

**CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE OF SEPARATION: A STUDY OF SEPARATED
FAMILIES IN NATEETE PARISH, RUBAGA DIVISION, KAMPALA CITY**

BY

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Declaration

I Nankinga Catherine Carol hereby declare that this dissertation entitled 'Children's experience of separation: A study of separated families in Nateete Parish, Rubaga Division, Kampala City' is my original work and it has never been submitted by any person. All the sources like websites, books and journals that I used have been cited and out under references.

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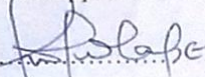
29th/02/2022

Signature

Date

Approval

This research has been compiled and documented by Nankinga Catherine Carol in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor's degree of Social Work and Social Administration of Makerere University. This research has been completed and submitted for examination with the approval of my supervisor.

Signature.....

Date.....29/12/2022

Assoc. Prof. Eddy J. Walakira

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to all children and youths from separated families. I want you to know that you're not a mistake and God is able to write a great story out of whatever you go through, you are loved by God. I also want to dedicate it to my family and friends that together we can change lives of children and youths in this world.

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I want to thank God for His love and grace towards me and for every opportunity he has given me to run this race, I don't take it for granted.

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Abstract

The study described children's experiences of separation in Nateete parish, Rubaga Division, Kampala City. Specifically, the study examined the psychological, social experiences and coping mechanism of children in separated families in Nateete Parish, Rubaga Division and Kampala City.

The study employed a purely qualitative approach, using in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. The participants included children aged 14-17years who narrated their experiences and coping strategies, as well as parents and teachers who spend significant time with the children.

The study findings indicated that children in separated families often experience psychological issues such as sadness, loss of interest in activities, low mood, confusion, frustration, anger, and aggressive behavior towards their peers. They may also have attachment problems with the parent who left. In terms of social issues, these children may struggle to open up to their parents, miss the parent who left, and feel lonely, isolated, or have strained relationships with the parent they live with. If these children are not given proper attention after separation, they may turn to negative coping mechanisms such as drug use, transactional sex, or theft.

In conclusion, psychosocial support is crucial in aiding children who have experienced parental separation to manage the psychological and social challenges they face. This support can help these children cope more positively and effectively with the changes. It is important to provide this support at any stage of the child's life, as the effects of parental separation can be long-lasting.

List of abbreviations

MF	-	Mother of Female
MM	-	Mother of Male
NGO	-	Non Government Organization
OECD	-	The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONS	-	Office for National Statics
UYDEL	-	Uganda Youth Development Link

Chapter one: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter comprises of the background of the study, statement of the problem, general objective, specific objectives, significance, justification and scope

1.1 Study background

Separation is a significant life event that carries an increased risk of negative consequences and poorer life chances for both parents and children (Amato, 2005; Mooney et al, 2009, Goisis et al, 2016). For many children, family break-up brings social and emotional instability coupled with financial disadvantage that can impact on all areas of their lives, from economic and material to deeply-felt social and emotional insecurity (Ridge, 2002).

Parental separation affects approximately one third of all marriages in many societies. Parental separation has been related to diverse negative outcomes of the child, including mental and physical health problems (Felitti & Anda, 2010). Many children from separated families show difficulties in functioning, including frequent emotional and behavioral problems (Amato, 2001; Lansford et al., 2006; Spruijt & Kormos, 2014).

However, family conflict often long precedes the actual physical separation, thus making it difficult to determine whether the negative effects on children are caused by the parental separation or by the family conflict (Goldthorpe, 2001), which increases the risk of separation as well as causing child maladjustment (McLanahan et al , 2013).

Divorce has devastating effects on partners, children, family and the wider community. The effects of divorce on children are psychological, social, emotional and economical (Eyo, 2018). These effects were identified as feelings of anger, feelings of abandonment, helplessness and self-blame, self-mutilation, confusion, depression, and mixed feelings of anger, loss, trauma and loneliness. The effects of parental divorce may be permanent and therefore cause the child to conclude issues that will have negative impacts on them for the rest of their lives. They might have lost meaning of parents and family; they might be confused about marriage and their children may have in their future (Sehlabaka, 2014)

According to David and Alan (1988), High divorce rates in the United States over the past 20 years have resulted in numerous changes in American family life, with perhaps the most important consequences bearing on children whose families were disrupted. In 1970, 12% of American families with children under age 18 were headed by single parent.

