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Disentangling the Economic and Educational Impacts of Single Parenting on Adolescent Girl Students: in the Case of Gambella Region, Ethiopia

Fentahun Gebrie^{1,2*}, Surafel Melsew^{2,3}

¹Disaster Risk Science PhD Candidate, Institute of Disaster Risk Management and Food Security Studies, Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia.

² Department of Gender and Development Studies, Gambella University, Ethiopia

³ Environment and Development PhD Candidate, College of Social Science, University of Gondar, Gondar, Ethiopia.

*Corresponding author: Fentahun Gebrie.

Abstract

Single parenting is a social phenomenon that has always been in existence and is as old as mankind, and today the number of single-parent families has been rampantly increasing. As a result, the researcher conducted a study in the Gambella region of Ethiopia to investigate the economic and educational implications of single parenting on female adolescent students. The study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study research design. The researchers used the purposive sampling technique to select the research area and research participants for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, and eleven interviewees, seventeen participants in focus group discussions within two groups, and seven key informants participated. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, translated, and thematically analyzed. Interviews with research participants revealed that adolescent girl students from single-parent homes experience financial difficulties. The study also explored those students with single parents are more likely to be absent from school, to come late to school, to score low marks, and to drop out of school. Therefore, having an understanding of the benefits of having intact parents for the well-being of adolescents and raising children together should be advocated.

Keywords: single parenting; adolescent girls; economic impact; academic performance; gambella; Ethiopia

Introduction

The single parent which is also referred to as a solo parent is a social phenomenon that has always been in existence and is as old as mankind [1]. The number of single-parent families, headed by single mothers and single fathers, has been increasing [2]. Today it is common for children to be raised by just one of their parents, and those children are often disadvantaged in several ways. Children in single-mother families typically have poorer outcomes, across a range of measures, than those living with both parents [3]. Single-parent families experience poor financial status except for the rich ones [4, 5]. Being the sole breadwinner of the family, they have to work full time or extra and a lot of sacrifices and adjustments are to be made to meet their family's basic needs [4]. Adolescence is the developmental stage between childhood and maturity, marking the time when a person goes through several biological and emotional changes [6]. It is a critical time in a person's development [7]. During this period, adolescents suffer from various forms of problems which ultimately impair normal psychosocial development aggravating psychosocial dysfunction [6]. As a result,

any failure on the part of the parents to assist and guide the teenager might lead to mental regress and the development of unwholesome behaviors [7, 8]. Early experiences with parents and family tie heavily shape development, according to Sigmund Freud, the pioneering architect of psychoanalytic theory [7]. These indicated that the basis of who a person will become in society is laid in the family and early in childhood and parents have a critical role to play in ensuring that their children receive the proper mental development.

Several problems have been known to be associated with single parenthood. Adolescents raised by single parents experience many problems that can influence academic performance, well-being, and resilience, all of which are important psychological resources for development [9]. In addition to having fewer resources, the single parent may not supervise adolescent children properly, and adolescents are susceptible to delinquent behavior and substance abuse [4]. In addition to that single parents are prone to high levels of stress, psychological distress, and anxiety due to their position of sole responsibility and concerns about finances [5, 10], and also experience a

decline in academic performance [10]. Mothers raising children alone are more likely to be low-income, and less educated, and their children typically have lower test scores and are more likely to drop out of school and have greater emotional and behavioral difficulties [11]. Adolescents from single-parent experience the social stigma that comes with living in a single-parent family which directly affects their academic performance. Besides, single parents have fewer resources to support their kids financially. Also, the parent is too busy working extra for the family that no one is there to help them with school [4]. Children raised by a single parent may develop negative self-images, and children raised by a single parent prefer to compare themselves to children raised by both parents. They may consider themselves lesser than others who have both parents [12]. Besides, single parenting significantly influences adolescent girls' sexual initiation [13]. There are a lot of studies conducted by Ethiopian scholars [14-17], and other scholars [3-5, 9, 18] on parenting style and sociocultural and economic effects on sol parents and their children. However, as far as the knowledge of the researchers it is the first study conducted in Gambella regional state, one of the regional states in Ethiopia. Therefore, this study will input to academicians, and governmental and non-governmental organizations working or will work on single parenting and related issues.

