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The Ideology of Baby-Mama Phenomenon: Assessing Knowledge and Perceptions among Young People from Educational Institutions

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Abstract

This study investigated the knowledge and perception of the ideology of baby-mama concept among the youths. Particularly, this paper assessed the knowledge of the concept of baby mama among youths and also their opinion on the acceptability of this style of family structure. The study employed a qualitative approach through an in-depth interview research method. Forty respondents between the ages of 16 and 40 years were selected across three educational institutions in Oyo state, south-west Nigeria. The participants of the study voluntarily agreed to participate in the research and everything said during the course of the interview was transcribed and subjected to qualitative content analysis of latent and manifest content. The findings of this study revealed that the prevalence of the baby-mama ideology is driven by social media making it more pronounced among the youths. The phenomenon of baby-mama is perceived differently, depending on the cultural background and the value system. It is believed that the nuclear family unit of a father, mother and their biological children is good, worthwhile and deserving to be sustained as a family structure. It is quite obvious from this study that the baby-mama phenomenon is not generally welcomed among the youths.

Keywords: Baby-mama, Single-mother, Knowledge, Perception, Acceptability and Ideology, Higher Education Institutions

Introduction

The twenty first century urban culture has become the bedrock of concurrent cultural practices, diffusing from the western to the third world nations with evident changes experienced in all spheres and levels of

individual and social interactions which also include the pattern of nuptiality and formation of families. The morphology of nuptiality has been able to accommodate diverse processes; from single parenting to teenage motherhood and today the concept of ‘baby mama’ is fast gaining providence and acceptability within the human lexicon of thought and practices most especially for many youngsters (Nze, 2017).

In Nigeria, the decisions taken by young adults in sexuality might be said to be changing. Many are likely now disassociating from getting into long tied marital union and this may be a result from the enculturation of a diffused western culture. Rather than the regrets teenagers now take pleasure having children out of wedlock as long as it raises prestige and status to stardom; not the companionship but the financial gains for having children for men with a high standards of living. Concerns may be tailored in this direction to understand the reasons behind this change in the pattern of sexuality.

Etymologically the term baby mama stems from a Jamiaca Creole used by fathers with illegitimate children to describe the mothers of their children with no form of marriage. These usually culminate the processes of teenage sexuality and pregnancy with the deliberate control of contraceptives (Snarkette, 2003). The predominance of casual relationships among people has increased the desire to avoid pregnancy however the unpredictable nature of relationships makes partners behavior unlikely. The culture of baby mama is in the direction of skewed relationships between children and parents; men relying on mothers as important catalysts in the relationship while they relate with their children from a distance (Raine, Gard, Boyer, Haide, Brown and Hernandez, 2010).

The family structure in contemporary society has continued to experience changes and there have been different views and opinions about the changes that have impacted the family structure in recent times. There is obviously a lack of enough research data on this social reality to assess and understand the acceptability and perception of the trending family structure in today’s society.

The Concept of Baby Mama

A baby mama is also called a solo-parent or a single parent. A baby mama is a parent, particularly a woman who is not living with a spouse or partner and shoulder the entire or most of the day-to-day responsibilities of raising the child or children as the case may be. A single parent is the primary caregiver whom the child or the children have residency with most of the time (Nancy, 1997). Originally, baby mamas are unwed mothers of any age. The fathers of their children are baby daddies. The baby mama syndrome is the constellation of circumstances, people, relationships, behaviours, and negative effects related in any way to two people making a baby together when they are not married to each other.

Today, many celebrities boast of their being baby mamas or baby daddies. This action has influenced many youngsters and teenagers who see being a baby mama or baby daddy as a cool thing. Most baby mamas and baby daddies are poor, and cannot afford health care for themselves or their children, and have trouble putting food on the table. Many have to live with parents or grandparents. In fact, a large proportion of them do not intend to make a baby at all. Majority of the intentions were tailored towards mere committed relationships and dating.

The baby mama phenomenon was not always in case in Nigeria. In the past, the news that a young lady got pregnant through premarital sex was seriously frowned at and seen as an unacceptable act. Today, however, there has been a complete change. Many are having babies out of wedlock. This is even celebrated by the media. A lot of young people have been caught in this web with the belief that a woman's "independence" is derived from having babies without any marital attachment. People hardly flinch, instead they see it as normal.

