

INFLUENCE OF SINGLE PARENTING ON PUPILS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN BASIC SCHOOLS IN THE WA MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT: *This study examined influence of single parenting on pupils' academic performance with a focus on whether academic performance differed between child from single parents home and those from two parent homes. The cross-sectional study design was used. A questionnaire aided the collecting of primary data while secondary data on test scores was obtained from pupils' report cards. The sample size was 170. Data analysis involved using cross tabulation and t – test. The results show that there is a significant difference between the academic performance of pupils from single parent homes and those from two parent homes. The main conclusion drawn from this study is that single parenting has negative impact on a child's academic performance. The study recommends that teachers should give pupils from single parent homes attention to enable them cope and that they should equally be counseled to make them adjust to the academic environment.*

KEYWORDS: Academic Performance, Single Parent Home, Two Parent Home, Pupil,

INTRODUCTION

Parents are the first point of contact of children. When both parents are present, it implies that the child would derive most care (Ortese, 1998). However, when one of the parent is absent in a child's life, a gap is created as the child would lose the support that would have emanated from that parent. Ortese (1998) and Salami and Alawode (2000) have asserted that single parenting result from divorce, separation of various kinds, having children from wedlock or death of one spouse which leaves the roles in the hands of a single parent. According to Steck (2009), the number of divorce cases has risen considerably in Europe since the 1960s and that the most affected countries include the United Kingdom, Portugal, Denmark and Belgium. The writer notes that it has resulted in one-parent families soaring in Europe. Latin America is equally experiencing a rise in one- parent families (Steck, 2009). Over the past 35 years, United States of America's children being raised in two-parent homes has dropped significantly from about 85% in 1968 to 70% in 2003 while the proportion of children living in single-parent homes has nearly doubled (Center for Marriage and Families, 2005). In the same vein, Andersson (2002) presents that in the United States of America; almost half of all children by age 15 will have lived in a single parent family. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) (2012), population which is 12 years and older constitute 16,886,306. Out of the total, 7,237,730 (42.9%) of them are married; 315,910 (1.9%) are separated; 574,271 (3.4%) are divorced while 823,562 (4.9%) of them are widowed. This indicates that in Ghana about 1,713,743 (10.2%) of the people are single parents (i.e., those people separated, divorced and widowed). In the Upper West Region those

married make up 235,341 (51.1%), those separated constitute 3,682 (0.8%), divorced people are 4,091 (0.9%), and those that are widowed represent 30,328 (6.6%) (GSS, 2012). The aggregate of single parents in the Upper West Region who are 15 years and above is 38, 101 (8.3%) (GSS, 2005). Similarly in the Wa Municipality, the study area, 9.2% are single parents (i.e., those separated, divorced and widowed). Considering these high figures of single parenting in Ghana and the Wa Municipality in particular, little is known about how single parenting affects children's academic performance. This study, therefore contributes to the literature on whether there is a difference between various forms of parenting and academic performance in the Wa Municipality. Overall, it is clear that many children are currently living under single parents. Nonetheless, parents are primarily responsible for the educational and career development of their children (Salami and Alawode, 2000). Hence, children under such a family structure might not receive the necessary attention they required because the single parent might be overwhelmed by many responsibilities.

The literature on academic performance among children suggests that children's academic performance improve when both parents are actively involved in their education (Fadeye 1985; Nyarko 2007; Nyarko and Vorgelegt, 2007). Some studies seem to neglect the issue of single-parenting as a variable. Generally such studies have tied academic performance of children to socio-economic status, parents' educational level, student attitudes to learning, school environmental factors, housing and residential experience (Win and Miller, n.d.; Donkor, 2010; Farooq, Chaudhry, Shafiq and Berhanu, 2011; Mahama and Campion, 2011; Insah, Mumuni and Bowan, 2013). What these studies failed to realize is that the variable family structure (particularly single parenting) is crucial in determining a person's academic performance. However, studies that seemed to have focused on assessing the role single parenting on the academic performance of children have mostly used respondents from senior secondary schools and universities without taking time to consider pupils from the basic schools (Fry and Scher, 1984; Krein and Beller, 1988; Salami and Alawode, 2000; Eweniyi, 2005). The basic school pupils are nonetheless the most fragile because they are still in their formative years meaning any disruptions could have everlasting result on them. This creates a knowledge gap. Also, studies in Ghana have basically focused on the parental involvement in children's school activities (Donkor, 2010; Nyarko, 2011; Chowa, Ansong and Osei-Akoto, 2012) but not on how the family structure (e.g., single parenthood) affects their academic performance which equally is lacking in Ghana and the study site, Wa Municipality in particular: This makes it necessary to investigate influence of single parenting on children's academic performance using basic school pupils. This study is timely as the performances of pupils at the basic school levels are declining in recent times (The Statesman, 2011).

