



Effects of Broken Homes on the Academic Life of University Students, Case University of Eswatini Students

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Abstract

Children's overall well-being includes social, psychological, moral, and academic dimensions. Both parents have a pivotal and complementary role in the formation of this multidimensional growth, leading to the mental health, academic success, and future career paths of their children. On the other hand, divorce and another unstable family life factored in the resulting dynamic. This work strove to investigate the situations of scholars with broken families, concentrating on the influence of solitary-family homes on the learners and the deviation of the students towards their career goals, to mention a few of the issues. The nature of the study required a qualitative design, more specifically, a descriptive research method. It was composed of semi-structured interviews using an already prepared guide. Beforehand, 20 of the students from Luyengo Campus, the University of Eswatini, from broken homes, were interviewed. The findings reveal that the learners experienced disruption on their lives, affecting their emotional well-being, academic performance, and future aspirations. They experience emotional turmoil, including feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression. The lack of parental support and guidance contributes to low self-esteem and a negative self-image and academic challenges. The instability and stress associated with broken homes can hinder academic performance. Students may struggle with concentration, motivation, and attendance, leading to lower grades and difficulty in achieving academic goals. The children lacked the social interaction proficiency to be able to communicate in the school context affect their social life too. Further research on how mental health issues impact academic performance is recommended.

Keywords: Broken Home, Academic Life, Family Structure, Parental Support, Divorce

Introduction

The family unit, especially the nuclear family, is the foundation of society. A child's initial stage of development is marked by its role in shaping their mental, emotional, and social growth. In spite of this, if family relationships are disturbed by causes like parent's death (for example), divorce or separation, the effects can be severe and may include academic disadvantage. When a marital relationship ends, it can have repercussions

on the child's future. Such disruptions, whether caused by death or divorce, can cause emotional turmoil, instability, and a sense of loss according to Awoniyi (2019)). The concentration, learning, and social connections of a child may be negatively affected by emotional difficulties. What are these types of challenges? Studies have consistently shown a strong correlation between parental relationships and. Conflict and separation between parents can result in stress, anxiety, and depression for children. Their cognitive skills and drive to study are directly linked to these emotional burdens. Furthermore, broken families can lead to financial hardships that hinder access to educational resources and opportunities (Bano, Jabeen & Qutoshi, 2018). A child's education is also influenced by their socioeconomic background. Why? Often children come from poor families, with few or no access to decent housing and education. All of these factors can be compounded in the situation of a broken home.

In Eswatinis society family wise there have been tremendous changes in the traditional family systems. Why? Increasing trend of single-parent families has been associated with major concerns over the effects it has to children's learning and wellbeing. The following are considered some of the vital parental responsibilities which are educating the child and or disciplining the child and or providing an economic support for the child. These responsibilities can be altered with or can lies fully with one parent or another; this is a difficult situation for the parents and the child. It should be understood that support systems required to solve the problem of so-called broken homes and their effect on school performance are needed. Counseling, education and financial assistance should be incorporated into such systems as the following. Given proper resources and direction it is possible to help children overcome the challenges of family dysfunction and achieve academic success.

Research has it that the structure of a family considerably influences the academic achievement of a child. The paper focuses on the role of broken homes in Eswatini as this has been a cause of concern in regards to the tutelage received by students and the outcome as determinant of their performance. It is considered that family is complete, consisting of both parents and children, in which every member has a pair of sets of complementary activities to facilitate child development. Nevertheless, if this structure gets unsettled, then it has numerous negative effects on the child. This research therefore aims at exploring the impact of the broken homes on performance of students in their studies at Luyengo Campus. By evaluating the relationship between family type and academic performance, this study attempts to determine the problems of such students and the ways in which such broken homes could be assisted.

