

**RISK FACTOR OF BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS AMONG
ADOLESCENTS LIVING IN SINGLE PARENTHOOD**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present research was to find out the risk factor of behavioral problems among Pakistani adolescents, living in single parenthood. It was hypothesized, that the adolescents of single parent due to lack of physical presence, separation, divorce, and death would have more behavioral problems as compared to adolescents living with both parents group. The sample of the research consists of 240 adolescents, 120 males and 120 females, ranging from 12 to 17 years of age. Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and, a short Demographic Information Form (DIF) were used to assess behavioral problems. For the statistical application, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to determine the differences between the various sub-categories of "sample". The results showed significant differences in the behavioral problems among adolescents living with four sub-categories of single parent groups and both parents.

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INTRODUCTION

The family is based on three-persons. Mother-father-child, the mother/child relationship cannot be understood without adding the father to the picture, nor can the father/child interaction be understood without the influences of mother. This is because parents directly or indirectly affect their children, through their ability to influence the behavior of their spouses. Mother, father and child, all affect one another, not for socialization but for their emotional and behavioral stability within the family or in society (Sigelman, 1999). In other words a family system cannot exempt the importance of either parent. Because the role of father and mother, their affection, behavior, guidance, all factors are conducive to better adjustment and emotional stability of a child.

The numbers of single parent families are increasing due to divorce, separation, death or desertion. A person who is a part of a family unit and affected by a crisis, trauma, or disaster is responsible for crisis to other members. The crisis can spread directly or indirectly. Directly through abuse, abandonment, violence, or neglect and indirectly through emotional and behavioral problems. Hammermeister and Peterson (2001) found that people from single-parent families had the lowest levels of indicators of well being, than young people from stable intact families. Students from stable intact families exhibit healthier psychosocial profiles in the areas of self-esteem, loneliness, marijuana use, alcohol use, and feelings of hopelessness.

There are several intervening factors involved in broken families, McNeal (1995) found the negative effects on the school performance of children, the dropout ratio of the students from single-parent households is greater than both biological parents. Divorce is the most frequently cited reason for a return to school, to complete their interrupted studies, Glass & Rose (1994). Spruijt and Goede (1998) also found that young people from single

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parent families had the lowest levels of indicator of well being while young people from stable intact families had the highest level. In a study, Nelson Clark & Acs (2001) compared adolescents from married biological parents cohabiting families and those living in blended families and found that adolescents who belonged to the married biological parents were better in all aspect than those living in cohabiting families and those living in blended families.

Several other researchers also suggest the negative effects of single parenthood. Parish and Dostal (1980) found the effects of stepparents; children who spend their lives with their stepfather are better and have positive behavior than the children without their father. Doberman (1973), Rosenberg (1965) found similar but less negative results when a family was broken by death. Compas and Williams (1990) found the stress coping strategies and adjustment in mothers and young adolescents of single parent families; they are at higher risk for a number of social problems than both-parent families. There are a number of psychological and health risks also involved with such groups.

On the basis of research evidence, O'Neill (2002) concluded that the decline of the both-parent, married-couple family has resulted in poverty, ill health, educational failure, unhappiness, anti-social behavior, isolation and social exclusion, for thousands of women, men and children. In the same survey adolescents also reported an increase in depressed mood and rebelliousness and smoking initiation due to the divorce or separation of parents.

Jalil and Asad (1998) studied paternal loss, sex-role, orientation, self-esteem and locus of control. Results show that the individuals who belonged to the loss group had low self-esteem, low masculinity,

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low femininity and high mean of external locus of control. In Pakistan, Ahmed and Munaf (1991) conducted a research on loss of mother and the results showed that the mean state of anxiety and the mean galvanic skin responses of the group were significantly high under the stressful situation in loss of support group as compared to no loss of support group.

Now a days the most common reason for single parenting is separation and divorce. Researches show the consequences of these risk factors. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found a relationship between divorce and behavioral patterns characterized by increased withdrawal and depression in children. Charles (1980) found that the school children from divorced families are high on absenteeism, are more anxious, hostile, and withdrawn, and are less popular with their peers than those from intact families. Hetherington (1989) compared the boys whose parents remained married, and the boys whose parents divorced. The divorced parent group was likely to have continuing problems with antisocial, coercive, and noncompliant behaviors.

According to Shinn (1978) single parenting reduces the amount of monitoring and guidance time resulting in the disruption of academic performance of children. Boys experience greater disruption and girls experience greater recovery of their academic performance. Brody et. al (2003) studied the problem behavior in adolescents he found that African American children's likelihood of developing conduct problems were associated with harsh parenting, a lack of nurturing-involved parenting, and exposure to an older sibling's deviance-prone attitudes and such behavior would be amplified among families residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Other researches also indicate that family factors are associated with delinquent behavior and some evidence shows that these youngsters are less carefully monitored by their Parents (Dorubusch et al., 1985).

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Adolescents who belong to single parent families are expected to be involve in smoking behavior. James (2002) found a relationship between parental divorce and adolescent smoking.

Hypothesis:

The adolescent of the single parent group (due to lack of physical presence, separation, divorce and death) would have more behavioral problems than the adolescents living with the both parents group.

