

PATTERNS IN CHILDREN RAISED BY SINGLE PARENTS: A TEACHER VIEW

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Abstract: *Introduction: According to European statistics, the number of single-parent families has grown alarmingly. Raising a child alone is not necessarily devastating, but it is not comfortable either (Safta, 2018), numerous studies suggesting emotional, academic, behavioral effects on the child. Objective: This study examines teachers' observations regarding the behavioral characteristics of children growing up with a single parent (CSP). Method: 48 secondary school teachers, V-VIII class leaders participated in group discussions to explore aspects of the child's/student's life in the school setting. Qualitative thematic analysis was implemented using a grounded theory framework to identify areas of CSP life that may be affected. Results: Specific aspects of CSP were identified in the following fields: a) socialization, b) attitude in relationships and towards learning, c) partnership with the family, d) early maturation e) exposure of the child to family conflicts*

Key words: *single parenthood; students; socialization; partnership with the family.*

1. Why do we care about single parenting?

Today, single parenthood has become an extremely common phenomenon, that's why the situation of these children has come under the attention of psychologists, sociologists, psycho-pedagogues, etc. The assumption of raising the child by a single parent brings with it significant difficulties in all spheres of family life. Children with a single parent are exposed to situations specific to the single-parent family: the parent is busier, so less time spent with the child (Kalenkoski, Ribar, Stratton, 2005), high level of parental stress (Weinraub, Wolf, 1983), overlap of parental roles, hence possible poor

communication (Minayo, 2020), lower financial possibilities, etc. The single parent has less time to get involved in the child's academic activities (Munir, Rani, Mahwish, Afzal, 2021) and all these factors lead to the impairment of the general well-being (Pérez-Corral, Moreno Mínguez, 2022).

The adolescent who grows up in a single-parent family has a lower level of self-esteem (Lowenstein, Koopman, 1978; Baumeister et al. 2003; Sterie, 2022), experiences poverty and depression (Huntley, Phelps, Rehm, 1987; Brown, Moran, 1997), has poorer academic results than other children (Fotoh, 2021; Pérez, Moreno, 2022; Ndinge, 2021).

Therefore, unlike other children, these situations definitely have an impact on the child, being forced to understand the only parent's perspective of the separation.

Content/Issue	Article
• nutritional deprivation	Pérez-Corral, Moreno Mínguez, (2022), Perera, (2022); Zakaria et al. 2022; Fotoh, (2021); Munir, Rani, Mahwish, Afzal (2021); Ndinge,(2021); Febrianto, (2021); Chua et al. (2020); Bago, (2022); Minayo, (2020); Dronkers, Veerman & Pong (2017); Okaka, (2012).
• clothing deprivation	Biblarz & Gottainer, (2000); Riala, Isohanni, Jokelainen, Jones, P. B., & Isohanni, M. (2003); Ermisch, Francesconi, (2001); Riala, Isohanni, Jokelainen, Jones & Isohanni, (2003); Stephen & Udisi, (2016).
• welfare deficiencies	Perera, (2022); Sackey, Mensah, Obeng, (2022); Ihedioha, (2021); Bago, (2022).
• financial difficulties	Akida, Ali, Karama, (2018); Chukwuka, (2018); Ndinge, (2021), Munir et al. (2021); Ihedioha, (2021); Wat, (2019)

- instability in the family Zakaria et al., (2022); Magara, (2017); Stephen & Udisi, (2016); Cheung & Park, (2016).
- Work involvement Akelo, (2016)

2. The impact of single parenthood on the child/adolescent. Literature Review

The interest in the impact of single parenthood on the child has increased with the increase in the scope of this phenomenon. In addition to the contexts that lead to single parenthood (death, divorce, separation), the situation of single mothers by choice (single mother by choice), SMC, a concept that entered the mainstream in 2005 and is perceived as a myth (Bock, 2020), is becoming more precise. Concerns related to the effects of single parenthood on the child are diverse and target different spheres of the child's life, as can be seen in the table below.

Table No.1. *Literature review regarding the impact single parenthood has on the child*

3. Study design

Purpose: the study is a quick scan of the behavior of the adolescent with a single parent in school, as perceived by the teachers.

