

Growth Group for Single Parents in a community in Ghana

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Abstract

The paper describes a counseling and psychoeducational group model designed to assist single parents of a town called Ayeldu in the Central Region of Ghana. The model was specifically designed to assist members to receive social support and, equip them with techniques and coping skills needed to deal with personal and interpersonal needs and conflicts. After screening and interviews, 10 members were selected from a total of 15 potential members to participate in the 12-week group program. At the end of the program, basic demographic information was collected along with pre and post assessment on knowledge of the topic, and finally a brief survey with questions assessing the group experience were conducted. The results of the pretest, posttest and evaluation survey indicate that members benefited from the program as evidenced by their change of behavior in terms of their life satisfaction.

Keywords: single parents, group, counseling, psychoeducational

1. Introduction

The rise of single-parent families have been attributed to the increasing divorce rate, death of a parent; out of wedlock birth, court appointed guardianship, rejection or other factors that leave one adult totally responsible for the rearing of children (Amaldo, 2004; Comstock, 2005; Kinnear, 1999). Single parents face economic hardship compared to two-parent families. Single parents experience difficulties with role identity (Comstock, 2005; Richard & Schmiege, 1993). Some social stigma is still attached to single-parents status, regardless of how it was acquired. Part of the stigma of single parent families is linked to a higher incidence of adjustment problems among children of single parents compared to two-parent families. Some of these are attributed to single-parent's inability to support their families financially, ineffective parenting practices of the non custodial parent, low income status, parental conflict before and after the divorce or separation.

The rationale was to begin a support group designed to educate this population on *self-empowerment*. Economic hardships and psychological distress coupled with lack of resources and support groups for single parents was common in the Ayeldu community where the author lived between 2011 and 2012. Ayeldu lies on the Mankesim-Tetsi Junction road, about twelve miles west of Mankesim. It is a small town at the Abura Asebu Kwamankese District in the Central Region of Ghana with a population of about five thousand people. It is about 35 km north of Cape Coast, the capital of the Central Region of Ghana that is situated 165 km west of Accra on the Gulf of Guinea. Ayeldu community and its other surrounding communities (Bosomin, Odompo, Brenyi, Nyamebekyere, Apaapomdo, Kekenase, have a population of about 5000 people. The people are mainly subsistent farmers cultivating mainly maize and cassava.

Ayeldu and its surrounding communities have very low per capita monthly income, low standard of living, inadequate social and technical infrastructure, low output and productivity levels, unemployment and under employment. Most of the youth migrate to the urban centres after completing basic school in search of greener pastures. It was this background that the author initiated the support group and provided ongoing education and supervisions to individual single parents interested to make their life better. The author coordinated the group and was the main leader for the group sessions that met 90 minutes weekly for twelve weeks. The purpose of this article was first to provide an overview of some hardships single parents face, the long term effects it has on their lives and discuss the ways in which their needs can be addressed through counseling and psycho-educational support group model. The model is specifically designed to assist members to receive support, equip them with techniques and coping skills in dealing with personal and interpersonal needs and conflicts.

2. Literature review

According to Dowd (1997), a single parent is a parent, not living with a spouse or partner, who has most of the day-to-day responsibilities in raising the child or children. A single parent is usually considered the primary caregiver that means the children live with the parent most of the time. The demographics of single parenting show a general increase worldwide in children living in single parent homes. About 16% of children worldwide live in a single-parent household (Rampell, 2010). In 2006, 12.9 million families in the United States of America were headed by a single parent, 80% of which were headed by a female (United States Census, 2006). According to the Australia Bureau Statistics (2007), 14% of all Australia households were single-parent families in 2003. A general household survey report indicate that in 2005, about 1 out of 4 families with dependent children in United Kingdom were single-parent families, 8 to 11 percent of which have a male single-parent

(United Kingdom Statistics, 2006).

