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Single-Parent Households and Effects on Student Academic Outcomes

A Research Proposal

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Abstract

The purpose of this proposal is to analyze how different family dynamics, specifically single-parent households, impact a student's academic achievement and their decision in continuing education after high school. Eight interviews, two narratives, and over 60 questionnaires will be used for data collection. Student participants will be chosen from San Marino High School in Los Angeles County and Santa Ana High School in Orange County. Causal-comparative and correlational research will be used in this study to evaluate these two high schools and their participants' backgrounds. Sampling will be purposive.

This paper will also focus strongly on these students' educational and career aspirations. Please note that "college" is not included as a variable here, but rather replaced with "continuing education." This is chosen due to any choices that students have with the liberty in choosing trade schools, apprenticeships, and further educational exploration instead of attending the university route. By ethical standards, this paper will honor multiple identities. All qualitative research methods will be inclusive to the foster-youth, LGBTQ, and adopted student populations.

Single-Parent Households and Effects on Student Academic Outcomes

Introduction

It's become common to hear others or maybe even us use the statement "I was raised by a single parent" while in explanation. When we use or hear this statement, what can we interpret from it? Is it a negatively or positively correlated? Commonly, being raised in a single-parent household is seen as a disadvantage. Why, exactly, is it critical to understand the role that growing up in a single-parent household has on student success? Parent involvement is proven through studies to be in relationship to children's achievement effects. The more intensively involved they are in their children's learning, the more beneficial the results (Khajehpour et al, 2011).

Further, it is important to understand what differences major factors make in this proposal. Findings are accurate that students who experience more family related advantages and resources at home tend to perform better academically (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). What are those resources? And how likely do students from single-parent homes tend to choose to continue their education after high school?

Purpose of the Research

This proposal will compare different family dynamics and how they affect the student's academic performance and continuing educational aspirations after high school. The purpose of the research is to analyze the household factors in a single-parent household that contribute to the student's self-efficacy and their decision in pursuing continuing education. This research will also be presented in comparison to the two-parent household student population.

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Initial Research Questions.

What role does a single-parent household play on a student's academic achievement and preparedness in choosing continuing education after high school?

Variables. The following are overarching factors that influence the target population of students and their academic success. Major factors are income and economic status, especially families that are growing up in poverty. Social factors are household instability and any personal traits exhibited by parents such as mental illnesses, personality disorders and/or serious health issues that impact the parent's role in staying involved in the child's life, parent and child age, and the parent's educational level. Cultural factors are gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and culture of both the parent and the child.

Review of the Literature

Family Policies and Children's School Achievement in Single- versus Two-Parent Families

A main parental factor that is positively associated with children's success is the input of time, coming especially from the mother (Pong, 2003). "Children in single-father families, however, exhibit more behavioral and academic problems than do children in either single-mother or stepfamilies" (Pong, 2003). Overall, single parents have fewer economic resources and less social capital to contribute to the school, and therefore, having a detrimental effect on their children's academic achievement (Pong, 2003). In order to seek relations between family policies and achievement gap by family structure, family resources are controlled in the study and hierarchical linear models were created. The models include family policy variables such as: parental leave, child allowances, and tax and security benefits (Pong, 2003). The following are findings on conclusions and limitations of the study:

First, single parenthood is associated with lower math and science achievement among young children. The largest math and science performance gap among all 11 countries is

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found in the United States and New Zealand. Second, family resources cannot account for this significant achievement gap. Research in the United States has found greater disadvantage of children with never-married single mothers than disadvantage of children with divorced or separated mothers.

Racial and discrimination factors are also thought to be attributed to the achievement gap. In the United States, single parenthood and being African American are positively correlated, and negatively correlated with academic achievement (Pong, 2003). Economic assistance and public welfare policies are discussed as some approaches to offset detrimental consequences for children in single-parent homes (Pong, 2003).

