



A Gendered Analysis of Educational/ Occupational Characteristics and Access to Domestic Network Support of Single Parents in Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine educational and occupational characteristics, access to domestic servant/network of support for assistance of single parents who are heads of households with children in Imo State, with a view to comparing years of schooling, access to formal sector employment, access to domestic servant/network of support for assistance of male single parents and female single parents. The study relied on State level data obtained through the administration of 686 questionnaires in six Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Imo State. Of the 686 questionnaires for single parent household heads sampled, 490 questionnaires were returned and found adequate for the analysis indicating a completion rate of 71.4%. The questionnaires were analysed using SPSS version 17.0. The results show that male/female single parents show no significant difference in years of schooling; female single parents have significantly higher access to formal sector employment/network of support for household upkeep than their male counterparts while male single parents have significantly higher access to domestic servant than their female counterparts. The implications of this study for policy stress the imperatives of a gendered analysis of key variable-years of schooling, access to formal sector employment, access to domestic servant/network of support-of single parents made from field work for an effective welfare improvement policy formulation initiative for single parent households in Imo state; and the heterogeneity within both MSPs and FSPs in respect of these variables examined should be taken into account in designing policies that aim to improve household welfare.

Key Words: gendered analysis, single parents, educational and occupational characteristics, access to domestic servant, network of support

Introduction

Among the key characteristics of single parents are: that single parent households are more prone to poverty than two parent households [Office of Statistics, Canada, Household Survey 2004; Department of Work and Pensions, United Kingdom, 2005/06 ; and Mc Lanahan, and Booth, 1989) and thus have more recourse to social welfare (Ambert, Ferguson, and Clifford, 2006; Chant, 2003; , Mc Lanahan, and Sandefur, 1994) ; have more severe time constraints/ time squeezes/time poor and face higher and unique challenges in balancing their work and family responsibilities beyond those experienced by working married parents with children (Ephraim, David and Granechotz, 2002; Sloan Foundation, 2005); higher triple-day burden/workload (Millar and Tess, 2006).

Single parents have been the focus of public debate in the western society (Manfield, 2004; Navarro, 2008). The debate has included both practical considerations around the role of government in their support and moral ones in response to the decline in the traditional family (Navarro, 2008). The policy debate on the practical considerations around the role of government in their support is a two-way perspective with fiscal conservatives emphasizing a minimal role for government and an employment focus, while liberals tend to support more government involvement in an attempt to minimize poverty (Navarro, 2008). Besides the enforcement of payment of alimony (to the

beneficiary divorced/separated female single parents), in the developed world (though variations do occur from one country to another), there are two principal mechanisms for tackling income poverty among families including single parent families: through transfers (i.e. social welfare payments/grants and income support) and through participation in the labour market (National Youth Council of Ireland, 2005), and education is known to play the role of providing the right conditions for such participation in the labour market. An auxiliary mechanism, so to say, has been the role of government in mitigating the impact of time constraints/squeezes, by assisting in addressing the issue of balancing work with family (Sloan Foundation, 2005; National Youth Council of Ireland, 2005), with public-sponsored provision of child day-care centres and government calls on employers to initiate corporate best practices that include flexible work schedules for working single parents topping the list among strategies in this vein (Sloan Foundation (2005). In the special case of single parents, time allocation is apparently more challenging because they cannot rely on intra household division of labour and they are solely responsible for childcare as well as gainful employment (National Youth Council of Ireland, 2005). It has been argued that single parents tend to have lower employment rates across the European Union owing to the fact that the single-handed juggling of employment with caring responsibilities makes it difficult for single parents to access and sustain good jobs (Gullani, 2001).

Planning for and articulating interventions to reduce poverty and improve welfare among single parents requires field data, at least, on (i) their educational and employment status, which are two key pathways to economic empowerment. Investment in education is a poverty reduction strategy which can enhance the skills and productivity among poor households (Bridge development gender, 1997; World Bank, 1991). It has been argued that access to employment does usually provide higher income than most types of welfare for those involved; and usually expands the availability of credit and the type of housing available for these individuals (World Bank, 1991); (ii) their status in access to network of support for assistance for household upkeep since such an access serves as a veritable medium for balancing household budget and bolstering household wellbeing (Chant, 2003); and on (iii) their status in access to domestic servant given that access to domestic servant is a key time resource which can aid in reducing the impact of time constraints/squeezes, and in addressing the issue of balancing work with family. The data on these variables should also be in gender disaggregated format to facilitate gender mainstreaming in policy formulation.

