

Assessment of Student of Single Parents' Support at Konongo-Odumase Senior Higher School in Ashanti Region

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Abstract

The study aimed at assessing single parents' support of their wards at Konongo-Odumase SHS in the Ashanti Region. The study adopted the descriptive design. The study used all students from single parental homes at Konongo-Odumase SHS. A sample of 97 participants was used for the study and participants were selected from form three students. The study used questionnaires to obtain information from participants and used descriptive statistics to analyse the research questions. The study revealed that students' of single parent receive support in the form of books and attendance of PTA meetings and other school activities. However, it was shown that single parents do not pay their wards fees on time as well as having less time to supervise their academic work. Furthermore, the study showed that the support wards receive from single parent were not effective. Again, the study revealed that inadequate time of single parent to participate actively in PTA meetings and inadequate funds are the major challenges students of single parenthood face at Konongo-Odumase SHS. It is imperative to note that many children born outside marriage are likely faced challenges with the negative aspect of having to grow up in single parent families. From the results obtained, it is recommended among others that the staffs of Konongo-Odumase SHS should be encouraged to pay attention to single parented pupils so as to help them adjust better and successfully pursue their academic work.

Keywords: assessment, challenges, senior high school, single parent, support

DOI: 10.7176/JEP/10-31-05

Publication date: November 30th 2019

1. Introduction

The word parent denotes to anybody who produces children; a forebear (father) or a 'mother'. It likewise implies a legal guardian or the other person standing in loco parentis (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom a child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare) (U. S. Department of Education as cited in Abudu and Fuseini, 2013). Again, it point out any grown-up who plays a major part in a pupil's (student) life. Parenting is the guideline of character or conduct (behaviour) as well as the development and growth of children, with the aim that they will be competent to live a generally (socially) desired life, familiarise their environs, and follow their life goals. (Bradley & Caldwell, 1995).

Parents play an essential role in the growth of their children. Parenting and high standard quality education are vital in developing the right human resources to take part in the development endeavours in order to help alleviate the problems that the nation is grappling with (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Research has shown that parents are the most accurate predictors as far as a student's achievement in school is concerned. The extent to which a student's family is able to create a home environment that encourages learning and effective communication plays a very important role in education (Hill & Craft, 2003).

The Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), is of the view that children develop simultaneously both in two systems, school and family. It is therefore no surprise that children from single-parent families are at high risk of having lower school performance and exhibiting more behaviour problems compared to children from nuclear families (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2003). Parents are their children's first and foremost teachers, guidance counsellors and nurturers. Parents are responsible for providing the basic resources that are needed, like home, and clothing. They are also responsible for taking good care of these resources, such as insuring that the home environment is safe and clean, and that children take foods that are healthy and nutritious.

Parental support is essential in maintaining a healthy relationship with children. Support can steer from being a good role model, talking to a child about their lives, becoming active in a child's education, creating a regular set of disciplinary rules and by loving and encouraging the child. The most important thing is setting time aside for the children which will help build a good relationship and emotional support. The care and attention a child receives at home, to a large extent influences the academic achievement of the child either negatively or positively (Sanders, 1996).

Ineffective or inadequate parental assistance may lead a child to feel overwhelmed and consequently to withdraw from school (Astone & McLanahan, 1991). In general, parental practices are related to all school achievement indicators: grades, attendance, attitudes, expectations, school retention, and degree completion (Astone & McLanahan, 1991). Stress the child experiences from parental separation may cause temporary interruption in the learning process, which leads to academic problems (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

In Ghana, a study conducted by UNICEF established that students' performance in school was greatly determined by family background in terms of a single parenting family, parental involvement, a parent's level of education and income which are determinants of children's attainment. George and Mensah (2010) explored the effect of parental contribution in homework on children's scholastic achievement. The authors also looked at the contributions of the parents in the activities of the students both in and out of school as parental involvement. Better relationships between parents and school would promote improved student's attitude, attendance, and academic success (George & Mensah, 2010).

Musgrave (2000) argues that children who come from an educated home would like to follow the steps of their family and with this, work actively in their studies. Jeynes (2002) also asserts that a child from a well-educated family with high socio-economic status is more likely to perform better than a child from an illiterate family. This, he suggests apparently because children from an educated family are seen to have lots of support such as a decent and good environment for academic work, parental support and guidance, enough textual and academic materials and decent feeding. Eamon (2005) again claims that virtually in all nations, children of parents high on the educational, occupational and social scale have a far better chance of getting into good secondary schools and from there into the best colleges and universities than equally bright children of ordinary workers or farmers.

