

Single Parenting and its Impact on Emotional and Academic Development of Adolescents

Sarwat Sultan¹ and Frasat Kanwal²

<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2013.2.1.5>

Abstract

This longitudinal study is best to understand the adolescents' emotional and academic development when are raised by one parent. Mothers and fathers have different parenting strengths and offer different emotional and academic resources. A sample of 260 adolescents (evenly taken from mother/father-led homes) across 7 years was tested every two years since the adolescents were age 13. A booklet containing 5 scales to measure Perception of Parents, Emotional Intelligence, Mental Well-Being, Current Thoughts, and Peer Relations was administered to adolescents at age 13, 15, 17, and 19. Over the years, it was found that the emotional health and academic success was differently developed in both samples from mother-led homes and father-led homes. Contradictory to assumption that mothers are usually considered more sensitive and nurturer parent equipped emotionally to handle raising children alone, present research suggested that adolescents living with their fathers had greater emotional intelligence, mental well-being, self-esteem, and academic achievement than adolescents living with their mothers because single fathers tend to have higher incomes so could have access to better housing, schools, and child-care options. In addition, adolescents in mother-led homes generally have stronger peer relationship than adolescents in father-led homes. Because it was found that mothers when are perceived more involved, and provide greater warmth, can develop the social skills in adolescents. Fathers, however, contributed to their adolescents' emotional development by providing autonomy. The study is helpful for teachers to comprehend the problems of students and to redesign schools to meet needs of students raised in floundering families.

Key words: Single Parenting, Emotional Intelligence, Well being, Self-esteem, Academic Achievement

Introduction

A family headed by one adult, either a mother or a father is a mark able question for researchers. Particularly, it is significant for pedagogs to understand that several students in their classrooms belong to single-parent ménage as a result of separation or divorce. It is to a greater extent arrogated that the findings from this study will be helpful in understanding the barriers that impede a child's emotional and academic development when raised by a single parent (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002).

It has been usually assumed that mothers parenting is always more fostering, flourishing, and nurturing. Mothers are considered as more sensitive parent and are viewed as more suitable for the fosterage and upbringing of children. Nevertheless some researches (Farrell, 2001)

¹ Chairperson, Department of Applied Psychology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan

² Department of Applied Psychology, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan



presented the contradictory notions that single fathers can also promote positive aspects of personality in their children.

The fact that the separated families are on the increase in the world, call in various questions. For instance, a child who is under single parenting how will be emotionally stable and intelligent? How this child will perform socially and academically better? And how the child will be creative and psychologically well-being? Particularly the questions will be more notable when the mother parenting is absent. It is more important to know that to what extent the single mother parenting would influence on adolescents' well-being and academic efficacy. Furthermore, do adolescents of single mothers report greater problems in their behaviors as compared to adolescents of single fathers (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

One of the potent factors affecting the well-being of child is the loss of economic status of the single parent. When parents are separated the absence of father's income create more stress for single mothers that may lead to depression resulting in inefficient and pathetic parenting. Single mothers become weaker in providing the stiff and steady discipline that children need to develop a strong sense of security and well-being (Weston, 1993).

Another aspect of economical loss of single parenting can be associated with children lower level of success at schools. It may be suspected that adolescents when come from financially deprived single-mother families report low accomplishments in their academic goals as compared to the adolescents from father-led families. For these reasons, instructors should look into the factors that may influence the adolescents of single-parent families and should realize the needs, emotions, and attitudes of the children in the classes when they are teaching. Instructors must understand that those students who brought up in staggering homes always demand sympathetic, nurturing, and ardent environment of classrooms (Rodgers, 1996).

When mother and father are divorced psychological well-being of children is a big question. Clarke-Stewart and Hayward (1996) conducted researches arguing the hurtful burdens of separation on self-esteem of children. Success in school and psychological adaptation are also found at risk. Empirical studies intimated that adolescents living with their fathers had a greater sense of well-being than did children living with their mothers (Biller & Kimpton, 1997; Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996; Farrell, 2001; Hilton & Devall, 1998). Additionally, the researchers found that mothers are more disadvantageous in terms of few chances of getting jobs and social prejudice that women cannot perform well in society.