Africa has an extremely high number of children living in single parent homes. Kinnear (1999) indicates that desertion, death, and imprisonment produce single-parent families, were primarily headed by women in developing countries. Other researchers report a rise in the rates of divorce in sub-Saharan Africa (Takyi, 2001; Takyi and Gyimah 2007) leading to single motherhood. Divorce rates in Ghana rose from about 40% in the 1970s to over 60% by the late 1980s among ever-married women aged 40-49 (Gage and Njogu, 1994). Higher levels of divorce in premarital childbearing (Gage-Brandon & Meekers, 1993) and age of first marriage at a very younger age (Amoateng & Heaton, 1989; Tilson & Larsen 2000), are also key predictors of divorce. Increase levels of women's autonomy and greater participation in the labour market as a result of modernization and urbanization also contribute to divorce rates. (Takyi, 2006). Coping with the circumstances of family disruption in most African countries has entailed single-parent families among lower-income groups taking their children to live with relatives, in particular, the children's grandparents (Moller & Devey, 1995)

According to Carney, Boyle, Offord, Racine (2003), research on single parents has focused on the challenges faced by single mothers, yet has generalized their findings to all single parents. Single-parent families experience significant social and economic disadvantages. Indeed, single mothers have higher rates of depression because of greater exposure to stress, both past and present. Consequently, single mothers are simply more vulnerable to the stressors that they encounter. Being married is considered as the primary sources of support for parents. As discussed previously, some of the causes of the rise of single families are attributed to death, divorce, separation of some sort, or rejection. Although the nature of the loss of dear ones could be different, the very real feelings of wounding are universal. Such loss of partner according to Comstock (2005) is characterized by stages of grief that include denial, anger, depression, psychic pain, longing and yearning and guilt. Loss changes people and their course of their lives, because of the bond and attachment that exist between individuals. Loss is the state of being deprived or being without something one has had, or a detriment or a disadvantage from failure to keep, have or get.

The demand of being sole caregiver of children is also considered to limit contact with friends in social settings and to limit participation in voluntary social organization (Carney et al., 2003). Consequently, this social isolation may in turn produce feelings of distress. The absence of a supportive social network for single parents produces more psychological distress for single mothers than for two parent families, who at least benefit from the social and financial support of a partner. Hellwig (1984) indicates that many single parents especially have special need to forgive because most of these women who bore children out of wedlock are carrying two people's burdens since the other partner is free of the consequences of the union. With such conditions, the single parent experiences trauma which inevitably produces feelings of despair, hopelessness, self blame and shame. Divorced or separated parents who suffered domestic violence or abused in their marriage develop chronic posttraumatic stress disorders. Comstock (2005) explained that trauma has wide reaching impact on our brains, bodies and eventually relationships. The individual single parents affected express painful feelings, they become afraid of discussing their hurts, and some fail to manage life and all that it brings. It is clear that, despite the misconceptions, single parents do have many needs and require support to live.

2.1 Group work benefits for single parents

Group work is highly recommended for single parents as part of their recovery process. First, groups are beneficial to single parents because they have the opportunity to become part of a network of social interaction (Gorrof, 1972). Second, groups serve as a support system and help members develop a sense of belonging, thereby reducing their sense of isolation and instilling a sense of hope. (Chen & Rybak, 2005; Gorrof, 1972). Third, people learn from one another through observation and imitation. Developing relationships within the group reduces mistrust of others as people become open to each other (Choate & Henson, 2003). Fourth, participants build self-esteem support, and are able to manage financial resources and reduce family stress. Group work can provide the opportunity to share common problems in a safe and caring environment and to find ways of making responsible choices. It can help single parent develop coping strategies and increase their sense of meaning in life as they learn to attend the needs of others (Chen & Rybak, 2005; Corey & Corey 1992). Fifth, the group offer economic power among single parents through income generating ventures. Group counseling enable participants to challenge and modify maladaptive beliefs and behavior related to safety, trust, power, self-esteem, and intimacy (Chen & Rybak, 2005; Choate & Henson, 2003). Sixth, members would have the opportunity to learn interpersonal skills, socializing techniques and anxiety management strategies and can

