

POVERTY AND THE CHALLENGES OF PARENTING: ISSUES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Parents across the globe are inarguably repositied with the task of raising children that are socially, economically and politically acceptable. It is, commonsensically, the primary duty of the parent to properly raise the child in ways that when he grows up, he will not depart from it. However, in the midst of global changes in the economy, traditional institutions and practices, the task of parenting has become more daunting than ever before. This is adversely aided by the challenges posed by deepening poverty especially in under developed countries of the world. Irrespective of the global efforts to combat poverty, it has remained prevalent in many developing countries especially Africa. Considering the consequent negative effects of poverty, it becomes expedient to critically examine ways in which poverty militate against 'good' parenting. This results in questions regarding the effects of poverty on parenting behaviour, parenting practices and parenting styles. Such questions as what is 'good' parenting? How does poverty affect good parental practices? What are the effects of poverty on children? Are differences in parental practices culturally induced or are they, as some researchers claim, mere bias towards low-income parents? This study in its exposition reveals that regardless of culture, poverty has a significant impact on the parental practices adopted by parents. In other words, poverty stands as a serious barrier to proper parenting hence, speedy effort should be made to alleviate poverty as well as teach parents good parental practices for the best outcome of the child.

Keywords: Parenting, Children, Poverty, Low-income, Socioeconomic Status

1. Introduction

Parenting, regarded as the oldest profession, has been considered "the most emotionally powerful, demanding and consequential tasks of adult life" (Teti et al., 2017:3). Parenting is concerned with raising of children in ways that conform to the culture in which the children are to thrive. It prepares children for socially accepted physical, economic and psychological situations that are characteristic of the culture in which they are to survive and thrive (Bornstein, 1991:6). Some decades ago, the task of parenting especially in Africa was a community affair. Thus, there is the popular saying that "it takes a village to raise a child and a community to keep the parents sane". This explicitly emphasizes how onerous the task of parenting could be on psychology of the parents. It also implicitly acknowledges that one does not own a child hence it is the duty of the community to assist in raising the child in ways that is in conformity with the societal shared social, economic and political values. Parenting is essential for the optimum development of the child. Indeed without optimum adult attention and care,

educational, behavioural and emotional progress for children becomes increasingly negatively impacted (Sherr et al., 2017:145). Sherr and colleagues further state that parenting style - warmth, support and harsh parenting all affect the child health as well as developmental outcomes (Sherr et al., 2017). Parenting, while it affects the child and parents, is itself influenced by a number of factors. Whereas "parenting is shaped by the parents' participation in other social micro-systems (such as the marital relationships and friendships) and by the institutions, values, cultures, and politics of the society in which the parent-child relationship is embedded (Kaiser & Delaney, 1991:69), it is also influenced by the socio-economic status of the parents (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002; Teti, et al., 2017).

There is evidence from research in the area of parenting that poverty plays a critical role in the parental attitudes and parental style and practices of low-income parents. However, there's is no consensus among researchers on whether or not poverty affects parenting. Dermott & Pomati (2016) argue that poor parents are not always *poor* at parenting. They argue that the dominant trope of poor people being poor at parenting may arise because the most educationally advantaged parents - who do look differently to the majority - are accepted as the benchmark against whom others are assessed (Dermott & Pomati, 2017:1). In support, Cooper (2021:349) adds that low-income parents are not an unusual or deviant group parenting differently to everyone else. On the other hand, the findings of Sherr, et al. (2017); Kotchick & Forehand, (2002); Eamon, (2001); and Teti, et al., (2017) all suggest that parents' socio-economic status affects their relationship with their children. Other studies have found that low socio-economic status of parents, which translates to childhood poverty and also affects parenting, has a deleterious effect on the brain development and academic achievement of the child (Claro, et al., 2016; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Ferguson, et al., 2007). This is in consonance with earlier findings that poverty reduces parent's responsiveness, warmth and supervision while increasing parenting inconsistency (Conger et al., 1992, 1994; Elder, 1974; McLoyd et al., 1994)

Based on the negative effects of poverty on parenting and the behavioural attitudes, brain development, academic achievement and the general outcome of adolescents and young adults, it has become imperative to look deep into the root cause of such behaviours. Child-rearing has consequences. A properly raised child is necessary for the continuation of a society while poorly raised child constitute a public health challenge to the society. It is therefore important that the family background, especially, economic background of the parents be given appropriate attention as poverty directly and indirectly affects the parental attitudes and parental style adopted by parents in the upbringing of their children. The essence of this paper, therefore, lies in bringing together the findings of researchers on different ways in which poverty affects parenting and the child's outcome. It further examines how this challenge portends threat to the future of the society. Poverty is well known to have negative effect that extends to how children are raised from infancy to

adolescent. Impoverished parents are said to be less responsive to the needs of the child and less warmth towards the child. All these are significant to the development of the child's internalizing and externalizing behaviour. This paper also adds to the body of literature on poverty and parenting.