A broken home, characterized by parental separation, divorce, or death, can significantly influence a child's academic performance. Minolin & Priya (2018) defines a broken home as a situation where one or both parents are absent due to separation, divorce, or death. Such disruptions can lead to various family structures, including stepfamilies,

child-headed households, kinship care, and foster care, each with its unique challenges. Stepfamilies, or blended families, often involve conflicts between step-siblings and adjustments to new parental figures (Meisenbach, 2010). Children in these families may experience a lack of security, love, and value, which can negatively impact their emotional and academic development. Child-headed households, where an older child assumes parental responsibilities, are particularly prevalent in Africa (Rodgers & Rose, 2002). Such children do not have what it takes to excel in school and are open countesses to abuse and exploitation. Kinship care, where children are raised by extended family members, can be a positive alternative to institutional care. However, challenges such as financial constraints, inadequate care, and potential abuse can impact children's well-being and academic performance (Rodgers & Rose, 2002). Foster care, while providing a temporary or permanent home for children, can also have both positive and negative effects. The quality of care, the stability of the placement, the way they feel about the foster parents and their feelings are also important. Contrary to this, other variables could have an influence towards academic achievements (UNICEF, 2011; Foster, 2005). Unfortunately, broken homes have many reasons behind them whence they occur and may involve divorce or separation, desertion or adultery, lack of communication or financial challenges, use of force and interferences from family members, particularly the in-laws (Afful-Broni, 2015; Bigatti, 2014). Children from broken homes moreover suffer from emotional instability, insecurity, and challenges in management of new change in living conditions (Kerby, 2002; Kasoma, 2012). These emotional challenges can affect their concentration, motivation as well as the performance on the academic work. In addition, they may experience social problems such as rejection by peer, being bullied, exclusion and rejection.

There are no two ways that other things equal parental involvement will play a key role in determining a particular child's performance in academic endeavour. Single-parent households, especially, may create difficulties in comprehending and meeting intended and required support and directions. Studies have demonstrated that children from homes that are headed by one parent, may receive lower grades than other children, lower self-esteem, fewer social skills, more behavioral disorder (Okoye, 2013; Lopez, 2010; Whitaker, 2012; Park, 2014; Akuto, 2017; Namka, 2009; Widener, 2017; Perman, 2019). To mitigate the negative impacts of broken homes on students' academic performance, it is essential to provide comprehensive support services, including counseling, tutoring, and mentoring programs. Also, the ideas of policies and programs related to the reinforcement of families and parenting participation may contribute to the development of more appropriate and desirable conditions for young people.

Methodology

In this study, a descriptive research with qualitative approach was used to find out the effect of broken homes on student performance at Luyengo Campus, Eswatini. Ryan

(2007) said that qualitative research enables the full exploration of a life panorama which enhances understanding of broken homes impact on students. The study population consists of all students at Luyengo Campus who are from broken homes. Convenience sampling, a non-random method, was used due to its practicality. For example, there were readily available students who met inclusion criteria (Oppong, 2013). Purposive sampling was also used to select students with broken home experiences to provide data of relevance (Patton et al, 2012). Semi-structured face-to-face interviews was conducted using a pre-validated interview guide. This allowed flexibility while ensuring key themes are covered. In-depth understanding was achieved through participants sharing their stories (Creswell, 2014). Transcription of the interviews was done with the participants' consent. This study established credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Preliminary validation of the interview guide was done with university lecturers to give credibility. Readers can gain transferability as a result of the thorough description of the broken home situations and their effects to specific context. Participants were actively involved in the whole research process to establish dependability. Lastly, audit trail was used to evaluate if interview guide does highlight every step of the data in order to provide a rationale decision. This process helped the researcher to establish findings accurately as portrayed by participant's responses. Permission was obtained from the university to enroll subjects. A pre-screen interview at the Library to compile a short list of suitable candidates was done. The interview was then scheduled in a private room inside the campus hostel (to ensure confidentiality and comfort). To identify the recurrent themes in the obtained data, thematic analysis was utilized. Such an approach helps to explore both directly stated and implicit meanings when participants communicated their thoughts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With this method, the qualitative data analysis was digested into a structured format that uncovers the patterns and insights of the students coming from a family with a single parent.

