"SINGLE PARENTS OF SCHOOL CHILDREN: TALES OF SURVIVAL"

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to shed light and find out the realities faced by single mothers with school aged children. Fourteen single parents with school aged children from Bansalan, Davao del Sur were carefully chosen to participate in this study through purposeful sampling. The results of the interviews were transcribed, translated as well as coded to produce major themes and core ideas. In-depth interviews and focus group discussion were conducted to find out the experiences of single parents these are the following: adversities, fears and insecurities, steadfastness, disenchantment and self-sacrifice. Insights from single parents were also presented as what they can share to other single parents in rearing school aged children, these are: endure and have courage, stay positive, have faith, forgive yourself, love unconditionally, dream on, and learn from experience. This study is significant in education to understand the students with single parents and to the community to know the struggles of every single parent.

 Keywords:

Single Parent. Sometimes called a solo parent, is a parent not living with a spouse or partner, who has most of the day to day responsibilities in raising the child or children.

School aged children. Children attending school.

INTRODUCTION

Single parenting or also called as solo parenting has long been a social issue concerning families, the basic unit in the community. Children are largely affected if single parenthood is caused by divorce, annulment, death and other circumstances. Families led by single mothers face three major problems, namely, inadequate income, parenting difficulties particularly in monitoring the children and running the house (Dunn, 2008).

Challenges faced by single mothers as head of the family are arduous because they have to shoulder dual responsibilities, where they are not only the breadwinner, but they are also the managers and educators of their children. Among the major challenges confronting single mothers are financial problems, emotional stress, psychological and physical problems, challenges in providing their children with education, care and love, and also negative social stigma towards them (Diyana et al., 2009).

Single mothers face enormous challenges as head of the family as they need to juggle competing priorities in providing financial means, and managing their children's education. Becoming a single mother is a traumatic experience due to the stress incurred in shouldering innumerable responsibilities encompassing providing financial means, managing the household and raising the children (Rani, 2006).

In addition, society's innumerable perceptions of single mothers also have a negative impact on the lives of single mothers. Among the prejudice faced by single mothers is the perception that single-mother families are dysfunctional families as there are no fathers disciplining the children. This result in the children becoming wild and ill-behaved, making them prone to negative behaviors such as gambling, drinking alcohol, taking drugs, stealing and prostitution. Ultimately this would lead to fragmented and broken families. Children from single –mother families have low self –esteem as they do not have a father, unlike normal children who have fathers who support and guide them. Low self-esteem causes the children to isolate themselves, not have friends and lack confidence in their studies (Simons, Johnson and Conger, 1994).

Single –mother families do not have security features which could have an indirect negative impact on the children, leading to failure, disappointment and violent actions resulting from economic problems and abject poverty, causing the children to drop out of school and scour for work in an attempt to assist their respective families. They live in poverty as there is no economic assistance from the fathers. Thus, children from single-mother families tend not to be well fed, well dressed and does receive any pocket money. It is in fact the norm for children from single-mother families to quit school and look for employment in an attempt to assist their families (Wan Halim, 1995).

Apart from financial problems, stress is also one of the challenges faced by many single mothers. Working single mothers are burdened by excessive responsibilities in meeting life demands. They rush to work, send and pick up the children to and from daycare, do endless household chores well into midnight. This portrays the typical life of single-mother families worldwide. Single mothers also need to bear the responsibility of educating and nurturing their children (Hittner, 1998).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the nature and scope of single parents experienced. This study involved different schools, with the intent of gaining a better understanding of the single parent family in terms of both strengths and weaknesses. This study also envisioned to document the traumatic experiences, demands, issues of single parents and how these affect their relationship with their school children.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

What are the experiences of single parent mothers of school children?

What insights have been gained out of these experiences to the lives of these mothers?

METHODOLOGY

Presented in this chapter are the nature of the study, the research design used with regard to presentation, analysis and interpretation, the philosophical assumptions, role of the researcher, research participants, the data collection process, data analysis, trustworthiness which includes the following: credibility, confirmability, transferability and dependability of the study and all individuals involved and the ethical considerations in the process.

Research Design

This research employed a qualitative design which is the most appropriate approach in describing the experiences of single parents of school children. Qualitative research designs study human behavior that cannot be approached with quantitative methodologies.