Single-Parent Households and Children's Educational Achievement: A State- Level Analysis:

A study done in 2015 by Pennsylvania State University's Department of Sociology examined associations between the single-parent household and effects on children's educational achievement. Data for this study was collected by examining state mathematics and reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Research done by the study shows that children in single-parent households score below children in two-parent households, on average (Amato et al. 2015). Reasons that exist for assuming that the number of parents in a household affects children's academic achievement begin with the fact that children in single-parent households have a lower standard of living when compared to their counterparts (Amato et al. 2015). Family income and parents' provision of social capital are also predictors of student success. Social capital includes "emotional support, encouragement, everyday assistance, and help with homework," (Amato et al. 2015).

Children who live with single parents, however, have less access to these social resources, in general, than do children with two parents in the household. Finally, most children with single parents have experienced the disruption of their parents' unions, and many of these children endure additional parental transitions before reaching adulthood. The cumulative amount of household instability or "turbulence" in children's lives is associated with a variety of problematic outcomes, including school performance and educational attainment (Amato et al. 2015).

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The study predicts that single parents and their personal traits may also have an effect on poor academic outcomes for their children. These traits are "low cognitive ability, personality disorders, alcohol or substance use problems, and poor social and parenting skills" and also increase the risk of relationship disruptions (Amato et al. 2015).

One-Parent Households and Achievement: Economic and Behavioral Explanations of a Small Effect

Children who live with both parents are "less susceptible to pressure from their friends to engage in deviant behavior" than those who live in one-parent families (Mulkey, 2002). Results show that school drop-out is strongly correlated with low grades and achievement. Living in a mother-only family decreases the likelihood of school dropout. However, living with two parents decreases that probability.

The parent's absence may also have negative effects on children's socialization and supervision (Mulkey, 2002). The study finds that even the loss of a parent through death is as harmful as the loss of divorce (Mulkey, 2002). There is also "more delinquency in father-absent homes than in other types of families" (Mulkey, 2002). The review of literature states that majority of researchers have constructed a single SES scale that combines marital disruption and measure educational resources. Using this SES scale, they were able to find that income was an important factor in explaining differences in school performance and high-school drop-out rates (Mulkey, 2002). More of the SES scale findings suggest the following:

Mother absence and father absence have differential effects on educational performance and that differences in the effects of those variables may most likely be accounted for by how they work in conjunction with or are mediated by the variables of family economic status and parents' and students' behavior (Mulkey, 2002).

Students in this model were asked about their after-school activities, how much time they spent visiting friends, reading, watching TV, and also asked about their school behavior (absences, tardies, and homework). Other variables in this study were whether the student went

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to kindergarten, whether the mother or father monitored homework, and whether the student changed schools (Mulkey, 2002). GPAs and test scores were collected for data, and the results showed that living in a single-parent family actually lowers one's grades about a tenth of a grade point. "The average student in a two-parent household has a GPA of 2.59; the average GPA for a child living in a home without a father is 2.42" (Mulkey, 2002).

The closer the relationship between the primary caregiver's academic and social resources and the family's income, the higher the correlation between the family's income and the student's performance. In mother-absent homes, the mother's academic ability and educational resources are weakly correlated to her earnings (Mulkey, 2002).

An International Look at the Single-Parent Family

Fewer financial resources, less parenting time, and psychological and emotional stress due to partnership instability are prevalent factors that also appear in Ludger Woessmann's study on the single-parent family and achievement gaps. Woessmann evaluated student test score data across countries. On average across the 28 countries, students living in single-parent families score 18 points lower than students living in two-parent families (Woessmann, 2015). The study also controlled background factors outside of family structure, which are: number of books in the home, parent's highest education level, immigration status, and whether the national language is spoken at home (Woessman, 2015).