Research Methodology

This study aims to explore the economic and educational impacts of single parenting on female adolescents in the Gambella regional state, Ethiopia. In line with the objective, the research question, and the nature of the issue under investigation, a qualitative research approach was employed. Qualitative research focuses on why and how something works and helps to build understanding [19]. The study adopted a case study research design that helps to answer complex and real-world research problems [20]. The population for the study consists of all single-parented female adolescent students in Gambella Town and Gambella Zuria Woreda, Gambella People's National Regional State, Ethiopia. In this study, to select participants and areas of the study, the researcher predominantly uses the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling technique that is most effective to select research participants with some inclusive criteria [21]. In addition to that, the

researchers also used the availability sampling technique to select the key informants. In the study, based on the inclusive and exclusive criteria eleven semi-structured interviewees, seventeen focus group discussants, and seven key informants participated. To conduct the study, primary sources of data were used, and to collect this data in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews were used. Written informed consent with research participants and parents of minors were taken. The researcher used the thematic data analysis technique. In addition to that before the study began it was reviewed and approved by Gambella University institutional review board and a consolidated criterion for reporting qualitative research (COREQ) checklist was used.

Finding and Discussion

Economic Impacts

According to the response of research participants, the economic problem is one of the major impacts of single parenting on female adolescents. Single-parented female adolescents explained that their parents don't have a reliable source of income for their home and due to this reason, they experienced difficulties in fulfilling school requirements. In line with this, one of the single-parented female adolescents during the interview described that; One of the major problems I as a child of a single parent face is financial problems. Members of my family as a whole need money for education and fulfillment of other necessities. But because my mother does not have enough money and no one to help her, we can't get enough money when we need it. (Asiya, 14 years of adolescent girl interviewee, Gambella Zuria Woreda)

Furthermore, one of the focus group discussants strengthens this issue by saying

I have only a mother and no one can help my mother to generate money for our home. All the members of our family depend on the money our mother earns from working. Since the money our mother earns is not enough, I sometimes find it difficult to get money when I need to buy school supplies. For example, one day our classroom teacher asked us all to bring ten birrs for tomorrow to buy materials needed for us. The next day, I could not find the money, then I decided to be absent from school for that day due to failing to get that amount of money. (Tihun, 16 years of adolescent girl discussant, Gambella Town).

The above narrations of the interviewee and focus group discussant indicated that single-parent female adolescents are living in economic hardship which makes it difficult for them to fulfill basic needs for the family. Similarly, one key informant also explained as economic hardship is one difficulty of single parenting. Due to this financial problem of the single parents, the children from this family experience difficulty to fulfill school requirements, and this, in turn, brings another challenge to their school performance. Concurrently, other studies conducted on single parenting indicated that financial constraint is one of the big challenges single-parented families are experiencing [5, 22, 23]. Similarly, Golombok in his book outlined financial constraints as a big problem for single parents [24]. Mrinde also added that their parents did not have a reliable source of income to meet their school requirements such as school fees, other school contributions, stationery, bus fare, and even pocket money on time [25]. One single parent as a key informant told the researchers that she faced an economic challenge to lead her family. She explained that the entire members of the family is depending on the money she earns from working which makes it difficult to fulfill the requirements for her children. She narrated her story as follows; Raising a child without a husband is a challenge. Especially, the economic challenge is difficult as a single parent. I don't have another individual who helps me by earning additional income for the family. Every responsibility is on my shoulder. Since the money I got through working is not enough, I face difficulty in fulfilling what my children need to be fulfilled. The entire family member depends on the money I earn from working. Sometimes, I even find it difficult to buy school supplies. (Ajulu, 37 years old single mother key informant, Gambella Town).

From the above narration of the single mother, it is noted that being a single mother is challenging due to the economic hardship of the family. Single-parented female adolescents face difficulty in fulfilling their school equipment which is basic for learning. On this issue, another single parent strengthens the comments of the single-parented female adolescents by describing that she is fully responsible for earning income for her family without the help of anyone. She narrated the issue as follows; Raising a child without a husband is a challenge. I have seen many challenges in my life in raising my children. I am fully responsible for earning income for my home because I don't have

another person who helps me. Beyond the social stigma, the children need to have enough food, exercise books, pens, sanitation materials, clothes, shoes, and school uniforms and it is very difficult to meet these without another person who helps us. (Ayalnesh, 42 years of old single mother key informant, Gambella Zuria woreda).

From the above-lived experience of the single parent, we can understand that the main challenge of single parents is economic hardship. Single parents don't have other persons who help them in generating income for their families and this economic challenge in turn affects the educational performance of female adolescent students since it makes it difficult to fulfilling the school requirement of the students. This was also found in other studies [26-30]. Based on the responses of the research participants, this study discovered that single-parent households are more likely to be low-income households. As a result, the challenges associated with their socioeconomic status would apply to these children of single parents. When there is just one parent, the family is frequently less financially secure, which is the root of many family difficulties. Besides, the repercussions of coming from a low-income household might include things like a lower educational level, psychological and social effects, and leaving the children feeling alienated and lonely. The narration of the research participants collaborates with the finding of the study conducted by Zhan and Pandey [30] who have explained that due to their low earning capacity, low job opportunities in economically depressed areas, and meager public benefits single parents have experienced economic hardship and due to the economic hardship of the family the female adolescents experience its effects. This finding is also in accordance with other studies because economic difficulties are identified as one of the impacts of single parenting [5, 31-33]. Due to the economic difficulty of their parents, students from single-parent experience social stigma [34] and difficulty in fulfilling school learning materials.