Qualitative research can be used to capture the experience as an entity as opposed to focusing on specific aspects of the phenomenon. He further espoused that unlike quantitative research methods, qualitative research designs do not impose predetermined theoretical frameworks which have the potential to distort rather than to illuminate human behavior, but aim to obtain comprehensive descriptions that can be used in a reflective process. This is achieved through the investigation and description of the meanings attached to an experience and not the measurement or explanation of its occurrence. Data obtained through qualitative research is essential in developing an integrated understanding of phenomena that can then be translated into evidence for further quantitative research (Moustakas, 1994).

Likewise, qualitative research designs tend to incorporate interpretive and critical approaches to social sciences, and thus adopt a transcendent perspective. Through this perspective, research participants are viewed as creative and compassionate beings and not objects of research interest. Consequently, such designs an awareness of power or inequality and strive to acknowledge the role of social relations within a given study (Neuman, 2003).

In the same perspective, Moustakas (1994) stressed that qualitative methodologies emphasize the interest, contribution and commitment of the researcher within the investigation. This attitude towards social investigation facilitates the aim of qualitative research designs to assist people in transcending their current social conditions through growth, increased responsibility for one's own life and active engagement in social change.

Role of the Researcher

Many have seen the horrible outcomes brought about by female single parents of school children. We see it on television and hear it in the news. Choosing the topic on female single parent of school children in the academe is considered relevant. It is for this reason that we undertook this study, to find out if indeed, female single parent of school children does exist and if it does, discover the underlying factors of the said phenomenon, to contribute in alleviating the incidents of female single parents of school children, particularly in schools and universities and consequently, improve the quality of Philippine education.

Since this study have a personal meaning for us, being a parent, a teacher and a professor, we personally gathered the data by conducting the in-depth interviews with all the seven informants and seven participants for the FGD, which we also facilitated, with the assistance of a colleague who took notes during the interviews and FGD and served as one of our independent readers and analysts. Moreover, we asked the assistance from another independent reader and analyst. The four of us analyzed the data gathered from the audio recordings of the interviews and FGD. After coming up with the same findings, we employed the expertise of a professional data analyst for data analysis and interpretation and thereafter, formed our personal insights.

Research Participants

Prior to the conduct of our study, we already identified some of our informants. The identified informants were the parents in the public schools whom we have chosen through purposive sampling as our participants based on pre-selected criteria relevant to the research study (Morse, 2000) in this case, they were all parents who have been victimized as single parents in their own place. They were referred here in this study as victims since they all suffered torment in the hands of being a female single parent.

Starting with only two informants, we asked them if they knew other female single parents who somehow experienced as a single mother in their place and if it would be possible to contact them. They gave us some referrals who could be informants in our study.   After contacting these prospects and explaining to them the purpose of our study, some of them agreed to participate. We also asked some school heads and educators we personally knew and asked if they had knowledge of any female single parents in their school that they could refer us. We also applied the different social media network like Facebook, Yahoo and Skype to contact friends who might be of help. Some of these friends really took time to help us search for participants in their schools. The rest was like a chain reaction. Starting with only few informants, it started to grow fast through chain of referrals or snowballing (Mack et al, 2005).

To obtain a good quality of qualitative research, we opted to get just a considerable number of participants for our research with seven informants for the in-depth interviews and seven participants to engage in focus group discussions. Focus groups are considered to work well with approximately 8 people (Hancock et al., 2009). We believed that this is already a considerable number of participants, adequate to give credible information and significant results and findings.

Data Collection

In the collection of data of the study, We underwent these processes namely: interviewing in-depth with the study-informants, conducting focus group discussion with the participants and note-taking. Before conducting the actual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with the study participants, we made sure that ethical considerations were properly observed. We applied the key principles of ethical issues (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006;Bricki and Green, 2007;Kaiser, 2009; Mack et al, 2005) that should be considered in any research study which are consent and confidentiality. Since *establishing rapport is an essential component of an interview* (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006), we arranged a preliminary meeting with them and explained the details of the study, made them understand that everything will be done in confidentiality. After gaining their trust, we asked them to sign a written consent. Essentially, rapport involves trust and respect for the interviewee and the information he/she shares. It is very important to provide him/her a safe and comfortable environment for sharing his/her personal experiences (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). To comply this requirement, we made sure that the setting of the interview was conducted in a quiet room that would ensure privacy and away from distractions like a private office or in the comfort of their homes, if they prefer.

