Single vs. Co-Parenting: Who Has the Better Deal?

Name

City College
Abstract
This paper will discuss the dramatic increase in the amount of single parents being the head of
the household and the challenges faced by a single parent versus the traditional nuclear family
unit consisting of two parents, typically a mother and father. Recently, a US Census Bureau
report found that “40% of all households with children under the age of 18 include mothers who
are either the sole or primary source of income for the family” (Wang, Parker, & Taylor, 2013,
p.1). Furthermore, “63% [of these] ‘breadwinner moms’ are single mothers” (Wang et al., 2013,
p.1). This paper will compare single parents with coupled parents regarding financial resources,
family support, and disciplinary procedures to conclude that raising a child as a single parent
may prove to be more difficult for the majority of current Americans, even though it is a growing
trend.
Single vs. Co-Parenting: Who Has the Better Deal?

Life is truly not a bed of roses, and raising children in this day and age has more than its fair share of challenges. Most parents aspire that their children’s dreams will be realized. Most parents want their children to be raised with manners and intelligence and see them gravitate to their dreams: going off to college, landing amazing careers in corporate America, getting married, and having children of their own so the subsequent generations can continue similarly. Not every family unit, however, has the same opportunities to thrive, and those who are less fortunate often struggle to provide those high standards for their children. While single-parent families are on the rise (Mathur, Fu, & Hansen, 2013), research shows that those individual parents may struggle more often to provide the same environment for their children as co-parents can. The most important contributing factors to successful parenting include financial resources, spousal or family support, and disciplinary actions.

The ongoing mandatory cost to provide daily meals as well as weekly and monthly childcare bills are expenditures neither single parents nor co-parents can run from. Sole providers of a household have the difficulty of trying to survive this rigorous expense cycle with the poverty level of a single-mother households increasing for “the fourth straight year in the US to 4.1 million, or 41.5 percent” (Yen, 2013, para.8). Such findings represent grim prospects for future single parents. In sharp contrast, “the share of married-couple families in poverty remained unchanged at 2.1 million, or 8.7 percent” (Yen, 2013, para.8). Additionally, in many single parent households, the caregiver tends to be less educated (Wang et al., 2013), which leads to the basic minimum wage jobs. Also, the fact that most single parents are juggling two or three jobs to barely make ends meet does not give leeway to further their education, as time is not in their favor. Many struggle to carve out quality time with their children. Respectfully, co-parenting allows for the flexibility of one parent to further his or her education while one brings
in the income and vice versa. In some instances, both parents are working, which doubles the income in co-parenting households. Research found that “married mothers earned a median family income of $80,000 in 2011, almost four times more than families led by a single mom” (Mathur et al., 2013, para.4). Other research recently proved that many mothers in a co-parent household are becoming the main breadwinners of their households, and they usually possess the highest educational degree in the family (Wang et al., 2013). As single parents, meaning factors into every penny, due to the fact that the “US is the only country in the top fifteen most competitive ones that does not mandate paid maternity leave, paid sick leave, and does not guarantee paid vacation time” (Mathur et al., 2013, para.7). Health insurance (through an employer or a private company) can be unaffordable for single parents; therefore, many single-parent households live without any health care benefits. Even if health insurance is provided by an employer, many single parents would have barely anything left to survive on after paying their monthly bill. Daycares are not very keen on having sick children for obvious reasons, so if a child is sick, the single parent must stay home from work, which can result in a pay cut for that pay period. Since daycare is expensive, it sometimes fails to motivate single parents to pay for it while they look for a job if they don’t already have one. Consequently, many single-parent households rely on government assistance to survive month to month. Food stamps, Medicaid, and Cash Assistance has become such a natural and imminent source of survival among single parents; however, with the budget cuts taking place, this method leaves a dismal future for future single parents and their children. Having an additional parent in the household supersedes the worries of daycare, health benefits, and falling ill because there is always that extra hand in the home to help out. If one parent misses work, the other can be counted on to bring in a paycheck. Even regarding healthcare, one parent is able to sacrifice the deduction from his or her checks
because the other parent is providing an additional income. When co-parenting, daycare is also an expense that may be deducted as it is not necessary to send the child to daycare if the spouses can make the necessary arrangements to set up a work schedule that allows for one parent to be at home while the other is at work.

It has been said that “no man is an island.” All people need some sort of emotional, physical, and mental support when nurturing children. Single parents are faced with having to wake up on a daily basis and face the reality that they are needed at work and at home as well. Most single parents are working two to three jobs and in some cases long grueling hours to make overtime. Depending on the age of the children, they may have homework they need help with or practice for sports. A co-parent may have the option to delegate responsibilities to the spouse in the event that he or she is pre-occupied. In many cases, children from single-parent households are deprived of extracurricular activities because the sole parent is burdened with the dual task of working and trying to raise a household. With spousal support, one parent may be free to support the child in school activities, which is beneficial to the children because they’re able to develop their social skills. Immediate family members can help single parents, but they may not always be as consistently available as a live-in spouse. Having an extra helping hand alleviates the pressure of always having to tend to the children on one’s own time.

According to research, “regardless of family structure, the quality of parenting is one of the best predictors of children’s emotional and social well-being” (Amato, 2005, p.83). With the ongoing stress of everyday life, single parents have no immediate emotional support for themselves, which can make disciplining a child more difficult as there is no other perspective on appropriate punishment for the bad behavior. The high levels of stress experienced by single parents can sometimes result in a lack of firm rule-setting for the child. If there are rules in place
but they are not enforced or often overlooked by a tired single parent, the child may rebel and act out more often. Inconsistency in the disciplinary procedures eventually causes more conflict between the parent and child. Research shows that “children growing up with single parents have an elevated risk of experiencing cognitive, social, and emotional problems” (Amato, 2005, p.82). Children need consistent discipline to thrive the same way they need their other needs (e.g. food, medical care, and education) to be consistently met. Children often thrive in a co-parent household as long as the two parents can agree on the rules they set for their child. When children can acknowledge that both parents are consistent in the disciplinary actions, the child will accept the rule as a norm and dismiss the temptation to claim that the rule is unfair. Co-parenting allows children more stability because the rules are set from the beginning and there is another supportive parent to guide the child when one is not present. Furthermore, research has shown that an additional benefit of co-parenting “is the modeling of interpersonal skills, such as showing respect, communicating clearly, and resolving disputes through negotiation and compromise” (Amato, 2005, p.84). Co-parenting can have negative disciplinary effects, though, if both parents do not model appropriate, respectful behavior.

Parenting is an act that is very necessary in raising outstanding, positive people in society. Even though many pregnancies are not planned, once the child arrives, it is the parents’ responsibility to guide and nurture children to become good citizens. In today’s time, “single moms account for precisely one-quarter of US households [and] single dads make up another six percent” (Mathur et al., 2013, para.2). Regardless of whether a parent is the single parent or co-parent in a household, that parent has sole or shared responsibility to provide financial support, resources, and disciplinary measures to ensure the success of the child. Though single
parenthood is on the rise, evidence shows that it is becoming harder to thrive in a single parent home as opposed to a two-parent home.
References