Question research

The following four research questions guided this qualitative study:

- a) How does CSP behave in the group?
- b) How do they relate to learning?
- c) Are they distinguished in the relationships they have?
- d) What are the implications of single parenthood on the adolescent?

Recruitment

The recruitment was facilitated by the school principals, being selected only the principals of grades V-VIII who have children living in single-parent families in their class.

Participants

The participants in the group interviews were teachers who teach grades V-VIII but who are conductors. This was a condition of participation in the FG, because this teacher's leadership quality facilitates mutual acquaintance and closeness to the family. 48 participants aged between 28-52, who work both in rural and urban areas, from different schools participated in 6 FG between October and November 2022. The participants confirmed that they currently have at least one child from a single-parent family and that in the past there were other cases of this kind.

Instruments

The administered interview guide was composed of questions focused on 4 dimensions: socialization, attitude towards learning, relationships, others.

4. Findings

I will present below, some of the discussion directions that have been set up, and among these, I will develop those on which an agreement could be talked about. Common experiences, therefore, have been detailed.

The teachers were asked to speak freely about the problem of the child with a single parent, respectively about the observations they made over time.

4.1. Difficult socialization

Regarding the social skills of children with single parents, we have enough data in the relevant literature. There is evidence for poor communication (Cheung, Park, 2016), negative social moods (Chukwuka, 2018), hence, impaired emotional well-being (Ntumi et al, 2016). Compared to the situation of the other classmates, they are frequently highlighted by the deprivation of the necessary materials for studies (Oyediran, 2019), lower financial possibilities (Wat, 2019) due to which these children cannot always participate in extracurricular activities that include transport, accommodation, so limiting exposure to socializing and non-formal learning situations.

The participants in the group discussions talked about the manifestation of social and anticipatory anxiety in these children, the reluctance to get involved in events that involve exposure (public speaking, debates, supporting points of view, personal discovery). They are less courageous to express themselves

authentically, persistent concern in evaluation situations, celebrations, group exercises.

I have a very capable student who has changed a lot in the last year; she hides important things from her mother, she is absent, she is duplicitous, she is not cooperative at all, she has lost interest in any school concern. I don't know what's going on in her mind, she doesn't allow herself to be discovered, she didn't even talk to the two psychologists her mother sent her to"

She doesn't like challenges, avoids social situations, we think it's because of the fear of ridicule, or of making a mistake. It is almost certain that she has trust issues.

Often, these children have a harder time making friends, they need to be helped to enter new groups, they require greater attention in situations that involve interaction.

Pleasing others attitude

The teachers talk about increased shyness in the case of children with only one parent, frequent associations with inappropriate groups, willingness to remain in friendships where they are not valued. The low self-esteem that manifests itself in many situations is determined by self-doubt and could be maintained, according to the participants, by the absence of the other parent, by the limited time they spend with the parent, by limited financial possibilities (most often). It happens that these children cannot participate in attractive school events (more expensive trips). There are also differences in terms of the possibilities to purchase clothes or necessary items for school. The respondents identified attitudes like pleasing others in order to be liked, that's why they remain in relationships where they are not treated with respect.

Sometimes, we see how they maintain friendships in which they are offended or insulted without asking for explanations or discussing with their friend. Sometimes they react violently and then go back despite their friend's unappreciative behaviour.

The need to belong to the peer group is very high in this age, and their communication and negotiation mechanisms are very low, both in the children we are talking about and in the others. This extremely tolerant attitude is a premise for abusive and unbalanced relationships.

Attitude towards learning

The attitude towards learning varies greatly from student to student, there are many factors that mediate self-determination and academic performance (Ning & Downing, 2012; Lin & Liang, 2014). However, it was possible to outline two extremes in the teachers' perception of the self-determination or the learning attitude of children with a single parent, namely: children with a higher level of self-determination than children from two-parent families, and children who lose their motivation along with self-confidence.

The first category of children seems to demonstrate a high level of resilience and self-determination, turning the adversity factor into a growth factor. We do not have the necessary data regarding the factors that maintain this motivation.