Trends were also analyzed as part of the study. It was analyzed that countries with larger increases in single parenthood from 2000 to 2012 tended to have larger increases in the achievement gap. When looking at achievement differences in math, the United States, compared to all other countries, had a substantially higher percentage in 2012 than it did in 2000 (declined by 29 percent). The following is on the rate of single-parent families being particularly high in the United States:

Students from single-parent families perform significantly lower in math than students from two-parent families in virtually all countries. To a large extent, however, this

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achievement gap reflects differences in socioeconomic background, as measured by the number of books at home and parental education, rather than family structure alone. The United States belongs to the group of countries with the largest achievement gaps by family structure, although the United States was more exceptional in this regard in 2000 than in 2012 (Woessman, 2015).

The study provides evidence that it is possible to enhance family environments to improve healthy child development. The background factors from the study are relevant for student achievement and differences in country characteristics and welfare systems most likely contribute to achievement gaps between single and dual family households as well.

Parent Involvement

A review of the literature provides that parents could be involved with their child's life in several ways. "When parents monitor homework, encourage participation in extracurriculars, are active in parent-teacher associations, and help children develop plans for their future; children are more likely to respond and do well in school" (Khajehpour et al, 2011).

The study takes a look at styles of parenting and reports that parental pressure has positive and significant effect on public school performance. Children of passive parents were found to perform poorly academically (Khajehpour et al, 2011). Parent involvement is shown to play a large role and is one of the greatest barriers to high academic achievement in children's education. Epstein, a researcher in collaboration, created Epstein's model which identified six types of involvement based on relationships between families, school and community. He models,

These are: parenting (skills), communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. He stressed it clearly that these six types of involvement need to be included to have successful partnerships (between the home and the school) (Khajehpour et al, 2011).

Research Procedures

To build accurate data for this qualitative study, several instruments will be used for methodology. To begin, a questionnaire will be distributed to all seniors at San Marino and Santa

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Ana High. Then, the interview method will be used to gather data intensively from eight selected students. Interview participants will be based on staff recommendations and student interest.

Lastly, two student narratives will be used in this study to support the students' standpoints, interpretations, and any experiences/social discourses that may have occurred and impacted their education due to family dynamic.

Site and Sample Selection

The two selected high school sites are Santa Ana High School and San Marino High School. These two schools, 30 miles apart, are useful for comparison due to their disparities in population and academics. San Marino, a Los Angeles public high school in the San Marino Unified School district, serves 1,123 students. The school is nestled between the more affluent areas of Los Angeles. These cities are Pasadena, Arcadia, and Glendale. 82.8% of students at this school are considered college and career ready (CA School Dashboard, 2018). Less than 11% of students make up the socioeconomically disadvantaged student population (CA School Dashboard, 2018).

Santa Ana High is the largest public high school in Orange County, with its' student body at 2,963 students. Anaheim, Orange and Garden Grove are neighboring cities. 93% of these students are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged (CA School Dashboard, 2018). State academic performance ratings reveal that majority of the student body test scores are below standard, and only 27% are college and career ready (CA School Dashboard, 2018).

Due to interest on students' continuing education and career interests in this study, high school seniors are favorable as the target population. A total of eight participants (four male and four female) will be selected for more in-depth sampling. Sampling will be purposive.

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Researcher's Role

The researcher's identity as an individual raised in a single-parent home has a definite impact in this study. Due to this background, the researcher was influenced personally as well as professionally by the research process in this study. Any bias due to the researcher's own life experiences is controlled for objective, and not subjective purposes in this paper.

As a graduate student researching for this proposal, the role is to understand as much about the factors *in* and *outside* school for students in single-parent households. These factors, as listed above in the Variables section, will help guide the research questions, along with using collected data sampling and findings from previous and present research.

Data Collection Methods

A nine-question Qualtrics questionnaire will be distributed and used as a method of instrumentation. Questionnaires will be distributed online to every 12th grade student's school email, including a message about confidentiality. Should the survey results from each school turn out to be less than 30 results from each school, the survey will be distributed to junior-level students and the sampling procedure will be changed. The researcher is hopeful that 30 questionnaire results will be successful from each school and interviews and narratives can be pulled from questionnaire subjects and staff recommendations. All interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. Interviewed subjects may choose to remain anonymous. Two narratives will be used, one male and one female subject (both from different school sites).