Educational Effects

The study found that in addition to economic difficulties, single parenting also has educational effects on female adolescents. The study indicated that single parenting affects the educational achievement of female adolescents by increasing school absenteeism, decreasing educational performance, and increasing the chance of school dropout.

School Absenteeism and Late Coming

Another problem female adolescent student from single parents experience is school absenteeism. Interviewed single-parented female adolescents described that they rarely attend schools due to the poor economic situation of their families. To help their parents in alleviating economic hardship by generating additional income, the female adolescents were absent from school repeatedly. In line with this, one of the research participants, single parented female adolescent, described her story as follows; I live with my mother. My mother baked and sold bread to support our family. She (her mother) sometimes gets sick and this makes it difficult to do her work. As a result, the family is always in financial trouble and this often upset my mother. In our family including me, there are two students. We have a hard time buying school supplies, such as exercise books, pens, and school uniforms. For this reason, I am often absent from school and miss tests to help my mother in baking and selling pieces of bread. Besides, sometimes I reach school late because before I go to school I am expected to help my mother in the morning. (Kebebus, 15 years old female student interviewee, Gambella Zuria Woreda).

In addition to that, another single-parent female adolescent told the researcher that she was repeatedly absents from school to help her mother because her mother is the only one who brings money for the family by selling fruits in the street. In her word she narrated as follows; Financially our family is supported by my mother only. For the survival and fulfillment of the needs of our family, my mother sells fruits in the street of the town. She (her mother) is very tired when she comes home from work, and she doesn't have anyone to help her in this business. Sometimes I miss school to help her in selling fruits. As a result, beginning last year my school performance is reducing. (Tangut, 13 years old female student interviewee, Gambella Town).

From the above accounts, one can understand that single-parent female adolescent students face economic hardship in their homes, leading to the inability to get necessary school materials such as school uniforms, exercise books, pens, and other school needs. This economic hardship results in absenteeism and tardiness in school which affects their educational performance. Supporting this finding, the study conducted in Oyo state indicated that students from single parents are habitually latecomers to school [35]. Besides, this finding also

corroborates the finding of other researchers [26, 36-38].

Poor Academic Performance

Single parenting is a very important social issue that can have significant effects on a child's academic success. The family structure, ideally, provides a sense of security and stability that is necessary for children. When there is a breakdown in the family structure, it may have a tremendous impact on the academic performance of their children.

Similarly, the study found that the economic hardship experienced by single parents created another challenge to the academic performance of their children. In line with this, the following research participant described her experience as follows; Living with a single parent has many problems. I was better educated when my mother and father lived together. But, because of the separation of my mother and father, I had problems with my education. Although I did not fail, my annual results were very low compared to the past. For example, I was a good grader until grade four, but I had a hard time getting up in the fifth grade after my mother and father were separated. (Hiwot, 15 years of adolescent girl interviewee, Gambella Town).

One key informant, a teacher, narrated that

Her mother died last year. She was one of the best students in academic performances among the students we have in our school. She used to attend classes properly and she had good behavior. But, after the death of her mother, she has been automatically changed. She is repeatedly absent from school, her academic performance is reducing from day to day, her behavior is somewhat changed and even the relationship she has with her classmates and teachers is already changed. (Nardos, 47 years old key informant, teacher, Gambella Town). The above reflections tell us how single parenting affects the academic performance of female adolescent students. Here one can easily understand those female adolescents from single parents are faced with many problems such as economic hardship, increased psychological distress, and health and behavior problems that negatively affect the academic performance of the children. In line with this, Bago and Ferrell also found out that students from single-parent families are likely to have a higher absentee rate at school that contributes to low academic performance; have low marks, and drop out of school [39, 40]. However, the study conducted by

Oluwatosin and Joseph to measure the effects of single-parenthood on the academic performance of students revealed that there is no significant relationship between academic achievement and single parenting [29, 41]. This difference may be due to the economic status of single parents.