As discussed earlier, it is to a greater degree admitted that single fathers lean to have higher economical status with good opportunities of jobs. Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1997) pointed out that single fathers can have approach of best schooling, housing, and caring choices. Most of the investigations into the academic achievements of adolescents from single parent homes suggested that academic success of adolescents can be best predicted through income of family (Downey, 1994; Farrell, 2001; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Schnayer & Orr, 1989). Downey (1994) coincided that psychological sufferings can be helpful in understanding the academic failures of students coming from mother-led homes. Adolescents from an financially weaker family headed by single mother also experience low inspiration and low anticipations for themselves than their fellows who live in better conditions (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

Schnayer and Orr (1989) proposed that lower academic achievement affect the self-esteem of children from single-mother and single-father families. They identified that instantly after separation of parents, a child's academic functioning and success incline turn down. In addition to analyzing the several consequences expecting from single parenting, Downey (1994) also investigated the aspect of single parent involvement and warmth in their children's life. It was found that children have more positive perception about their single

fathers than their single mothers. Mothers are found more involved with their children's activities, studies, and their friends as well. Single-mother parenting promotes the social skills and social competency in their children. Adolescents from single mother led homes learn more understandings of relations and experience stronger bounds in their relations.

Lastly, it must be addressed that the academic conditions itself can affect distinctively on the academic success of students raised by single parent homes. An institute providing a firm, integrated climate, supportive environment, and warm teaching can produce highly academically competent, emotionally intelligent, and creative students particularly coming from single mother homes (Carlson, 1997).

With an extensive look into the review literature available on the issue of single parent and its impact on children's emotional and academic development, the present research was planned to compare the effects of being raised by single mothers and single fathers in the context of Pakistani context where mothers are traditionally thought as more nurturer and best fit for the upbringing, breeding, and fostering of child in our society in case of when they are divorced and separated. Peculiarly, the main centre was to compare the self-esteem, psychological well-being, peer relations, emotional intelligence, and perception of parents of children raised by single mothers to that of children raised by single fathers.

Methods

Participants

The sample consisted of 260 adolescents evenly taken from mother/father-led homes. They were of age 13 when were first tested on variables. Then across 7 years the participants were tested every two years since the adolescents were age 13. All the participants belong to different socio-economic classes. Sample was selected through the non-probability convenience sampling technique and the data was collected in 2004-2011.

Instruments

The following instruments were used after the Urdu translation to achieve the objectives of present study.

Perception of Parents Scale (POP):

Perception of Parents Scale (Robbins, 1994) is used to measure children's perceptions of their parents' autonomy support, involvement, and warmth. It is a 42-items scale wherein 21 for mothers and 21 for fathers. Responses are obtained on 7-point rating scale. To obtain the scores on scale, the scores on the following items are first reversed: 2, 6, 12, 13, 14, 15, 20, 21, 23, 27, 33, 34, 35, 36, 41, 42. And then are added the scores of the items. The translated scale has alpha reliability co-efficient of 0.71, and validity co-efficient of 0.66

Emotional Quotient Scale (EQS):

The Emotional Quotient Scale developed by Goleman, (2001) was used to measure emotional intelligence. It is a 5-point scale with 12 items. A student can respond by opting "1" for "Strongly Disagree", "2" for "Disagree", "3" for "Neutral", and "4" for "Agree", and "5" for "Strongly Agree". The exercise was completed alone to avoid social pressures. The score may range from 10-60. The scores are obtained by adding the responses to each question. Participants who score above 25 are considered as highly emotionally intelligent people. The scale has alpha reliability co-efficient of 0.91, and validity co-efficient of 0.79.

Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWS)

Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) is a 42 –items self-report scale to assess individual's PWB. It consists of a series of statements reflecting the six areas of psychological well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, and purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Responses are obtained on 6-point rating scale containing six categories ranged from 1 indicating 'disagree strongly' to 6 indicating 'agree strongly'. Twenty two items on scale are negatively stated and are reverse scored before calculating a whole score on each subscale. High score on each of the subscale indicate high PWB on that domain. To obtain the total score on measure, the scores on each item are averaged. Higher scores on scale indicate greater PWB. The translated scale has alpha reliability co-efficient of 0.68, and validity co-efficient of 0.70

Current Thoughts Scale (CTS):

Current Thoughts Scale (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991) is a scale to assess self-esteem that what one is thinking at this moment. It has 20 items with 5-point likert scale. Response categories are as follows; 1 = not at all, 2 = a little bit, 3 = somewhat, 4 = very much, 5 = extremely. Score is obtained simply added by the scores on items after reversing some items. The translated scale has alpha reliability co-efficient of 0.72, and validity co-efficient of 0.78

The Index of Peer Relation (IPR):

The Index of Peer Relation (IPR) developed by Hudson (1982) measures the level, intensity, or amount of a problem with one's peer relation. It is a 25-item scale in which the items are scored with a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 (seldom or never), to 5 (most or all of the time). To obtain the score, after reversing some items the responses on 25 items are added and then denoting the item responses as Y, the total score S is computed for scale as $S = \sum Y - 25$. 30 is a clinical cutting score for IPR. It indicates that a score above than 30 is interpreted as low on peer relation, while a score below is considered high on peer relation. The translated scale has alpha reliability co-efficient of 0.88, and validity co-efficient of 0.81

Procedure

Sample was identified with the help of class teachers in the schools. They were approached in their classes. A booklet containing 5 scales were administered to them to measure their Perception of Parents, Emotional Intelligence, Mental Well-Being, Current Thoughts, and Peer Relations at age 13, 15, 17, and 19. Over the years, sample was tested on the variables. A record of every two years testing was maintained. They were given a brief introduction to the study and they were assured that the information would be kept confidential and it will only be used for statistical calculations. Instructions were provided to respondents to make questionnaire easy and understandable. Statistical analysis was done by using SPSS. Descriptive and inferential statistics were computed for the data obtained from the participants.

Results

Descriptive analysis in terms of mean and SD is presented in Table 1 and 2 for the scores of adolescents of single-mother and of single-father respectively across the seven years. In order to see the comparison, analysis was performed for two groups of adolescents; single-mother adolescents and single-father adolescents. Results pertaining to these expected differences are presented in Table 3.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for the Scores of Adolescents of Single Mothers Urdu-Versions of POP, EQS, PWS, CTS, and IPR (N=130)

Scales	Age	Single-Mother Adolescents			
		13 years	15 years	17 years	19 years
POP	<i>M</i>	116.3	137.09	178.55	196.23
	<i>SD</i>	12.20	12.69	9.25	11.14
EQS	<i>M</i>	30.21	37.74	42.88	41.46
	<i>SD</i>	10.83	11.63	8.76	10.15
PWS	<i>M</i>	158.01	173.77	166.00	171.55
	<i>SD</i>	15.62	19.45	19.70	16.45
CTS	<i>M</i>	36.41	40.77	54.63	61.56
	<i>SD</i>	17.17	16.35	12.16	12.66
IPR	<i>M</i>	29.49	21.16	24.50	22.47
	<i>SD</i>	09.77	11.62	8.09	10.70

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for the Scores of Adolescents of Single-Fathers Urdu- Versions of POP, EQS, PWS, CTS, and IPR (N=130)

Scales	Age	Single-Mother Adolescents			
		13 years	15 years	17 years	19 years
POP	<i>M</i>	116.3	137.09	178.55	249.86
	<i>SD</i>	12.20	12.69	9.25	11.14
EQS	<i>M</i>	36.21	47.74	51.88	55.95
	<i>SD</i>	10.83	11.63	8.76	09.87
PWS	<i>M</i>	178.01	183.77	216.00	233.40
	<i>SD</i>	15.62	19.45	19.70	14.07
CTS	<i>M</i>	56.41	60.77	74.63	82.84
	<i>SD</i>	13.17	10.35	11.16	11.91
IPR	<i>M</i>	49.49	47.16	44.50	53.69
	<i>SD</i>	16.77	19.62	8.09	12.07