provide a safe environment for members to practice new skills and behaviors. Seventh, Group work can address members' needs, identify and build on their skills to become self reliant. Groups offer single parents the opportunity to learn to experience love, caring and acceptance that opens the door to real relationship with others. Group work enables members to have the opportunity to share their own experiences and provide immediate mutual feedback (Hassal & Madal, 1980). Lastly, group work enables single parents to talk about and come to understand their feelings, reduce feelings of depression, hurt and anger, and help them understand that they are not alone in their feelings and experiences. Group work will help them gain more realistic view of their situations as single parents and move toward acceptance of themselves and their families as a result of divorce, separation, and loss.

3. Method

The model presented in this article is a description of psycho-educational and counseling group work for single parents held between February 2012 and May 2012. The group originated as a result of the author's interviews with single parents in Ayeldu and its surrounding communities that were facing economic hardships and psychological distress coupled with lack of resources available to them. The author coordinated the group and was the main primary leader of the group sessions. Group work was intended to educate, offer support, and teach problem solving skills and thereby seek personal growth (Chen & Rybak, 2005). Theoretical orientation used in the counseling process includes cognitive-behavioral technique that helps to change the individual way of thinking and behavior.

3.1 Eligibility criteria.

A prerequisite for joining the group was attendance at an individual screening and orientation meeting. A second, membership criterion was single parents who were going through stress, economic difficulties, grief and hurt due to rejection, separation of some sort, divorce or death of their partner. Once all the members had been selected, there were a preliminary session designed to be acquainted with one another and to prepare the members for the group work. Although the group was composed of volunteer members only, involuntary members were also welcome. The group was a closed group whereby no members were admitted after the group had started. The group work used both semi- structured and non-structured process. The group sessions were facilitated by the author who has great experience in group counseling. The sessions were held in a classroom. Chairs were arranged in a circle with the leader seated as part of the group.

3.2 Goals for the Group

The group was to assist single parents through psycho-educational and counseling process. It was expected that the members would be able to cope with the changes in their family system and live happy life after the program, nurturing, sustaining and protecting their families. Finally, members would gain an understanding of barriers to their economic growth, and family issues. The general group goal were as follows (a) to educate them on self empowerment, (b) to raise group members' motivation to cope with stress in life and reduce sense of isolation, (c) to provide education about how to generate income (d) to enable members meet their personal needs and to help individuals become more self reliant and (e) to provide psychological healing irrespective of their predicaments (Choate & Henson, 2003; Morganett, 1990).

3.3 Method of Advertising, Screening/Membership Requirements

Advertising for the group began two months prior to the group's projected starting date in February 2012. The methods used for advertising the group included contacts with individual single parents identified in the church where the author attended weekly. After announcing the group and recruiting members, the next step was the screening and selecting members for the group. The screening procedure also included a private session between the author and the candidates (Corey & Corey, 1997). Pre group orientation was also employed to answer questions from potential members. The group was open to Christian single parents in a church community. However, the number of females was proportionally higher since most single parents were women. *The Ethical Guidelines for Group Counselors* by the Association for Specialists in Group Work (1989) state: " In so far as possible, the leader screens and selects group members whose needs and goals are compatible with the goals of the group, who will not impede the group process, and whose well-being will not be jeopardized by the group experience" In accordance with the above guidelines, members who were accepted were those whose goals were compatible with the group goals listed in the previous section.

