

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
OF CHILDREN RAISED BY SINGLE PARENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

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The Psychological Well-Being and Academic Achievement
of Children Raised by Single Parents

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The purpose of this study was to compare the psychological well-being of children raised by single mothers to the psychological well-being and academic performance of children raised by single fathers. In addition, the effects of same-gender parenting on children were examined.

A review of literature from the past 15 years revealed conflicting and contradictory views on what living arrangement is best for children being raised by one parent. Mothers and fathers have different parenting strengths and offer different emotional, academic, and financial resources to their children. Therefore, results do not

indicate a consensus regarding the superiority of one custody arrangement over another.

In general, the research indicated that custodial parents who had successfully adjusted to the divorce and who provided a warm, stable environment for their children were most likely to raise children who demonstrated emotional health and academic success.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This study was inspired by two former male students. Both students were raised by single fathers. Both were bright, articulate young men who were well liked by their peers and teachers. However, both students were dealing with the effects of having been “left” by their mothers; both mothers lived in other states and had very little contact with their sons.

Given the judicial system traditionally awards custody of children to the mother in cases of divorce, having these two students cross the writer's path at the same time seemed highly unusual. For a good part of the twentieth century the courts subscribed to the “tender years doctrine.” This doctrine stated that young children were better off with their mother during their formative or tender years (Downey & Powell, 1997). The mother commonly has been thought of as the nurturer, the more sensitive parent, and the parent who is better equipped emotionally to handle raising children alone. However, Farrell (2001) cited census figures indicating that homes led by single fathers increased from 10% in 1980 to nearly 19% in 1998. This represents nearly two million fathers who parent full-time. According to Rawlings and Saluter (cited in Hilton & Devall, 1998), single-father families are currently the fastest growing segment of the single-parent population.

Given that father-led homes are on the increase, several questions arise. In general, how well do children fare when raised by single parents? More specifically, are children raised solely by their fathers in a better situation, emotionally and academically, than children raised by their single mothers? Further, will the absence of a mother have

far-reaching emotional and academic effects on children? Conversely, does being raised by a single mother have a significant impact on children's sense of well-being and their academic performance? In addition, do children from mother-led homes display more behavior problems than do children from father-led homes?

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research was to compare the effects of being raised by single mothers and single fathers. Specifically, the focus was to compare the psychological well-being and academic performance of children raised by single mothers to the psychological well-being and academic performance of children raised by single fathers.

This research focused on studies conducted within the last 15 years, and was limited to studies of children living in the United States. This research was conducted by means of a literature review.

Research Objectives

Specific research objectives of this study were to:

1. Examine the psychological and behavioral effects on children from single parent homes.
2. Examine the academic effects on children from single parent homes.
3. Compare the effects on children raised by single mothers and single fathers.

Definition of Terms

There are several terms used throughout this paper that need to be clarified.

They are:

Academic achievement -- A child's performance in school, measured not only by

grade reports, but also by teacher observation and the student's own self-perception.

Psychological well-being -- A general sense of emotional health as evidenced by high self-esteem and positive relationships with others, and a lack of anxiety, depression, and deviant behavior.

Single parent family -- A family headed by one adult, either a mother or a father. The adult may be a single parent through divorce, widowhood, incarceration or having never married.

Socioeconomic Status (SES) -- The social and economic standing of a family measured in terms of income, occupational prestige, and education.

Assumptions of the Study

Approximately half of all marriages in the United States end in divorce, leaving many children to be raised by one parent (Department of Commerce, 2003). In addition, there are many families led by never-married single parents and families led by a widowed parent. While this research will not attempt to distinguish between these variables, it is important for educators to realize that many children in their classrooms come from single-parent households due to divorce. It is further assumed that the information learned in this study will be useful to educators who want to better understand the obstacles that hinder a child's emotional and academic development when raised by a single parent.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This chapter will review research from the past 15 years describing the emotional, social, and academic effects on children raised by single parents. This literature review will begin with a discussion of the psychological well-being of children raised by a single parent, followed by a discussion of the academic achievement of children from single parent homes. The chapter will conclude with a review of the literature regarding the effects of being raised by a parent of the same gender.