Research Question

What is the level of parental involvement in pupils' academic work in the Wa Municipality?

Hypotheses

1. H_0 : *There is no significant difference between the academic performance of pupils from single parent homes and those from two parent homes*

H₁: There is a significant difference between the academic performance of pupils from single parent homes and those from two parent homes

2. *H₀: There is no significant difference between the academic performance of male pupils and female pupils from single - parent homes*

H₁: There is a significant difference between the academic performance of male pupils and female pupils from single - parent homes

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental Involvement in Pupils Education

Nyarko (2011) and Chowa *et al.* (2012) showed that in Ghana, parents worry about the affairs of their children's school environment. For this reason, Nyarko (2011) further argues that Ghanaian parents often help mostly on a limited basis towards ensuring completion of their children's homework. Similarly, Chowa *et al.* (2012) showed that parental involvement in the school environment appears high because most (87%) reported attending Parent Teacher Activities meetings, discuss expectations with their children, discuss school work and make sure that their children's do their homework. The results further showed that married parents are more likely to involve in their children's education than single parents. Using a scale of 1 (never involved) to 5 (very often involved), married parents reported checking whether their children have done their homework more often ($M=3.51$) than single parents ($M=3.37$; $p<.001$). Among the 1,270 single parents, 38.7% assist their children with homework, but 44.8% of the 3,291 married parents give more direct help with homework. As parents engage in the academic activities of their children, it is most likely to have a positive influence on their academic performances. For instance, Nyarko (2007), Nyarko and Vorgelegt (2007) and Topor, Keane, Shelton, and Calkins (2010) found that parental involvement is positively associated with students' academic performance in school. This does not necessarily suggest that once parents engage in a child's academic activities the child would be academically successful as the child's own abilities and the school environment also play critical roles in that respect. In a related way, Donkor (2010) indicates that parents noted that the poor performance of their children emanates from their lack of proper supervision of their wards' homework.

Family Structure and Child's Academic Performance

Fadeiye (1985) and Uwaifo (2008) found that differences in academic performance of children exist in terms of those from single parent and those from two parent families. Fadeiye (1985) in particular found that in two parent homes, both parents have roles to play in child education. The father is to give the necessary tools for the educational advancement, while the mother is to supplement the father's efforts in this regard. Where the father is absent and the mother is not privileged enough to cater for all the basic needs as well as supervised the academic performance of the child, the child will have poor academic performance. Uwaifo's (2008) study examined the effects of family structure and parenthood on the academic performance of Nigerian university students. The sample for the study consisted of 240 students drawn from the six randomly selected faculties in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State. The analysis involved using *t*-test statistical method. The level of significance for the null hypothesis is 0.05. The results showed that significant differences existed between the academic performance of

students from single parent family and those from two-parent family structures which supports the findings of Center for Marriage and Families (2005). The results also indicated significant differences in academic performance of male and female students compared on two types of family structures. Contrary to the above findings, Ushie, Emeka, Ononga and Owolabi (2012) shows that there is no significant difference in the academic performance of students from single parent families and those from two parent families. This might have been so because differences exist despite the single parent's inability to give the child all the necessary care. Also, with time the child is able to adjust in the environment as such the performance if it was poor might now improve.

Pong, Dronkers and Hampden-Thompson (2003) investigates the gap in Math and Science achievement of third and fourth-graders who live with a single parent versus those who live with two parents in 11 countries. They found that the United States and New Zealand ranked the least among the countries they compared in terms of equality of achievement between children from single-parent families and those from two-parent homes. The multilevel analysis showed that single parenthood was less harmful when family policies equalize resources between single and two-parent families. In addition, the single- and two-parent achievement gap is greater in countries where single-parent families are more prevalent. These findings suggest that belonging to a single parent family does not mean the person is academically condemned since certain policy implemented could turn fortunes. This discovery supports that of Uwaifo (2008).

