

Invisible and Visible Helpers in Negotiating Child Parenting by Single Mothers: A Comparative Analysis of South Africa and Germany

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Abstract : In South Africa and Germany, countless number of children are raised by single mothers with little or no support from the biological fathers. As evidenced in literature, having an involved father living at home can have a positive influence in the life of a child and the mother can be supported in her role. Often single parenting is seen as a causative factor in numerous psychological and social challenges which are faced by children from single-parent households, which is an indication of a pathological lens of viewing single parenting. The empirical data from our study reveals that single mothers in formal employment experience social, economic and emotional hardships of parenting. However, a sense of determination to raise healthy and well-balanced children using economic and social capital accessible to them was one of the key findings. The participants reported visible and invisible sources of support which creates an enabling environment for them to negotiate the challenges of parenting without support from non-residence fathers. Using a qualitative paradigm, a total of twenty professional single mothers were interviewed in Germany and South Africa. Four key themes emerged from the data analysis namely; internal locus of control, positive new experiences, access to economic capital and dependable social support. This study suggests that single mothers who are economically self-reliant and have access to bonding social capital are able to cope with the demands of single parenting. Understanding this multi-dimensional experience of parenting by single parents in formal employment is important to advocate for supportive working conditions for mothers.

Keywords : child parenting, child protection, single parenting, social capital

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