Psychological well-being

Parental contact

There is a wealth of research evidence concluding that the effects on children's psychological well-being are enormous when parents divorce. Clarke-Stewart and Hayward (1996) cited studies documenting the deleterious effects of divorce on children's self esteem, achievement in school, and psychological adjustment. Clarke-Stewart and Hayward (1996) offered several hypotheses as to which aspects of divorce had the greatest impact on children's sense of well-being. Notably, the amount of time children spent with the non-custodial parent and the emotional environment provided by the custodial parent were hypothesized as being contributory factors. Additional research suggested that children who lived with their fathers had a greater sense of well-being than did children who lived with their mothers (Biller & Kimpton, 1997; Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996; Farrell, 2001; Hilton & Devall, 1998).

Clarke-Stewart and Hayward (1996) noted that past studies investigating non-custodial parental contact produced inconsistent results. Some studies showed that time

spent with the non-resident parent was very important to children's well-being, while other studies showed no relation at all. Another body of research suggested that contact with the non-resident parent was actually detrimental to the children's well-being and caused more problems (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

In their research, Clarke-Stewart and Hayward (1996) studied 187 children; 115 in single mother homes and 72 in single father homes. Each family was interviewed once for 1 1/2 hours. The custodial parent and the child were interviewed separately. Standardized tests and parental reports were used to measure the child's psychological well-being and perceived adjustment to the divorce. Results of the interviews showed that time spent with the non-custodial parent was important to the children. Their psychological well-being was affected by two aspects of contact with the non-custodial parent: spending holidays together and participating in a variety of everyday activities together. Rather than spending time going out to eat or taking big vacations together, children preferred doing everyday tasks with the non-resident parent, such as doing homework, watching TV, or just talking. The researchers noted that out of all the variables considered, contact with the non-resident parent was the only predictor of psychological well-being for girls in the study. Additionally, children who had close contact with the non-resident parent tended to have better relationships overall with both parents, and this contributed to a strong sense of well-being. Clarke-Stewart and Hayward (1996) noted that it was important for both parents to remain "full service" parents if their children were to experience psychological growth and strength. In most cases, children reportedly loved both of their parents and strongly wanted contact with both.

Unfortunately, non-custodial parents, mothers and father alike, tend to become more permissive following a divorce (Dornbush, et al., cited in Carlson, 1997; Hilton & Desrochers, 2002; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994.) Non-custodial mothers especially are prone to permissiveness, while non-custodial fathers tend to become either overly indulgent, taking on a "recreational, companionate role" or disengaging from their children entirely (Carlson, 1997, p. 625).

Emotional environment

The emotional environment provided by the custodial parent also appears to have an effect on children's well-being. Hilton and Desrochers (2002) cited the "parental adjustment perspective," which posits that the parent's psychological state after a divorce has a direct effect on children's well-being (p. 31). Clarke-Stewart and Hayward (1996) found that children had stronger relationships with both parents and a greater sense of psychological well-being when the custodial parent had made a successful emotional adjustment to the divorce -- especially those children in mother custody. Single mothers seemed to suffer more following a divorce, perhaps because they typically experienced a severe loss of income since due to a lack of child support (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). According to McLanahan and Sandefur (1994), the loss of a husband's income (and the psychological effect on the custodial parent) was one of the most important factors in determining a child's well-being. Carlson (1997) agreed, noting that in single parent families, parenting abilities are affected by the family's financial status (p. 625). In particular, single mothers suffer higher stress rates due to a loss of economic status, possibly leading to maternal depression -- "predict[ing] negative maternal attitudes and ineffective parenting" (p. 625).

In another study, Hilton and Devall (1998) gathered data from 30 single-mother families, 30 single-father families, and 30 intact families. The researchers found that besides having to adjust to a lower standard of living, single mothers also experienced less access to occupational training and less access to the higher education needed to pull themselves and their children out of poverty. Additionally, the researchers found that "occupational segregation, wage differentials, and the glass ceiling" contributed to the challenges facing single mothers (p. 74). Given these obstacles, single mothers tended to feel more overwhelmed in their parenting role, experiencing high stress levels and depression (Carlson, 1997; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). The authors posited that a combination of these factors could lead to ineffective parenting, with the single mother unable to provide the firm, loving discipline that children need to develop a strong sense of security and well-being.

McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) noted that divorced families move more often, especially families headed by a single mother. Whether due to a change in jobs or the need for a smaller home that is more affordable, single mothers often make changes in residence once the father moves out and the family income decreases. Single mothers also tend to disengage from family and friends, not taking the time to maintain old relationships or to build new supportive ones. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) asserted that single mothers tend to be so depressed at their lack of status and income following their divorces, they had no energy to maintain relationships. The authors asserted that this lack of family and friendship connections can have a detrimental effect on children's well-being, as they see their old, well-known world fall away.

Single fathers, on the other hand, tend to experience much more psychological stability after a divorce than did single mothers (Biller & Kimpton, 1997; Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996; Farrell, 2001; Hilton & Devall, 1998). Research also suggests that children who live with their fathers experience a greater sense of well-being than do children who live with their mothers (Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996; Hilton & Devall, 1998).

Ambert (cited in Schnayer & Orr, 1989) suggested that fathers were more effective single parents because our society tends to look more favorably on single fathers. According to Ambert, single fathers did not experience a decline in social status as did single mothers, and single fathers were more likely to receive offers of help from family and friends. In addition to having a stronger support system, single fathers had higher incomes and were therefore less likely to require child support.

Single fathers tend to have fewer children to take care of (Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996). In addition, children in father-led homes generally have stronger relationships with their non-custodial mothers than children in mother-led homes have with their fathers (Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996). For reasons not specifically clear, non-custodial mothers often stay more connected to their children after a divorce than do non-custodial fathers (Carlson, 1997; Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996), even though mothers tend to live farther away from their children than do fathers (Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996).

Using data from the 1990 National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) and from General Social Surveys, 1972-1994, Downey, Ainsworth-Darnell and Dufur (1998) compared the well-being of children living in single mother and single father homes. The

researchers studied the theory that since single mothers and single fathers parent in different ways, there should be measurable differences in children's well-being from one household to another.

For instance, Downey, et al. (1998) cites several studies hypothesizing that mothers generally are more adept at meeting children's interpersonal needs. Therefore, children raised by their mothers would have stronger skills for building relationships. Fathers, on the other hand, have traditionally been seen as stronger disciplinarians, so children raised in father-led homes should demonstrate fewer behavior problems.

Using the NELS data, Downey, et al. (1998) compared occupational prestige, family income, parents' education, parents' age, and race. They found that for nearly every characteristic measured, single mothers were at a distinct disadvantage compared to single fathers. Single fathers had higher occupational prestige, higher income (\$36,984 vs. \$25,309), and more education (14.3 years vs. 13.5 years).

Evidence from the Downey, et al. (1998) study did not support the idea that a child's well-being suffered as a result of being raised by a single mother despite the mother's economic and educational disadvantages. Indeed, few differences in self-concept were found between children of mother-led and father-led homes, and a majority of the children had no problems forming quality relationships with others. This contradicts the assumption that children are "handicapped by the absence of a maternal role model" (p. 887). Additionally, the researchers reported that when teachers were surveyed, children from father-led homes appeared to be less well behaved and had a harder time getting along with others compared to children from mother-led homes. This contradicts the theory that fathers are more successful disciplinarians than mothers.

Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1997) noted that although children from divorced homes did experience more psychological and behavioral problems than children from intact homes, 70% to 80% of these children emerged as "reasonably competent and well-adjusted individuals" after a time of readjustment to the divorce (p. 198).

Much of the reviewed research painted a mixed picture as to which aspects of parenting were most important to a child's sense of well-being after a divorce. What seemed most apparent was that while single mothers and single fathers tended to parent in different ways, it was the amount of time that a parent personally invested in his or her child that most influenced the child's degree of self-worth or sense of well-being. Research seemed to indicate that the parent who focused on providing a nurturing environment for his or her children was the parent who experienced the most success in raising emotionally healthy children. General statistics show that overall, children living in mother-led and father-led homes tended to be equal in terms of having a strong, highly involved parent -- 49% and 46% (Downey, Ainsworth-Darnell, & Dufur; 1998).