Sex of Child in Single Parent Home and Academic Performance

In Hetherington, Camara and Featherman (1983) study, they concluded that the intellectual and social development of males is more adversely affected by living in one-parent homes than that of females from similar family circumstances. Similar results have also been reported by other research that point that females from single parent families performed academically better than those males from the same family type (Fry and Scher, 1984; Krein and Beller, 1988; Farooq *et al.*, 2011). For instance, Fry and Scher (1984) found that the achievement scores of boys declined significantly over a five-year period of living in a single parent home while the scores of girls in similar home environments remained stable. With respect to Krein and Beller (1988), they discovered that Caucasian males spending 18 years in a single parent home complete 1.7 fewer years of school as compared to Caucasian males spending 18 years in a two parent home. These evidences suggest that females are less affected academically as compared males when they live in single parent homes. In terms of Farooq *et al.* (2011), they found that academic performance of secondary school students in Pakistan, females performed better than males.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the situation is not much different from similar patterns reported in developed countries. Salami and Alawode (2000) research on influence of gender on the adolescent's academic achievement reveals that there is a significant difference between the academic achievement of the male and female adolescents from single parenting homes with girls scoring higher than boys. It is also clear from the result of the null hypothesis on male and female from intact homes that, there was no significant difference in the academic achievements of male and female students from two parent homes. Eweniyi (2005) examines the impact of family structure on the academic performance of university students and the show significant

differences in academic performance of male and female students compared on two types of family structures (single versus two parent homes).

METHODOLOGY

The design used in this study is the cross-sectional study design. In the view of Kumar (1999), a cross-sectional study design is best suited to the studies for finding out prevalence of a phenomenon, situation, problem or attitude, by taking a cross-section of the population. This research design was right for this study because it involved collecting data from pupils who live with a single parent and those who live with two parents at only one point. Purposive sampling helped in selecting 10 Junior High Schools (JHS) within the Wa Municipality as the sample sites. This method aided in the picking of schools that had many pupils in JHS form three who come from single parent families. A sample size of the study was 170 respondents. This is captured in Table 1.

Table 1: sample size distribution

		Sex		Total
		Male	Female	
Respondent category	Pupils from single parent home	30	40	70
	Pupils from two parent home	70	30	100
Total		100	70	170

In other to select the respondents, the sample was first stratified into pupils from single parent homes and those from two parent homes. Simple random sampling was then used to select those from two parent homes and this resulted in 100 pupils being selected. In the case of those from the single parent homes, they were further stratified based on sex before simple random helped in the selecting 30 males and 40 females which was to make sure that both sexes form part of the sample. The third term (2012/2013) promotion test (i.e., a test conducted by the Wa Municipal Ghana Education Service taken by all the JHS for the purposes of promotion to the next class) scores in Mathematics, Social Studies and English Language of these pupils sampled constituted the data. Permission granted by the head teachers opened the gate for collecting the data from the sampled pupils' report cards from the various schools. Calculating of the average of the three subjects for each sampled pupil is to make sure that the data is not skewed as differences in performances in the various subjects may exist. A questionnaire aided in the gathering of data from the pupils on the class of parenting they come from, their demographic characteristics and level of their parents' involvement in their academic work. The parental level of involvement in pupils work was ranked on a five point Likert scale ranging from very low (1) to very high (5). The data analyses used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis entailed using cross tabulation and *t*- test. The analysis of the level of parental involvement in pupils' academic work involved using cross tabulation. The *t*- test helped to decide if significant differences exist between the academic performance of pupils from single parent homes and those from two parent homes and whether there is a significant difference between the academic performance of male pupils and female pupils from single - parent homes. The significance level of 0.05 was used for the *t* - test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Parental Involvement in Pupils Education

Table 2 presents pupils' perception about the level of their parents' participation in their educational activities.

Table 2: Respondent Category * Parental Level of Involvement in Pupils Education Cross tabulation

Respondent category		Level of Parental Involvement in Pupils Academic Activities (i.e., homework and attending PTA meetings)				
		Very Low/Low	Moderate	High/Very High	Total	
Pupils from single parent home	<i>f</i>	37	26	7	70	
	%	52.9	37.1	10.0	100.0	
Pupils from two parent home	<i>f</i>	28	30	42	100	
	%	28.0	30.0	42.0	100.0	
Total		<i>f</i>	65	56	49	170
		%	38.2	32.9	28.8	100.0