The Prevalence of Baby-Mama

Globally, single parent families are rapidly on the increase. In the United State for instance, about 28% of children are currently raised in single-parent households and a majority (over 80%) of the household are headed by single mothers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Baby mamas have been on a steady increase from the 1978s into the twenty-first century, and they have exceeded 40% of the entire population (Cahn and Carbone, 2014). The National Centre for Health Statistics (2014) put it thus:

In fact, four in ten births in the United States. Continue to occur to unmarried women – and more than half of all births to women under 30 are to unmarried women.

Before the financial crisis of 2008, there was an increase from two percent to five percent of White college graduates becoming mothers outside marriage. On the long run, it was revealed that those that never-formed families experienced instabilities in relationships than their counterparts, thereby causing fusion for mother and child relationship (Kline and Mahn, 2014).

It is clear to also note that young adults getting married are at a lower rate now than in the previous generation. Higher cohabitation and lower rates are analyzed in numerical terms. Kilin and Mahn (2014) put in this form;

If current trends continue, more than 30% of millennial women won't be married by 40, almost twice the number of Generation X women.

The role of marriage is changing tides in Nigeria. This is as a result of the dynamism in social norms towards cohabitation and the state of economy under recession (Olaleye, 2010). While situations like this encourage couples into marriage, on the hand discourages many others (Amato, 2000). Indeed, more mothers are single than married, since education influences the timing for young women to become mothers. Where those less educated become mothers before getting married than others (Hamburg, 2004). According to Adelani, Tijani and Ogunbanwo (2008), more than half of all babies born to mothers without college education are out of wedlock when compared to those born to mothers with college degrees which is not more than ten percent.

When marriage declines, children lose most benefits attached to marriage because the quality and stability of a child's life is closely connected with marriage of the child's parents (or the lack of it). Amato (2007) in a study, posited that children from least educated parents are unlikely to grow up with both parents.

Moderately educated middle-class parents with at least a basic diploma are increasingly unlikely to stay happily married (Wilcox, 2012). Children of these parents are necessarily deprived of family stability and family wealth. A double disadvantaged situation for these children. Their needs are not basically a few economic resources, they are more desiring and envious of

the shelter, nursing stability and security generally afforded by an intact married family. To be more direct, children raised in single-parent or mingled-families are less seemingly to thrive than their peers from intact families (Wilcox, 2012).

The Baby Mama Syndrome on Children

From the economic point of view, poor single mothers are less likely to make substantial investments in their children, which is part of the gaps created in need for state intervention on the provisions of education and other human capital investments. This also explains that children without father possess a greater risk for society in the long run (Brown, 2014).

Fathers who are well acquainted with their significance to their children and are encouraged to be committed and more involved with their children, on a long run yields better children, moms and dads, creating strong families as a result (Andrews, 2014). The void created by the circumstances of a never-formed family gets filled by the state interventions which initially are caused by inactive and unoccupied mothers and fathers in a child's life (Dowd, 1997).

Children growing up with both parents are less likely to face stressful experiences compared to those with single parents (Ekepyong and Udisi, 2016, Benokraitis, 2012). These experiences are composed of imbalances in both emotions and physiological domains.

Aside from the family, other socialization agents have great influence on children. Hence, separation of couples, death of a partner, poor parental care and cases of divorce will only expose children to possible damaging situations in the society (Olaleye and Oladeji, 2010).

Maatta, Jaana and Satu, (2014) narrates that children from families with both parents are more prepared to work and marry than children born into fatherless homes. The latter are very likely to end up as teenage mothers, involved in crime and struggle in school, propagating economic divides in the next generation. Most female-headed families consist of children born and raised outside marriage, where the poverty rate among children is at least four times as equal to the poverty rate in married-couple families" (Haskins, 2014).

Theoretical Understanding of Baby Mamas from the Postmodernity Movement and the Formation of Families

Quite different sociologists have related the change in the institution of family to the concept of modernity and postmodernity. The postmodernist perspectives see the view and explanation of family life by other perspectives as too narrow. To the postmodernists, they see family in a post-modern society as modifying itself to fit or meet the changed circumstances of contemporary society (Haralambos & Holborn 2007). Their explanation of the changing and modifying family life is largely related to choice, diversity and pluralism which are a reflection of postmodern ideas about behaviour and lifestyles. To this extent, this paper will engage the works of Judith Stacey (1998) on the Post-modern Family, and Anthony Giddens on the transformation of intimacy.