In-depth interview is one approach that was undertaken in order to gather information from the study informants. The in-depth interview is a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research topic (Mack et al, 2005). It is more than just an approach to understand the participant's experiences but it is going deeper into their thoughts and behavior, listening to their inner voice to explore new issues. Through the interview process, the researchers listened to the participants'

descriptions and then repeatedly reviewed and studied the data as they were transcribed (Penner and McClement, 2008). This strategy required time and space so that we could draw out portions of experiences and insights from the informants. First, we had to make our participants feel comfortable and conveyed the message that we are interested in what they were saying.   It is important to closely internalize what the informants would share, particularly on the details female single parent incidents.

       Furthermore, the in- depth interview has the primary advantage of providing much more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods, like surveys. Also it provided a more comfortable atmosphere in which to collect information in as much as participants felt more relaxed having a conversation about a certain topic of interest as opposed to filling out a survey. The key characteristics of in-depth interviews are the following: one, open-ended questions which gives the informants freedom to answer the questions using their own words; two, semi-structured format; three, seeking understanding and interpretation during which it was important to use active listening skills to be able to reflect upon what the participant is saying; and four, recording responses with an audio recorder, with the participant's approval. They are to be complemented with written notes on both verbal and non-verbal behaviours as they occurred as well as immediate personal reflections about the interview (Boyce & Neale, 2006)

Analysis of data

       Analysis of data in a research study involves summarizing the mass of data collected and presenting the results in a way that communicates the most important features (Hancock et al, 2007). Data were analyzed using a method which included data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2007), adding that qualitative content analysis is any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings. Data analysis includes: data reduction, data display, conclusion and conceptual framework.

Trustworthiness

       To establish the trustworthiness of the study, we observed its four components. These are the following: credibility, confirmability, transferability and dependability. To establish the credibility of our study, we ensured that rigor was properly observed during the data collection especially during the interviews, wherein we avoided drawing conclusions from the interviews but based everything on factual data, directly from the participants. We saw to it that no relevant data was excluded and no irrelevant data was included. We also brought with us our colleague in the field to do the note taking for us during the interviews. Confirmability. To address the confirmability of our study, We set aside our personal opinions, assumptions and judgments in order to guard against distortion of data. The use of audio-taped interviews, note-taking and journals we kept throughout the study is one way of ensuring confirmability. To address transferability, we described in detail the research context and the assumptions that are central to the research and showed all data as transparent as possible. We made sure that the data are rich with descriptions, so that the person who wishes to "transfer" the results to a different context is then responsible for making the judgment of how sensible the transfer is. To establish the dependability of our study, we ensured consistency during the data collection and analysis by doing the code-recode system during data reduction and applied the peer examination and investigator triangulation of the data collected and analyzed.

Ethical Consideration

       Since our research study involved single parents, they were hesitant to disclose information out of fear and withheld some data. However, as part of research rigor, several safeguards were applied that erased their fears and promoted trust.   We ensured that our study was guided by ethical principles as described by (Mack et al., 2005), namely: respect for persons, beneficence, justice, consent and confidentiality.

RESULTS

This chapter presents the participants' experiences, insights and perceptions which include generalizations that emerged from the information collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion The following research questions contributed to the realization of the data results from the informants. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

What experiences do single mothers have in rearing their families alone?
What insights can single mothers share in rearing their families alone?

Table 2. *Themes and Core Ideas on the Experiences of Mothers in Rearing Children Alone*

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Adversities	I encountered a lot of difficulties.
	I am always financially hard-up.
	Forced to work abroad to provide needs of my child
	When child is sick, I'm the only one looking after him.
	There are times I almost wanted to surrender.
	Raising a child without a father is very difficult.
	It is very demanding to become a single mother.
Fears and Insecurities	Worried of the future because I am all alone in raising my kid.
	I feel ashamed to face people.
	I'm worried where to find money to support my child and send him to school.
	My kid might be teased and discriminated for having no father.
	If I get sick, who will take care of my son?
	My child might blame me in the future.
	I fear that I will not be able to raise my son properly.
	I'm afraid my child will be bullied in school because of our situation.
	I'm worried that I can't give everything to my child.
	I'm afraid because I'm not financially stable.

	I'm afraid that my kid will be influenced by bad friends.
	I'm afraid my child will be against me; will not respect me.
Steadfastness	I tried to be brave despite times that I feel so down.
	I learned to stand on my feet.
	I became strong and responsible for my child.
	I told myself I'm not the only one in this predicament
	There's nothing that I won't do for my child.
	I will take care of my child even without a father.
	I will double my effort for my child.
	I need to provide for their school needs, food, shelter
	I became mature in my perspectives in life.
	I became more compassionate, accepting and understanding.

