

## A Comparative Study of Levels of Self Esteem among Students of Single and Dual Parent Families. the Case of Students in Selected Secondary Schools in Nakuru Municipality, Kenya

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### Abstract

Children from single parent families tend to be viewed as having low self esteem and challenges associated with it despite the fact that children from duo parent background are not immune to the same challenge. This study therefore aimed at establishing whether there is a comparison in levels of self esteem among students of dual and single parent families from selected schools in Nakuru Municipality, Kenya. It adopted the causal-comparative research design. A total of 4257 Form 3 and Form 4 students comprised the population of the study . The study was carried out in 18 public secondary schools within Nakuru Municipality, Kenya. A sample size of 360 students, from both single and dual parent families took part in the study. Stratified and Purposive sampling techniques were used to obtain the sample. Data was collected by use of a questionnaire that included a self esteem test. Analysis of data was done using descriptive and inferential statistics including the independent t-test statistics. The significance was set at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The analysis was performed using Statistical Package for Social sciences (SPSS) version 17. Findings of the study indicated that there was no statistically significant comparison in level of self esteem among students from single parent families and those from duo parent families ( $p > 0.05$ ). This suggests the level of self-esteem of a student does not depend on the type of parenthood per se but on a complex interaction of other factors such as the type of relationship between parents and children, the school environment and teaching conditions among others. The study recommended that since self esteem is a concern for children from both single parent and duo parent and teachers, counselors, parents and other educational stakeholders should address the issue from a more holistic position and seek to come up with strategies to boost self esteem that are unique to each student's situation.

**Keywords:**Self-esteem, single parenthood and dual parenthood.

### Introduction

There is an increasing rate of single parenting in Kenya and the world at large today, yet this type of parenthood is viewed negatively. This negative perception of single parenting by the Kenyan society implies that children brought up in such family structures may not get adequate acceptance, support and recognition from teachers, students and the society at large compared to children brought up in dual parent households. Indeed children from single parent households may be stigmatized which may adversely affect their self esteem and result in indiscipline, drug abuse and poor academic achievement. It is also important to note that low self esteem is not a preserve for children from single parent families. There exists a general condemnation of children from single parent households and much indiscipline, drug abuse, truancy among other ills tend to be attributed to them yet children from dual parent families have an similar challenge to contend with. This study therefore makes a comparative view of level of self esteem among single and dual parent households. Findings may be useful in informing self esteem issues among students from both single and dual parenthood and may be instrumental in addressing self esteem issues from single parent and dual parent households.

### Literature Review

#### Demographics of Types of parenting

The demographics of single parenting show a general increase worldwide in children living in single parent homes (Jayson and Sharon, 2009). Single parenting has become an accepted norm in the United States and is an accepted trend found in multiple other countries. The wide spread cases of single parenting raises concerns as to whether we may not need to redefine the concept of the family. Although divorce is one of the main events that lead to single parenting, it may be that the majority of cases in the US are from pregnancy outside of wedlock.

There is a continuing decline in the popularity of marriage as more relationships break down and fewer couples choose to wed. In the UK over the past decade the number of married couples fell by 262,000 to 12 million, while the number of cohabiting couples rose from 2.1million to 2.9million and there are 1.8 million children living with unmarried partners (**Bertus Preller,2012**). In the UK some 8,000 same-sex couples now have children according to the Office for National Statistics, while almost 8million people are living alone. The situation is no much different in Africa. According to Monama (2011) in 2007 about 52 percent of African urban parents were single. In South African children are growing up in dysfunctional families. Millions of children grow up living without one of their parents. A worrying revelations is that More than 20,000 children are affected by divorce each year in South Africa(**Bertus Preller,2012**)According to a 2011 study by the South African Institute of Race Relations only a third of children in South Africa are growing up living with two of their parents, 98,000 children live in child-headed households, 81% of whom have a living mother and 9 million children are growing up with absent but living fathers. Only 35% of children in South Africa grow up living with both their biological parents (**Bertus Preller,2012**)