Same-gender parenting

Clarke-Stewart and Hayward (1996) and Downey and Powell (1997) examined the question of same-gender parenting as it pertained to a child's sense of well-being. Downey and Powell (1997) note that a prevailing thought among some researchers is that if a child has to live in a single parent home, it is better for boys to live with their fathers and for girls to live with their mothers. Citing the adage that "a boy needs a father to become a man" and noting the bond between a mother and her daughter, the researchers asserted that the same-gender theory fits "commonsense conceptions of maternal and paternal roles" (p. 521).

There is some evidence that same-gender parenting can have an effect on a child's psychological well-being. An early study by Santrock and Warshak (cited in Carlson, 1997; Downey & Powell, 1997; Farrell, 2001) found that boys demonstrated more sociability and maturity when they lived with their fathers, while boys who lived with their mothers tended to be more demanding and had more home and school behavior problems. Girls raised by their mothers appeared to be more confident in social situations. Carlson (1997) and Downey and Powell (1997) both noted, however, that the sample used in the Santrock and Warshak study ($n = 65$) was too small to provide conclusive, generalizable results.

In a study cited earlier in this report, Clarke-Stewart and Hayward (1996) investigated 187 children from single-parent families. In addition to assessing the general well-being among the children sampled, the researchers also specifically measured the well-being of boys in father custody ($n = 39$) and girls in mother custody ($n = 59$). Gender-of-child by gender-of-parent analyses were conducted, and this finding showed no evidence to support the same-gender theory set forth by the Santrock and Warshak study.

What the Clarke-Stewart and Hayward (1996) study did reveal, however, was that both boys and girls in the study did better in the custody of their fathers. In terms of well-being and self-esteem, the research showed "strong and consistent" results for both boys and girls being raised by fathers (p. 257). Downey and Powell (1997) suggested these results may have had more to do with the father's ability to provide a higher standard of living than superior parenting skills.

In a literature review regarding same-gender custody, Downey and Powell (1997) extended their report to include data from three separate studies: the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, High School and Beyond, and the General Social Survey. After analyzing the data and reviewing the literature, Downey and Powell (1997) again found no evidence to support the same-gender parenting theory. The authors offered several explanations for these results. First, children often identify with same-gender role models outside the home, such as parents of friends, teachers, and media idols. Therefore, the influence of the opposite-sex parent becomes an important counterbalance, especially as children move into adolescence and begin to interact with friends of the opposite sex. Second, the researchers argued that in the absence of a second adult in the home, the single parent becomes more androgynous and assumes many of the roles and attributes of the absent parent. Third, much of the research measuring the well-being of children in single-parent homes focused on boys raised by mothers since single mothers form the bulk of the single-parent population. Downey and Powell (1997) asserted that "some scholars have used the negative pattern for boys as a springboard for the same-sex argument" and they note the "undue attention" given to troubled young men living with their mothers (p. 537). The researchers argued that it is the absence of a second parent that contributes to the negative effects of living in a single parent home, regardless of the custodial parent's sex. Hetherington (cited in Carlson, 1997) maintained that boys in mother custody show more negative outcomes because of a "coercive" parenting style (p. 618) arguing that relationships between single mothers and their sons tend to be fraught with arguments and complaints, as well as a lack of consistent rules and punishments. Hetherington (cited in Carlson, 1997) suggests that although it may be difficult, single

mothers need to be authoritative with their sons to promote healthy emotional development. Carlson (1997) concludes "an authoritative parenting style, regardless of the sex of the child or sex of the parent, produces the best child development outcomes for youth . . ." (p. 620).

Academic achievement

As stated previously, it is widely acknowledged that single fathers tend to have higher incomes. Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1997) stated that, in addition to greater financial resources, single fathers also have access to better housing, schools, and child-care options. Given that a child's life chances can be directly related to family income, it may be surmised that children who come from economically disadvantaged single-mother homes would experience less success in school than children from father-led homes.

Much of the reviewed literature regarding the school achievement of children from single parent families indicated that family income can be a predictor of children's academic success (Downey, 1994; Farrell, 2001; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Schnayer & Orr, 1989). McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) stated that economic poverty was the most important factor when analyzing the poor academic achievement of children from single-mother homes. Downey (1994) concurred, stating that economic distress must be considered when attempting to understand the academic difficulties of children from mother-led homes.