2. Parenting and Good Parenting

The concept of parenting is complex and multifaceted. Parenting is the process of giving birth, providing for the basic physical, social and emotional need of the child as well as providing protection until the child attains the age of reason and is able to care for himself or herself. Parenting is also defined as a primary mechanism of socialization, that is, a primary means of training and preparing children to meet the demands of their environments and take advantage of opportunities within those environments (Parenting Matters, 2016:19-20). Bornstein (1991:6) sees parenting as the particular and continuing task of parents and other caregivers to acculturate children...to prepare them for socially accepted physical, economic and psychological situations that are characteristic of the culture in which they are to survive and thrive. The notion of parenting comprises parenting behaviours/styles; the quality of the parent-child relationship; parenting activities; and more general caring activities (Dermott & Pomati, 2016:5). Parenting involves parent-child relationship that has effect on both the child and the parent. The influence of parenting on the child can last through adulthood hence, above other things; parenting is being prioritized in some nations. It affects how the child relates to people in the society. Thus, parenting, broadly defined, becomes the medium through which the child experiences the world (Kaiser & Delaney 1996:69). The quality of parenting a child receives is important to the child's development and outcomes. More than money, poor parenting is said to be adversely dominating the lives of children (Field, 2010). What makes parenting good or bad?

The idea of 'good' parenting cannot be conclusively described by a set of parental behaviour over others. What we refer to as good parenting lacks a definitive definition. As Kaiser and Delaney (1996:70) puts it, "no single description of good parenting would adequately describe the variants behavior across the developmental period of childhood or across cultures defined by race, ethnicity, class, or geography". Parental practices are influenced by different factors; economic, ethnic, cultural and environmental factors. The ways in which parents convey positive behavior, monitor behavior and provide basic support for their child at developmental age vary from topographies (Collins, Harris, & Susman, 1995; Holmbeck et al., 1995). In dangerous neighborhoods, parents tend to establish higher level of control and grants less autonomy so as to guard the child against deviant influences (Eamon, 2001). For example, parenting practices of African American parents may be more authoritarian and coercive (Kelley et al., 1992). Such parenting practices may be dually influenced; first by their

disadvantaged environment in which they grow and second by the traditions of childbearing inherited from previous generation (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 1985; Garcia-Coll, Brillion, & Meyer, 1995). Kwok and Wong (2000) also note that Chinese parents may be more authoritarian due to cultural expectations.

Regardless of these differences, there are basic parenting practices which best support the outcome of the child and therefore are considered good. Even though there might be inconsistency in the measures of parenting used, there is a wealth of evidence suggesting that certain parenting behaviour tends to have positive or negative association with children's outcome. Baumrind (1991) identifies good parenting with an authoritative parenting style, characterized by both high demand (behavioral control and monitoring) and high supportiveness. These parenting styles he argues is associated with better outcomes for children and adolescents. Supportive parenting with moderate disciplinary practices, according to Conger et al. (1992), is related to adaptive child adjustment such as academic competence, self-confidence and positive peer relations. This supports the findings of other studies which also reveal that parenting practices that is supportive, warmth, involved in child-monitoring and consistent but moderate disciplinary strategies is important for the child's academic competence, high self-esteem, positive peer relations and fewer behavioural problems (Baumrind, 1978; Brody & Flor, 1998; Patterson et al., 1992).

Another quality of good parenting is parental responsiveness. Parental responsiveness and sensitivity to the needs of the child is also critical to the child's behavioural development. Responsiveness through positive and negative reinforcements help in the formulation of the child's social behaviour. When a child's actions have a positive effect, for example they are rewarded for their behaviour; this provides an incentive to repeat that behaviour in the future, and when a child's actions have a consequences such as punishment, they avoid repeating those actions again (Bandura, 1977:17). These positive parental strategies, Kotchick and Forehand (2002) state , are particularly important for children in families facing adverse circumstances such as economic strain, marital problems or parental illness.