METHOD

Participants:

A total of 240-school/college students (120 males and 120 females) were selected on the basis of demographic information for this research. The sample was selected through purposive sampling. The whole group was divided into two broad categories:

1. Living with both parents group; including 60 adolescents (30 males and 30 females).
2. Living with single parent group; divided into following sub categories; Death/loss 60 adolescents, divorced 40 adolescents, separation 40 adolescents, and lack of physical presence group 40 adolescents.

The numbers of participants in each group are shown in Table – I. The age range of participants was between 12 to 17 years. The mean age was 16.68. The variable of single parenting was determined on the basis of living with one parent since birth to five years of age. It was difficult to collect the equal number of participants in each group due to social stigma or there was a lack of availability of participants in single parent group.

PROCEDURE:

The entire sample was collected from different colleges of Karachi, (Pakistan). The procedure followed for the purpose of data collection was identical for the college students. With the consent of the college authority the researcher approached the students who were enrolled in the 11th grade of academic level in colleges of Karachi. On the basis of demographic information participants were selected for the required categories which are as follows.

1- NORMAL GROUP:

Adolescents living with both real biological parents.

2- EXPERIMENTAL GROUP:

Single parent group including four sub categories; Death, Separation, Divorce and Lack of physical presence.

MEASURES:

Demographic Information Form (DIF).

It consists of basic information of the participants, which helps the examiner to select the required group such as; current age, family structure, age when separated from parents, gender, parental status of job, and income group, living with both parents, mother or father, as well as whether belongs to death, separation, divorced and lack of physical presence group.

The subjects belonging to each of the groups were requested to complete the following scales. The test was administered in supervised setting and no one was allowed to take the form home.

Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire(SDQ):

It measures the following problem behaviors; Emotional

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Symptoms, Conduct Problem, Hyperactivity, Peer Problem, Pro-social behavior. The following Instructions were given to the participants; “Fill up these forms with the correct information, answer each item as accurately as you can, answers will be kept strictly confidential, mentioning the name is optional. Read all the instructions carefully before starting”.

Statistical Analysis:

For the purpose of statistical analysis ANOVA was used to find out the difference between single and both parent groups. SPSS version 10.0 was used to determine the results.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS:

1. Both Parents Group:

The adolescent living with their real or biological parents since their birth.

2. Single Parents Group:

The adolescents living with their single parent either father or mother from birth to 05 years of their age. Single parenting may have been caused due to the following four reasons: Divorce, Separation, Death and Lack of physical presence of a parent.

Behavioral Problem:

A person (child or adolescent) usually exhibits problem behavior (Reber, 1992), which has been sub-divided into the following categories:

Conduct Problem Scale:

A pathological pattern of behavior in which the child or adolescent repeatedly violates the basic rights of others displaying

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aggression and sometimes destroying others property, lying, cheating, smoking or running away from home.

Hyperactivity Scale:

Abnormally active, restless, and lacking the ability to concentrate for any length of time, especially as a result of deficit disorder.

Emotional symptoms scale:

Openly affected by emotions, especially sadness, and governed by the emotions rather than reason or will power.

Peer Problem Scale:

Difficult to discipline; to deal with somebody who is equal to him or her, or to deal with other people in some respect such as same social-class or same age.

Pro-social scale:

Somebody who is skilled at what he or she does relating to the way people in groups behaves and interacts.

Table-I
Showing sample size in each category

Living with both parents group			
Groups	Male	Female	Total sample
Living with both parents	30	30	60
Living with single parent family			
Lack of physical presence group	Male	Female	Sample size
	20	20	40
Separation group	Male	Female	Sample size
	20	20	40
Death group	Male	Female	Sample size
	30	30	60
Divorce group	Male	Female	Sample size
	20	20	40
Total sample size	120	120	240

RESULTS

Table II - Showing ANOVA on the variable of behavioral problem among both parent and sub-categories of single parent groups

ANOVA

BEH_PROB Behavioral Problems

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1870.179	4	467.545	16.843	<.05.
Within Groups	6523.317	235	27.759		
Total	8393.496	239			

Table 4 (a) shows $F= 16.843^{**}$ at $p < .05$ significant lener indicating the significant difference between Both Parent and sub-categories of Single Parent groups on the variable of Behavioral Problem.

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**Table-III - Showing mean differences among
both parent and single parent groups**