In terms of pupils from single parent families, about 52.9% of the pupils indicated that the level of the parents' involvement in their educational activities at home is *low*. This represent majority of the respondents. With respect to the pupils from two parent home, about 42% of them constituting majority of the respondents note that the level of their parents' involvement in the school activities is *high*. Comparing the two categories it is clear that those from two parent homes have most of their parenting helping them in their academic work as compared to those from single parent families which supports the findings of Chowa *et al.* (2012) that married parents in Ghana are more likely to engage in their children's education than single parents. It is most likely the case that two parents can share their responsibilities within the house with one partner providing help to the child (children) in terms of their academic activities while the other partner engages in other equally important household chores. This may not likely be the case for a single parent who meet time crunch. A single parent is usually burdened with multiple households' chores to the extent that little or no time is available in helping with the academic activities of their children.

Academic Performance of Pupils from Single and Two Parent Families

The results in Table 3 show that the *t*-calculated is -4.770, *p* value is 0.000 and the significance level is 0.05. It is clear from the results that the *p* value is less than the significance level ($0.00 < 0.05$) which implies that the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. This means that the alternate hypothesis (H_1) that there is a significant difference between the academic performance of pupils from single parent homes and pupils from two parent homes is accepted. Thus, it is clear that the academic performance of pupils from single and two parent families are different. Turning on to the means of 64.2143 for pupils from single parent home and 76.7900 for those from two parent

homes, the means show that the pupils from two parent families have a higher mean score than their counterparts from single parent homes illustrating they have better academic performance than those from the other family structure. This situation could be linked to the fact that most of the pupils from two parent homes have greater parental involvement in their academic activities than their mates from single parent families as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: t – test of difference between the Academic Performance of Pupils from Single Parent Home and those from two Parents Home

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t_{cal}	Sig	Df
Pupils from single parent homes	70	64.2143	19.52174	-4.770	.000*	168
Pupils from two parents home	100	76.7900	14.83396			

* $p \leq 0.05$

These findings are consistent with other studies that found that children from two parent homes do academically better than their colleagues from single parent homes (Pong *et al.*, 2003; Eweniyi, 2005; Center for Marriage and Families 2005; Uwaifo 2008). This is in contrast to the findings of Ushie *et al.* (2012) in Nigeria that there was no significant difference between pupils from single parent families and those from two parents families academic performance. This study's finding is different from others probably because of the study population (children), sex composition of the sample and the limited parental involvement in the children's academic activities.

Sex of Child in Single Parent Home and Academic Performance

It is observed in Table 4 that t - calculated is -4.460 with a p value of 0.00 and 0.05 level of significance.

Table 4: t – test of difference between the academic performance of male pupils and female pupils from single - parent homes

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t_{cal}	Sig	df
Male pupils from single parent homes	30	53.5667	19.66036	-4.460	.000*	68
Female pupils from two parents home	40	72.2000	15.30410			

* $p \leq 0.05$

The results denote that the p value is less than the level of significance. This clearly shows that H_0 is rejected. The results signify that H_1 which is that, there is a significant difference between the academic performance of male pupils from single parent homes and female pupils from single parent homes is accepted. This result shows that the female pupils from single parent homes have better academic performance than the male from the same family variant as depicted

by the mean scores (*i.e.*, *mean values for males=53.5667 and females=72.2000*). The current study's finding is in line with that of Hetherington *et al.* (1983), Salami and Alawode (2000), and Eweniyi (2005) who discovered that there is a significant difference between the academic achievement of the male and female adolescents from single parenting homes with girls scoring higher than boys.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from the study that most of the pupils from single parent homes experience low parental involvement in their academic activities compare with pupils from two parent families rather have a high level of parental participation in their academic work. Evidence also suggests that single parenting has a negative effect on the academic performance of pupils. Finally, the study results reveal that there is a difference between the academic performance of male pupils from single parent homes and their female counterparts from the same family type.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Parents, especially those who are single parents should apportion their time in such a way that they would be able to aid their children in doing their homework, give them tidbits on becoming academically successful, visit their children's school to finding out their performance in class as well as give them all the materials they required for their studies. This is important as it shall complement the efforts of the teachers.

Teachers should give remedial lessons to pupils from a single parent home when they are lagging behind in class helping them cope with their studies. Males in single parent homes in particular should receive much attention to enable them improve on their performance.

School counselors should offer the necessary help and psychological support for students from single parent homes to overcome their academic and emotional problems. When the right help is given, they would focus on learning.

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