In the developed climes, field survey data on these and related variables and their derivatives has long been underway; are on ground and readily available and constantly updated (see for example, Sloan Foundation, 2005). In the study area, these data are lacking, rare and or non-existent, as single parent households in the State, as a group, have not been subjected to empirical enquiry. This has necessarily stalled initiatives for planning for single parents amid burgeoning incidence of single parenthood in Imo State. It is against the backdrop of the foregoing that this research was carried out. It attempted to provide baseline data on educational and occupational characteristics, access to domestic servant/network of support for assistance of single parents who are heads of households with children, which are completely non-existent for Imo state, for policy and planning. The study will go a long way to enhancing gender-informed planning and programming in household welfare support initiatives besides helping address gender information gaps in this category of household.

Gendered analysis here specifically refers to the process of examining and comparing, male and female single parents, in respect of the variables under study, for the purpose of identifying, ascertaining, establishing, quantifying and diagnosing/accounting for gender gaps/similarities, in those variables. The assumptions of this study are that male single parents (MSPs) have higher access in education, in formal sector employment and in domestic servant than the female single parents (FSPs) while the FSPs have higher access to social network of support than the MSPs.

In the light of the foregoing the study posed five key questions:

- 1 What is the nature of education status, occupation, access to domestic servants and to network of support for family up-keep of male and female single parents in Imo State?
- 2 Are FSPs less educated than MSPs?
- 3 Do FSPs have lower access to formal sector employment compared to their male counterparts?

- 4 Are there differentials in access to domestic servants between FSPs and their male counterparts?
- 5 Are there differentials in access to network of support for family up-keep between FSPs and their male counterparts?

Objectives of study

- i. To ascertain whether FSPs are less educated than MSPs in Imo State?
- ii. To establish the nature of educational status, occupational status and access to domestic servants/network of support for assistance of single parents male and females in Imo State
- iii. To determine if FSPs have lower access to formal sector employment compared to their male counterparts?
- iv. To ascertain the differentials in access to domestic servants between FSPs and their male counterparts?
- v. To ascertain the differentials in access to network of support for family upkeep between FSPs and their male counterparts?

Research hypotheses

- i. There is significant difference in mean years of schooling between MSPs and FSPs in Imo state.
- ii. There is significant difference in access to formal employment between single parent males and single parent females in Imo state
- iii. There is significant difference in access to domestic servants between single parent males and single parent females in Imo state.
- iv. There is significant difference in access to network of support for household upkeep between male single parents and female single parents in Imo state.
- v. The research hypotheses were tested at the level of 0.05 significance difference.

Significance of study

Both government/policy makers and students stand to benefit from this study. In the first place, the data generated would go a long way to galvanizing policy makers into immediate action by furnishing them with relevant gender disaggregated data which are imperative for mainstreaming, and articulating policies aimed at poverty reduction/welfare improvement among single parents in Imo State. Moreover, being the first of its kind to be conducted for Imo State, the data generated, thus would form a data base for consultation by students/researchers in subsequent similar studies. Yet, data generated is also expected to be extremely useful to policy makers in assessing the performance and effectiveness of government gender equality initiatives in Imo State.

Scope of study

The study area spans six Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Imo State: two LGAs each from the three senatorial districts in the state, namely: Owerri (Imo East); Okigwe (Imo North) and Orlu (Imo West) . One of the Local Government Areas selected from each senatorial district is an urban centre while the second one is a rural centre since poverty differential exists between rural and urban centers in Nigeria [17 NBS, 2007). The Local Government Areas selected are Owerri zone (Imo East) - Owerri Municipal (urban) and Aboh Mbaise (rural); Orlu zone - Ideato North (rural) and Oguta (urban); Okigwe zone-(Imo north)-Ehime Mbano (rural) and Okigwe (urban). In terms of time scope, the study was carried out between March 2010 and August, 2013.