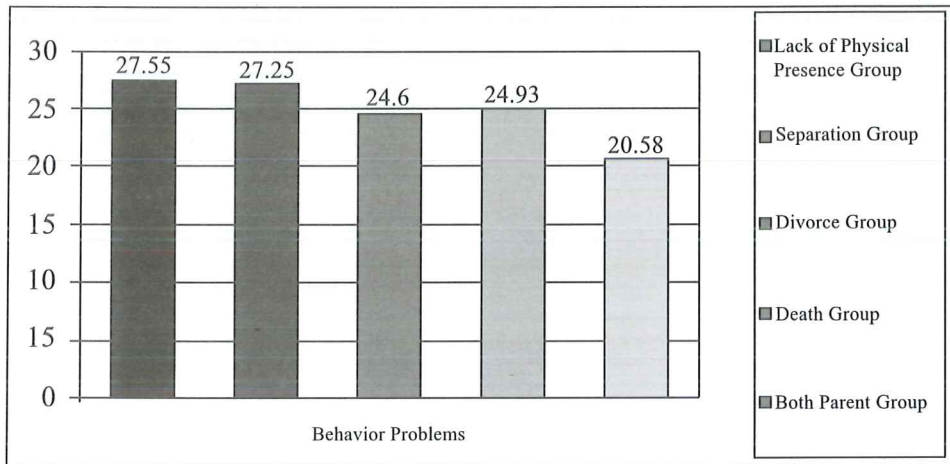
Report

BEH_PROB Behavioral Problems

Comparis Group	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1-Lack of Physical Presence Group	27.55	40	5.18
2-Separation Group	27.25	40	6.29
3-Divorce Group	24.40	40	4.34
4-Death Parent Group	26.93	60	5.81
5-Both Parent Group	20.58	60	4.53
Total	25.08	240	5.93

Graph (i)

**Showing mean difference
between both parent and single parent groups**



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DISCUSSION

Results show that the mean scores of behavior problems are significantly high in adolescents living in single parent as compared to living with both parents group. It shows that the chance to develop behavioral problems is more in adolescents living in single parent families. The behavioral problems considered in this research were conduct problem, hyperactivity, emotional symptoms, peer problem or lack of pro-social activities.

It is obvious that all responsibility automatically shifts to the single parent, after divorce, separation, death or lack of physical presence. Single parent fails to enforce proper monitoring system due to multiple responsibilities. Due to lack of monitoring and lack of parental support child or adolescent repeatedly violates the basic rights of others displaying aggression and sometimes destroying others property, lying, cheating, smoking or running away from home. Their sadness is governed by the emotions rather than reason or will power. There is also difficulty in disciplining or dealing with their peer group and hence a lack of socialization for these adolescents. Another important reason is that single parent her/himself is a victim of unbalance saturation. In such circumstances closed relatives and friends sympathize with the living parent and provide social support in society. This additional support helps in better controlling the behavior of the child. Research evidence shows that adolescents in single parent homes appear to be less likely to engage in delinquent behavior if a second adult (a grandparent) lives in the home (Dornbusch et al., 1985).

The healthy support and positive relationship helps the child to face society. Separation definitely disturbs a child in adjusting with the environment. As Amato (1993) suggests, if parents continue to squabble after the divorce and are hostile towards each other, both will be upset. The custodial parenting is likely to suffer and children will feel torn in their loyalties and eventually experience behavioral problems. Behavior problems are likely to develop in

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the negative environment and disturbed interpersonal relationships. Both parents play an important role in child's behavioral monitoring. Research evidence shows that parental support and contact plays an important role in minimizing problem behavior. Seltzer and Bianchi (1988) found that children also suffer when they lose complete contact with their non-custodial parents (Amato 1993, Simonset al 1994). Unfortunately about one third of children living with their mother lose all other contact with their father. Research also supports that regular contact with the child after divorce or separation with both parents minimizes the negative consequence of problem behavior in adolescents. Non-custodial fathers, who are supportive and who have good parenting skills, help children make a positive adjustment in single parent home.

Results confirm the hypothesis. Research studies also support the negative effects of single parents on the behavior of child and adolescents. Hetherington (1981) suggests that the child of divorce parents is likely to be whiny, dependent, disobedient, unashamed and disrespectful. The Transactional Model of Family Influences shows that the behavioral problems and the parent's ineffective parenting style feed on each other.

In the death group result show significant difference between the single and both parent groups. Although there are several causes of behavioral problems in the present society such as changing society value, media, nuclear family system, awareness, etc. but the major cause appears to be lack of proper monitoring of children. Single parents fail to provide the proper guidance and monitoring of children. Thus single parenting becomes a risk factor for the development of behavioral problems.

The quality of relationship among family members also precipitate behavioral problem. Nye (1957), compared children from intact but unhappy homes with children from broken but happy homes and found some real

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personality differences. Happy broken homes show less psychosomatic illness, less delinquent behavior and better adjustment with parents than youth from intact unhappy homes. The tug of war between families may lead to separation or divorce as seen in exchange marriage system (wata-sata) in Pakistan. Most of the divorce and separation were the result of discord between two families. This leads to single parent families and emotional and behavioral problems.

The effect of single parenting is definite, it may appear in multiple ways; to pay attention on education of a child, healthy physical activities, career development and vocational preparation is also responsibility of parents but due to disturb family environment does not continue a healthy process of development. Sociologists and psychologists agree to the importance of parental effects on child's development. As Young and Ferguson (1979) stated males and females at different times in adolescence are influenced by their parents.

In most of the families, father usually, controls behavior of a child especially in outdoor activities. And mother controls most of the behavior inside the home. Thus it is difficult for a single parent to control all areas of behavior all alone.

CONCLUSION:

After the statistical analysis and discussion, it is concluded that adolescents in single parent group were more problematic and have greater chance to get involved in negative activities and behavioral problems, than those living with both parents.

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