Findings and Discussions **Children's Experiences from Broken Homes** **Adjusting to New Lifestyles**

Research findings indicate that following family dissolution, children are compelled to adapt to new living arrangements. Their perspectives and emotional well-being are often disregarded during these transitions. Children are not afforded a choice in the matter and are instead subjected to the family's chosen arrangement. As Participant 4 stated, "*When my mother remarried, I was not allowed to stay with my father but was forced to live with my maternal grandmother.*" These new circumstances necessitate adjustments to the family structure. For instance, children residing with grandparents may experience unfair treatment from aunts and uncles. Extended family members may inherit the deceased parent's property and possessions, leaving the children with nothing. Participant 9 reported,

"The cows and farms that my father owned were taken by my uncles, and we were sent to live with my maternal family after his death." Children from broken homes are often integrated into blended families, sharing a household with stepparents and siblings. Stepsiblings may display unkind behavior, making the child feel unwelcome. This new environment can hinder the child's sense of belonging. Participant 2 stated, *"My stepsister would mock me and make me do her chores. If I didn't comply, her mother would call me an ungrateful child."* The demands of adjusting to a new lifestyle can also lead children to abandon their hobbies due to time constraints and limited resources. Participant 3 explained, *"I had to stop my tennis training after we moved because my mother couldn't afford the coaching fees, and I was occupied with other responsibilities in the afternoons."* Family breakdown necessitates significant adjustments for children. Park (2014) emphasizes that children must often relocate to a new home, requiring substantial adaptation. Kasoma (2012) highlights that difficulties arise when children struggle to adjust to societal norms and expectations. Furthermore, Kasoma (2012) notes that children from broken homes may experience increased school absenteeism due to a lack of parental supervision. These children may also exhibit negative behaviors such as laziness, poor academic performance, and social instability due to difficulties in establishing a stable foundation for personal growth. The children of broken homes in such a community could receive little regard from the other children within such a family, in turn, possibly affecting their grades at school negatively. As Widener (2017) notes, the corresponding trend shows that academic goals are not a priority for children whose families are not intact. The statement by Amato (2014) further emphasizes this issue by pointing out that many of these individuals lack academic ambition and often need to put more effort into tuning by their teachers. Consequently, children are faced with adjustment challenges, and this can reduce the time they have to enjoy their childhood. Asri et al. (2017) show that exceptions from broken families tend to feel deprived and may act in less compelling ways. Coming back to the streets, they may become active in petty thug life and find no meaningful ways to spend their free time. Eventually, the old familiar living conditions may switch to new living conditions that may result in children taking more obligations to the family, e.g. more household chores, or helping more in the domestic work. In such situations, the older child may sometimes be compelled to take on a primary care role for the younger siblings, who may be considered the parents' work schedules or limited availability of time. This points out the importance of having a home environment that is stable to facilitate the emotional adjustment that is foundational to a child attaining psychological, moral, and spiritual development, according to Widener (2017).

Limited Family Socialization

Literature shows children from separated family's experience substantially weaker levels of family socialization. The respondents shared that family members appeared to

differ in sharing nurturing and affection in the way they should within a proper family. They articulated the undesired situation of just being cohabitated with no love between members and the absence of genuine connection in the house. Students claimed too long for a family connection and establish bonds with their new families, which took the role of their original nuclear families. A crucial part of this statement was that it talked about the understated but highly evident feature that the family spent little time together. The instances of watching the TV together, visiting a sports game, or just chatting were scarce and almost never happened. *"Family relations were always kind of strained. We would tend not to talk when everybody is present, and the instances of addressee role passing or message deliverance would be more prevalent. Generally, I felt displaced,"* emphasized Participant 2. "Developing closeness in our family was something that I never really experienced here. I'd say the activities of our family members were not about sharing the same reasons, but sharing a roof." In a context characterized by family socialization deprivation, high school students, in some cases, yearned for attention and recognition from other individuals. School then emerged as a social environment, which they employed to draw the attention of both peers and teachers. *"I was so hyper and noisy most of the time at school, and I wanted to be a point of attraction, because I knew this was the only avenue I would be notable,"* says Participant 1. Such an action seems to be a natural compensatory means of neutralizing a gap in emotions created by not having support from family members. Apart from the family environmental impacts, it has been suggested that the risk of coming across with the so-called high-risk-taking behaviors, such as, for example, the substance abuse problems, considerably increases. The respondents implied that carelessness towards the drug and alcohol issue was one way among such tools to attract the attention of the parents. *"My mum never noticed me. I'd get myself drunk so that the next day, I'd tell her and she could finally berate me about drugs,"* recalls Participant 6. This highlights the inordinate steps taken by kids to be noticed and favored by their parents. The unstable personal relationships form a ground for premature attachment to romantic partners as a way of trying to fill up the emotional void resulting from family neglect. This, as described by Participant 7, a 15-year-old girl said, *"I dated this guy at 25, and for the first time in my life, I felt wanted and loved. And that was the feeling I wanted to experience - love and intimacy."* Often, the act of being in close relationships at an early age reveals a juvenile longing for emotional support and for fitting in, which was not adequately provided in the familiar place.