Literature Review

In the developed climates, literature has it that single parent have less education (see for example Ambert, Ferguson and Clifford, 2006; Sloan Foundation, 2005). According to Sloan Foundation (2005), single parent household heads, both male and female, are more likely to have no more than a high school diploma and are less likely to have a four-year degree than are married heads of household. About 55.9 percent of married dual-earner household heads and 64.3 percent of married single-earner household heads with children have a high school diploma or less (Sloan Foundation, 2005). In contrast, 74.9 % of single father household heads and 72.3 % of single mother households heads have a high school diploma or less (Sloan Foundation, 2005). In 2003, the most common occupational category for unmarried female household heads was office and administrative support (22.3 %), while the most common category for unmarried male household heads was construction/extraction trades (17.5%).

Panda, (1997) explored the relative wellbeing of children between female-headed households and male-headed two parent households in rural Orissa, India. His comparisons of access to education and to domestic servants between the two heads of households indicate that female-headed households have lower access to these variables compared with the male heads of two-parent households.

In developing countries females typically receive less education than do males (NPC, 2009a; Bridge Development Gender, 1997; Desarrollo, 2004). In terms of access to network of support for family upkeep, literature show that female single parents tend to have more access than their male counterparts. For more on this see Lino (1990); Safa (2002).

The study Area

Imo State is located in the south-eastern part of Nigeria and lies between Latitudes 4° 45' N and 7°15' N and Longitudes 6°50'E and 7°25'E (fig.1). Imo State covers an area of about 5530sq km (Ileoma and Arunsi, 1990), and has a population of 3,934,899 persons in the 2006 national population census (NPC, 2009b). The population is youthful with children (1-18 years) making up 42 % of the population. The inhabitants of Imo State are Igbos, a culturally homogeneous group

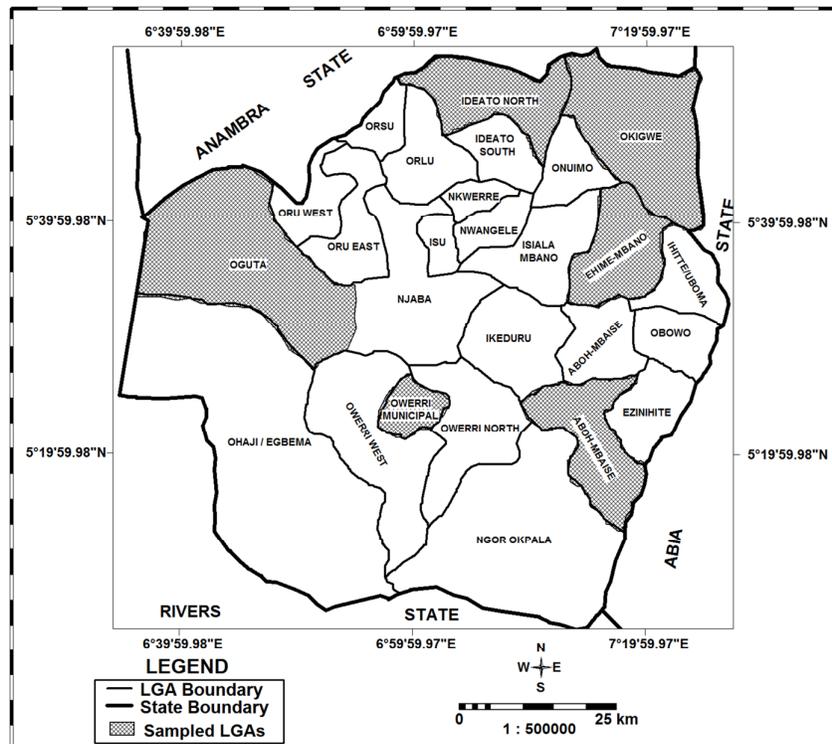


Fig 1. Imo State Showing the Study Area

Source: Department of Geography Federal College of Education Zaria

Materials and Method

Sources of data

Data for this study were selected from primary sources using structured questionnaire and interview schedules. Secondary data were also gathered to complement the primary data.

Types of data

For this study, the data needs were data that supplied information on single parents' area identification- compound name, village, autonomous community/town and local Government; educational and occupational characteristics of single parents; single parents' access to domestic servants and to network of support for assistance for household upkeep.