The leader endorsed screening procedures that include a private session between him and candidates. Some of the evidence that the leader looked for during the private sessions was whether the group might be beneficial to

the candidates who understood the purposes and benefits of the group; who were motivated to change, ready and willing to go by the group rules, and ready to maintain the confidential nature of others' disclosures (Corey & Corey, 1997). The interview and screening was based on a questionnaire similar to that of assessment that include demographic information (e.g. age, gender, living arrangement, and employment status), the parent's last level of education, his/her academic ability at that time, past job history if any, how many children in the family including any other persons living with them, their current source of income and the state of health for all family members availability of social support, and the candidate's expectations for the group. Those who qualified after the screening and the interview were accepted. All the members could read and write English language. The reason for the selection procedure was to get a clear picture of possible group topics to be discussed over the 12-week period that the group met.

A total number of 15 potential members were interviewed during the screening process to participate in the 12-week group program. Of these, four individuals were excluded from the group because they did not meet the conditions and the criteria set as discussed above. Four of the members disqualified wanted to join the group because they thought they were going to be given money to take care of their families. The other remaining one had scheduling difficulties in the evening due to meeting her family needs and was not ready to participate at that time. The 10 members that remained attended the group sessions according to the time schedule. One of the participants in the group was absent with permission during one of the sessions. In general, participants were present in all the sessions during the program. Eight of the participants were females and two males. Group met on every Tuesdays once a week for ninety minutes at 7.30 pm to 9.00 pm. (19.30 to 21.00 GMT).

3.4 Measures

Pretest and Post test: The pre and post group test utilized questions based on the topics of the group sessions.

Survey Material: The survey Evaluation was measured with a questionnaire developed for use in this study. It contains six statements. The six statements measure participants' growth in knowledge, motivation, skills, self-reliance, healing and the overall experience in the program. (A copy of the survey can be obtained from the Author). The survey was developed throughout a validation process. Initially, the survey items were developed by the author on the basis of the single parent's literature. Suggestions were solicited from senior researchers in the psychology and counseling field familiar with single family issues. Next the survey was pilot tested with a small group of single parents ($n = 4$). The survey was refined and the final revisions were made to the survey after the pilot testing. Participants were asked to rate each statement on a four-point scale from 1 (least helpful) to 4 (most helpful). Questions were kept simple and easy to understand to accommodate varying levels of literacy among group members.

4. Group Sessions

The leader opened the weekly sessions with a relaxation exercise to calm the participants down and to let them feel comfortable and relaxed, sought agenda items from the group members and engaged them what they wanted to gain from the session (Chen & Rybak, 2005). The quick go-round helped members identified issues that they were interested in pursuing. The group leader facilitated productive functioning within the group and encouraged group members to interact with each other. The Group leader pointed out common themes and gave feedback to individuals in the group as a whole. Typical rules include: punctuality of members, letting someone finish talking before one talks; keeping confidentiality for fellow members (Chen & Rybak, 2005). Participants were encouraged to share their experiences and insight gained that would be useful to them for the week. The weekly agenda included psycho-education (didactic style of teaching psychologically relevant information) found to be effective tool in a number of settings (Valasquez, Mauer, Crouch & DiClemente, 2001). The format also included cognitive restructuring techniques and social and communication skills (valasquez, Mauer, Crouch & DiClemente, 2001) The leader closed every weekly session by summarizing what occurred in the session and told the members to tell the group of what they heard and learnt in the session. From observations, the author noticed that during the first few weeks, group members did not seem highly motivated to take an active stance and were often either silent or constrained in their overall emotional and verbal input in to the group. However, during the last five sessions of the group, most group members exhibited behaviors indicating more investment in group activities as demonstrated by sharing their experiences and plans for the future.

4.1 Summary of group sessions.

Session 1: Introduction and goal setting. During the first session, members introduced themselves and participated in the sessions. The leader used an icebreaker activity to relax the group members. Members

discussed group goals and plans. Members explored the purpose of the group, reviewed group goals and introduced personal goals. Members identified their problems in life. Group rules and norms were established. For example, members were expected to participate, to be punctual and to keep matters in confidentiality. The Leader summarized themes emerging in the group and introduced them to the use of journaling in the group work.