According to Caroline et al, (2017) experiences of growing up or parenting in a separated household are different in a number of key respects from the experiences within families where both parents live together. When families are separated, it is not sufficient (as many studies do) to focus solely (or largely) on the resident parent and their household. Nor is it sufficient (again as many studies do) to assume any resident parent's partner plays a primary 'father figure' (or other parent) role, regardless of their actual relationship to the child.

According to ONS (2016) the absolute number and proportion of families and children who experience separation in the UK is substantial. One in six children are born into a family in which their birth parents do not live together and one in three children experience the separation of their parents during their childhood (OECD, 2013). Around two percent of families with dependent children separate each year (authors' analysis), resulting in 2.5 million separated families raising over four million children at any point in time (Punton et al, 2012). Three million children are living in single parent households (25 percent of children), and a further one million with stepparents (eight percent of children) (ONS, 2015).

According to Caroline et al, (2017) despite the high proportion of children living in separated families, the survey data about their lives are often inferior to those for families in which parents live together. The added complexity of family life in separated families tends to be insufficiently reflected in the questions asked and/or who is interviewed as part of the study. There is often a primary focus (in terms of questions and respondents) on the household in which the child is living.

In developed countries, where there is extensive literature about the stepfamily, it was shown that this type of family arrangement is disruptive and has detrimental consequences for young adults, adolescents, and children, especially in terms of schooling, health, and harmful behaviors (Amato 2001; Case et al, 2001; Dawson 1991; Heckman 2011).

According to Gage (1997) the handful of studies that have investigated the consequences of divorce for African children produce even more dire findings than those documented in high-income countries. For instance, Kenyan children of formerly married mothers are significantly more likely to be malnourished and to miss out on key vaccinations compared to their peers with married mothers. Results from research in Burkina Faso corroborate these findings, demonstrating that children of divorced mothers have higher risk of under-five mortality compared to their peers with married mothers (Thiombiano et al, 2013). Supplementing these country-specific studies, a recent multinational study further confirms that African children with divorced parents face substantially higher mortality risk, although the impact of divorce varies across countries: the effect is non-significant in Ghana and Zambia, but is associated with a 36 percent increase in the risk of dying in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 52 percent in Liberia, 57 percent in Nigeria, and an almost two-fold increase in Sierra Leone (Clark and Hamplová 2013). Further evidence shows that African children with divorced mothers who survive childhood face educational setbacks, including delayed school entry (Thiombiano et al, 2013) and lower educational attainment compared to their peers with married parents (Chae 2013).

Together, literature on parental divorce and child wellbeing in Africa, matched with the literature on North American and European societies, confirms that divorce disadvantages children in a wide range of countries; however, the magnitude of its childhood disadvantages appears to be greater in historical periods and cultural contexts where it is rare and lessened in those where it is more prevalent (Amato and Keith 1991, Amato 1994, Lacey et al. 2012)

Martin et al (2020) Divorce or separation problems have particularly negative impact on children. In the most dramatic cases of family breakdown, the children are exposed to abuse, torture and exploitation. Family breakdown can lead to situations of children getting into conflicts with the law, or even ending up living on the streets. The well-being and best interests of children are also key dimension of divorce or separation procedures. When relationships are breaking, the children are the most vulnerable participants. In extreme cases, such consequences can aggravate considerably.

A meta-analytical shows that children with divorced parents experience more problems in such variables as academic achievement, psychological adjustment, social adjustment and self-concept compared to children of continuously intact two-parent families (Amoto, & Keith, 1991).

1.2 Problem statement

Separation is experienced by couples irrespective of their social, religious, academic, political and economic status (Eyo, 2018). Separation is caused by various reasons for example religious reasons, economic, domestic violence, sexual incompatibility, extra marital affairs, medical reasons, addiction, unrealized expectations. (Eyo, 2018).