Sampling techniques/procedure

A total of two (2) LGA's were sampled from each senatorial zone, making a total of six (6) LGAs out of the 27 LGAs in the state. The stratified sampling combined with systematic sampling procedure was adopted in the selection of the study LGAs. This entailed listing the LGAs in each senatorial district on the basis of urban and rural status and in alphabetical order and every first LGA in each of the rural and urban groupings in each of the senatorial districts was picked, one rural and one urban LGA from each of the three senatorial district making a total of six (6) LGA's (Table 3.1). The six LGAs, two LGAs from each of the three senatorial zones were selected in order to ensure even geographical spread across the state.

Table 1. Sampled local government areas and communities

Senatorial Zones	Sampled LGAs	Sampled Communities
Imo East	Owerri Municipal Aboh Mbaise	Aladinma 1; Azuzi 11; Ikenegbu 1 ; Amuzi; Lagwa; Nguru -Amato
Imo West	Oguta Ideato North	Awa; Ngal-Uba; Oguta A Akpulu; Isiapko; Ndihem Arondizuogu
Imo North	Okigwe Ehime Mbano	Aku; Ihube; Okigwe Urban Agbaju; Nzerem; Umueze 11 Umueleke

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

From NPC (2009b), Imo State has 118813 female heads of household and there were 551273 male-headed households in the state. Reconnaissance survey showed that there was approximately one single parent MHHs to every thirty two-parent MHHs which translates to approximately 18376 single parent male heads of households. When the 18376 single parent male-heads of households are added to the 118813 female heads of households, it gives a total of 137189 single parent households in the state. Using a 0.5% proportion of this number (137189), a total of 686 questionnaires were arrived at as the sample size for this study and distributed to the 18 communities selected in proportion to the number of districts in each community (Table.2)

Table 2. Number of questionnaires distributed to communities by number of districts in each community

Communities	Number of District in each community	Number of Questionnaire distributed
Azuzi; Ikenugbu; Ngalala Uba; Akpulu	Less than 10	33
Aladinma; Awa; Isiapko; Ndichem Arondizuogu; Amuzi; Lagwa; Okigwe Urban 1; Aku; Ihube; Nzerem	10-12	38
Oguta A ; Agbaju	13	42
Nguru-Amato; Umueze 11 Umueleke	14	45

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

Questionnaire administration

The questionnaires and interview schedules were conducted and administered respectively using the purposive sampling technique, which targets only those respondents who are household heads in the single parent households with children in the 0-18 year age group and who were equally willing to be part of the study. The major roads/streets in each of the selected communities were used for picking the respondents. Beginning with the first house along each of the roads, any third ordered house to the left or right was selected and any single parent who was willing to be part of the study was picked and interviewed. At the end of the questionnaire administration exercise, 490 or 71.4% of the total questionnaires administered were returned made up of 408 female single parents and 82 male single parents

Six research assistants were recruited and trained to assist in questionnaire administration. The researcher was responsible for the training of the research assistants. The questionnaire administration exercise lasted for three days beginning from 16th June, 2011 to 18th June, 2011.

Data analysis

SPSS version 17 was used in data analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in presentation of data. Tables and figures were used to present information in summary form.

Result and Discussion

Educational

Gender disaggregation of educational attainment data of single parents as presented in Table 3, indicates that all the male single parents (MSPs) have formal education while 14 female single parents (FSPs) representing 3.4% of the female heads of households have no formal education at all.

Table 3. Distribution of educational attainment of single parents by sex

Education Attainment	Male		Female		Total	
	N=82		N=408		N=408	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
None	-	-	14	8.3	14	2.9
Primary	23	28.0	106	26	129	30.1
Secondary	24	29.3	102	25.0	126	25.7
Post secondary	10	12.2	50	12.3	60	12.2
University	25	30.5	124	30.4	149	30.4
Others Msc	-	-	12	2.9	12	2.4
Total	82	100	408	100	490	100

Source: Fieldwork, June 2011

A little above three-quarters of the male single parents and a little below three-quarters of the female single parent have attained formal education beyond primary education. Two-fifths of the male single parent have post secondary education and above while that of the single parent females is a little below half.