There were several ways that income (or the lack of it) can affect a child's school achievement. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) stated that children who lived in poverty tended to live in neighborhoods with poorer schools. In addition, less family income

meant less money for after-school music lessons and dance lessons, summer sports camps, and other activities that fostered intellectual stimulation in children. For example, Downey (1994) found that 26% of single fathers were able to provide their children with computers for educational use, while only 16% of single mothers were able to do the same. In addition, according to the Downey study, single fathers tended to provide more educational objects (such as dictionaries and encyclopedias) and were able to save more money for their children's college expenses.

McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) also found that mothers who had to work longer hours at low-paying jobs had less time to be involved in their children's daily lives, especially related to their schooling. Having a parent take the time to read to a child or help with homework can be an immeasurable advantage; mothers who worked long hours tended to be overwhelmed with their parenting responsibilities and could offer less academic support to their children (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

Children coming from an economically disadvantaged mother-led home also appeared to have less motivation and lowered expectations for themselves compared to peers living in better circumstances. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994), for example, stated that children who didn't expect to go to college tended to not work as hard in high school. Those researchers also noted that children from mother-led homes who received no child support from their fathers had little expectation of receiving financial support for college.

An earlier study by Schnayer and Orr (1989) showed that there was little difference in the academic achievement of children coming from mother-led homes and children coming from father-led homes. Schnayer and Orr administered the Self-Perception

Profile for Children (SPPC) to 62 children, ages six to 16, who lived in single-parent families. The SPPC consisted of 36 items that contained two statements. The child indicated which statement best described him or her, such as "some kids feel that they are good at their school work but other kids worry that they cannot do the school work assigned to them" (p. 175). The child then marked whether the statement chosen was "sort of true" or "really true." Included in the SPPC was a subscale for scholastic competence, along with other subscales that measured such constructs as perceived self-worth, perceived athletic ability, and perceived popularity.

Schnayer and Orr (1989) found scores measuring the academic achievement of children from single-mother and single-father families did not differ dramatically. The only exception to this finding was on the perceived scholastic competence subscale. Children from single-mother homes scored significantly higher than those raised by single fathers. Citing several earlier studies, Schnayer and Orr (1989) suggested that this difference was likely related to the number of years a child had lived in a single-parent home. They noted that immediately after a divorce, a child's school performance tends to decline, a finding corroborated by Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1997). Since most of the single mothers in the Schnayer and Orr study were parenting alone for a longer period of time than the single fathers, the researchers attributed the difference in scores to the length of time since the divorce, rather than to the sex of the parent. Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1997) asserted that most families achieved "homeostasis" within two years of a divorce and were able to function fairly well as long as no new crises presented themselves (p. 201).

Downey (1994) concurred with McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) in that income can have an effect on children's success in school. However, consistent with Schnayer and Orr (1989), Downey's research also indicated that children from father-led homes did no better in school than children from mother-led homes. In his research, Downey measured eight educational outcomes for 409 children in single-father and 3,483 children in single-mother led homes. Grades, science, math, reading, history, effort, obedience, and student educational expectations were used as outcome measures. There were no measurable differences in the grade point averages between single-mother and single-father homes. In teacher evaluations of effort and obedience, the scores also were comparable. The only area where children from single-father homes performed better was on standardized tests, especially in math and science. Biller and Kimpton (1997) agreed with the Downey finding, stating that boys especially showed stronger cognitive development and problem-solving abilities when given a high degree of support and nurturance from their fathers. This was also corroborated by Farrell (2001), who cited studies suggesting that a child's math and science aptitudes were affected by the presence of a father in the home. Farrell (2001) maintained that both sons and daughters do better in these areas when the father is involved.

Besides measuring the educational outcomes of children from single parent homes, Downey (1994) also measured the amount of involvement single parents have in their children's academic life. Downey found that mothers were more likely to attend PTA and other school meetings, as well as specific school events. Single mothers were also more likely to know their children's friends and the parents of those friends. Fathers scored higher on "parent's educational expectations," while both mothers and fathers

scored comparably on "help with homework" and "talk" (e.g., talking about the child's school day).

Finally, it must be noted that the school environment itself can have a marked effect on the academic achievement of children from single parent homes. A school that provides a stable and structured environment and warm, nurturing teachers will see greater academic (and social) achievement by those children, especially for children coming from permissive homes (Hetherington, cited in Carlson, 1997).