Various parenting practices are good for various child outcomes. For instance there is substantial evidence that home learning environment is important for children's cognitive development (Melhuish et al., 2008; Washbrook, 2010). Black et al. (2016) see a stimulating home learning environment and parent's engagement with their children in cognitive stimulating activities such as reading, singing, and storytelling, as well as the exposition of young children to varieties of experiences as indicators of good parenting. Parenting quality - a child's milieu of warmth, responsiveness, and stimulation - are all important for a young child's cognitive, social and emotional development (Knauer et al., 2019). Good parenting is generally viewed as the aggregate of parents' warmth, stimulation and responsiveness to the child's needs.

The doctrine of the Catholic Church as contained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, 1994) sees good parenting as one that is essentially involved in the moral education and the spiritual formation of the child. It summed up the role of good parents in the following passage.

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by *creating a home* where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for *education in the virtues*. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery, the preconditions of all true freedom (CCC, 1994:594).

The Church document further added that children's education should start at their tenderest age and that parents reserve the right to choose schools for their children being those first responsible for their education.

Competent parenting, according to Teti et al. (2017), is protective, mindful, and an integrated blend of warmth and developmentally-appropriate control. It seeks to protect the child from physical, social and emotional distress while offering nurturance attuned to the best child outcomes. It is mindful and sensitive to the child's expressions and needs especially during parent-child interactions. Good parenting, adequate attention and responsiveness also help in the child's language development. Conversely, harsh discipline and unsupportive parenting practices downplay children's emotional well-being. Kotchick and Forehand (2002) note that parenting that is overly harsh, passive and inconsistent, or emotionally vacant has deleterious effects on children's developmental trajectories. Parental practices - limited parental responsiveness, harsh and abusive parenting and failure to monitor child behaviour outside the home - that result to poor child outcomes (Kaiser & Delaney, 1996) can be seen as poor parenting.

3. Effects of Poverty on Parenting

Poverty is one of the factors that influence parenting. It has deleterious effects on both parents and the children. Chronic poverty can have devastating effects that persist through adulthood. Poverty deprives families of the capacity to prepare for the task of parenting. The effects of poverty on parenting can be seen in the pre-birth environment of the infant. It affects the mother's nutrition during pregnancy. Mother's nutrition during pregnancy has consequences for the child. The prevalent condition of lack amongst parents of lower socioeconomic status makes it onerous to fulfill the parental task of providing for the nutritional and health needs of children (Guo & Harris, 2000; Cooper, 2021; Kaiser & Delaney, 1996). Kaiser and Delaney (1996:73) observe thus:

Parents who are poor have greater difficulty meeting the basic nutritional, health, housing and clothing

needs of their children. Inability to meet these needs compromise parents' role as provider for their child's well-being. Inability to fulfill the role of provider may further exacerbate the stresses experienced by parents who are poor (Kaiser & Delaney, 1996:73).

Parents in poverty also tend to have unhealthy lifestyle such as drinking and smoking and less likely to engage in health-promoting activities such as recreation (Guo & Harris, 2000).

There are evidences that parents in poverty experience more parental stress compared to those from middle-income class. Economic strain increases the risk of parenting stress which is associated with greater risk of mental health challenges (Wahlbeck, et al., 20017). Studies have shown that parental distress - stress, anxiety and depression, is common among parents of lower socioeconomic status. Parental stress that accompanies economic strain gives rise to parental harshness, non-responsiveness and inconsistency in parenting behaviour (Evans, Boxhill & Pinkara, 2008; McLoyd, 1998; Aber, Jones & Cohen, 2000). Low parental income leads to diminished expression of affection and decreased responsiveness to the child's needs (McLoyd, 1990). The CCC (1994:595-6) states that "parents' respect and affection are expressed by the care and attention they devote to bringing up their young children and providing for their physical and spiritual needs. Children whose caregivers show lower level of warmth and sensitive responsiveness display weaker language skills compared with those who received higher level of such parenting behaviour (Madigan, et al., 2019). Inability to develop age-appropriate knowledge and competence and age-appropriate language skills decreases a child's readiness for school (Ferguson, et al., 2007). Also parents of lower socioeconomic status tend to have more spousal problems. Higher level of stress may lead to uncontrollable emotions that can elicit conflict between couples. The stress suffered by a couple can also make him/her unsupportive of the partner, thereby increasing the stress of the partner (Kwok & Wong, 2000). Lötter (2007) stated that poverty has devastating effect on interpersonal and family relationships. According to him, inadequate resources for the fulfillment of basic needs and the negative feeling of powerlessness can wreck havoc on interpersonal and social relationships.