Scoring no education 0 year; primary, 6 years; secondary, 12 years; post-secondary 15 years; university, 16 years; and others, 18 years and multiplying each of them by the corresponding number of household heads at that level of education and dividing the sum or total by the number of households gives the average years of schooling for the entire male heads of households as 11.9 years and 11.7 years for the entire female heads of households. In the NDHS 2008, 40% of females and 28% of males aged 15-45 have not attended any school (NPC, 2009a).

The reasons for the higher access to formal education observed in the study could be due to the fact that Imo State is one of the states in the federation with very high literacy rates of 75.4% (UNDP, 2008-2009) and the fact that the prestige of a family is determined by the number of educated persons it has produced (Ogbonna, 2000). Moreover, large numbers of the heads of household were between

1-18 years old when the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme of 1976 was introduced which made primary school education free and reduced secondary education fees. So, they must have benefited from the scheme. These findings generally give support to the notion that social inequalities based on education attainment of gender are less severe in magnitude in this context.

At the higher education levels (post secondary, university and others), the education attainment distribution data does not follow the national pattern which normally has proportionately more males attaining higher levels of education than females (NPC, 1998). In this study females have more proportion in higher levels of education (45.6%) than males (42%) (Table 3). The reasons could be connected to the fact that since the recent past, households in the state have been according equal education opportunities to both their male and female children. There is also a new conviction among parents that female children if well-trained academically, would equally serve as old age security hedge for their parents. Moreover, beginning from the recent past, education has implications for the marriage market within the Imo society and has become a major concern among the youth (male and female) in choosing marriage partners. The more educated a girl is, the brighter the chances of her getting married to a better educated and well-off potential groom. Thus, with this in mind, parents have higher education aspirations for their female children while the girls in turn reciprocate by facing the challenge headlong.

The impressive and near parity in higher education attainment between MSPs and FSPs could have wide ramifications for household headship; for women's employment in the paid workforce, children's welfare and household poverty. Higher educational attainment is associated with better labour market outcomes including higher earnings, lower poverty, and lower unemployment (UNDP, 2008-09; World Bank, 1991). Higher education attainment for women engenders opportunities for them to have improved pay and pay parity with their male counterparts *ceteris paribus* (Weeks, 2005); and could also empower women to acquire strong social and economic independence to desire to establish households on their own and cater for their children's upbringing single-handedly, and thus assisting in increasing the so called phenomenon of household transformation. For more on this see Mc Lanahan and Booth (1989). Yet, data implies positive signs for children welfare. It is well documented that parent's education may be both direct inputs into the production function that generates child quality and may indirectly facilitate a higher quantity of other inputs through the effects of education levels on household income (Xie and LaLumia, 2010).

Occupation of single parents

Gender disaggregation of the occupation data (Table 4) indicates that all the 490 single parents who are the respondents in this research are participating in the work force. It has been argued that single parents are often working parents because someone needs to earn money to buy food, clothing, and a place to live (Chant, 2003).

They must provide economic support for the household. Trading and business is the largest employer of male single parents (68.3%) while civil service is the largest employer of female single parents (41.2%). The reasons for this could be attributed to the fact that teaching at both primary and secondary levels is the largest formal sector employer in the state and females are disproportionately more numerous in the teaching service (ISSSEBR, 2009). Secondly, more men go into private business than women with the conviction that they would be more successful and or excel in private business even after graduation from the university (Ogbonna, 2000). Thirdly, the improved educational attainment of the female heads in the study area empowers them for formal sector employment. In Imo state, women compete effectively with men educationally as is evident in Table 3. In the Sloan study (2005), the most common occupational category for single parent female heads of households was: office and administrative support (22.3%) while the most common occupational category for the single parent male heads of households is construction/extraction trades (17.5%). In the Sloan study (2005), the most common occupational category for single parent female heads of households was: office and administrative support (22.3%) while the most common occupational category for the single parent male heads of households is construction/extraction trades (17.5%).