School-family partnership

Another topic that emerged clearly was the partnership with the single-parent family, which presents several specificities. During the 6 FG, a pattern of the director's relationship with the parent who raises the child alone took shape. In most situations, the single parent is the mother, but there are also cases of a single father. According to the participants, they are in more intense contact with the directors, they are more concerned about the child's trajectory. They are very willing to talk about the difficulties in the family and are fully aware of the constraints and lacks that come with the absence of the other parent. It is more difficult for them to participate in the daily meetings, but they are in constant telephone contact.

There are frequent situations in which the parent is late, requests the teacher's help, especially in situations where there are misunderstandings between the parents regarding compliance with the rules imposed by the court. Sometimes problems arise related to taking over the child (the parent who does not have custody wants to take the child from school; differences in perception between parents regarding decisions regarding the child, etc.).

The child exposed to internal discussions and conflicts/different parentage

The participants talked about the emotional state that the child with a single parent experience. Grandparents often appear to help pick up the child from

school. An occasion in which they "complain" about the hardships of the parent left alone, the "trouble" caused by the other parent (sometimes abuse) and the difficult situation of the grandson. I often use terms such as "the poor", the Poor, the bitter, the unhappy, the girl with the child. They constantly hear that they are inferior to the other children, that they cannot afford some things, that they must understand that it is not possible, which can cause serious frustrations in the child. It is possible that they perceive their situation as humiliating, hence the low self-esteem. Parents or grandparents do not understand the impact of exposing the child to the complications of adults. Parental alienation is frequent and has serious effects on the child.

Another important aspect reported is the pressure the child feels as a result of the different parenting exercised by the two parents (when the parent who does not have custody is also involved) and the grandparents who take care of some of the children during the day. These discrepancies frighten children in general (it is also a reality in two-parent families).

Without wanting to, I was in the situation of having to listen to the confessions of both parents, asking myself to be a kind of judge.

I could observe how each parent tries to form a coalition with the child against the other parent.

Early maturing-being involved in house chores

The teachers observed a higher level of maturation of children with a single parent, and it is expected to happen this way. Some children amaze with the answers they give; they have lost their innocence; they have already come into contact with the real life that they have to face. Depending on their personal characteristics, some have a more serious attitude, are less serene, others isolate themselves and painfully perceive the differences between themselves and their colleagues. Some show strong resilience, successfully integrate into the group, even being leaders. But teachers saw few such children.

These children are in a position to reconfigure their mental map regarding their status as children; takes on household tasks, provides emotional support to the mother, takes on the role of the absent father.

Conclusions and Implications for practice

The elaborated observations of the teachers also speak implicitly about the extremely important role they play in the well-being of adolescents (Jauhiainen, Kivirauma, 1997). The first conclusion is related to the wealth of information that teachers have about their students. They constitute a particularly important filter, an interface between the student and real life. The partnership with the family is the necessary premise in approaching any type of difficulty. Although they recognize many behaviours as possible symptoms for the lack of a parent in the family structure, the teachers declare that they are sometimes overwhelmed by the situation, claiming therapeutic support for themselves and their families. Also, they do not have very detailed information about social services in the community that could help parents. Their interventions are more intuitive, based on their experience as parents.

The question arises: and if we understand what is happening, what do we do with this information? It is useless for them to return to the parent already overwhelmed by responsibilities. Adolescents are not strangers to socialization and relationship difficulties, not even intra-family tensions. However, the context of the single-parent family is specific and involves new and diverse challenges

Limits and recommendations

The observations of the participants in the group discussions, confirmed in different studies, cannot be generalized to the question of the category of children growing up in a single-parent family. In fact, these manifestations are also found among children who live in two-parent families. In linking the results of this study with the didactic practice in the classroom, our analysis suggests that the intervention of school counsellors and psychologists is necessary in raising the awareness of teaching staff, informing and training them about the CSP issue. The high extent of this phenomenon (single-parent families) but not only, the situation of children left behind, those with a deceased or incarcerated parent, etc. requires minimal specialized knowledge about behavioural, psychological, emotional symptoms and some work techniques to improve their situation.

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