Presently in Kenya, the number of children living in a single parent family is also steadily increasing alongside other parts of the world. In a study conducted in 1997 by the Government, Unicef and the Family Support Institute in 13 districts in Kenya it was established that 45 percent of the families had both parents present; 30 percent were single parents headed by women, 9 percent were single parents headed by men, 8.7 percent were extended, 5.3 were child headed, 2.3 percent were headed by grandparents. In addition, 70% represented unmarried teenage mothers, who are among the core poor - which lead in generating children in special need of protection (Family Support Institute, 1997). This phenomenon could be attributed in part to the rapid breakdown of traditional structures in the face of globalisation, modernization, migration and urbanization. As a result, children have borne the brunt of the fall-out (Hamner & Turner, 1985). As in any country, single parenthood arises because of divorce, death or estrangement of a spouse and teenage pregnancy.

#### **Influence of Single Parenting on Self Esteem**

Several studies have been done all over the world on the influence of type of parenting on children's self esteem. A majority of these studies points to a significant influence on type of parenting and self esteem. The study of Hetherington (2003) found that children in divorced and remarried families show higher levels of depression and anxiety, and lower levels of self-esteem compared to children in nondivorced families. These findings are collaborated by the study of Elfhag, Tynelius and Rasmussen (2010) who also found out that children from single parent families had lower self-esteem compared to those raised by both parents. Amato and Keith (1991) examined the 92 studies involving 13,000 children ranging from preschool to young adulthood and the overall result of this analysis was that children from divorced families are on "average" somewhat worse off than children who have lived in intact families. These children have more difficulty in school, more behavior problems, more negative self-concepts, more problems with peers, and more trouble getting along with their parents. Further research has shown that children with present fathers do better in school, are less prone to violence, and have higher self-esteem and self-confidence (Kevorkian 2010). Boys without fathers are less likely to finish high school, more likely to suffer emotionally and economically, and are more likely to have difficulty forming relationships (Passley, Gerring, & Gerson , 2006).

In a study examining how family characteristics affect African American youth, Mandara and Murray(2000) found that African American adolescent boys with nonmarried parents are more at risk for developing low self-esteem compared with other African American adolescents. The study illustrates the apparently valuable role of the African American father in raising his children, particularly his boys.

Psychologists Jelani Mandara and Carolyn B. Murray, PhD, of the University of California, Riverside, studied perceptions of self-esteem and family functioning from a sample of 116 fifteen -year-old African American girls and boys and their parents from various high schools in southern California. Fifty percent of the parents were married, 38 percent were divorced and 13 percent were never-married single mothers. Results show that boys with married parents had higher overall self-esteem compared with boys with nonmarried parents, even when family income and family functioning were taken into consideration. Parental marital status had no affect on girls' self-esteem.

The researchers say the gender differences in their findings may be explained by mothers' and fathers' different socializing patterns. "In a two-parent home, the balance between the mothers' and fathers' different socializing patterns may be what keeps the self-esteem of both sexes relatively equal," explained the authors. "Apparently, the absent father upsets this balance, which leaves the African American male adolescent in a family environment in which less is expected from him, and, consequently, he may not develop the positive feelings of self-esteem. Much of the literature reviewed indicate that most researchers uphold the view that self esteem of children from single parent families is lower than that of children from duo parent families.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

The following objective guided the study:

(i) To compare the level of self-esteem levels among students from single parent families and those from dual parent families.

### Hypothesis of the study

The study was guided by the following hypothesis

H0<sub>1</sub>: There is no comparison in level of self esteem among students from single parent families and those from dual parent families.

### Methodology

The study was conducted in 18 public secondary schools with a target population of 4257 comprising of form three and four secondary school boys and girls, in Nakuru Municipality. A sample of 360 students from both single and dual parent families took part in the study. Both purposive and stratified random sampling were used to get the sample for the study. The study adopted a causal-comparative research design. This design was appropriate for this study because it was used to explore causal relationships between levels of self-esteem among students from single and dual parent families. A structured questionnaire which consisted of a self-esteem test was used to collect qualitative and quantitative data from the respondents. Data collected was analyzed using inferential statistics mainly the independent sample t-test. The analysis was done with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17.