The social learning theory emphasizes the significance of role models, focusing on parents as the initial and primary reinforces of child behavior (Bandura and Walters, 1963). Children reared in households where the two biological parents are not present will exhibit lower levels of wellbeing than their counterparts in intact nuclear families. The adverse effects on youthful wellbeing will be acute when the cause of parental absence is marital separation, divorce or desertion. (David and Alan, 1988).

Failure of children to adapt to the changing structure of the family leads to negative ways of adaptation to parental divorce or separation, such as drug abuse, becoming street children, engaging in criminal behaviors, developing sexual behavioral disorders and exhibiting other abnormal behavior. Therefore the main purpose of this research is to find out the experiences of those children after separation that might have triggered them to live a lifestyle different from children in intact families and to identify ways to help them adapt positively after the separation of their parents.

1.3 Objectives of the study

1.3.1 General objective

To assess the experiences of children in separated families in Nateete Parish

1.3.2 Specific objectives

1. To describe the psychological experiences of children in separated families in Nateete Parish
2. To describe the social experiences of children in separated families in Nateete Parish
3. To examine the coping mechanism of children in separated families in Nateete Parish

1.4 Research questions

1. What psychological experiences do children in separated families go through?
2. What social experiences do children in separated families go through?
3. What is the coping mechanism of children in separated families?

1.5 Significance

The study will enable researchers and people who work with children to design policies and programs that will help children from divorced and separated families to positively adapt to the changes in the structure of their families and also cope with the trauma. The findings will also evoke further research in the area of study.

1.6 Justification

If the problems affecting children in separated families are not addressed, the children will continue to use negative coping mechanisms that will have a lasting impact on their lives. For instance, they may decide not to marry, struggle to socialize with their peers, turn to drugs or other substances to cope with the trauma.

1.7 Scope of the study

1.7.1 Content scope

The study focused on the psychosocial experiences of children in separated families in Rubaga Division-Kampala City.

1.7.2 Geographical scope

Geographically, the study was carried out in Kampala district Uganda. Kampala is located in the district of Kampala at 0°19'N 32°35'E, at 3,900ft (1,189m) above sea level.

1.7.3 Time frame

The study took a period of about 5 months.

Chapter two: Literature review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents literature in relation to experiences of children in separated families on the development of the child. The literature is about psychological and social experiences children go through when their parents' divorce and families separate, coping mechanism and gaps emerging.

2.1 The psychological experiences of children in separated families

According to Amato (1994) one of the experiences that can be considered as critical regarding mental health among children and adolescents is parental divorce. As a result of divorce, one of the parents departs from home, typically the father who provides emotional support, protection, assistance, guidance, and supervision to children. Thus, divorce is seen as a significant life experience which creates difficulty in psychological development and adjustment.

Parental divorce often causes stressful events that threaten the psychological wellbeing of children. These events include one parent leaving the home, exposure to continuing inter parental conflict and discord, parental distress, remarried parents, moving to a new home even in another city, changing school, a decline in economic resources, and etc. (Amato, 2000; Sandler et al, 2000).

In this situation, children with divorced parents may experience increasing feelings of rejection due to the emotional distance between parents and themselves (Johnson et al, 2001), which may result in feeling lonely.

The feelings of being caught between choosing on one of the two parents, when a family unit is split in a half in the event of divorce, sometimes children find themselves in the middle of two terms that they must choose between (Kerry, 2012).

Fear or anxiety about personal relationships is a feeling found in children of divorce. Children of divorce may feel that they are unable to form lasting relationships with other people. They may experience fear a fear of commitment difficulty with relationship openness, trust issues (Woods, 2008).

Children of divorce often suffer from behavioral problems as they struggle to manage their feelings. Possible behavioral issues of divorce include aggression, anti-social behavior. Parental conflict also leads to negative outcome, and the longer the parental conflict lasts, the greater the risk will be that children will suffer from behavioral issues (Johnson et al, 1987).

According to Jack C, (2016, Pg.695) the sudden announcement of the parents' divorce can be experienced as a devastating betrayal. The teenager may construe exclusion from awareness of parental thinking as; you didn't care how I feel. Unfortunately, in many instances this is an accurate perception, because the parents have focused largely upon their own perspectives.