Session 2: Impact of single parents on the family. In the second session, members shared the general effects of being a single-parent family and its impact on children. Members also brainstormed all the roles a single parent takes in keeping a household afloat (e.g., disciplinarian, cook, house cleaner, and teacher) (Paleg & Jongsma, 2000). The leader gave empathic support to, accepted support from other group members, and encouraged them to relate their own experience and situations to those of the leader. Each group member gave feedback of his/her impression of the first and the second sessions to peers.

Session 3: Coping Stress reduction. The third session was devoted to verbalizing three general sources of stress and examples that pertain to the three sources. In the session 3, the leader initiated the discussion that stresses result from changes (positive or negative) in one or more of the following: one's environment, one's body, and one's thoughts. The leader taught members how to practice stress-reduction techniques to alleviate anxiety. Members were taught deep abdominal breathing and progressive relaxation and were encouraged to practice for twenty to thirty minutes daily. A stress symptom checklist adapted from the Anxiety phobia workbook (Bourne, 2000) helped members increase their awareness of both physical and psychological symptoms of stress. Members reviewed the exercises in the session 3 and gave feedback to group members. The Leader facilitated group discussion of general time management strategies, including the need for clarifying priorities. We also identified distorted cognitions that contribute to depression, anxiety and guilt (Paleg & Jongsma, 2000).

Session 4: Building of self-esteem. The session 4 was to identify the causes and barriers to low self-esteem. Members discussed the ways in which the negative self-concept kept them from taking risks or making changes in their lives and the ways in which their current view of themselves is affected by the abuse from their past (Choate & Henson, 2003). Members also discussed the pathways to self-esteem, completed and discussed a Self Esteem Inventory, adapted from Life after Trauma: A workbook for healing (Rosenblum & Williams, 1999), and processed their responses as homework.

Sessions 5 & 6: Managing anger and developing coping skills. In the fifth and sixth sessions, the leader assisted members to verbalize an understanding of the two-step model of anger. In the session, members brainstormed their reaction to words like, separation, loss, grief, conflict and anger. Members' separation or divorce in their marriage and its physical /emotional and psychological effects on them were discussed. Members were challenged to discuss "what is behind anger"? Anxiety, shame, sadness, jealousy, disappointment, frustration, fear, worry, guilt and embarrassment were issues raised. Furthermore, to monitor effects of relaxation and coping self-talk in anger log, group members were assigned to include coping efforts in anger log, went through several imagery coping skills rehearsals of midrange anger (5 or 6 on scale of 10) and high-anger scenes (9 or 10 on scale of 10). Group members completed a "Ways I cope Check-list" (Rosenblum & Williams, 1999).

Sessions 7: Building one's spirituality. This session 7 was concerned with members' spirituality through development of humility, courage, and trust in God. Daily prayer and the importance of church as their support in their life were discussed. The session also focused on Forgiveness and let go of hurts. The process of healing through forgiveness of past hurts, rejections, hostilities, hates, fears in their life were examined and addressed. To help support their children spiritually, members discussed the ways they could help their children grow spiritually.

Session 8 & 9: Addressing work and career issues. Boosting their self-esteem in the work arena, members discussed and reminded themselves of their skills at home and further recognizing that many of these skills are transferable to the job market. The leader assisted jobless single parents in making choices about additional training skills to help improve their situation.

Session 10 & 11: Poverty and money management. Poverty and money management, along with ways to alleviate some of our financial burdens were discussed. The leader educated members some of the causes of poverty and some of the interventions to use to overcome the situation. Discussion also focused on how to manage their income through their earnings. The eleventh session was also used to assess the participants on the post-test survey.