### Results and Discussion

#### Comparison between levels of self esteem of students from single parent and dual parent families

The objective of this study was to compare the level of self-esteem levels among students from single parent families and those from dual parent families. The independent sample t-test was used to test the hypothesis stating that there was no comparison in level of self esteem among students from single parent and those from dual parent families. The t-test is used to determine whether the difference in the means between the two samples was significant or not. For it to be used, the independent variable (parenthood: single-parent and dual-parent) should be a nominal or ordinal variable, while the dependent variable (self-esteem) should be an interval or continuous variable. Table 1 summarizes the output of the independent sample t-test.

**Table 1**

**Independent Sample T-test Results for Comparison of Level of Self-esteem and Type of Parenthood**

<i>Variable (parenthood)</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Self esteem mean</i>	<i>Mean difference</i>	<i>t- value</i>	<i>Sig (2 tailed)</i>
Single-parenthood	180	57.29	-0.44	0.508	0.612
Dual-parenthood	180	57.73			

The null hypothesis which stated that there was no comparison in level of self esteem among students from single parent families and those from dual parent families was accepted ( $p$  value  $> 0.05$ ). There was therefore no statistically significant comparison in level of self esteem among students from single parent families and those from duo parent families. This is quite contrary to the views of many scholars as seen in the review of literature. This suggests the level of self-esteem of a student does not depend on the type of parenthood, if the students' school environment and teaching conditions are the same. The view of the researchers is that development of self-esteem in children largely depends on the relationship between a child and the parent(s). In fact, children tend to have a high level of self-esteem when they have a good relationship with a single parent than when they have been brought up by two parents who are always quarreling (Papalia *et al*, 1999). In addition, inaccessible, rejecting or hostile parent can be more damaging than an absent one (Hetherington, 1989). The study of McKay and Fanning (2000); Manassis (1996) and Canadian Mental Health Association (2011) shows that level of self esteem depends on several parental factors, not just whether the child grows in a single or duo parent family. His study asserts that developing children's self-esteem begins with the life of the parents. Parents' insecurities are frequently injected into the life of their children; therefore, becoming the children's own set of insecurities. Parents' vulnerabilities commonly become those of their children. Parents' strengths and optimism can be an asset for their children (McKay and Fanning (2000) This happens in the lives of both single and duo parents. Ultimately, children are a mirrored reflection of the life lived by their parents. If parents' have a particular set of perceived vulnerabilities, limitations, negative self-talk, weaknesses, or negative habitual acts, then the propensity that their children will develop such negative behaviors are increased. Likewise, if parents have developed positive habits, self-talk, and perceivable strengths; their children are placed in an advantageous position to develop a positive self-esteem. This is to indicate that it is the manner of parenting, rather than type of parenting *per se* that influence the development of an individual's self esteem.

### Conclusion

It was concluded there was no significant comparison in level of self esteem among students from single parent

families and those from dual parent families. Students from dual parent households generally recorded slightly higher levels of self esteem as compared to their counterparts in single parent households but the difference was not significant enough to attribute level of self esteem to their type of parenting. This implies that there are many more variables which work together to determine a student's level of self esteem rather than type of parenting *per se*. It therefore means that self esteem is a concern for children from both single parent and duo parent and teachers, counselors, parents and other educational stakeholders should address the issue of self esteem from a more holistic position. This does not ignore that children from single parent families have an extra challenge to contend with in reconstructing their self esteem and there is need to develop specific strategies to address their unique situation.

### Recommendations

Since self esteem plays a critical role in human adjustment it is necessary that parents, teachers, educational administrators, counselors and policy makers develop strategies to enhance self esteem among the students. Since there is a wide continuum of issues that determine the level of self esteem there is need to consider self esteem as an issue for every student without bias to the type of parenting. It is also necessary to establish and work on specific issues that students from single parent families have to contend with in order to help them enhance their level of self esteem. It is also necessary to educate parents in both single and dual parent families on the importance of self esteem to a student's wellbeing and academic adjustment and equip them with strategies to help then enhance their children's self esteem.

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