed resources.
- **How can the church become a resource for single-parents?**

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# Beyond One: A Few Good Men

Practical suggestions for helping single parents  
raise boys to be godly husbands



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# Compared to girls, boys are:

Educational	Social	Emotional
Held back more often	More behavior problems	More likely to be labeled as emotionally disturbed
More likely to have a learning disability	More likely to use drugs & alcohol	More likely to be admitted to psychiatric hospitals
Less likely to graduate from college	More likely to demonstrate antisocial and criminal behavior	More likely to commit suicide

# Single Parenting Intensifies the Boy Problem

- *These social and contextual factors are intensified by single parenting*
- *Childhood parental separations/divorce were associated with reduced partnership quality at age 29-30 (Fergusson, et al., 2014)*
- *In addition, children of single parents are more likely to leave their childhood religion, and are less likely to attend church as adults. (Uecker and Ellison, 2012)*

# Inadequate Structures to Nurture Men

- *While these boys face challenges, our education and church system are sometimes poorly designed to help nurture boys to become strong, godly men, husbands, and fathers.*

# The Three R's

- **Role**-How can we help boys understand their role as a man of God?
- **Responses**-Responses refers to the range of emotions that boys face. How can we help them grow into emotionally healthy men?
- **Religion**-In light of the fact that many children of single parents leave their faith of their home of origin, how can we help ground these boys in their relationship with God?

# Group Discussion

# Role Strategies

- *Mentoring*
- *Paint a picture*
- *Read stories together*
- *Point out examples in real life*
- *Rite of Passage (Man Maker Project-Chris Bruno)*

# Responses-Strategies

- *Books on emotions- e.g. The Way I Feel, by Janan Cain*
- *Name the emotions*
- *Understand that boys process emotions differently*

# Religion - Strategies

- *Bible Heroes-lessons from good and bad examples*
- *Teach habits of personal devotion*
- *Engage boys in church with more active lessons*

# A Note on Media

- *Guard, guard, guard*
- *Choose books, movies, games that can teach positive values*
- *What Stories Does My Son Need?* *By Michael Gurian*
- *Common Sense Media; Plugged In, etc*

# The Greatest Want...

*The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall. Evangelism, 57*

“...But such a character is not  
the result of accident...”

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