

Parental Separation: An Exploration on Learner's Psychosocial well-being

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ABSTRACT: Parental divorce or separation is an extensive issue that may affect children's emotional, social, and academic well-being. Children who undergo parental separation may encounter a range of emotions, including confusion, sorrow, and rage, as they adjust to alterations in their family structure. Furthermore, they may face challenging loyalty issues, feel conflicted between their parents, and experience guilt for favoring one parent over another. This study utilized a phenomenological approach to investigate the experiences of a junior high school student living in Barangay Glan-Padidu, a rural area within the Municipality of Glan, Sarangani Province, Region XII, Philippines. The collected data revealed the disruption of students' daily routines and the loss of stability and security, resulting in anxiety and tension. These consequences also impacted students' social connections, academic achievements, and ability to develop healthy relationships with peers and adults. This study aimed to demonstrate how parental separation can weaken an individual's self-esteem and alter their perceptions of themselves. Family members with close ties are more likely to address problems both positively and productively. This study suggests that the power of a family stems from its ability to provide its children with a sense of identity, support, and purpose. By respecting and investing in familial relationships, we not only promote children's personal development and happiness but also contribute to a more compassionate and resilient society.

KEYWORDS: Child, Family, Separation, Rural Area, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

"An article titled 'Understanding the Impact of Family Dynamics, on Religious Beliefs, published in JSTOR in 2024' emphasized the role that family plays in society and how it influences individuals lives and interactions. Family members are allies offering unwavering support during life trials. In today's fast-paced world, acknowledging the importance of the family in cultivating bonds and ensuring a brighter future for us and our loved ones is crucial. By dedicating time and effort to nurtu ring family connections, we establish a support network that empowers us to confront life's obstacles, with strength and resilience."

(Guanlan, 2024) stated in "Characteristics of parent-child separation related to bullying involvement among left-behind children in China" that bullying among children from harrowing families is a widespread problem that affects children of all ages and backgrounds. It can take numerous forms, including physical, verbal, and cyberbullying forms. Bullying can have devastating effects on children, leaving emotional and psychological scars. (Sullivan et al., 2023) stated that an individual's persistent fear of being targeted by their peers can lead to feelings of helplessness and isolation, making it difficult for youngsters to build meaningful relationships and participate in social activities. This can lead to a cycle of loneliness and despair; that may continue into adulthood.

The actual separation of parents can be a source of distress, especially if it occurs unexpectedly and the children are unprepared. (Qaiser, 2024) on "Inter-Parental Conflict's Persistent Effects on Adolescent Psychological Distress, Adjustment Issues, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Lockdown" expresses that an adolescent may struggle to understand why their parents are no longer together. People may blame themselves for their parents' divorce, and feelings of guilt and confusion lead to a keen sense of sadness and hopelessness, which eventually contributes to melancholy.

"What About the Children? Co-Occurrence of Child Maltreatment and Parental Separation," a study article produced by (Sheila, 2024), described how when parents' divorce, their children may begin to act out, demonstrating violent or defiant behavior to cope with overwhelming emotions. They become irritable, easily irritated, and have difficulty adhering to regulations

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and directions. Behavioral changes indicate that a young person struggles to process emotions and changes caused by phenomena. (Crittenden & Spieker, 2023) also stated that divorce can induce stress and upheaval in households, making it difficult for children to maintain their study patterns and focus. Consequently, divorced children may struggle with their studies and may fall behind in class.

("Response and Coping Mechanisms of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) Children to Parents' Separation | Emerald Insight," 2023) explained that the absence of a parent due to labor migration can cause feelings of abandonment and loneliness in children, who may struggle to cope with the emotional void left by their parent's absence. This may result in emotions such as uneasiness, worry, and instability within the family. In other situations, children may seek emotional support and direction from other family members or classmates, potentially leading to unhealthy relationships and behaviors.

According to Paediatric Child Health's research in (2000), children who experience parental separation, regardless of the reason, may exhibit a range of emotional and behavioral reactions. These reactions can include regression, anxiety and depressive symptoms, increased irritability and noncompliance, and difficulties in social relationships and academic performance.

As (Richardson, 2016) found, a child's healthy socio-emotional development and well-being depend on a strong attachment to their primary caregiver. Additionally, Samuelson, Bartel, Valadez, and Jordan's study from the same year suggested that attachment relationships can significantly predict childhood cognitive and behavioral problems, such as mood and anxiety disorders in childhood and adolescence, as well as trauma- and stressor-related, substance-related, and addiction disorders.