Table 4. Distribution of single parents by main occupation and sex

__Occupation	Male N=82		Female N=408		Total N=490	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Agric wage labourer	-	-	28	6.9	28	5.7
Civil servant	15	18.3	168	41.2	183	37.3
Trading and Business	56	68.3	152	37.3	208	42.4
Self-employed artisan	06	7.3	26	6.4	32	6.5
Self-employed professional	05	6.1	24	5.9	29	5.9
Others	-	-	10	2.5	10	2.0
Total	82	100	408	100	490	100

Source: Field Survey, 2011

The implications of the occupation for the welfare of the parents and their children cannot be glossed over. In the first place, an all-working heads of households implies that parents' time for childcare and unpaid domestic work would be serious issues of concern among the households. Secondly, because these parents are likely to have less time and energy left for child care after working, the possibility of paying large fees for their children care needs rises and become challenging, while these single parents would have less free time to spend on their own interest For more on this see [9] . On the other hand, the fact that close to half of the female single parents are civil servants may suggest the existence of a sizeable crop of female heads of households with pensionable, decent and more stable employment, better regular wage income with potentials of advancing with years of experience, which could in turn have positive impact on overall children welfare.

Single parents' access to domestic servant

Table 5 shows that a little more than half of the MSPs and a little above one-tenth of the FSPs have access to domestic servant which suggests that FSP households could face a much more severe time constraints compared with their male counterpart *ceteris paribus* and this may have implications for children's wellbeing.

Table 5. Distribution of single parents by domestic servant

Do you have a domestic servant? Access to domestic servant	Male N=82		Female N=408		Total N=490	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Yes	45	54.9	50	12.3	95	19.4
No	37	45.1	358	87.7	395	80.6
Total	82	100	408	100	490	100

Source: Fieldwork June 2011

The reasons for higher access of MSPs to domestic servants could be that they have much younger children compared to the FSPs (i.e. the life-cycle stage of the children theory: households with teen children might not find it expedient hiring house help (Minett, 2000.) and or that the MSPs have higher incomes than the FSPs. It has been argued that individual differences in time-allocation decisions are also likely to depend on the household's overall ability to substitute time for money (Minett, 2000).

Single parents' access to network of support for household upkeep

Table 6 shows that a little above half of the female single parents and a little above one-tenth of male single parents have access to network of support for household upkeep. This suggests that female single parents receive assistance more than male single parents. This result is also consistent with Lino (1990) finding that on average, one percent of MSPs income comes from assistance sources, 18% of FSPs total assistance come from same sources. The higher access of FSPs to network of support could be a source of salubrious welfare for their children. It has been argued that extended family members and community support system can result in female-headed households being less disadvantaged in practice than are often believed to be in practice (Chant, 2003).

Table 6. Distribution of single parents that access to network of support for household upkeep by sex

Do you receive support for children's upkeep?	Male N=82		Female N=408		Total N=490	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Yes	29	35.4	222	54.4	251	51.2
No	53	64.6	186	45.6	239	48.8
Total	82	100	408	100	490	100

Source: Fieldwork June 2011

Single parents' sources of support for household upkeep

Table 7 shows that only The Church and relatives are the sources of support for the single parents. Relatives are the largest sources of support for both male single parents and female single parents with about four-fifths of the total support recipients, while The Church comes behind with about one fifth. The glaring absence of government as a source of social support for assistance for the single parents has implications for policy.

Table 7. Distribution of single parents by sources of support for household Up-keep

Sources of household Support	Male N=29		Female N=222		Total N=251	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Relatives	27	93.1	179	80.6	206	82.1
Church	02	6.9	43	19.4	45	17.9
Total	29	100	222	100	251	100

Source: Fieldwork June 2011

Hypotheses Testing

i There is significant difference in mean years of schooling between MSPs and FSPs in Imo state.

$$\chi^2 = 0.0016949; df=1; p= 1.0$$

Result of hypothesis testing show that the p-value for mean years of schooling of single parent males and their female counterparts is 01 which is higher than 0.5. This indicates that there is no significant difference. Therefore we conclude that mean years of schooling of FSPs and their male counterparts in Imo State show no significant difference.

ii There is significant difference in access to formal employment between male single parent and female single parents in Imo state

$$\chi^2 = 8.81361; df=1; p= 0.001$$

The result of hypothesis testing shows that the p-value for access to access to access to formal sector employment (civil service) is (0.001) which is less than 0.05, hence the hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is significant difference in access to formal sector employment between MSPs and their females counterparts. We therefore conclude that FSPs have higher access to formal sector employment than their male counterparts.

iii There is significant difference in access to domestic servants between MSPs and female FSPs in Imo state.

$$\chi^2 = 27.0054; df=1; p= 0.001$$

The result of hypothesis testing shows that the p-value for access to access to domestic servant is (0.001) which is less than 0.05, hence the hypothesis is accepted. We therefore conclude that single parent males have more access to domestic servant than their female counterparts.