Parenting styles among poor families have a higher tendency of being punitive, less consistent, and more likely to be coercive than in many affluent families (Kaiser & Delaney, 1996; Whiteside-Mansell, et al., 2007). Harsh parenting has been observed to be dominant among parents in poverty who try to exert control over their children. According to Akmatov 2011, about 40% of parent in sub-Saharan Africa uses corporal punishment in childrearing. He further states that the risk of child abuse and parental attitude towards corporal punishment increase with poverty. This corroborates with earlier findings of Kaiser and Delaney (1996) who reveal that harsh parenting and child abuse is disproportionately higher among

lower income families. They further state that while income alone does not account for harsh parenting practices, it is a dependable marker for other factors that predict abusive behaviour. Poor parents often tend to vent their frustration through their children by being overly cruel and enforcing strict discipline (Lötter, 2007).

Low-income parents are also characterized by lower level of education. Studies show that parents of lower income are typically less educated and lack the structural resources to provide more stimulating environment for their children compared to parents from higher socioeconomic status (Kotchick & Forehand, 2021; Dermott & Pomati, 2016; Kaiser & Delaney, 1996). Poor and less educated parents engage less in activities that support children's cognitive development. Parents with lower educational qualification, although they may have high interest in their children's education, may be less able to engage in school based activities due to their own lack of education. According to Kwok and Wong (2000), poor and less educated parents are more likely to experience parenting stress. This is because they see their children to be more demanding, less adaptable and less reinforcing. Poor mothers, according to Bradley and his colleagues, are less likely to effectively communicate with their children or show verbal affection towards them (Bradley et al., 2001). Poor communication during parent-child interactions decreases stimulation for language development in children. Parents living in poverty are less likely, compared to those from higher socioeconomic status, to provide stimulation for children's thinking, learning and language (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). The import of education and the role of parents in educating their children cannot be overemphasized. The CCC was explicit on this matter. The doctrine notes that the primary duty of couples extends beyond procreation to include the moral education and the spiritual formation of the child (CCC, 1994).

Low-income working parents often have to contend with parenting and erratic work schedules that affects parent-child interactions and contact. They often rely on the assistance of caregivers who in some cases are not efficient enough. Poor parents are occupied with means to survival that they lack the time to interact and monitor children's behaviour both inside and outside the home. According to Dermott and Pomati (2016:8), "perhaps due to the combined pressures of paid work and unpaid household chores parents simply do not have enough time to engage in full range of 'good' parenting on a frequent basis". Poor parents tend to often be away from home to instill the necessary values into the child. Poverty makes it difficult for parents to fulfill their primary task as parents which include the moral education of their children. Poverty reduces parent's availability to their children and being that children learn from imitation and role-playing, they tend to learn wrongly from peer groups. The church in the CCC (1994:594), recognizing that children learn by imitation and role-playing insists that "parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them" so as to ensure proper reinforcements for good character molding. Parent's unavailability and lack of family session compromises parenting,

increases the risk of antisocial behaviour in children. In this media age, it also increases the use of social media, consumption of harmful media content and cyber-bullying. Traditionally poor parents are more likely to raise their children in high risk neighborhood. Due to scarce resources, poor parents raise their children in environments that are prone to crime and deviant activities.

Finally, parents in poverty often suffer from low self-efficacy. Raikes and Thompson (2005:180) note that "people facing financial hardship report lower levels of self-efficacy, and this variation is assumed to arise in part because of the economic and sociological conditions that characterize poverty". Poor parents have greater feeling of self-insufficiency compared to more affluent parents. They nurse the feeling of being different from others and emphasize their inadequacy and powerlessness. They see their children as less acceptable, more demanding, less adaptable and less reinforcing (Kwok & Wong, 2000). Lower self-efficacy increases the risk of parental distress among parents in poverty. Higher self-efficacy, evidence reveals buffers or moderates the impact of parenting stress.