It is important to note that separation can disrupt a child's attachment system and lead to negative outcomes, as (Fox & Rutter's research, 2010) indicated. Young children are particularly sensitive to stressors, and experiencing separation during childhood can result in a range of emotions, including fear, helplessness, dysphoria, rage, confusion, and anxiety, as (Malone, Westen, & Levendosky, 2011) found.

The effects of separation on children are associated with impairments in executive function, profound deficits in adaptive emotional behavior, difficulty in maintaining appropriate interpersonal relationships, and disrupted biological and behavioral systems, including dissociative symptoms, as (Scott, 2015) suggested. This research is grounded in attachment theory, which suggests that early attachment bonds are influenced by separation. (Delima & Vimpani, 2011) and (Hostinar & Gunner, 2013) both found similar results.

In the Philippines, (Tubeza, 2011) reported a significant increase in parental separation cases over the past decade, with a 40% increase and approximately 22 cases filed each day. The Catholic Bishop News Agency indicated that the number of annulment cases increased from 4,500 in 2001 to 8,282 in 2010. The agency also reported that those who filed cases had to 3-4 children, and 1 percent had to 5-6 children.

Children from these marriages were likely to be affected by their parents' separation.

The Municipality of Glan, Sarangani Province has not addressed this issue. There were learners whose parents had separated, while others faced academic challenges, including lower grades, premature dropping out of school, and increased disruptive behavior.

Considering these circumstances, researchers have been inspired to investigate the consequences of parental separation on learners' psychological and social wellbeing. Teachers play a crucial role in molding the youth and building the nation's future. As part of their responsibilities, they must look after the welfare of their learners and recognize that the school serves as their second home.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To explore the psychosocial consequences of parental separation in relation to the learner's personal distress, this study sought the answers to the following research questions:

1. How does the learner react and deal with parental separation?
2. How does parental separation affect their psychological well-being and social identity?

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a qualitative phenomenological method to examine the experiences of children who have been impacted by parental separation. To offer a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences, interviews were conducted for approximately two hours.

The research aimed to explore the consequences of parental separation on children's psychosocial well-being. A descriptive method was utilized, providing a comprehensive overview of the techniques and procedures involved. This approach encompasses the process of recording, transcribing, analyzing, and interpreting the data. The primary means of collecting information were in-depth interview questions and group discussions.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This research aimed to explore the psychosocial inclinations of learners following parental separation. To bolster the examination of the collected data, researchers referred to relevant authorities and utilized citations to strengthen the evidence.

Informant's reaction/dealing and Psychosocial well-being with parental separation

When a child is born, they are entirely reliant on their parents for survival. The parents are responsible for feeding the infants when they are hungry and comforting them when they cry. The consistent presence of the parents provides the child with a sense of safety and security. As a result, children begin to develop trust in their parents and the world around them. The primary developmental goal of a child's first year of life is to foster love and trust in others.

Unfortunately, when both parents are absent, children often feel uncertain and doubtful. Their expressions lack any specific emotions, and they appear to have a question mark etched on their faces. It is crucial for parents to be present and supportive during their child's formative years to ensure their emotional and psychological development.

In: May I know asa man imuhang parents? (*May I know where your parents are?*)

A2: abroad akoang mama. (*My mama is abroad*)

In: ang imuhang papa asa man? (*Where is your father?*)

A2: na-priso sir. (*He's imprisoned sir*)

In: kanus-a lang? (*When?*)

A2: katong pag grade seven nako sir. (*When I was in Grade 7 sir*)

In: pila na katuig napriso imuhang papa? (*How long has he been in prison?*)

A2: upat naman siguro sir. (*may be 4 sir*)

The informant directed their gaze towards the interviewer, however, their focus remained on a blank space, displaying no discernible emotions. Nonetheless, it was evident from their responses that they were feeling frustrated, as their eyes, though not fixed, conveyed a sense of loneliness and worry. Parental absence can have a profound influence on children, often leaving lasting emotional scars due to feelings of abandonment, sadness, or anger caused by the absence of a parent.

