

PARENTING JOURNAL

SINGLE PARENTING AND MENTAL HEALTH -DURING THE PANDEMIC-

ISSUE 1

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Parenting is the process of rearing and supporting the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood and beyond. Usually, through conception, it requires the genetic material of two adults (male and female) to produce a child and the ideal situation would be that both parents are actively and positively involved in the upbringing of this child together. However, the sad reality is that this is not always so and the child ends up being raised by one parent, either male or female.

Being a single parent under normal circumstances is a difficult and challenging feat, however, Covid-19 has made this parenting situation even harder with parents having to face unprecedented conditions with little or no familial and governmental support due to Covid-19 restrictions, economic constraints and mounting personal caution.

In homes headed by two parents, the work load of parenting and the concerns that it carries are usually shared, however, in stark contrast, **single parents are forced to bear many of those parenting roles** and address concerns alone and single-handedly carry the strain of parenting.

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The introduction of online schooling presents additional trials for parents, many of whom are still at home having lost their jobs from earlier Covid-19 lockdown restrictions so there is a reduced household income.

For those who tapped into their natural or learned abilities to utilize their skills and earn a dollar while being at home still have to contend with maneuvering the supervision of their child/children’s online schooling, fulfilling parental domestic duties and producing the output of their business venture to earn an income. Additionally, other parents who have retained their jobs and/or are essential workers are facing their own challenges having to go out to work as well as contend with the challenges associated with their child’s online schooling.

This is the new normal....yes!!! but as one parent divulged to me, “Miss, I not working stable nowhere inno, I does iron for a lady off and on and I have three children of different school ages in different schools, I doh have no money to buy no smart nothing for any of them, I have one phone and I does tief a lil juice from my neighbour in a certain part of the house so I cud check my what’s app and facebook in the night and dey fadda fall off de grid....I feeling like a real failure tuh my chirren boi. What going and happen to dem with dey school work?” only way of finding the limits of the possible is by going beyond them into the impossible.”

This is one reality. Here's another , ‘Ms J, this online school thing stressing me, not because my children doh have they things inno, I does work and I does try my best to provide but when I gone to work, I doh have nobody tuh really help them and monitor them when they online. I have to work and my mother is the only person I could trust with them but she kinda sickly now....every time I leave home, I does feel like I on edge until I reach back home. I feeling the back of my neck real hurting me, not to mention that I working in a hospital so that in itself is more stress for me because I does fraid I carry this Covid back home for my children and my mother. I cyah make again inno. I trying but I really cyah make.”

Another parent shared the following,

“Miss, I work from home three days one week and two days the next week and is me with my two children. The little one is 3, in kindergarden and the other one is 11 in SEA class, she ok but yuh see the 3 year old, she is stress... I does cyah get to work in peace because she always following me around, she doesn’t sit still and then I have to sit with her for her to do her work which does take away from my work and my boss have no sympathy. I going in a panic now too because just now my 11 yr old hadda go back to school when school open. Every time I study that, I does get anxiety attacks because she would have to travel and yuh see what going on in this country with women and crime. Plus she does help me with the little one when I have to work so I doh know nah, I really doh know”



One male single parent disclosed that since he and his wife separated three years ago, he is parenting his children (16 and 13) because their mother constantly left them home alone and his elder son started hanging out with the wrong crowd in the community. He admitted that it was a tough job because he has to do everything financially, emotionally, educationally and physically for his children and it is often depressing. **But as a man**, he is required to maintain a strong front and level head so as not to be viewed by society and his children as weak

These accounts are the realities of many single parents and represent the underlying causes that compromise one’s mental health and render many to be susceptible to developing mental illnesses as they singlehandedly deal with all that they are currently up against magnified by the fallouts of the pandemic.

But what exactly is mental illness? Mental illness, also called mental health disorders, refers to a wide range of mental health conditions that affect your mood, thinking and behaviour. Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviours.

Many people have mental health concerns from time to time. But a mental health concern becomes a mental illness when ongoing signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect one’s ability to function. There are hundreds of mental illnesses listed in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), the American Psychiatric Association’s diagnostic manual. The DSM-5 puts illnesses into categories based on their diagnostic criteria.

From this very definition, it is easy to understand why single parents and all that they have to deal with are more susceptible to developing a mental illness and it really does not matter what name the DSM-5 attaches to it, what the profession of a single parent is, their social class, their religion or their ethnicity, the fact remains that single parents are dealt a heavy hand and are more prone to being diagnosed with a mental illness than parents in a dual parent households ,



Even for single parents who are mandated to work from home are faced with dilemmas of having to share a small work space, share a device, give of their time and forego their assignments for the sake of providing for their children's needs and while I understand and appreciate that most parents whether single or dual-headed home are faced with almost the same issues,

I maintain that single parents by the mere definition of single are **more than likely to fall faster into a state of depression because of emotional and mental fatigue.** One single parent with no familial support told me that she gained her weekly solace and support from her spiritual family, which gave her the much needed motivation and encouragement to trudge on during the following week but even that cushion was unceremoniously and unexpectedly ripped from under her due to Covid-19 restrictions and that caused her to suffer a near mental meltdown.

Single Parenting

When you have one parent that has to deal with more than one child in a home and each child has to be engaged in online schooling, there is only one device or two for the most and that parent is the only one that has to juggle monitoring, mentoring, nurturing, providing all the needs (financial, emotional, nutritional, spiritual, educational support), which means awake early and go to bed late, it's difficult. When you have a stressed parent that cannot provide for his/her child/children's academic needs and he/she finds little comfort in the fact that the Ministry of Education have mandated principals to have printed packages of school work ready for pick-up for those students who do not have access to the online stream because the question is then asked "how do I get to and from the school for the package because I am short on funds and most importantly when I collect the package, who is teaching my child the subject because I cannot" These are recipes for mental and emotional breakdowns.

Single parents are facing five (5) key stressors:

(1) There is a debilitating fear of catching the virus and passing it on to their children which causes a ricochet spin-off of worrying about who will care for them if something goes horribly wrong (2) Worrying about being able to afford the basic necessities of food and shelter as well as child care services (3) Worrying about online school, providing for their children's academic needs and their children falling behind academically (4) Co-parenting concerns and the fact that some of these situations are stressful in itself (5) Worrying about having to work and having to take their child/children to someone's home because there is no-one in their circle that can come to their house to look after them.

These key stressors lead to stress, anxiety and depression which are all gateway symptoms to mental illness and nervous breakdowns. Worrying robs us of sleep, undermines our focus, ratchets up our nervous system and generally makes us feel out of control and miserable. This in turn can lead to other physical illnesses that does not auger well for our physical health and shortens our life span.

All of this can be overwhelming as a single parent to read, so what can parents do to safeguard their mental health and minimize the onset of mental illness?

Learn more in our next Parenting Article where we explore in

ISSUE 2 - COPING STRATEGIES FOR SINGLE PARENTING