Data Management Strategies

All data recorded will be protected through user logins and password-protected for narratives and interviews. Student participants may choose to remain anonymous.

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Trustworthiness Features

To ensure the process of triangulation, the following methods will be used for reliability and validity: interviews, narratives, coding and a questionnaire.

Ethical Considerations

All student interview and narrative participants will be given an informed consent form requiring parent or guardian signatures. Students participating in the anonymous survey will be notified in the initial e-mail that answers are all anonymous and confidential unless the student is willing to provide contact information for a follow-up interview. Counselors and any school-mandated employee in the facilitation process of this study will be provided a handbook of research procedures including the American Counseling Association's Code of Ethics.

Potential Contributions of the Research

Any research in this proposal will be used to contribute to further discussion on educational and household factors that could be mitigated by school administration and counselors for the target population of students. Data analysis could be further assessed at the state level and even in turn, used to leverage funding for schoolwide programs that are beneficial for students from single-parent homes. This proposal is guided by asking the questions "Why?" and "How is it a disadvantage for these students?" every step of the way.

Data Analysis Strategies

All data (excluding narratives and interviews) will be collected and extracted through Qualtrics. Results will be produced on bar and pie charts. To eliminate students from two-parent households, the first question will ask the subject to identify their household type. If the answers "two-parent household," "homeless," or "fostered/adopted with two guardians," the survey will end. For students who are effectively targeted in their single-parent households, the survey will

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ask for subject's gender, race, and parent's level of education. To assess parent involvement, students will be able to describe, or list ways parents are involved in their lives, if at all. The last block of the survey will ask for student's goals in continuing education, and any household factors that may have prevented them from their academic success. Qualitative coding will be assessed and extracted through QSR International.

Limitations

Student willingness in participating in the questionnaires, narratives, and interviews are all limitations. Another limitation is also the sample size of students. When collecting data, any student self-reported data will be a limitation in reliability and validity. Should a student be an ESL-learner and has trouble understanding interview or survey questions, then another limitation will exist.

Discussion

The purpose of this proposal is to deliver research methodology that will be effective towards programs and funding that can better support students from single-parent households, so they can acquire readiness to continue education after high school. The data collected could be especially critical to the two counties, their school districts and their demographics of students. Counselors, educators, and parents could take data and apply them to future research and resources for counseling and parenting skills. Schools could use data to encourage increased parent involvement as it is essential and has an impact on children's performance.

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APPENDIX

A: Questionnaire

Link found here: https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6Ma3gDPoDHakCwt

In an effort to learn about our student body and their households, please state which of the following households you currently live in:

Two-parent household

Single-parent household

I'm fostered/adopted, and my parent/guardian is a single parent

I'm fostered/adopted, and my parents/guardians live together

I'm currently homeless or living in a shelter

Other:

Please choose the gender you identify with:

Male

Female

Transgender

In your single-parent household, who is the primary sole parent?

Mother

Father

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What is your racial background?

White

Black

Asian American

Hispanic

Indian or Middle Eastern

Two or more races

Other:

What is your parent/guardian's highest completed level of education?

High school diploma or GED

Community college or other 2 year school

University

Never graduated

To the best of your ability, please describe the ways your parent or guardian is involved with your education.

Involved. How?

I wish my parent/guardian was more involved. Please list some reasons how:

My parent/guardian is not involved with my education

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Please state your goals upon completion of high school.

I have plans to attend a community college or university

I have plans to attend a trade school

I have no plans in continuing my education

I have a job or internship already lined up for me

Other:

Please choose which social or cultural factors in your household, if any, have been a disadvantage towards your academic achievement and wellbeing.

Household income

Culture

Serious health issues that have occurred

Relationship issues

Other:

Are you interested in being an interview participant for this study?

Yes

No



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