4. Effects of Poverty on Children

Exposition to economic strain has been proven to consistently affect child's development. Poverty affects child's health, growth and development. The risk associated with poverty increases when children are raised in a chronically impoverished neighbourhood and when they are members of a minority group (Kaiser & Delaney, 1996); and also more debilitating when children live in poverty over a long period of time. Poor children, more than those from wealthier families, face health challenges and higher rate of child illness and mortality. This is, in part, as a result of poor nutrition common among impoverished families. Poverty and undernourishment affects growth and brain development in children. There are evidence from studies that people who suffer from economic deprivation are prone to mental health problems and cognitive development (Kaiser & Delaney, 1996; Wahlbeck, et al., 2016; Luby, et al., 2013; Ferguson, et al., 2007). Children from poor families are often raised in a disabling environment with little or no facilities that enhance learning. Children raised in a traditionally poor neighbourhood tend to have lower IQ. The parents of poor children are often less educated and with lower IQ and they are less engaging in activities that stimulate and develop the children's cognitive capacities (Kaiser & Delaney, 1996; Ferguson et al., 2007). The findings of Parveen et al., (2018) reveal that there is a correlation between poverty and moral development in children. There is a higher risk of crime and violence in a chronically poor environment compared to richer environment.

Children of poor parents sometimes are compelled by economic hardship and parents' influence into immoral activities such as prostitution (Parveen et al., 2018). As Lötter (2007) posits, poverty gives people the incentive to engage in immoral activities. Poverty erodes values as the desperation to make a living makes people more prone to lies and other dishonest means of making quick profit in order to survive. Children of low-income families also experience more stress compared to

children from middle-income and higher income families. The high level of parental distress suffered by the parents of poor children often affects the children's stress level. There are more cases of child abuse and maltreatment among children living in poverty. They are less cared for and shown affection. They lack intimate nurturing and attention. They seem to be shown less affection, warmth and responsiveness which aids the development of language skills necessary for effective communication within and outside the home. Poverty plays a significant role in the processing of both internalizing and externalizing behaviours in children. Studies have also revealed that poverty negatively affects brain development. According to the finding of Luby and his colleagues (2021:1136), "exposure to poverty has deleterious effects on human amygdala and hippocampal development". The amygdala and hippocampal are responsible for stress regulation and emotion processing respectively. Poor development of the amygdala and hippocampus may lead to antisocial behaviour. In corroboration, Kaiser and Delaney (1996) add that children raised in poverty are at greater risk of conduct disorder. They tend to be more aggressive, withdrawn and show low self-confidence. Their insecurity makes them more aggressive as a way of protecting themselves before they are attacked. They are more likely to see themselves as unfitting and different from others. Unlike their wealthier peer, poor children are less like to hold a growth mindset which Claro et al., (2016) find to buffer the deleterious effects of poverty on achievement. Poverty leads to poorer academic achievement by making low-income students believe that their intellectual capabilities are immutable. They are less open to new learning and achievement. They are more likely to hold a fixed mindset. Economically disadvantaged children equally lack material resources necessary for their academic exploits; hence they are also prone to dropping out of school. Lack of education places poor children at greater risk of vicious cycle of poverty.

Children who suffer from economic strain are also prone to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Poverty increases parental stress which in turn increases the risk of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) among children. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have debilitating effects that persist through adulthood. According to Steele et al. (2016), parents who suffer adverse children experiences face more parental distress. Beyond the influence of poverty on parenting stress, exposure to adverse childhood experiences independently affect parenting distress. Exposure to adverse childhood experiences, regardless of family's ethnic or economic status, is a risk factor for parenting in the next generation (Steele, et al., 2016). In other words, adverse childhood experiences can still increase the chances of parenting stress regardless of whether the poverty cycle is broken.

5. Negative Effects of Poor Parenting on the Society

Poor parenting affects the society in various ways. Parenting is critical to the well-being and future of the society. Field (2010:11) explicitly states that "we imperil the country's future if we forget that it is the aspirations and actions of parents which are critical to how well their children prosper." He went further to say that

"something more fundamental than scarcity of money is adversely dominating the lives of these children" (Field, 2010:17). This justifies the designation of "parenting as a public health issue" by O'Connor and Scot (2007:27).

Nonperformance or poor performance of parental role is closely associated with children antisocial behaviour. Children and adolescents who do not receive proper parenting and home training more often get involved in antisocial and deviant behaviours. The society is endangered when children who are the future of the society are not properly trained to abide by the societal norms, values and custom that knits the society together. Poor parenting exposes the whole society to delinquent activities and other crimes that are detrimental to the progress, growth and development of the society. Many children who do not receive much affection and care from their parents tend to see others with envy and jealousy, hence a great number of them tend to be aggressive.