Iv There is significant difference in access to network of support for assistance between MSPs and FSPs in Imo state.

$$\chi^2 = 4.02004; df=1; p= 0.001$$

The result of hypothesis testing shows that the p-value for access to network of support for assistance is (0.001) which is less than 0.05, hence the hypothesis is accepted. This indicates there is significant difference in access to network support between ,MSPs and their female counterparts. We therefore

conclude that FSPs have higher access to network of support for assistance than their male counterparts.

Conclusion

This study examined data on educational and occupational characteristics, access to domestic servant/network of support for assistance of single parents who are heads of households with children in Imo State, as well as compared years of schooling, access to formal sector employment, access to domestic servant/network of support for assistance of male and female single parents, and hence provides baseline gender disaggregated data for mainstreaming in policy and planning for single parents in Imo State. The results show that all of the single parents have formal education with both male and female single parents having years of schooling above eleven years; trading and business is the largest employer of male single parents while civil service is the largest employer of female heads of households; a little above one-third of the single parents work with the civil service (formal sector) with about two-fifths of the female single parents and a little below one-fifth of the male single parents working with the civil service (formal sector); about one-fifth of the entire single parents have access to household domestic servant with a little more than half of the male single parents and a little above one-tenth of the female single parents having access to domestic servant; more than half of the entire single parents have access to network of support for household upkeep, with a little above half of the female single parents and a little above one-tenth of male single parents having access to network of support for household upkeep. The result also revealed that friends and relatives and The Church are the only sources of support for these single parents which indicates absence of government income/social support; MSPs and FSPs in Imo State show no significant difference in mean years of schooling; FSPs have significantly higher access to formal sector employment and to higher access to network of support than the MSPs; while MSPs have significantly higher access to domestic servants than the FSPs. Our results are largely in the expected direction and are consistent with main body of single parent headship literature.

The implications of this study for policy stress the imperatives of a gendered analysis of key variable-years of schooling, access to formal sector employment, access to domestic servant/network of support-of single parents made from field data, for an effective and successful welfare improvement policy formulation initiative for single parent households in Imo state. Such analysis identifies/ quantifies gender gaps, breaks down gender blind spots, and engenders the generation of relevant gender disaggregated data, which makes gender mainstreaming in policy easier to accomplish. Besides, the heterogeneity within both MSPs and FSPs with respect to these variables examined should be taken into account in designing policies that aim to improve household welfare.

The results of this study suggest certain directions for policy. Firstly, the study reveals that over three-fifths of the single parents are with the informal/private sector. This suggests the need for the State authorities to ensure that critical factors relating to the business environment in Imo State are addressed. Measures aimed at creating an enabling business environment that could drive investment and entrepreneurship (like steady power supply, security and transport infrastructure; removal of multiple taxation and encumbrances in business registration) so as to reduce the cost of doing business are imperative.

Secondly, given that these parents have children that need care and the fact that only about one-fifth of these parents have access to domestic servants, with high possibility of facing heightened challenges in balancing their work and family responsibilities/time poverty, suggests the need for policy makers to borrow a leaf from the developed world in establishing public sponsored child day-care centres, in addition to encouraging universities and research centres for the production of locally made, low-cost, domestic chore appliances that accomplish domestic tasks within shorter periods, and making same available at subsidized rate for the single parents to ease their workload.

Thirdly, given that relatives and the Church are the only sources of support for assistance for single parents while nothing comes from the government in this regard suggests the need for government to establish a continual income transfer/family benefits/social support program initiatives for the single parents in the state.

Fourthly, the fact that almost all the single parents have formal education suggests that education has a key role to play in any initiative at reducing the tempo of single parenthood in the state and a need for policy review in the education curriculum that would ensure that marriage/family life education are taught in concert with education in general in the State, to cement marriage ideals in the minds of youths and children, and to instil the spirit of marriage stability among them as well.

Finally, given that The Church comes second in terms of sources of support for household upkeep for the single parents, suggests that the Church should be a vital constituency in consultations in any government initiative at evolving poverty reduction/wellbeing improvement packages for these single parents in Imo State.

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