School Dropout

Another impact of single parenting on female adolescents is school dropout. Female adolescents from single parents experience a lot of challenges that hinder them from attending school which is essential for the betterment of their life. Many single parents face difficulty in fulfilling school materials because of the financial constraints they are facing and this situation contributes to the school dropout of single-parented female adolescents. Related to this one of the research participants narrated her and her sister's experience as follows; Children's priority to learn their education properly is to have a happy family and have school equipment but if that does not happen, children will be forced to drop out of school. I dropped out of school and my sister joined the prostitute due to the separation of our parents. We were repeatedly absent from school and we did not have the necessary educational equipment.

(Yordanos, 16 years old female adolescent interviewee, Gambella Town). The narrations of the above research participant reflected female students from single parent's experience school dropout because of their parent's separation. The research participant explained that single parents face difficulty in fulfilling school requirements for their children. The separation of the parents disturbs the situation of the family and the remaining parent is lonely responsible for fulfilling the wants and needs of the family members. For example, they are expected to fulfill the educational requirements of their children who are learning and failure of doing this makes their children drop out of school. In addition to that from the above story of the research participant, one can cognize that the separation of parents leads female adolescents to enter prostitution as a means to get money for survival that makes their life complicated.

The finding of this study is consistent with the study conducted by Mrinde on challenges that single-parent students are facing [25]. The study revealed that the challenges that single-parent students are facing have got a great impact on their schooling as attendance of the child at school is directly related to the situation at home. Likewise, Amoakohene asserts that the

academic performance of students from single parents is lower than students from two parents [42]. The finding of this study is in accordance with a study conducted in Oyo State that found that pupils of single parents perform lower in academic activities are habitual latecomers and engage in deviant behaviors in the school [35]. This study also indicated that counseling, supporting, encouraging distressed families, and showing love to their children were the solutions to the negative effect of single parenting on the pupil's academic performance in primary school. On the other hand, one research participant described that living with a single parent doesn't hurt the behavior and educational performance of children. Concerning this, one research participant stated that; I have lived with my mother since I was a child. My father died when I was 3 years old. I am now 9th grade and 17 years old. True, it is difficult to grow up alone with my mother, but my mother does not want me to have any problems, and even if my mother is always busy at work, I don't have bad behavior that differentiates me from those who have lived with their mother and father and I am also good in education. (Altash, 17 years old female student interviewee, Gambella Town), From the above narration, we can cognize that even though she lives with her mother alone and lost her father during her childhood she (the interviewee) doesn't experience difficulty more than other children who live with their intact parents. This finding is similar to the study conducted by Oluwatosin and Yaw and which shows there is no significant relationship between academic achievement and single parenting [29, 41].

Conclusion and Recommendations

As it was mentioned previously, the objective of the study was to investigate the economic and educational impacts of single parenting on female adolescent students. Based on the finding of the study it was concluded that female adolescent students from single parents encountered a lot of challenges that would be a hurdle for their future life. The study found that single parenting has economic and educational effects on female adolescents. They experience economic difficulties which is a challenge to fulfill basic needs and educational requirements. Besides, school absenteeism and late coming, poor academic performance, and school dropout were the major educational impacts of single parenting which are identified through the study. Based on the finding of the study, the following recommendations are

proposed for all concerned bodies. Since a multi-sectorial response is needed, the recommendations are forwarded to the female adolescents, parents, community, teachers, schools, government, and researchers. Parents and the community should work together to guide and counsel children from single parents to improve their future life. School counseling units/departments should put more emphasis on guidance and counseling to students from single-parent families to accept the situation of being single-parent children, work hard at school and improve their future life.

Teachers should be near to those single-parent female students to try to understand their problems, advise them on how to keep up with those problems, and give them academic support. Religious organizations should discourage their believers from divorcing their marriage partners. Single-parent female adolescents should be encouraged to try their best and concentrate on their education regardless of the challenges encountered in their upbringing as a result of the change in their family structure. The government should give adequate attention and support to children from single-parent homes. Local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should intervene to challenge the impacts of single parenting. Researchers are expected to conduct a study focusing on a large sample and adopt a survey design to establish the magnitude of the problem and be able to generalize the findings.

Declarations

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank all the individuals who participated in this study and Gambella University for funding this study.

Data Availability

The data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Funding

The study had been funded by Gambella University, Ethiopia.

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Cite this article: Gebrie F, Melsew S. (2024). Disentangling the Economic and Educational Impacts of Single Parenting on Adolescent Girl Students: in the Case of Gambella Region, Ethiopia. *Journal of Women Health Care and Gynecology*, BioRes Scientia Publishers. 4(1):1-7. DOI: 10.59657/2993-0871.brs.24.057

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Article History: Received: July 13, 2024 | Accepted: August 06, 2024 | Published: August 31, 2024