

Challenges and Coping Mechanisms of Students with Parental Separation

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ABSTRACT

This paper studied the common challenges of twelve students from a public high school in Batangas and their shared personal coping mechanisms from broken family life situation specifically due to parental separation. The consequences to the students' social, academic, financial, emotional, psychological and spiritual dimensions were determined. The data of this Narrative Qualitative Research which came from one-on-one in-depth interview and non-verbal responses showed how their experience having a parental separation situation affected their life which led to their personal strategies to survive its struggles. The findings revealed that students have a lot of untold stories relative to the dimensions and they managed to cope with these challenges primarily through spiritual interventions. In conclusion, students with broken family are indeed challenged but good socially, inspired academically, able to manage financially, tough emotionally, winning psychologically, and has hope spiritually. Though students face different challenges in life, making God their inspiration, source of comfort and strength in facing the challenges in the family is the most ideal coping mechanism recommendation.

Keywords: Coping Mechanisms, High School Students, Life Challenges, Narrative Research, Parental Separation

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Introduction

The family is the smallest yet most influential unit of society when it comes to molding the lives of the young individuals. The Philippine's Department of Education stresses lessons about family by featuring this most important unit of the society as the root of proper socialization. Teacher's concern for his students goes beyond academic learning inside the classroom. There are times that even the students' issues at home become also a concern of the teacher, just like the classroom is an extension of one's home, and one among these issues is the family set-up of students. In an online article posted in wordpress.com (2024) entitled "The Filipino Youth Today: Going Beyond the Lines" which was reported in 2013, a survey conducted by Social Weather Station revealed that one of the many factors where Filipino youth put great importance is the family. The survey explained why students are greatly affected by a broken family situation, specifically associated to separation of parents in the family because these young individuals are very sensitive to how they and their parents' make personal sacrifices for one another. As many years passed after this survey, follow-up studies and researches concerning students from a broken family are seldomly conducted especially in the Philippines (Lanozo, Tabieros, Solmianos, Paras and Tus, 2021 p.958). The authors of the study are educators themselves and based on the written works and reflections of students they regularly read and check, the study witnessed true stories that served as an inspiration in addressing and helping out student challenges and learning their coping mechanisms which can be shared to those who are also living in the same life situation, and be a dynamic realization to fellow educators, school stakeholders, school administrators and family members. By carefully and ethically conducting the narrative qualitative research approach, the challenges relative to social, academic, financial, emotional, social, psychological, and spiritual aspects surfaced and these were presented for sociological understanding and external support in the shared coping mechanisms to alleviate the pain and struggles felt when parents chose to live separately.

Three theories were valuable to the study,

Cherry (2024) cited the Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura because the theory suggests that observation, imitation, and modeling play a primary role in the development of a child, thus consideration on the life formation of the respondents in their role as a child at home and as a student while in school was taken special importance. Davis (2024) cited the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Theory among students, this theory is contributory in identifying not just social and emotional effects but the other life dimensions as well of the students. Self-Determination Theory is based on the fundamental humanistic assumption that individuals naturally and actively orient themselves towards growth and self-organization (Kosinski, 2024). The theories served as basis in understanding the different challenges faced by students with broken family due to parental separation as they encompass the impact of family to different aspects of students' development. These theories suggest the influence of the significant others to the development of an individual's behavior, mental ability, personal ability and interpersonal competence. If the children are living in this family condition, there will be a question on the kind of role model they are going to observe and eventually emulate at home, in school, and in the society. The ability to love and to negotiate as the cornerstones of personal ability and interpersonal competence of the children is at risk. Thus, it is beneficial for students to experience a school, society and a community that promotes developmental learning and positive behavior.

The study's setting and identified volunteer respondents made its unique character. Sharing common challenges and their unique coping mechanism in the light of sociological demographics is the major intention of the study. The study is spiritually significant since in the Philippine setting, the church is always a partner of the school in the spiritual and values formation and an avenue where pastors, priests, nuns and other members of any religious congregation to extend their catechetical ministry.