Continuation of Table 2

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Major Themes	Core Ideas
Disenchantment	I don't trust men anymore.
	I have fear in trusting men.
	I feel hatred towards men.
	People judge me and talk behind me.
	Other people still criticize me.
	There are gossips and backbiting in the neighborhood
	There were ugly things people said about me.
Self-sacrifice	I don't have time to bond with friends anymore.
	I had to leave my child because I wasn't prepared to face the responsibilities of a mother.
	I don't have time for my children because of work.
	I wasn't able to raise them by myself or do hands on parenting.

	I sacrificed by working hard miles away from them.

Table 3. *Themes and Core Ideas on Insights that Single Mothers can Share*

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Endure and have courage.	Never run from any problem you may encounter.
	Do not give up on the challenges.
	We must go on with our life and face the problems boldly.
	Do not be afraid.
	Have no fear -there's always an option for every situation.
	We should be strong in facing every life situation.
	Everything happens for a reason.
	It's not easy to be a single mom.
Stay positive.	Life does not stop by being a single parent
	There are still so many options and opportunities if we choose to think positive.
	Poverty is not a hindrance.
	Accept the reality and don't be bitter with life.
	Always remember you have a family you can count on.
	They must not lose hope.
	Be open-minded and open your heart.
	Enjoy life.
Have faith.	Call unto the Lord because he is always there.
	Ask guidance from God to surpass the trials.
	It is important that God is at the center of your life.
	Have a strong faith in God.

	With God, you can do anything even if you are alone.
	Face the problem with the Lord.
Forgive yourself.	Never mind what others will say.
	Do not do something bad or rash.
	Being a single mom is not that bad – it can't let you down for the rest of your life.
	Be patient, forgiving and humble.
	Share your feelings with your child and let them be open to you also.
	Single moms need patience, love and understanding
	Don't give up even if someone criticizes you.

Continuation of Table 3

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Love unconditionally.	Love your kids because they are blessings.
	Give your child attention and care.
	Make them always feel that you are always by their side.
	I will be there for my son whatever he wants to become.
	Keep learning about your child each day.
	Work hard and take good care of your kids.
	Be proud of your kid and handle the responsibilities positively.
	Extend patience and more love to your children.
	Be truthful and faithful so you will be an example to your child.
	Always be there for your child.

Dream on	I want my child to finish his studies; see him graduate and reach his dreams in life.
	A great future for my kids; decent jobs for them
	To finish my master's degree
	For him to have a healthy, happy life
	That he will have a happy family of his own
	That my son will grow up as a good person
	To have a partner someday who will accept me as I am
	A partner beside me to help me raise my child
Learn from experience	Use mistakes as lessons to be learned and to guide us.
	We must learn to move on.
	It's an experience to learn from.
	Accept the situation and absorb the lessons.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the discussions, conclusions, implications for future research. This was based from the themes which were produced from the analysis of data. The purpose of this study has been pointed out to investigate the experiences of the single mothers of school children. Its goal is to explore and bring out the various emotions and insights of the participants to use as concepts in the findings of the study.

The results of this study have shown that the single parents of school children face a lot of various adversities in life. Financial and emotional adversities in taking care and supporting the needs of their children are common dilemma they stand against. Few single parents can successfully raise children alone, despite the social expectation that noncustodial parents (usually the father) should only be responsible for supplemental financial support, while the custodial parent (usually the mother) takes on both parenting and economic roles (Goldscheider and Waite 1991). The behaviour of children may also be affected by the separation of parents. In fact, according to a study many fathers stop seeing their children on a regular basis after the first year of divorce. This can cause children to act out from the hurt and lack of a positive male role model. Behavioural problems can also occur when single moms are working too hard, making it more difficult to manage discipline effectively (Welton, 2015)

Implications for Practice

In the light of the findings, it is necessary that single parents with school aged children be supported by the efforts of the community, government and their children be given adequate assistance by the school community.