According to Schrodts and Afifi (2007) children of divorce often experience a variety of negative emotional responses during the process of divorce. Researchers have determined that parental separation has been connected to depression anxiety, low self-esteem. Studies identify that parental conflict before, during, and after separation is one of the factor that contributes to these feelings in children.

2.2 The social experiences of children in separated families

One of the emotional states that may occur as a consequence of parental divorce among children is loneliness. Loneliness is defined as the disturbing experience which emerges when insufficiencies in quality and quantity are perceived in an individual's social relationships. In other words, loneliness is the subjective discrepancy between the level that is attained and the level that one aspires to attain in social relationships (Peplau and Perlman, 1982).

Loneliness may be considered as deficiencies in the systems of interpersonal interactions e.g., family; (Cristina et al, 2004).

Patterns of play and relations with peers have been found to be areas in which stress and difficulties in coping are often reflected. Age inappropriate play, disruptions in play and unpopularity with peers have consistently been found to be related to anxiety and emotional disturbance in children (Hartup, 1976; Roff et al, 1972). In addition, children's play and interactions with peers not only provide critical opportunities to acquire certain social competencies but also play an important role for children in working through or modifying their problem behavior (Hartup, 1976)

Some fathers find it difficult to maintain a relationship with their children, which results in fewer visitations (Cooney and Uhlenberg 1990; Umberson 1987). Fathers may ultimately feel they have less in common with their daughters due to gender differences, and because girls are generally closer to their mothers, their relationship with their fathers is often underdeveloped.

Studies show that children of divorced parents are up to six times more likely to experience delinquent behavior than children from intact families (Swyers and Larson 1995). Boys raised without their fathers were more than twice as likely to end up in jail as those who lived with their fathers, and 70 percent of incarcerated adults come from single-parent homes (Georgia Supreme Court Commission on Children, Marriage and Family Law 2004)

According to Erickson (1980) as children moved into the adult phase, also considered the intimacy versus isolation stage by researchers, those who are able to go through this juncture without conflict are known to connect with others more effectively. Unfortunately, young adults who are children of divorced parents have difficulty developing these skills, which could lead to isolation and loneliness throughout adulthood. The relationships of young adults are directly correlated to what they have witnessed as children.

2.3 The coping mechanism of children in separated families

According to Weiten and Lloyd (2003) coping efforts by individuals could either be regarded as adaptive (e.g., problem focused) or maladaptive (e.g., self-blame or giving up on further attempts at solving problems). Coping therefore also closely links with the interpersonal variable proposed by Vorster (2011) of “adequacy of problem-solving skills” (p. 94), which is of paramount importance for optimal mental health and buffering of stress such as divorce.

According to Compas et al (2017) there is considerable evidence that children’s coping behaviors can be protective, leading to better adjustment for children who experience a wide range of stressors. For children from divorced families, active coping strategies, such as problem solving and cognitive reframing, have been found to be associated with lower child mental health problems cross sectionally and five months later (Sandler et al,1994). Similarly, higher use of secondary control coping strategies, such as distraction and acceptance, in response to interpersonal stressors is associated with fewer mental health problems in youth with depressed

parents (Jaser et al., 2007). The overarching goal of effective coping is to regulate emotional responding and reduce risk of becoming overwhelmed during stressful moments and to solve problems.

According to Kelly (2007) the majority of the children deal reasonably successfully with the divorce after an initial transition period showing resilience to cope with stressful change within their family.

Support for materialism as a stress coping mechanism from Belk (1988) and Rachins (1994) who described the importance of material possessions in fulfilling the symbolic role of maintaining interpersonal ties. Children from separated families may come to rely on certain special possessions to reduce stress by bridging the physical gap between themselves and the absentee parent for example a son placing more value on a baseball glove.