Session 12: termination/closure. The last session was to consolidate their learning in the session. The leader helped the members consolidate the gains they have made in the group sessions. The members reviewed the progress they have made in meeting their personal goals through evaluation of questionnaires. The leader and the members explore plans and goal, shared their feelings concerning the ending of the group, and discussed their plans after the program. Additional 30 minutes was used for prayers thanking God and praying for each other. Members gave positive feedback to each other and ended with saying “Good bye”.

5. Results

Basic demographic information was collected along with pre and post assessment on knowledge of the topic, and finally a brief survey with questions assessing the group experience. Evaluation focused on the individual member’s current feelings, attitudes, beliefs and change of behavior. This evaluation of the effectiveness of the group were made with members providing feedback to one another, and helped members evaluate the degree of their investment in the group and the extent of the gains they have made. This data made it easier to evaluate the success or failure in attaining group goals. As will be recalled, the group was to assist single parents cope with the changes in their family system and live happy life after the program, nurturing, sustaining and protecting their families through the following goals: a) to educate them on self empowerment, (b) to raise group members’ motivation to cope with stress in life and reduce sense of isolation, (c) to provide education about how to generate income, (Hawkins, Catalano & Miller , 1992), (d) to enable members meet their personal needs and to help individuals become more self reliant and (e) to provide psychological healing irrespective of their predicaments.

5.1 Pretest and Post test

The pre and post group surveys utilized questions based on the topics of the group sessions. Five participants out of the group of 10 (50%) submitted answers to the pre test, and all the ten participants of the group (10%) responded to the post test on the eleventh session.

Answering the first pre and post test question, “what are the social and economic disadvantages that single families experience?” all participants (100%) demonstrated broad knowledge of the experiences. Responses to the second question, “ Name three training skills to help improve your economic situation?” demonstrated that when the group started there were no participants (0%) who had any knowledge of three main training skills to help improve his/her economic situation . However, by the end of the group, seven out of ten participants (70%) responded with all three dimensions, and three participants (30%) responded with two of the three main skills, answering the pre test question, “What are some of the ways of coping stress and manage anger? None of the five participants had good insight to the ways of coping stress and managing anger. The results of the post test show that by the end of the group sessions all the ten participants (10%) had good knowledge about issues related to anger and the ways to cope with stress and manage anger. Comparison of the pre and post test answers to the question, “What are the benefits of forgiveness, letting go past hurts, rational thoughts and self esteem,?” demonstrated that at the beginning of the group, none of the participants had good insight into the benefits of forgiveness, letting past hurts, rational thoughts and self esteem. However, by the end of the sessions, nine out of ten participants (90%) responded with stated benefits.” Furthermore, all participants had no idea to the question, “what are the personal benefits of group work/ counseling?” according to the pre-test survey. When they entered the group, by the end of the group sessions their answers changed. The post-test survey indicates by the end of the sessions that five participants responded with references to education, self empowerment, economic power among themselves, communication skills improvement, and two responded, “Just being different.” Two responded, “healing of past hurts and how to manage anger,” while one responded “personal growth.”

5.2 Evaluation of Survey and findings

The survey Evaluation was measured with a questionnaire developed for use in this study as already stated in the previous session.. It contains six statements. The six statements measure participants’ growth in knowledge, motivation, skills, self-reliance, healing and the overall experience in the program. Members completed anonymous evaluation questionnaires two weeks after the end of the group work to assess what members found most and least valuable in their group experience and to rate the helpfulness of the program based on the goals of the group sessions. The response categories were designed so that program participants could indicate the extent to which their behavior had changed and to identify what they found ‘most helpful’ to meet the goals of the group work about the support provided by the project. The results of growth group programming are summarized in Figure 1. The total number of respondents ranged from (N= 6; 60% to N= 10; 100%, depending on the

specific indicators to which they responded.

(i) **Goal 1: Increases knowledge in the area of self empowerment.** In response to questions on the first goal, nine of the participants (n=9; 90%) reported that the program increased their confidence and self esteem in their parenting abilities and provided information on single parenting issues.