CHAPTER THREE

Summary and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter will include a summary and discussion of the results of the literature reviewed. Summaries of the psychological well-being and academic achievement of children raised in single parent homes will be presented first, followed by a discussion of research results regarding the effects of same-gender parenting. This chapter will also discuss the limitations of the literature review, as well as implications for future research and practice.

Psychological well-being

Results suggested that children's well-being was associated with participation in a wide range of activities with the non-custodial parent (Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996). Children benefited more from participating in everyday activities, such as grocery shopping and going to the library, than they did from going on one-shot big vacations, like Disneyland. This regular close contact with the non-custodial parent had the added effect of the children getting along better with both parents. Getting along with both parents appeared to increase the children's sense of well-being.

The emotional environment provided by the custodial parent appeared to be directly affected by that parent's ability to adjust to the divorce. Children's mental health was stronger and the children had better relationships with both parents when the custodial parent had made a healthy adjustment to the divorce (Carlson, 1997; Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996; Hilton & Desrochers, 2002; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

The ability of the custodial single parent to successfully provide a nurturing environment for the children appeared to be affected by the family's socio-economic status. In general, single mothers have a harder time making ends meet. Mothers had more difficulty securing well-paying jobs and more difficulty getting further education or job training. Single mothers typically did not receive enough child support to maintain the standard of living the family was accustomed to before the divorce (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Because of the financial strain experienced by many single mothers, they tended to be more anxious, depressed, and overwhelmed with parenting issues (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

Single fathers, on the other hand, fared much better economically. They were able to maintain a socio-economic status more similar to what the children experienced before the divorce. Single fathers also maintained more social status than single mothers, and they tended to receive more outside help with the children from family and friends (Biller & Kimpton, 1997; Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996; Farrell, 2001; Hilton & Devall, 1998).

Given these differences in environment, it was expected that children raised by single fathers would have a stronger sense of well-being than children raised by single mothers. It was found that mothers enhanced their children's well-being through interpersonal interactions, such as engaging in conversations about topics important to the children. Fathers, however, contributed to their children's well-being by setting "expectations" for them, such as getting homework done and going to school everyday. Despite the differences in socio-economic status, it was the amount of time invested in

the children and the custodial parent's adjustment after the divorce that appeared to affect the child's well-being (Downey, Ainsworth-Darnell, & Dufur, 1998).

Research into the hypothesis that children fare better in the custody of a same-sex parent provided contradictory results. Some studies indicated that the sex of the custodial parent had no bearing on the emotional health of the children (Downey & Powell, 1993, 1997), while other studies asserted that same-gender parenting is crucial to children's sense of well-being (Schnayer & Orr, 1989). A third body of research maintained that all children -- boys and girls alike -- do better when in the custody of their fathers (Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996; Farrell, 2001).

Schnayer and Orr (1989) suggested that the decision regarding which parent should receive custody of the children should not be based on the sex of the child or the parent. Rather, an assessment of each parent should be undertaken to determine what each has to offer the children. Financial considerations, psychological adjustment to the divorce, and other qualities that would influence the emotional environment of the home should all be factored into the decision of who will receive custody, not the sex of the parent.

Academic achievement

Research regarding academic achievement of children from single parent homes was also contradictory. Some researchers claimed that children in father-led homes did better academically since fathers had greater economic resources and could provide better schools and more educational materials such as computers and encyclopedias (Downey, 1994; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Other researchers argued that the academic achievement of children from mother-led and

father-led families did not differ dramatically (Downey, 1994; Schnayer & Orr, 1989). Despite economic hardships, mothers tended to be more involved in school functions and were more likely to stay in touch with their children's teachers, factors that enhanced their children's school performance (Downey, 1994). This mixed picture suggests that single mothers and single fathers provide different types of resources and support for their children. Children appeared to profit academically when both parents provided aspects of an orderly and nurturing home life.

Limitations of the Study

Given that single mothers are more prevalent, it is important to note that the manner in which the sexes become single parents may affect children. In a study cited by Downey, Ainsworth-Darnell, and Dufur (1998), mothers tend to become single parents due to a mutual agreement between the two parents. However, fathers are more likely to become single fathers due to contest, or because the spouse was considered "unsuitable." Whether a parent seeks the responsibility of raising the children or finds it thrust upon him or her, it is important to recognize the various ways that parents become single parents because the conditions affecting the single parent household can also affect the children.