Lack of Emotional Security

This study found that students from broken homes experience significant emotional insecurity. Witnessing family breakdown and subsequent changes in family structure profoundly impact their emotional well-being. Emotional isolation is common, with students withdrawing from family support and experiencing depression. *"I used to*

lock myself in my room and cry myself to sleep when I was accused of things I never did," shared one participant. This isolation hinders emotional processing and leads to internalizing negative emotions. Emotional insecurity manifests as low self-esteem and a lack of confidence. Students often doubt their abilities and value, leading to self-criticism and avoidance of challenges. *"I never joined the school competition due to the fact that I knew I was not going to compete with my peers,"* emphasized another participant. Furthermore, the instability of broken homes contributes to frustration and anger. Children often question their self-worth and struggle to understand the reasons for family breakdown. *"I did not know what to do as I didn't know what I did wrong to experience these changes,"* one participant mentioned. Unfair treatment and favoritism within the family further exacerbate these negative emotions.

These emotional challenges have significant academic implications. As Uwakwe (2007) noted, instability in the home environment, inadequate resources, and inconsistent routines can hinder academic progress. Pinheiro (2006) emphasized that emotional distress can significantly impact a child's ability to learn and demonstrate their true potential. Depression, a common consequence of family breakdown, further exacerbates academic difficulties. Symptoms of depression, such as cognitive impairment and social dysfunction, directly impact school performance (Widener, 2017). Low self-esteem also hinders academic success. Hewitt (2005) highlighted the crucial role of self-confidence in academic achievement. Children with low self-esteem are more likely to avoid challenges and struggle to reach their full potential. In conclusion, the emotional insecurity experienced by students from broken homes has profound and detrimental effects on their academic and personal development.

Assessments of how Broken Home Influence Future Aspiration Impact of Poor Financial Status

This study found that family breakdown significantly diminishes household income. When two parents contribute to the family's economic well-being, their combined efforts typically lead to greater financial stability. However, divorce or the death of a parent can severely impact a family's economic situation. *"My father was the sole breadwinner, and my mother was a homemaker. His loss drastically reduced our family income,"* explained Participant 9. The study also revealed that family members sometimes utilize inheritance intended for children to support their immediate needs. This often necessitates significant lifestyle adjustments for students. *"We lost company benefits, including health insurance, and had to change schools because my father's company covered our expensive tuition fees,"* stated Participant 7. To cope with financial hardship, many students resorted to entrepreneurial activities, selling goods and services to peers and within the community. *"My mother would give me sandwiches to sell at school to help improve our family's income,"* shared Participant 3. Financial constraints often limited students' access to

extracurricular activities and enrichment opportunities. *"I never went on those school trips to Durban after my father died. I saw how hard my mother worked for that money, and I couldn't justify the expense,"* explained Participant 6. The study also highlighted the psychological impact of financial hardship. Some students from broken families engaged in risky behaviors, such as selling drugs, to maintain the lifestyle they were accustomed to before the family breakdown. *"I used to sell drugs to afford the designer clothes I was used to wearing, a lifestyle my parents could no longer support,"* explained Participant 5.