Table 1 and 2 indicate means and standard deviations for the scores of adolescents from single mother/father led-home on the measures. Results show that perception of parents, emotional intelligence, psychological well-being, and self-esteem are increased in adolescents of both single mother and single father across the time period but this enhancement is larger for the adolescents of single fathers. While results also indicate that the peer relationship is found more stronger in adolescents of single mothers.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations and t-values for the Scores of Adolescents of Single Mothers and of Single Fathers on Urdu-Versions of POP, EQS, PWS, CTS, and IPR

Scales	Single-Mother Adolescents (N=130)		Single-Father Adolescents (N=130)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
POP	196.23	11.14	249.86	11.41	-2.27	0.03*
EQS	41.46	10.15	55.95	9.87	-2.26	0.02*
PWS	171.55	16.45	233.40	14.07	-1.99	0.04*
CTS	61.56	12.66	82.84	11.91	-2.34	0.01*
IPR	22.47	11.28	53.69	12.07	-1.99	0.03*

df. = 258, * $p < 0.05$,

Table 3 indicates the significant differences in the perception of parents, emotional intelligence, psychological well-being, self-esteem, and peer relationships. Results suggest that adolescents of single fathers have develop more positive perception of parents, high emotional intelligence, eminent psychological well-being, and high self-esteem as compared to the adolescents of single mothers. However, peer relationship was found more potent among adolescents of single mothers as compared to adolescents of single fathers.

Discussion

The present study is substantial in respect of providing the picture of adolescents' psychological and emotional developmental when are raised by single parents. Findings are mark able to identify what single parenting; single mothers vs. single fathers contribute positively in psychological well-being and academic development of children. It has been researched out that family plays pivotal role in the healthy development of personalities of children. Youngsters are benefited when are living with their biological parents. But separation or divorce between both partners of parents adversely affect the well-being of their children.

In the present study it was assumed on the basis of general observation of the traditional role of mothers in society that mothers will contribute more positively in developing the perception about parents, psychological well-being, self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and peer relationship of their children. Contradictory to this assumption the present study indicated that single father parenting is more strengthen in this regard as compared to single mother parenting.

Many empirical researches have provided the support for these findings in the review literature. Hilton and Devall (1998) conducted a study on 30 single-mother families, 30 single-father families, and 30 intact families. The investigators finally concluded that single mother families are under more stress and problems in handling the issues of their children. Though mothers adjusted better with their lower standard of living but they remain poor in getting better jobs and higher education that may be required to take themselves and their children out of impoverishment. Adolescents from single mother-led homes don't perceive

their mothers strong and powerful as compared to the adolescents from single father-led homes.

Present study also asserted that single fathers developed high psychological well-being than single mothers. These findings are supported by the literature given earlier that single mothers are more likely to be depressed due to their economic status following their separation. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) also asserted that single mothers found themselves in difficulty to preserve their old relationships and due to this lacking of relatives associations the adolescents' well-being can be negatively affected. Opposite to the assumptions of the present research it was found that single fathers play significant roles in the development of children's well-being. Researchers also pointed out that single father's children than that of single mothers prone to experience much more psychological constancy, firmness, and health (Biller & Kimpton, 1997; Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996; Farrell, 2001; Hilton & Devall, 1998). This was also corroborated by Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996; Hilton & Devall, 1998 who documented that children when live with their single fathers report a high level of well-being as compared to the children who live with their single mothers.

One another important findings of this study is that single mothers develop the strong sense of relationship in their children. This finding is in consistent with the several studies conducted by Downey (1994) who asserted that mothers are usually found more ace and expert in developing the social and interpersonal skills in their children. Thus, children from single mother led homes have more potent skills for establishing healthy connections with family and stable relationships with their friends.

Findings further suggested that emotional intelligence was more associated with single father parenting. Several justifications can be put for the support of this conclusion. Likewise Clarke-Stewart and Hayward (1996) have asserted that children are more benefited when are involved in daily routine activities, for instance shopping and going to school. This close contact with single father may part into the pivotal effects on children's emotional intelligence. Fathers therefore are considered as stronger disciplinarians which is ultimately resulting in lesser academic and behavioral problems in children.