In the Konongo-Odumase SHS, a cursory observation of teachers in the schools showed that a good number of students come from single-parented homes. These children are noted for behavioural problems such as lateness to school, absenteeism, sleeping during lessons, and others and all these affect the academic performance of the children. There are three main pathways by which being raised by a single mother may produce a long-lasting impact on well-being in adulthood.

1. Children in single-mother households are more likely to suffer from less effective guardianship and a higher likelihood of family distress and conflicts (Amato, 2000). It is well established that two-parent families generally provide more emotional resources to children than single-parent families (Amato, 2005; Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). In a related vein, children, whose parents' divorce, exhibit slightly lower psychological well-being and social adjustment than children from stable two-parent families (Amato, 2005, Bjarnason et al., 2012). The experience of parental divorce may cause further emotional distress to the child (Amato, 2005; Fomby & Cherlin, 2007) and may eventually lead to an insecure attachment representation (Amato, 2005; Waters *et al.*, 2000). Prolonged family distress and insecure attachment representation may in turn complicate the development of social skills and make it more difficult to engage in satisfying intimate relationships which may eventually also hamper life-satisfaction during adulthood (Waters *et al.*, 2000).
2. A second pathway of impact is related to the generally lower socio-economic status and increased risk of economic deprivation among children in single-mother households (Amato, 2000). Economic deprivation affects children's adjustment and well-being in multiple ways. Children from poor households are at increased risk to live in a low quality home environment and poor neighbourhood conditions. They are more often exposed to harsh parental rearing practices and poor parental mental health, and they more often receive suboptimal nutrition and suffer from poor physical health (Pruett, 2000). Finally, economic deprivation also increases the likelihood of these children to enter careers with poor socio-economic prospects and to show poor social integration when they reach early adulthood (Amato, 2005).
3. A third pathway can be summarized as the 'missing-father hypothesis.' In popular science, it has been discussed that children need both a mother and a father, presuming that fathering involves distinct and necessary qualities which are particularly important for gender identity formation in boys (Zimbardo & Coulombe, 2015). There is also evidence that the absence of a father is associated with an increase in antisocial behaviours in boys, including violence, criminality, and substance abuse and a decrease in social adjustment in general (Amato, 2005).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Although there is a growing body of literature, focusing on parental involvement in education during middle school, to date no systematic research has been carried out to determine what types of involvement have the strongest connection with the achievement. Existing research shows that teachers want parents to be involved in their children's education. However, it is not what the situation is in Konongo-Odumase Senior High School (SHS).

Most basic schools have developed a range of strategies designed to assist parents in supporting their children's learning at home, particularly as far as helping children learn to read is concerned. However, there seems to be a specific way in which teachers expect parents to get involved in their children's education. Lareau (2000), for instance, indicates that teachers and principals do not ask the parents to get involved by intervening and nor do they (i.e. teachers and principals) always appreciate parents' actions.

Single-parenting is not a myth in Ghana. Studies by several authors such as Abudu and Fuseini (2013), and Chova *et al.* (2012) give evidence of the fact that single-parenting is a major cause of poor academic performance

among pupils in Ghana. Abudu and Fuseini (2013) revealed that the sample of two parent homes has most of their parents helping them in their academic work as compared to those from single parent families. In a similar vein, the findings of Chowa *et al.* (2012) revealed that married parents in Ghana are more likely to engage in their children's education than single parents.

Interaction with some opinion leaders in some of the communities in the Konongo-Odumase showed that there is a growing awareness of the effects of single parenting on the academic performance of basic school pupils in the Konongo-Odumase. Some of the children complained about the negative effects of single parenting on their academic performance. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to investigate single parents' support their wards at Konongo-Odumase SHS.

1.2. Research Objectives

The following research objectives guided the study to:

1. Determine the support single parents give to their wards at Konongo-Odumase SHS in the Ashanti Region.
2. Establish the effectiveness of single parent support.
3. Identify the factors hampering single parent families' support of their wards.

2. Research Methods

This section presents an overview of the method and procedures used for the study. The following are discussed: research design, population, sampling procedure and instrument used in the data collection. Additionally, administration of the instrument and the procedure for data processing and analysis are also discussed.

2.1. Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive design. With descriptive research, Zikmund (2003) did explain that a researcher tries to describe the characteristics of certain groups, to estimate the frequency or proportion of subjects in a specified population, to analyse relationships between variables, or to make specific predictions. In other words, it is concerned with the conditions or the relationships that exist, such as determining the nature of the prevailing conditions, practices and attitudes; opinions that are held; processes that are going on; or trends that are developed (Mensah, 2019). This design was used because it enabled the participants expressed their opinions on the single parents' support of their wards at Konongo-Odumase SHS.