A second limitation of this study was that most of the subjects in the literature reviewed were volunteers, and some came from single-parent support groups. Therefore, it would be difficult to generalize the findings of this review to the population as a whole. In addition, a number of the studies researching father-led homes involved fathers who were "self-selected." That is, these particular fathers chose to seek custody of their children, custody was not thrust upon them. Further, the research tended to focus on

white, middle-income fathers, ignoring the sizable number of minority fathers with low socio-economic status.

An additional limitation to this research is that a child's academic achievement and psychological well-being can be affected by the amount of contact the child has with the non-custodial parent (Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996). It is widely accepted that all children do better with two involved parents; therefore, a child who has a non-custodial parent who is still an active part of the child's life may have a stronger sense of well-being than a child who does not have this advantage.

The final limitation of this research is that it is a literature review, encompassing only a small portion of published research from the past 15 years. By its very nature, it does not contribute new empirical evidence to the field.

Implications for future research

Given the dissenting opinions within the research reviewed, it is imperative that research in this area continue in order to discern what works and what doesn't work for children within single parent families. The first suggestion for further study would be to expand the base from which volunteers are recruited. Using support group volunteers for this type of research is a good place to start, but perhaps other recruiting methods could be implemented. Researchers could draw participants from a broader base of schools, inner-city youth centers and court records.

In addition, it appears that more research needs to be done regarding minority and low SES father-led homes. Given that father-led homes are the fastest growing segment of the single parent population, this subset of the population should be included in future studies. Poor, minority families led by a single parent are the families most in need of

child-related services, and it is time to focus on those families where fathers have taken on the task of child rearing. It is important to determine what factors produce successful or unsuccessful children within this population. Information from this research would be valuable to the courts in determining custody and visitation rights.

Third, it is obvious that socio-economic status plays a big part in determining how well a child will do after his or her parents divorce. It is also obvious that a parent's adjustment to the divorce and interpersonal skills can influence how well a child will adjust to a divorce. The interplay between these aspects need to be studied further. For example, a study could test the theory that a drop in socio-economic status has the most profound effect on a child's well-being after a divorce.

Implications for practice

It is one thing to read divorce statistics in a journal or newspaper. It is quite another to see the faces of those statistics in a classroom. It is not enough to know that a child comes from a single-parent home. Teachers, counselors, and administrators need to have a knowledge of those factors that affect children from single-parent homes, to better understand the behaviors and attitudes of the children they are teaching.

While many children in single parent homes grow up into successful, mature adults, Carlson (1997) cautions that many children being raised in single parent homes may not reach their full potential, due to "inadequate family resources" (p. 626). These inadequate resources may include poor parenting by the custodial parent, an uninvolved non-custodial parent, a lack of income, and a lack of parental involvement with the school. Teachers, counselors, and administrators need to understand that children raised in floundering families need schools that are warm, nurturing, structured and

authoritative. Although boys and girls differ in what specific aspects of school are most crucial to their success, boys and girls alike need a structured, predictable routine to develop a sense of security. This sense of security will enhance their emotional, social, and academic competence.

School personnel also need to provide support to the mother or father who is parenting solo. Having a teacher or counselor to consult and collaborate with can be an immeasurable help in raising well-adjusted and successful children. In addition, school personnel often have knowledge of community-based resources that can offer assistance to divorced families. Meeting with single parent families on a regular basis will help ensure that parents are made aware of these resources, thus enhancing their parenting skills and the chances of raising emotionally healthy children.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to compare the psychological well-being of children raised by single mothers to the psychological well-being and academic performance of children raised by single fathers. In addition, the effects of same-gender parenting on children were examined.

A review of literature from the past 15 years revealed conflicting and contradictory views on what living arrangement is best for children raised by one parent. Mothers and fathers have different parenting strengths and offer different emotional, academic, and financial resources to their children. Therefore, results do not indicate a consensus regarding the superiority of one custody arrangement over another. In general, the research indicated that custodial parents who had successfully adjusted to the divorce

and who provided a warm, stable environment for their children were most likely to raise children who demonstrated emotional health and academic success.

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