The results and discussions of this type of study enlighten the society of the difficult situations the youth have to undergo because of decisions made by the parents, and they will be understood and will be given appropriate love, attention and encouragement to strive life's mishap.

Methodology

The narrative qualitative research design was the primary methodology of the study. Sulakatko (2024) combined both narrative analysis and qualitative content analysis where qualitative content analysis plays a crucial role in categorizing insights from data. However, an exclusive reliance on content analysis might result in the loss of important contextual aspects associated with these insights. Consequently, narrative analysis becomes valuable, as it enables linking diverse elements in the data, such as the subject of study, its context, associated events, and identified categories. The lived and told stories of individuals were identified, collected systematically and analyzed thematically based on the shared experiences of the respondents following the procedures are followed: 1) developing tentative ideas from the data, 2) developing codes, 3) creating narratives, 4) linking codes and narratives, and 5) connecting the data with theory (Sulakatko, 2024, p.220) or related studies. The results and discussion part of this article highlighted the second and last procedures. Purposive sampling

was used to determine the 12 public junior high school student participants who have experienced living where parents are separated in the family in a 3rd class municipality of Batangas Province. In-depth one-on-one interview, backed with informed consent and ethical considerations, was used to gather data through the experiences of the participants given through storytelling and sharing time. The preconceived notion and biases of the researchers were set aside to extract the essence of the existing process (Digo and Ramirez, 2020), thus the study's pre-understanding of the situations of the family with separated parents did not influence the interpretation of the shared experiences of the participants.

Results and Discussion

The coded themes emerged from the interview data relative to the challenges and coping mechanisms in every life dimension of the students with broken due to parental situation family are presented and enumerated in the following tables.

Table 1. Coded Response Data from the one-on-one in-depth Interview

Life Dimension	Challenges	Coping Mechanism
Social	Envy with the situation of other students Difficulty in finding a true friend	Sharing experiences to friends Presence of usual company Support of one of the parents Assistance from friends Presence of company in school Assistance from classmates Presence of friends Support from peers Support of people around Support of friends Support of other members of the family
Academic	No assistance from parents in studying Absence of parents in events and meetings in school Absence of parents in meetings because they are working abroad Could not relate and share insights when the topic is about parents Could not express feelings and insights Failing grades in some subjects	Sharing experiences to friends Presence of usual company Support of one of the parents Assistance from friends Presence of company in school Assistance of classmates Presence of friends Support from peers Support from people around Support of friends Support of other members of the family Presence of friends Assistance of classmates in school Sharing experiences to friends

Financial	Insufficient allowance Delayed allowance Lack of financial support from the father and relatives Insufficiency in the basic needs Limited Financial resources	Prioritizing the needs and not the wants Finding job Being thrifty Learning to budget because support is not from the parents
Emotional	Envy/Jealousy Loneliness due to envy Loneliness	Emotional support from one of the parents Positive outlook in life Understanding the situation and helping one another in solving problems Sufficient support from one of the parents Regular communication Self-reliance and determination Inspiration from the situation
Psychological	Lack of guidance and support Feeling of forgotten Loneliness	Self-confidence Positive outlook Not self-pitying Enough support from one of the parents Being hopeful Being optimistic Being determined Achieving the dreams Having trust in the Lord Being determined and strong
Spiritual	N/A	Believing in God Believing that God answers prayers Going to church gives strength Praying and Trusting the Lord Trusting the Lord Praying about the problems Acknowledging the Lord Drawing near to the Lord Praying

The challenges and coping mechanisms of the respondents in the social aspects were the same findings in the study by Siméon, Luijkx, Waninge, and Putten (2024) when they said that children should be assisted to achieve socially accepted pattern like peers. A student strikingly shared that “Ano po, minsan po siyempre, hindi po mawawala ang inggit dahil po may... kagaya po sa pag-attend po ng meeting. Minsan po ay. Yon pong ama ang naattend, tapos po ako ay ang mama.” (sometimes, the envy won’t go away because there’s... like attending a meeting, it’s the father who attends, then I act as the mother). Based on this statement in the light of SEL Theory, it can be said that the student’s challenge in the social aspect is envy with the situation of other students, however, her coping mechanism towards

envy is controlled in the social acceptance from her trusted friends.