2.2. Population

The target population in research is the aggregate of cases in which the researcher would like to make generalisations. For the purpose of this study, the target population was all the single-parented students in the Konongo-Odumase SHS. The accessible population was all Form 3 single-parented students at Konongo-Odumase SHS. The estimated accessible population was 121 single-parented students.

2.3. Sampling Procedure

The study used a simple random sampling technique to select participants. The lottery method was used whereby the names of students were written on slips of papers, folded and mixed in a bowl. Participants were drawn with replacement from the bowl until the required sample size was obtained. A sample size of 97 was used for the study based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample determination table.

2.4. Data Collection Instrument

The study used questionnaires to obtain information from participants. The questionnaire was designed by the researchers. The questionnaire was divided into two sections with 8 items. The first section collected data on the forms of support single parent give to their wards and contained 4 items. The second section collected information on factors that hamper the support wards get from their parents and contained 4 items. The data collection instrument was validated (content and face) by two experts in the field of educational psychology and guidance and counselling from the Faculty of Educational Foundations in the University of Cape Coast. The data collection instrument was pilot tested on 15 single-parented students at Wesley High SHS. The reliability estimate of the instrument was 0.91 using the Cronbach's alpha.

2.5. Data Procedures

An introductory letter was sent to the headmaster of Konongo-Odumase SHS to seek participants' consent. Before the administration of the questionnaire, the researcher made preliminary enquires in the school to obtain permission from headmaster and teachers to conduct the study. Participants were given the opportunity to ask any question that baffles them in order to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire was collected on the day of administration.

2.6. Data Analysis and Processing

Data obtained were analysed by research questions. Descriptive statistics tools, namely, frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to analyse the data. Research Question One sought to determine the support single parents give to their wards at the Konongo-Odumase SHS in the Ashanti Region. The responses obtained were coded from 1-4 for worded items from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’ to determine their direction. Individual item means and standard deviations were calculated. Individual item means were commented on. Research Question Two was on the effectiveness of the support student received. The criterion for judging the effectiveness or otherwise of support was that a mean of means score of 2.50 or higher shows the support is effective while a score less than 2.50 indicates that support is not effectively offered. Research Question Three examined the factors hampering single parent families to support their wards at Konongo-Odumase SHS in the Ashanti Region. The responses obtained were coded from 1-2 for worded items from ‘Yes’ to ‘No’ to determine their direction. This research question was analysed by using frequencies and percentage.

3. Results

Research Objective One sought to determine the support single parents give to their wards at Konongo-Odumase SHS. The data obtained from the participants were analysed using means and standard deviation. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Type of Single Parental Support

Statement	M	S.D
Single parents pay students school fees on time.	2.47	.75
Single parents provide all the books their children need on time.	2.53	.81
Single parents normally supervise studies of their children at home.	2.40	.86
Single parents attend a PTA meeting and other school activities.	2.57	.69

Table 1 shows the support single parents give to their wards as indicated by participants. The table shows that the statement ‘single parents attend a PTA meeting and other school activities’ recorded the highest mean of 2.57 and a standard deviation of 0.69. It is also shown that the participants agreed that their parent (single parent) provide all the books their children need on time (M=2.53, S.D=0.81). On the contrary, the statement ‘Single parents normally supervise studies of their children at home’ recorded the least mean score (2.40) with a standard deviation of 0.86. Next to this, ‘single parents pay students school fees on time’ followed with a mean and standard deviation of 2.47 and 0.75 respectively. These findings suggest that students of a single-parented home receive support in the form of books and attendance of PTA meetings and other school activities. However, it was shown that most single parents do not pay their wards fees on time as well as having less time to supervise their academic work.

Research Question Two sought to determine the effectiveness of the support single parent offer their wards at the Konongo-Odumase SHS in the Ashanti Region. The data obtained from the participants were analysed using mean of means. The result is present in Table 2.

Table 2. Single Parent Support Effectiveness

Statement	M	S.D
Single Parent Support	2.49	.35

Table 2 shows the effectiveness of the support students of single parent receive. In Table 2 the mean of means score of single parent support is 2.49. This figure is less than 2.50 and this indicates that the support wards receive from single parents were not effective.