This phenomenon, commonly referred to as "empty arms," can have significant and long-lasting effects on a child's emotional development and overall well-being, regardless of the reason for their absence, whether due to divorce, work commitments, or other reasons.

In: Unsa may feelings nga wala imuhang parents? (*How does it feel when your parents are not around?*)

A2: Sa una pa mingaw kaayo labi na wala pud si mama nga muatiman sa amua. (*Since then, it is so lonely especially that my mother is not around to take care of us*)

In: Gimingaw ka sa iyaha, unsay reaction nimo nga pati si Papa mo wala pud. (*You miss her so much. How did you react to not having your father around also?*)

A2: Sobra kahadlok Sir. Daghan kaayo ko og pangutana. Unsay mahitabo sa amuaa. Mura ko og mabuang kay unsa nako pag atiman ang mga manghod nako? (*I was so scared sir. I had plenty of questions. What will become of us? I felt I was going crazy because how would I take care of my siblings?*)

The consequences of parental separation can have a profound impact on the mental wellbeing of children, leading to the development of adverse behavioral patterns, a negative self-concept, social problems, and difficulties in forming family relationships. As the family unit serves as the child's primary point of contact, it is often the case that students within these families are the ones most affected, feeling as though their world has been completely upended. Consider another extract below:

In: Kumusta imuhang pag eskwela? (*How is school?*)

A2: pirmi ko wala sa klase. Dili man gud ko ganahan. (*I am always out of school. I don't have any interest.*)

In: Nag inom na ka? (*Do you drink?*)

A2: Yes sir.

Here, it clearly shows that separation is also associated with negative outcomes and earlier life transitions. Children are more likely to experience poverty and educational failure. Parents must bear in mind the substantial impact that their absence

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can have on the emotional or mental health of their offspring and take proactive measures to establish a robust emotional bond and physical presence with them.

The loss of a parent, whether through death, abandonment, or prolonged separation, can have a profound impact on a child's emotional well-being. In such circumstances, children may experience intense fear, panic, grief, depression, helplessness, and hopelessness. The child has lost a vital life and may struggle to maintain a sense of self. The world and life may appear disorganized and terrified by the child.

In: aware baka sa imuhang feelings sa imuhang gipaminaw panahon nga wala imuhang ginikanan pirme? (*Are you aware of what emotions to feel, knowing that your parents are not around?*)

A2: Yes Sir.

In: Unsa man imuhang ginabati? (*What do you feel?*)

A2: Wala ko kasabot sir, mutulo ra akong luha, usahay wala ko kabalo nga naghilak

na diay ko. (*I am uncertain whether there will be instances in which my tears will spontaneously flow from my eyes, and there have been instances in which I was unaware that I was crying.*)

It is crucial for children who experience parental loss to receive adequate emotional support from loved ones to help them work through their grief. Failure to do so can lead to long-lasting emotional distress. Children who consume grief may lack the psychic energy necessary to engage in learning, play, and other activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Parental separation has several adverse effects on children. These children have poorer outcomes than their counterparts from intact families, including more stress, more problems with their parents, dismal views of their lives, and low academic standing. Despite the challenges posed by parental separation, many children can navigate through these difficulties and adapt to new circumstances with resilience and support.

By understanding the ripple effect of parental separation on children's lives, parents, caregivers, and professionals can work together to provide the necessary support and resources to help children cope and thrive in the face of adversity. Parental separation can have a profound impact on children's lives, causing emotional, behavioral, and academic challenges. It is important for parents to prioritize their children's well-being during and after separation by maintaining open communication, providing emotional support, and seeking professional help if needed. By being aware of the ripple effect of parental separation on children, parents can mitigate negative consequences and create a more positive and stable environment for their children to thrive in.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE:

School as the children's second home and their teachers as their second parents, these students must be treated just like any other student in the school, social justice, and equality. Social justice and equality would mean equal opportunities in terms of obtaining an education and having a high level of parental support and contact. Specifically, early intervention can drastically alter perceptions and outcomes.

Such interventions may include family and individual counseling to ensure that students are coping with the situation, communicating with parents, and maintaining stability in their education and other aspects of life. Early intervention with these students may have had a profound and positive influence on their overall well-being. Therefore, students experiencing parental separation would be able to fulfill basic needs earlier, resulting in equal opportunities. In the academic realm, this study may contribute to a better understanding of the long-term effects of parental separation.

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