(ii) **Goal 2: To raise members' motivation to cope with stress in life and reduce sense of isolation.** With regard to questions on the second goal, sixty percent of participants (n=6; 60%) reported the program helped them overcome isolation and linked them with other single parents with similar problems, greatly valued the fact that they knew that there was someone there to support them if they needed it

(iii) **Goal 3: Skills development in the area of income generation.** All the participants (n=10; 100%) reported that they have increased knowledge on how to reduce poverty and to generate income to support their families through job skills and money management.

(iv) **Goal 4: Meet members' personal needs to become more self reliant.** Nine of the participants (n=9; 90%) believed the program has helped them to learn how to become self reliant through coping skills in the field of work.

(v) **Goal 5: Provide psychological healing to members.** Seven of the participants (n= 7; 70%) indicate that they have received healing through forgiveness, anger and other emotional hurts that they had towards their ex partners, family members and friends.

(vi) **Content of the program.** All the participants (n=10; 100 %) indicated that the content of the program met their needs. Indeed, they report they have gained specific ideas acquired new skills that they can implement in life.

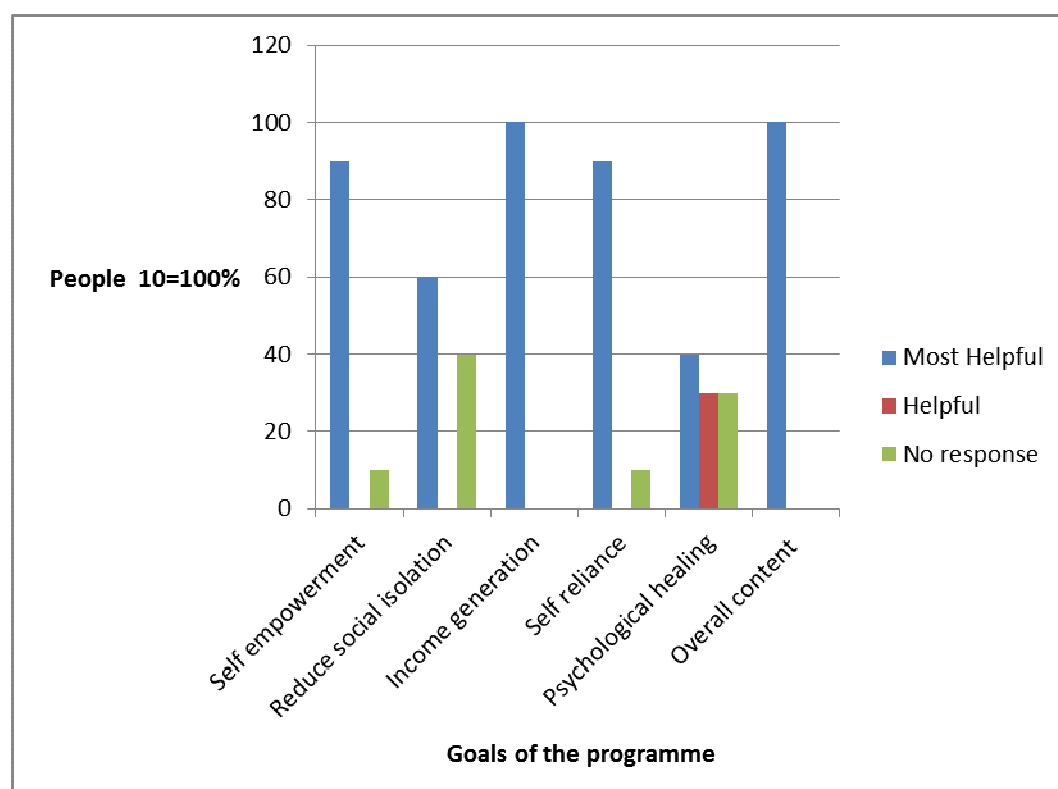


Figure 1

6. Discussion

The lowest number of participant percentages was found on goal two. This indicates that single parents in the study were not so much concern with loneliness and social isolation. The study indicates that social loneliness which is the lack of social connectedness or sense of community may not be a problem for most single parents in the study. There are many reasons for this. First, the single parents in the study have nuclear and extended families that give them social support. Second, the single parents in the study also live a collective community where the individual have a sense of belonging with strong family ties that could reduce social loneliness. This is contrary to other studies in the western countries like the United States of America and United Kingdom where