According to Judith Stacey (1998) in her work “The Divorce-Extended Family”, the postmodern family has evolved using the United State as a case study based on her study on families conducted in Silicon Valley, California. She argued that women in the postmodern world have more freedom than ever before. This freedom has impacted on the changing family arrangement which is basically inclined to meet their needs and breakout from patriarchal oppression. She emphasized that women rather than men are the major social change agents in the family. Thus, they rejected the traditional house-wife-mother role; they chose to work to boost their independence, as many others returned to school to also boost their job prospects. In the process of getting fitted into this change, many women divorced and later remarried. On this note, women particularly create new types of family that meet their needs. Stacey (1998) revealed that divorce extended is one the new created families in which members of the family are connected by divorce rather than marriage.

As explained by Judith Stacey (1998), the desire for freedom by women in today’s society has greatly increased. This freedom is connected to the choice of type of family, their role in the family, the control over the choice of their chosen career. This freedom has significantly altered the family arrangement which has made women to desire and choose to be baby-mamas. Rather than be bonded in marriage to a man and be fulfilling marital obligations as designed by their cultural background and societal values, they choose the path to express high level of independence by the choice of being baby-mamas which will make them highly independent of marital roles and obligations. Also, many women who wanted to build their chosen careers see a lone family as the fitted family to advance their chosen career. Playing the role of a housewife might limit them to pursue their

chosen careers especially those who have chosen the entertainment industry.

Basically, it is important to note that the increase in the choice of lone family (baby-mama) is not solely a matter of the freedom of choice of individuals. Many people are forced to go the path of lone family because of structural changes making life more difficult for them. For instance, young ladies desire to get the opportunity of getting pregnant by some celebrities, with this they can always depend on the celebrity for monthly allowances for the care of the baby which is meeting their own economic demands. Based on this, many young people may perceive that baby-mama ideology is a welcome idea and see it as part of the necessary change to the family structure. Apt to this understanding this study focused on the knowledge and perception of baby mama among young people living in selected areas of southwest areas in Nigeria.

Data and Methods

The study employed a qualitative approach through an in-depth interview research method, a key ethnographic method, to generate primary data from the samples. The samples for this study were purposely drawn from the population of interest, which comprised youths between the ages of 16 and 40 in selected higher institutions and communities in Oyo State, Nigeria. Four research assistants were engaged to conduct the interview between November 2017 and February 2018. The research instrument used for the data collection was a semi-structured interview guide. Various salient questions were administered as the interview guide employed was designed to effectively answer the research questions and actualize the objectives of the study. The in-depth interview session lasts between 20 to 40 minutes. The interviews were recorded and field notes were taken for verbal and non-verbal actions of the samples. The data collected for this study were analyzed using appropriate qualitative data analysis tools.

More than 50 persons were identified to participate in the study using the purposive sampling method. During the course of the implementation, a total of 40 participants gave their consents and took part in the study

The study was conducted at Educational Advancement Centre, University of Ibadan and Agbowo community of Ibadan all in Oyo State, South Western Nigeria, between the month of November and December, 2018. Educational Advancement Centre, located in Bodija area of Ibadan was established in 1996 and was one of the earliest advanced level Schools in Nigeria. The school is privately owned and currently has about 500

students. University of Ibadan founded in 1948 is the oldest and first Nigeria University located in Ibadan (largest city in West Africa). The school was first established as a College of the University of London and in 1962 became a full-fledged independent University. The university has thirteen Faculties which are: Arts, Science, Basic Medical Sciences, Clinical Sciences, Agriculture and Forestry, the Social Sciences, Education, Veterinary Medicine, Pharmacy, Technology, Law, Public Health and Dentistry. Agbowo community is a populous residential neighborhood in the city of Ibadan. The community is close to the popular Mokola Hill as well as the well-known Ojoo Market in Ibadan. Most of the inhabitants of this community are of low socio-economic status and the community can also be categorized as one of the slum areas of the Ibadan city.

Before participating in the research study, the purpose, objective and benefit of the study were relayed to the participants and thereafter their consents were sought. The respondents who were below 18 years interviewed in this study were students of the Educational Advancement Centre. In that light, the consent was obtained from their teachers and the head of the sociology department prior to data collection. Respondents were all informed that they were free to withdraw their participation at any time.

Results

The findings of this study are grouped into two sections: knowledge and perception of the baby mama phenomenon and acceptability of the baby-mama family system ideology. The reporting style adopted in the study is the content analysis of verbatim explanations.