Conclusion

The main objective of this research was to look into the comparison of adolescents' emotional and academic development when they are raised by single mothers and single fathers. Findings suggested that single father-led homes' adolescents are positively affecting the psychological wellbeing, emotional intelligent and self-esteem as compared to single mother-led home adolescents. However, results also indicated that the single mother-led home adolescents are higher in peer relationship. Perception of parents among adolescents was also found more positive towards single fathers than towards the single mothers. Thus results are not supported that mothers are more sensitive agent of parenting and play more significant role in developing psychological well-being and academic achievements. The reasons might be drawn from the fact that single mother remain unsuccessful in providing the financial support to their children for their needs while single father can fulfill the needs of their children that in turn cause the psychological well-being and emotional intelligence in their adolescents.

Limitations of the Study

Though the present study is significant in regard to highlighting the matter of single parent families and its impact on the well-being of children, it also bore some limitations that must be considered when results are generalized. Father or mother when are in single parenting must be seen that who has first taken the decision to be separated from partner. This could be

an important element to understand the impact of single mother/father parenting on children's well-being and development. Sample size and sampling technique are other limitations of this study. Study may well be replicated with some other variables associated with single parenting such as economical status, family system after separation, working/nonworking single mothers, same gender parenting, custodial parents, and education of parents. These are the aspects that may be benefited in exploring the exact picture of single parenting in one society.

References

- Biller, H. B., & Kimpton, J. L. (1997). The father and the school-aged child. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (3rd ed.; pp. 143-161). New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Carlson, C. (1997). Single parenting and stepparenting. In G. G. Bear, K. M. Minke, & A. Thomas (Eds.), *Children's needs II: Development, problems and alternatives* (pp.615-631). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.
- Clarke-Stewart, K. A., & Hayward, C. (1996). Advantages of father custody and contact for the psychological well-being of school-age children. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, (17)2, 239-270.
- Downey, D. B (1994). The school performance of children from single-mother and single-father families: Economic or interpersonal deprivation? *Journal of Family Issues* (15)1, 129-147.
- Farrell, W. (2001). *Father and child reunion: How to bring the dads we need to the children we love*. New York, NY: J.P. Tarcher.
- Goleman, (2001). Primal leadership: The hidden driver of great performance. *Harvard Business Review*,79(11), 42-51.
- Heatherton, T.F. & Polivy, J. (1991). Development and validation of a scale for measuring state self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60, 895-910.
- Hetherington, E. M., & Stanley-Hagan, M. M. (1997). The effects of divorce on fathersand their children. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development*, (3rd ed.; pp.191-211). New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Hilton, J. M., & Desrochers, S. (2002). Children's behavior problems in single-parent and married-parent families: Development of a predictive model. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 37(1/2), 13-36.
- Hilton, J. M., & Devall, E. L. (1998). Comparison of parenting and children's behavior in single-mother, single-father, and intact families. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 29(3-4), 23-54.
- Hudson, W. W. (1982). The Clinical Measurement Package; A field manual. *School of Social Work*. The Dorsey Press, 60430
- McLanahan, S., & Sandefur, G. (1994). *Growing up with a single parent: What hurts, what helps*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Robbins, R. J. (1994). *An assessment of perceptions of parental autonomy support and control: Child and parent correlates*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Psychology, University of Rochester.
- Rodgers, B. (1996), 'Social and psychological wellbeing of children from divorced families: Australian research findings, *Australian Psychologist*, 31 (3), 174-182.
- Ryff, C., & Keyes, C. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 719-727.
- Schnayer, R., & Orr, R. R. (1989). A comparison of children living in single-mother and single-father families. *Journal of Divorce*, 12(2/3), 171-184.
- Weston, R. (1993), 'Income circumstances of parents and children: a longitudinal view', in Funder, K., Harrison, M. & Weston, R. *Settling Down: Pathways of Parents After Divorce*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.