Research by Dang & Bulus (2015) emphasizes the significant financial burden of education. Insufficient financial support can create significant stress for students, hindering their academic progress. Asri et al. (2017) found a strong correlation between family socioeconomic status and student academic performance. Effective financial management within the family can significantly impact a student's motivation and academic achievement. Financial problems can adversely affect student academic performance through various pathways. Widener (2017) highlights the link between financial stress and mental health issues such as anxiety, which can lead to negative behaviors like substance abuse and compulsive spending, ultimately distracting students from their studies. Moreover, the need for part-time employment is another element greatly influencing the participation of students in academic studies. The unmanageable number of working hours can keep one away from studies, frequently missing lessons, and the grades will drop. According to Asri et al. (2017), under a financial crisis, students would take fewer credits and the results would be poorly graded. Students coming from broken families regularly go through a number of issues which prevent their academic excellence, for example, there is the issue of a student having to contribute towards family income, students being in a position to access learning materials, and every so often there is the issue of the financial difficulties. These hurdles may hold back students from being focused on studying and achieving their academic objectives (Perman, 2019).

Poor School Social Interaction Skills

The research findings show that students coming from broken homes have problems in forming social interaction skills at school; this can have implications for their interaction with peers and teachers in school. We all have to interact with society in one way or another on a day-to-day basis. Communication with others helps us in putting our thoughts in order, thinking about what we have understood and then what we have misunderstood. Also, classroom socializing is known to impact student learning by driving enthusiasm, curiosity, and a shared sense of the learning process. Students who are from the broken families frequently end the friendships because of the presence of the trust and communication issues. The respondent expressed, *"I didn't have a single friend. I could hang out with everyone around me at that time"* on a particular occasion - quite often such students suffer from social isolation connected with the fact that they feel different from

their peers. The similar experience was that one individual likes the solitude in the school courtyard and occasionally observes happy students, and during the sports time would be either watching or just sleeping on a school desk. Solitude is sought mostly to have a life without noise and enjoy the present moment with no stress from other people. Further investigations have demonstrated that such students very often become passive participants, taking part in daily class discussions: students give quite traditional answers and keep silent. Lack of verbal expression can be caused by one's inferiority and avoiding speaking. After a participant described, *"There was no time in the clove when I felt like expressing my own opinion other than when I was being threatened with punishment. I was as "voiceless" as if I wasn't even on the early-four."* Members of disrupted families have usually fewer social interactions skills, which are primary for managing challenges of life. Serín (2001) affirms that social skills are the "sets of abilities that facilitate well-adjusted and useful communication" between individuals. Strong social skills are crucial for successful social and academic adjustment. Namka (2009) emphasizes the significance of factors such as peer relations, social adjustment, emotional intelligence, family structure, and social skills in the overall social development of a child. Furthermore, these students often lack interpersonal skills, a finding that aligns with Masten et al. (2005). They emphasize the critical role of interpersonal skills in fostering peer acceptance and social adjustment throughout childhood and adolescence. Strong social skills have been linked to improved academic achievement, positive behavior, and healthy relationships within the school environment. The limited social interaction experienced by students from disrupted families can significantly impact their academic performance. These students may exhibit behavioral challenges such as aggression, anxiety, developmental disorders, and increased school absenteeism. Park (2014) highlights the school as a social institution where students learn from teachers, peers, and the surrounding environment. Cultivating strong social skills is essential not only for peer relationships but also for establishing positive connections with teachers.

Lack of School Motivation

Many research findings suggest that students from disrupted family environments experience decreased school motivation because of the absence of family support. The instability in their family situation might serve to discourage a child from attending school by not giving the requisite encouragement and support. Academic success requires emotional resilience, self-discipline, and intrinsic motivation to a large extent. Students exhibiting these traits readily withdraw from class discussions, surrender promptly on assigned tasks, and show aloofness in seeking clarifications for difficult concepts. In one participant's words (Participant 6): *"I never thought of pushing myself to research further if I did not understand anything learned in class; I never asked anything that I never understood."* Additional difficulties that these financial constraints place on students from

disrupted families often hamper their quest for academic success. For example, because it is not in their budget to purchase a complete set of school uniforms, students are sometimes subjected to ridicule, especially on the days when some uniforms are required. The sentiments of a participant (Participant 2) were captured in the expression: "*I would only go to school with the school tunic uniform and always sulked to go on tracksuits Day so that I was not seen in my school tunic.*" In addition, students from disrupted families tend to be bored in class, leading to their disruptive behavior and destruction of the learning environment. Students are more likely to skip classes due to lack of supervision and lack of value placed on the education they are afforded during their absence. A participant (Participant 3) explained this: "*I would show up wearing late in the after-lunch classes if I happen not to attend that class, and my grandmother cared about only the last-term school report.*"