Knowledge and Perception of the Baby Mama Phenomenon among Youths in South-West Nigeria

Baby-mama is quite a popular slang across the globe and it is becoming more prominent and pronounced among youths in Nigeria today. According to the Urban Dictionary, the term “baby mama” is used to define an unmarried woman who has had a child. This practice of a woman giving birth outside marriage has been existing for a long time but it gained prominence when celebrities and entertainers were having babies outside wedlock and hence, prefer to be called baby mama or baby daddy rather than being regarded as a single parent. This study examined the shades of

opinions among youths on who a baby mama is. One of the respondents described the term 'baby-mama' in a simple way. According to her:

A baby-mama is a lady who has a child for a man she is not married to.

[IDI|Female|27years old |Yoruba| Christian| Married and Living with her husband]

Another female respondent explained that becoming baby-mama is usually out of circumstances. According to her:

I do not think ladies make up their minds to become baby-mamas; it is usually out of circumstances. The original intention was not to become a baby-mama, it is usually to enjoy the pleasure of sex and then pregnancy comes in. If that happens she considers her options and settles for giving birth to the child.

[IDI|Female|26years old |Urhobo| Christian| Married]

Also, findings of this study showed that youths basically get to know about the baby-mama family system through social media. Particularly, celebrities' gossip on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, blogs etc. are sources of information on the baby-mama ideology for youths. Other sources include: experience (personal and/or family members/friends/neighbors) and word of mouth.

While some of the youths believe it is not quite rampant around them, others believe it is fast becoming rampant in Nigeria society. Factors youths considered are responsible for the increase in the adoption of the baby-mama family system are: poverty, independence for women, avoiding marital commitment, socialization, civilization, lack of self-control, priority misplacement, the increase of domestic violence cases in the society.

A female Nigeria Youth Service Corp member emphatically noted:

When you have a child for a rich man, you will also be rich likewise. Your needs will be taken care of just like what the baby-mama celebrities are enjoying.

[IDI|Female|25years old | Christian| Married]

Another female participant affirmed that:

Basically, some women want freedom from men. Freedom from the male dominance that is common in this part of the world. Being a

baby-mama you can pursue your career without the control of a man in your life.

[IDI/Female/16years old | Christian/ Single]

Also, a male student of an A-level college established that:

Career is an important factor. Men consider having baby-mama rather than a proper wife because of their choice of career. Some rich sport men today keep their girl-friend as their baby-mama and then much later in their life marry them if the relationship is still intact.

[IDI/Male/17years old | Christian/ Single]

The study, thus, reveals that the term ‘baby mama’ and single motherhood are perceived to be different among the youths. They believe baby mama is fast becoming prevalent in today’s society as it is quite embraced among top celebrities and/or the well to do category of people in the society.

They perceived single motherhood family may arise due to unintended pregnancy, death of a parent, separation, and desertion but the baby mama family system is perceived to be a deliberate choice of the parties involved. A deliberate choice is when the parties involved do little or nothing to prevent pregnancy while in a sexual relationship. They consciously and unconsciously accept the fact the relationship can lead to child bearing but may not be married for the time being.

Acceptability of the Baby-Mama Family System Ideology

Increasingly, the perceptions and acceptance of single-parent families are changing. The youths are accustomed to seeing more emerging single-parent families. Acceptability of the Baby-Mama family system ideology is, indeed, a subjective matter, some youths do not support the ideology of the baby-mama family system based on different reasons, some of which are religious, socialization, and the consequences of such family system on child-development among others. They believe the Nigerian society is not in support of such a family system.

A post graduate Yoruba male student explained that:

Well I am a Christian, and a responsible one for that matter. The Bible does not agree with such so I do not agree with it as well.

[IDI/Male/26years old | Christian/ Married]

Another female participant affirmed that:

My culture and my religion do not permit me to be pregnant outside wedlock. I am strongly of the opinion that pregnancy should be in the context of marriage.

[IDI/Female/25years old / Christian/ Single]

Others with a negative perception about the baby-mama family system described it as ‘bad’, ‘terrible’, ‘nonsense’, ‘immoral’, ‘not cultural’. The baby mama ideology is not well accepted by the youths while some are not supporting the ideology and do not consider it as an option, some consider it as a choice of whom it is okay for. According to a Yoruba female HND graduate:

Everybody knows what is good and best for themselves, if you think that is the best way to live your normal life, I don't see anything bad in it. if you think to be alone with your children without being married to their father will give you peace and rest of mind, I do not see anything bad in it.

[IDI/Feale/37years old / Christian/ Married]

Relating the baby-mama family system to the conventional two-parents' family system, this study unveiled why youths still prefer for themselves the conventional two-parents' family system despite the prominence of the baby-mama family system.