This connotes that everyone in the community is responsible for helping each other. Single parents may be marginalized and feel that they are alone in their battles. Community, church and school leaders may devise a program and activity to provide livelihood and financial assistance to single parents. It is in this way that the most crucial problem of single parents be lessened and solved. Livelihood in form of art crafts, cooking saleable goods and paid services such as hairdressing and massage can help single parents in sustaining their families' needs. While their children are at school, they can do their sidelines and livelihood project in a location situated near the school so as they can monitor and look for their children. Likewise, teachers can act as counsellors to children with single parents and schedule a time for guidance and counselling. There may be issues and questions that single parents can't give to their children for their lack of time. The teachers may keep the communication with both parents open and accessible especially if there are changes in behaviour displayed by a student. Education is one area where effects of single parenting on children are very noticeable. Even a little change in a child's behavior can signify issues at home. This is why it becomes very important to keep parents fully involved in the child's education. There should always be open communication between the school and home (Women's and Children's Health Network, 2015).

In the Philippines, Republic Act 8972 provides programs, services, benefits and privileges for solo parents. A person is qualified to be called and given the privileges if: a woman gives birth as a result of rape, left alone with the responsibility due to death of spouse, spouse is detained, spouse is mentally incapacitated, legally separated or annulled.

Implication for Future Research

This study is limited to public elementary school of Davao del Sur, the following future researches are recommended:

The findings of this study generalizable to 14 participants, future research may be conducted on the single parents with school children with another group of participants in order to consolidate and validate the findings of this study.

Second, future research maybe conducted on single parents with children in other parts of Region XI and other regions in the country to add research information and insights from the single parents. Future research on single parents with children in college level and single parents in urban areas may also be conducted to compare the significant variance since this study was conducted in a rural setting.

Third, future research may be done by re-interviewing the participants to find out if their insights and point of views are still the same.

Fourth, future research can take into consideration the creation of intervention programs for single parents and their children so that they may feel that the school community is their strong ally from which they can draw support and professional guidance by the School Guidance Counsellor.

Fifth, a research on the role of community in creating a body to cater the issues and concerns of single parents and their children which may include financial assistance, loan programs and giving opportunities by inviting single parents to join cooperatives and social groups that may help them in the future especially concerning their children's needs.

Single parents, who are struggling to juggle a lot of responsibilities at home and at work must prioritize the welfare of their children, as it is their duty to positively influence their children.

The findings of this study were viewed from the concepts of single parents with school children. Further research may be done to determine the teacher's and Guidance Counsellor's views and insights on the effects of single parenting to school children to confirm the findings held by this study.

Concluding Remarks

From the results of the study, we can say that single parents with school children are facing a lot of struggles and that there is only limited support for these struggling parents from the community and school. Their issues and concerns in rearing their children are often left unheard and community leaders are passive with the single parents' dilemmas. Children in single-parent families are at greater risk of performing poorly at school than children in other types of families. Even when they have the same academic abilities, children in single-parent families are three times more likely to drop out of high school than children from two-parent families (Rani, 2006). The school also lacks support and considerations for single parents and their children especially at times when the children cannot go to school due to problems at home. Single parenting is not the sole predictor of academic failure for children. There are many risk and protective factors that interplay to encourage a child's academic success or contribute to a child's poor school performance. Regardless of family type, parents should stay involved with their children's education from elementary school through high school and beyond to help them maximize their academic achievement (The Black Family Initiative, 2014).

From the findings of the study, we have observed how single parenting is a very challenging role and how their experiences affected the participants of the study. This is related to the academic performance of their school aged children and how single parenting affects their performance at school as well as their social, emotional and mental well-being. They are less likely to use consistent discipline, and have less parental control. These conditions may lead to lower academic achievement. Among children in single-parent families, those from mother-absent households earn lower grades than children from father-absent homes. No matter which parent is missing, children from single-parent families generally find it more difficult to connect with school (Rani, 2006).

Based on the finding of this study, we can also assert that single parents need more support from the community where they belong and from the schools their children are enrolled. Both the single parents and their school children must be given assistance and support. Parent support acts as a protective factor countering some of the risk factors these children encounter (The Black Family Initiative, 2014).

The endeavour of this study lies in the availability of the single mothers of elementary students and their views and insights based on their experiences from which the results were derived. It is in accordance with the views of Maslow (1943) which contributed a lot in the process of this research. These views were my ladder to reach wider understandings and insights of the single parents with school children.

It provides the opportunities for the future researchers in other areas of single parenting that have not yet investigated and could be used in order to determine useful features of the qualitative research. There is much to be explored in this area and we consider our study as one of the bases on learning more about the experiences of single parents in the Philippines.

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