The constant change of living places and financial instability of many students from disrupted families also affect their motivation. In Participant 9's words: "*The transfer of schools has been tiring, and not having pocket money drove me to animosity for going to school.*" All these qualities embarked on by poor parental support and interruptions in the home affect motivations, aspirations, and goals of disrupted family students. Omoruyi (2014) defined lack of motivation as deprivation of interest and enthusiasm to perform one both emotional level tugged inwards one's self. This very lack of motivation affects one's ability to engage with those materials and comprehend them in a more productive way. Meisenbach (2010) cites low self-confidence, dissatisfaction with the learning process, and personal cares as the basis for low motivation among the disrupted family students. Moreover, the lack of motivation herein impacts the determination, effort, and full engagement of students in their work. In that regard, it acts as a catalyst for creating interest and responsibility towards learning tasks. When motivated, students have higher chances of attaining perfection and keeping on trying for the sake of attaining educational objectives. Besides, although intrinsic motivation is extremely essential, external environmental encouragement from home is extremely necessary (Uwakwe, 2007). The absence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can substantially contribute to distorted academic performance. Lack of motivation is chronicled as a major internal influential factor leading to unwanted academic outcomes. It entails a very marked effect upon one's concentration, internal processing of information, and really significant interactions with the learning materiel (Widener, 2017).

The last consequence of lack of motivation from a disrupted family can betoken massive disadvantages in behavior, values, and characteristics maturing in the children. Omoruyi (2014) underscored the influencing factor of the home environment regarding student attitude and perspectives towards learning. He purports that finally, a disrupted family environment is liable to adverse ramifications leading to a laid slew of compulsion and learning difficulties. Besides, such students come to face a number of issues due to

lack of parental support; show a decline in motivation; and are, in truth, more susceptible to various behavioral problems, like indulgence in drugs and laziness (Omoruyi, 2014).

Conclusion

This research paper takes a closer look at the lives of students who found themselves in broken families at the Luyengo Campus. This study brings to light the negative impact of family breakdown on learning and academic success. Students are left emotionally troubled, physically unable to focus, and psychologically unsound as a result of the family trauma. The major findings are that students are insecure emotionally. Children from broken homes often have emotional problems which cause feeling alone, concern, and frustrations in regard to children's problems. It is lack of parental love and concern that lowers self-esteem and brings distorted self-images among the children. Furthermore, the academic difficulties. The behavioral instability associated with broken homes leads to poor academic performance. Students may encounter demotivation issues, not being able to focus, and attend lessons to complete the required coursework and don't pursue higher education. It leads to social issues. People who grew up in a broken family may lack personal social skills which reflect in interactions with other people. Children may have the difficulties in creating and maintaining friendships, which may result in their social exclusion and limit the availability for the peer support. Usually, it also means no big dream altogether. Some students, however, are not so fortunate due to financial constraints, outdated parental traditions, and poor academic achievements, which hinder them from having big ambitious dreams. They may have difficulty envisioning a successful future and may settle for less ambitious goals.

Recommendations

In response to the problems of the children from broken homes, counseling, and other support services, was recommended. Schools should keep a counselor to assist students in dealing with the emotional issues that come with the disintegration of the family units. They can be great tools for young people to employ coping mechanisms, stress management, and mental health promotion. As well as academic support, they need the teachers to guide them when they face the tough topics. Schools should make teaching support programs, like mentoring and tutoring, available to ensure that the students have improved results in their academic performance. Such programs can offer extra support and mentoring for students who are struggling academically. Along with parental responsibility, student involvement is advised as well. The setting should make an attempt to employ parents in children's education, even if the genetic relationship in the case of a family is broken. This can be done by organizing parent-teacher meetings, motivational programs for children, as well as other similar activities. Last but not the least, due to the

fact that children are part of the society, community intervention goes uncontested. Families that are torn apart can get support from community organizations and NGOs. They can offer tutorship, mentorship, and extracurricular activities to help these children realize their potential. By considering these strategies, it becomes possible to counteract the negative impacts of the shattered homes on the students and help them fulfill their educational needs.

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