Studies also show that the conditions of lack, deprivation and inequality that are associated with poverty and parenting and the lives of children and adolescents raised in poverty contribute to acts of terrorism. Lia and Skjølberg (2004:29) state that "where poverty is extreme and widespread, little economic incentive is needed to motivate young people to risk their lives as guerrillas, if only for the monetary compensations involved". Lack of education and economic strain makes it easier for them to be targeted as recruits in perpetrating acts of terrorism. According to the report of the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Nigeria, about 8,000 children have been recruited for acts of terrorism by Boko Haram in Nigeria since 2009. It is believed that this is because "children are usually paid less (if at all) and require less food to survive (UNODC, 2017:11). In other words, parents' inability to fulfill their parental role - providing for the physical, nutritional, and emotional needs of their children, exposes the society to a wide range of danger. Similarly, parents' unavailability and lack of family time often lead to wrong moral and value education. According to Omede and Omede (2015), the failure to inculcate core values such as honesty, obedience, discipline, hard work, love for one another, and truthfulness in children and adolescents could serve as a nursery for insecurity. The report of Onuoha (2014) indicates that children with difficult upbringings, illiterate and ignorant of religious teaching against violence are more prone to radicalization and extremism. Poor parental upbringing is tied to aggressiveness and violence as can be seen among cult members, terrorists and other criminals. This can sometimes be linked to the neighbourhood in which poor children are raised.

Poor parenting leads to a vicious cycle of poverty. It institutionalizes and makes poverty generational. Parents in poverty fail in providing proper education for their children. While education has been acknowledged to be a verital tool in the eradication of poverty, poor parents, notwithstanding their interest in their children's education, are often unable to avail their children the opportunity to engage in such academic escapades. Children today become adult and parents

tomorrow. And with their poor status and educational deprivation, they tend not to also be able to educate their wards. The cycle therefore continues. In a nutshell, poor parenting creates a society tensed with violence, crime social tension and moral depravity. It further deepens poverty in the society. By not showing adequate care, warmth, sensitive responsiveness and stimulation, poor parents tend to raise children that are more prone to antisocial behaviour and negative emotions.

6. Conclusion

In this article I tried to explore the relationship between poverty and parenting. While there might be ethnic and cultural variations in what may be considered good parenting and the best parenting practices to adopt in order to meet up with the ethnic and cultural expectations of parents, contemporary 'good' parenting is seen in relations to certain ways of raising a child (Faircloth & Lee, 2010). The article exposed how poverty compromises parenting regardless of ethnicity and culture. Irrespective of clime, poverty makes parents unable to fulfill their primary parental responsibilities. It becomes extremely difficult for parents in poverty to meet up with the physical, social, economic and health needs of their children. The predominant condition of lack among poor parents renders them incapable of raising their children in a risk-free neighbourhood. My findings also show that poverty affects the moral development of the child. The constant absence of parental monitoring due to lack of time, and peer pressure from high risk neighbourhood increases the risk of antisocial behaviour and makes it more difficult for parents (whose moral values may be jeopardized) to instill moral values into their children. Poverty poses a serious challenge to the primary duties of parents and proper parenting.

Having established that poverty constitutes public social health challenge as regards parenting, it becomes expedient to chart a way forward. In order to enhance proper parenting, this paper, firstly, suggests that the government as a matter of urgency declare a state of emergency on the root cause of poor parenting and many other social ills. The government should empower parents, especially women, through education which studies have proven to be the bedrock of economic revamp. Education empowers and equips women specifically with the necessary skill, knowledge and self-confidence (Okojie, 2002) which buffers the effects of poverty on parenting. In the same vein, the government should embark on social support and intervention programmes that enhance quality parenting as well as improve child outcomes. Since in most African societies, child-raising is often viewed as the mother's responsibility, the government is also advised to put in concerted efforts towards the eradication of "unfriendly market structures that concentrate women in lower paying and time-consuming work" (Okojie, 2002:3) so as to allow parents some ample time to spend and interact with their families.

The church and other religious bodies should as well develop parenting goal-driven course that will equip intending couples with the skills and knowledge of parenting. Evidence shows that high percentage of married couples lack the

knowledge of parenting. Including courses on proper parenting in the marriage course would better equip prospective couples with good parenting practices for raising children in conformity with societal morals and values. Parents should also note that children learn by imitation and role-playing and therefore should prioritize spending quality time with them. They should not be too busy for their children. There should be time to eat together as a family and other family sessions. Parents should be involved in the lives of their children.

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