Research Question Three sought to identify factors hampering single parent families’ support of their wards at Konongo-Odumase SHS in the Ashanti Region. The data obtained from the participants were analysed using percentages and frequencies. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Challenges Students of Single Parent Families Face

Statement	Yes		No	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Inadequate funds to support wards’ education	59	60.8	38	39.2
Failure on the part of parent to control their ward	49	50.5	48	49.5
Inadequate time to participate in school activities (PTA meetings) of wards	67	69.1	30	30.9
Parents verbally abuse their wards	39	40.2	58	59.8

Table 3 shows the challenges students of single-parented homes face as indicated by participants. There were 67 (69.1%) of the participants who responded positively with a ‘Yes’ response to the statement ‘inadequate time to participate in school activities (PTA meetings) of wards’. Similarly, the statement ‘inadequate funds to support wards’ education’ recorded 59 (60.8%) responses for ‘Yes’ and 38 (39.2%) responses for ‘No’. Furthermore, the statement ‘failure on the part of parent to control their ward’ also recorded 49 (50.5%) responses for ‘Yes’ and 48 (49.5%) responses for ‘No’. However, 59 (59.8%) said ‘No’ to the statement ‘Parents verbally abuse their wards’

and 39 (40.2%) for 'Yes'. The implication of these findings is that inadequate time of single parent to participate actively in PTA meetings and inadequate funds are the major challenges students of single-parented homes face at Konongo-Odumase SHS.

4. Discussion

This section summarises and discusses the research result with, an attempt to integrate the results into existing literature. The study revealed that students of single-parented homes receive support in the form of books and attendance of PTA meetings and other school activities. However, it was shown that most single parents do not pay their wards fees on time as well as having less time to supervise their academic work. The findings of the current study is in with the findings of Chen *et al.* (2008) that teachers are aware of the importance of parental involvement such as attending schools function with the focus on concerns about the learners. Furthermore, these findings agreed with those of Tassoni (2002) who notes that because of low income most single parents face problems in providing for their educational material needs of their children which compromised the learning and development needs of their infant children. The research study found out that single parents in most instances had no time to supervise their children's homework. The type of work they did was time consuming and involved a lot of physical activity like vending where they walk from one station to another looking for customers.

Furthermore, the study showed that the support wards receive from single parents were not effective. The findings of the present study tally with the findings of Sanders (1996) that the care and attention a child receives at home, to a large extent influences the academic achievement of the child either negatively or positively. Sanders stressed that a support which ineffective would yield a negative consequence on the child. Parental support is essential in maintaining a healthy relationship with children. Support can steer from being a good role model, talking to a child about their lives, becoming active in a child's education, creating a regular set of disciplinary rules and by loving and encouraging the child.

Again, the study revealed that inadequate time of single parent to participate actively in PTA meetings and inadequate funds are the major challenges students of single parented homes face at Konongo-Odumase SHS in the Ashanti Region. The current findings of the study is in line with the findings Marziyeh and Khaidzir (2009) that students from single-parent families, most of the affected people are confronted with several stressors and changes which prevent them from enjoying a healthy lifestyle. Characteristically, the findings support the findings of McLanahan *et al.* (2001) that single parent families can have limited human capital and financial resources. As a result, the provision of school needs for children could be difficult. The reason for these challenges results from the weak financial strength of a single parent (mother or father) to take care of all children at the same period.

5. Conclusion

The study highlighted the support students from single parent families receive. However, single parents faced challenges in paying school fees of their children as well as monitoring their children's school-work. It is imperative to note that many children born outside marriage are likely to face challenges with the negative aspect of having to grow up in disrupted homes (single parent families). There are many things that can be done to help these children growing up in single-parents households such as the after school programme or having a mentor.

5.1. Implications for Practice

From the findings and conclusion, counsellors need to engage in occasional talks with pupils from single parent homes to be able to identify any social or behavioural issues they might be battling with and in so doing provide the necessary counselling assistance since single parented pupils might not spend much time with the single parent. The Board of Governors and authorities of SHS must organise seminars and workshops for parents to enable them know that the importance of support their wards need. School counsellors can also work together with the form masters/mistress, senior housemasters/mistress and housemasters/mistress so that if class teachers identify any issues that single parented pupils are battling with, the class teachers can refer the pupils to the school counsellors.

5.2. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made from the findings above:

1. Konongo-Odumase SHS board of governors and authorities should organise seminars and workshops for parents to enable them know that the importance support their wards need.
2. Staffs of Konongo-Odumase SHS should be encouraged to pay attention to single parented pupils so as to help them adjust better and successfully pursue their academic work.
3. Government agencies and NGOs should provide some form of assistance to pupils from single parent homes to enable them cope with the financial burden that comes with single parenting so that they can get the needed books and materials for academic work.

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