According to a female participant who is a single mother:

Single parenting is not the best choice. It is associated with lots of challenges because you are alone in taking responsibility for the child care. My experience particularly is a challenging one. Immediately I got pregnant, the guy responsible was not willing to accept it. It was his parents that gave me some money during the pregnancy period and never showed up when I delivered. He was not financially capable and avoided me even till now. I had no other option than to strong to single handedly take care of my child.

[IDI/Female/19years old / Christian/ Single Mother]

When further asked how she became a

I had a boyfriend as teenager just like every other girl. I usually visit my then boyfriend in Lagos. It was one of the visits I got pregnant and immediately I informed he deserted me.

[IDI/Female/19years old / Christian/ Single Mother]

Another respondent who is a Post graduate student opined that:
The baby-mama ideology is not a welcome one. Although it exists but it doesn't end well. Among the drama involved is the issue of sending money for the upkeep of the mother and the child. The demand for the money is always by force. Most of the children

involved grow up to become nuisance because of lack of proper upbringing.

[IDI/Female/27years old / Married]

Although not everyone agrees that the baby-mama family system should be embraced, a detailed investigation of their perception reveals that the dominant family ideology among the youths defines the real family as the nuclear family unit of a father, mother and their biological children. The conventional two-parents' way of raising a family is therefore a cherished value passed on to the youths and the youths consider such a value worthy of nurturing and preservation. While the design of the family may have changed in recent years, the fundamentals of the conventional way of raising a family and the importance of emotional closeness in a family setting are still present.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of this study revealed that “baby mama” designation is a slang and also a language used to refer to a family structure where the woman is not married to her child’s father. Having a baby-mama automatically implies that there is a baby daddy. Baby mama family system can therefore be said to be one of the varieties of single parent family structure. The father being one of the parents is a non-resident parent who is not involved at all in parental work and responsibilities. This is in line with studies (National Centre for Health Statistics, 2014; Shah, 2014) showing how nature of families today have come in a variety of shapes leading to the rise in single-parent families.

This study established that the terminologies of “baby-mama” and “baby-daddy” are commonly used by those in the entertainment industry especially celebrities all around the world. These terminologies, particularly baby-mama is well pronounced among the youths. The youths perceive that ladies are motivated to become a baby-mama to a top celebrity or who is financially buoyant and well capable for her upkeep and that of the child. Citing examples of baby-mamas of some Nigeria celebrities who are enjoying the wealth of their baby-daddy, the participants of this study mentioned Davido, Wizkid, Teckno, Patoranking, Timaya among others. Also, the youths perceived that the motivation to have a child outside wedlock and not be married to the mother is usually driven by career demands and the desire of women to be independent of a man. Also, the desire not to be committed to the conventional family demands is also perceived to be a motivating factor. This finding is

supported by Essays, UK. (2018) and the work of Motapanyane, M. (2016).

Also, based on the responses of the respondents of this study, it was revealed that the prevalence of the baby-mama terminology is quite driven by social media. The participants stated that the celebrities' news majorly on social media about their baby mama has made the baby mama concept more pronounced among the youth especially users of the different social media platforms. This implies that among other functions of social media, it facilitates interaction with others and having contact with popular culture. This simply implies that advancement in technology and the evolvement of social media have made the world more integrated and has enabled the growth of global pop culture across societies. This finding is supported by the work of Juszczuk (2015) on fields of impact of social media on youth.

Findings of this study established the fact that the ideology of the baby-mama family system is well pronounced among the youths. However, the conventional nuclear family system remains widely accepted and preferred based on the values the society places nuclear on family and some religious doctrines on nuclear family. For an ideology, the baby mama system is accepted and welcomed but for a personal lifestyle the acceptability is slightly low. This implies that high values are placed on parenthood and the nuclear family is still the societal norm in the 21st century. The study further revealed how the perception of the baby mama family system among youths have impacts on their choices of family structure and system. The youths believe strongly that the baby-mama family system will help the parties involved individually ultimately pursue their career without disruptions majorly from marital commitment and relationships.

Conclusion

Continuous changes in social norms have brought fluctuation to family formation. This makes the younger generation have less confidence in the institution of marriage. Rather than keeping a long-term marriage commitment, the youths are beginning to embrace the ideology of raising baby (s) alone as a lady or having a lady raise baby (s) for them as men. The baby-mama phenomenon is a public knowledge with the aid of globalization and social media. Although the nuclear family structure is believed to be worth having among the youths.

Based on the cultural acceptance of the nuclear family unit of a father, mother and their biological children, it is therefore important for the family to play a vital role in imparting such values to the children.

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