In the academic aspect the effect of parent’s absence in school events and meeting agreed with the findings of Felisilda and Torreón (2020) that the challenges encountered by students who live with a single parent are lack of supervision and monitoring and lack of guidance and counselling. According to Hassan and Hatab (2021), parents act as the first guide and teacher of the kids. Therefore, their guidance to the studies of their kids means a great impact in performing better in academic aspect, as one student shared, “Minsan po yong... kapag kailangan ko po ng... ng... tulong ng isang ina (sa pagaaral). Parang wala po siya para ano... ano po,

gabayan po ako” (she doesn’t have any assistance from her parents when she is studying her lessons). The coping mechanisms in the academic aspect coincided with edX.com’s (2024) article entitled “Teacher Changes Lives” about the role of school teachers in reaching out to the students. The article commented that people in school must connect with pupils and reach them on multiple levels because the best teachers are committed to their students’ well-being both inside and outside the classroom. The study of Wakhley (2024) mentioned that there are students in a broken family who used their situation as inspiration to study hard. They added that these students are determined to finish their studies, “kahit gaano po... kasakit na maghiwalay ang kanilang magulang pilitin niyo pa din pong makapagtapos ng inyong pag-aaral dahil importante pong makapagtapos ng pag-aaral. Dahil pag... pagdating po ng panahon, ikaw po’y, ikaw po’y, kayo ay may...trabaho na, kayo naman po ang siyang tutulong sa mga magulang” (no matter how... it hurts that parents are separated, finish your education because it is important to finish your education. Because when... when the time comes, you, you, you already have a job, and you will be the one to help your parents).

In the financial aspect, Liu and Yu (2024) stated that economic hardships is one of the challenges encountered by the students who live with a single parent. Simonian (2024) proved in her research that economic stability is a family factor that can affect students’ behavior and performance in the school. More so, financial challenge was confessed by this student due to lack of support from her father, “Tulad ng... dahil po e, simula po ng umalis na ang aking ama’y, tatlong taon na’y hindi nagsusustento sa amin e. ...Minsan po’y nagigipit sa pagkain... pero kinakaya sa pagtitipid...” (financial challenge is lack of financial support from his father.. but we save for our ends to meet). All mentioned coping mechanisms by far are supported by the self-determination theory of Kosinski (2024) when they said that people strive to expand and understand themselves by integrating new experiences; by cultivating their needs, desires and interests; and by connecting with others and the outside world.

For the Emotional Aspect, the responses concurred with the explanation of Deacy (2024) that family problems will cause the students to

weaken and lessen the confidence in their own abilities even with simple issues. This may lead to emotional problems, lack of respect and trust, and lack of emotional stability (Sala, 2016). Adolescents belonging to a broken family due to parental separation must have an optimistic attitude, one student shared, “...kagaya ko po iniintindi na lang po namin yong problema namin, pinipilit pong masolusyon yong pong problema sa magulang, kaya po kaming dalawang magkapatid ang nagtutulungan” (understanding the situation and helping one another in solving problems). Adolescents who are experiencing tough family situation should attract positive by appreciating everything and every person that comes in their lives (Wakhley, 2024). Barnes and Ross (2023) indicated in their study that sharing the situations of an adolescent living in a broken family to other people ease the family situation and they also said that accepting the situation is the most important because according to their study this will make them happy in spite of their situation.