single women appear to experience social isolation (Carney et al, 2003). Nevertheless, the group work served as a support system and some helped members develop a sense of belonging, thereby reducing their sense of isolation and instilling a sense of hope. (Gorrof, 1972).

The results of the survey also indicate that all the participants (n=10; 100%) found the third goal as most helpful and to meet their needs. The findings in the study indicate that single parents appear to experience low income and economic disadvantages that reflects realities on the ground in the study setting. For single parents in economic hardships and psychological distress coupled with lack of resources, income generation and other economic program that reduce poverty such as money management, job skills are of much importance to single parents in the study. Indeed, the people of Ayeldu and its surrounding communities are mainly subsistent farmers cultivating mainly maize and cassava. They have very low per capita monthly income, low standard of living, inadequate social and technical infrastructure, low output and productivity levels, and unemployment and under employment. This finding is consistent with other studies that single parent families in Africa are among the lower income groups (Takyi, 2006).

The study also indicates that the group work addressed members' needs, and helped the participants to build on their skills to become self reliant. One of the indicators of the benefits of the group work was the ability to help these single parents to overcome some of their family problems. Seventy percent of the members believed to have benefited from the group through the psychological healing. Indeed, Single-parent families encounter a number of stressful challenges. Single parents experience loss characterized by stages of grief that include denial, anger, depression, psychic pain, longing and yearning and guilt (Comstock, 2005). Furthermore, lower income could place single parents at extremely high risk for anxiety, depression, and other health problems (Hamner and Turner, 2001; Brooks, 2001). Indeed, psychological healing appears to be an important indicator to offer single parents overcome anger, forgiveness and resentment. While Loneliness or social isolation is not of much importance to single parents compared to other goals that were addressed, socio-economic and psychological healing are of great concern to the single parents in the study.

6.1 Implication and Conclusion

Counselors and psychologists have and an ethical responsibility the ability to promote and help single parents. The results in the study will alert professionals that additional strategies and reinforcement are needed to teach these concepts and that program resources may need to be extended. Every parent is faced with certain issues, such as time and money management, good communication, and discipline, but these issues are more challenging for single parents. Single parents are faced with making decisions on their own. Counselors can be proactive in facilitating this group counseling in rural areas where they have no access to professional counseling. Health professionals and Non-governmental organizations can help single parents in income generating projects to support their income. The case presented in this article is specific to single parents in Ghana, with African identity. Although the process of group counseling intervention may be similar to other races and cultures, their perception of single parents and how they cope with issues is not homogenous.

The single parent group work was intended to educate members and to help members resolve the usual yet often difficult problems that needed to be solved (Gladding, 2004). Limitations need to be noted. First, the study was conducted in a one community in the central region of Ghana, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, the author was the only primary leader. In spite of the limitations, the model provides an avenue for future research into African culture and some cultural issues that could be incorporated into working with African single parents.

The support group offered acceptance, emotional avenues for catharsis and a place for testing new values and judgment. Members had the great opportunity to grow through support group. Members learnt from one another through observation and imitation. The emergence of both male and female participants helped the opposite sex to have different perspective of issues. According to the evaluation of the members, most of the group goals were met as some members claimed to have gained sense of self-esteem and have reduced hurt and anger, have had a change of attitude and could cope with life stress and financial resources. From further review, inferences can be made for planning future programs for single parents. The article suggests a future work of how to teach single parents to fish instead of donation only.

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