Psychologically, the separation of parents could affect the kids’ psychological health according to Yeo (2015). A student psychological point of view is built as he said, “...tsaka si Mommy po sinasabi po niya na huwag na daw hanapin yong wala, huwag na daw pilitin yong ayaw. Dahil pinupunan niya naman po lahat ng pagmamahal na kulang sa tingin nyo po, sa tingin po ng ibang tao ay kulang” (...mommy said don’t look for what you don’t have, don’t force what you don’t want because she will fill all the love that’s lacking and what other people think as lacking..). Natalie and Widhigdo (2024) mentioned that the best psychological way to improve oneself is use the not so good family experiences as learning lessons to do better from the choices of their parents. They added that humans are capable of learning from their experiences just like what this student shared, “...Ano po, think positive lang po, tapos ano po punta lang po kay God kapag hindi na po kaya yong problema, kahit po walang problema basta po, pray lang po...” (be optimistic... just go to God when you can’t handle the problem anymore, even if there’s no problem, just pray).

Spiritually, respondents don’t have any challenge with regards to their spiritual aspect, instead it showed that spiritual aspect is the best coping mechanism of the respondents. According

to this student, “Pray and trust Lord... Yes! Hindi naman, hindi man po ako nakakapagdasal tuwing umaga lagi, pero tuwing gabi po, yong tuwing gabi talaga... wala po akong natandaan na hindi po talaga ako nakapagdasal tuwing gabi. Halos lahat po ng mga kakilala ko po, dinadasal ko din po na pag... pagpatawad niyo po sila sa kanilang mga kasalanan sa isip sa salita at sa gawa? (Pray and trust Lord... Yes! I don’t always pray every morning, but every night, every night really... I don’t remember that I didn’t pray every night. Almost everyone I know, I also pray God to forgive their sins in mind, word and deed?). Furthermore, spiritual aspect is the hope of the respondents in facing their challenges because the identified coping mechanisms of students whose parents are separated like praying, trusting the Lord, believing in God, believing that God answers prayer, going to church, acknowledging the Lord in life, and drawing near to God are answers that concurred with the insights of Rudolph and Barnard (2023) that the helping hands of the Almighty God is the best option to deal every challenge in life.

Implications

In the light of these challenges and coping mechanisms as guided by Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, students living in a broken family due to parental separation are challenged but good in social aspect; they are challenged in academic but their learned to turn this challenges into inspiration; they are challenged in financially but able to manage their financial aspect; are challenged but tough in emotional aspect; are challenged in psychological aspect but winning in these challenges begins with their right psychological perspective; that the spiritual aspect is an assurance of hope with students living with broken families where their parents are separated. Tumangday (2015) asked how does one meet and conquer challenges of family crisis? She added that it must be admitted the very foundation of the family goes through a severe test when separation in the family hit the home. In response to this, she quoted Charles Swindoll as she answers his own question by saying, family must endure until God steps in and bring relief. She continued by giving her readers and assurance that no “matter how dark the present may seem, God knows. He cares. His wisdom is deeper than any human thinking, can be applied. His unchanging

love is man’s final hiding place”. (Tumanday, 2015, p.52)

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that respondents are not pretending about the challenges they have because of their family set-up. They are socially challenged, therefore they became good in social aspect because they see people around as someone who can fill the missing piece in their heart; struggling every school affair where presence of parents are needed but not struggling academically because this became an inspiration to excel in their education; indeed challenged financially therefore must be contented to what they have and believed that there are people around them who are willing to lend a hand for them to cope with this aspect; emotionally tough and when facing bad emotional aspect they choose to be good; and there’s battle in the psychological aspect but the respondents optimistic and spiritual point of view is the best motivation in facing the tough situation as they quote, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (New International Version Bible, 2024, Mt.11:28). The study highly recommends students to choose trusting God and believe that something good is going to happen out of their unexplained situation; teachers and students must accept and not deny that there are struggling students and whenever the situation calls them to help they must be willing to lend a hand, provide hope, comfort, and love; and the written curriculum must be carefully evaluated since students with broken family are small portions of the total students population, their needs might be neglected, provide not only lessons to teach the mind but also promote academic programs to inspire the heart.

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