A number of authors have referred to social support as helpful in coping effectively with parental divorce (Amato, 2000; Hobfoll, Dunahoo et al, 1994). According to Wallston et al, (1983) studies have consistently demonstrated a salutary effect of social support on the ability to cope with stress, a finding that is applicable to children of divorce. Cognitive characteristics influence strategies for dealing with stressful life events. Among these cognitive characteristics are the mental models, beliefs, attitudes, self-perceptions that are habitually employed by individuals dealing with events in life. Positive mental models are important to coping in as much as they form basis for constructive efforts to adapt in face of perceived adversity (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

Taking advantage of outside support to alleviate children's divorce related stress, previous research shows two different options for outside support that is to say therapy and social support. Both types of outside support were recommended to help children learn to cope with problems associated with separation (Afifi and McManus, 2006).

According to Kerry (2012) open communication to parents on the problems disturbing the children on matters to do with divorce help children gain a better understanding on divorce especially on issues bothering children in separated families and this simplifies their coping.

2.4 Gaps emerging from literature

Despite the significant life event that parental separation represents, with an increased risk of negative consequences for both parents and children (Amato, 2005; Mooney et al, 2009, Goisis et al, 2016), there is a lack of literature on the actual experiences of children during and after parental separation. While some studies have examined the social and emotional instability and financial disadvantage that can result from family break-up and impact all areas of children's lives (Ridge, 2002, Cristina et al, 2014) their research is limited by its focus on the effects of divorce on children, rather than their experiences during and after the separation. Therefore, further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences children go through during and after parental separation.

Afifi and McManus (2006) and Belk (1988) research is limited by its focus on the positive coping mechanisms of the children in separated families leaving a gap for the children who cope negatively.

Most studies on children in separated families have been conducted in other countries, such as Europe rather than Uganda for example (Orok, 2007 and Compas et al., 2017); therefore, there is a lack of literature on the experiences of children in separated families in Uganda.

Chapter three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology that was used to collect and analyze information for the study. Under this following section, the themes covered included: research design, research approaches, description of the geographical area and where population of the study exists, description of the population from which samples were selected, sampling strategies, data collection methods, data quality control, measurements, data analysis.

3.1 Research design

A case study design was used. Case study can be defined as an empirical research method used to investigate a contemporary phenomenon, focusing on the dynamics of the case, within its real life context (Sudhakar et al, 2017). It involved a detailed and intensive analysis of a particular event, situation, organization or particular social unit. In terms of scope, a case study is an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context. The case study helped me gain a more detailed understanding of the experiences of children in separated families.

3.2 Research approach

A qualitative research approach was used, which involved collecting and analyzing non numerical data to understand concepts, opinions or experiences of my study population (Natasha et al, 2005). This research approach helped me gather in-depth insights into the topic and this was done by the use of different data collection methods like interviews.

3.3 Study population

The population from which my sample was selected was children from 14-17 years in divorced and separated families in Nateete parish- Kampala district, as well as parents and teachers who spend significant time with the children. The study population enabled me get the experiences of the children in divorced and separated families.

3.4 Area of study

The area of my study was a parish located in Nateete bordered by Nanfuka, Nateete Central ABC, Factory zone, church zone, Makayi and Wakaliga.

3.5 Sample size determination

My sample size consisted of 10 participants that I interacted with. I interviewed 6 children from separated families (14-17 years), that is to say 4girls and 2boys, 2 parents of the children from separated families and 2 teachers from UYDEL. However the final sample size was determined by the principle of saturation. Saturation occurs when adding more participants to the study until I felt no information is left out.

3.6 Sampling techniques

One sampling techniques was used; purposive sampling or judgmental sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the units to be observed are selected on the basis of the researcher's judgment about which ones would be the most useful. Therefore purposive sampling was used to handpick elements to fully ensure that those only relevant in the study are included (Karina et al, 2012). This was done through assessment where the children from separated families were identified and also through field tours with the help of the youth leader where the children who were living with single parents were identified and were included in the study.

3.7 Datacollection method

3.7.1 In-depth interviews

An interview is generally a qualitative research method which involves asking open ended questions to converse with participants and collect elicited data about a subject (Karina et al, 2012).

In this case, I used in-depth interviews or unstructured. Interviews are usually described as conversations held with the purpose in mind to gather information about the experiences children in divorced and separated families go through. With the help of an in-depth interview guide,

(Appendix II), children aged 12-17 years were asked open ended questions on the psychological, social experiences and their coping mechanism.

3.7.2 Key informant interviews

The main objective of the researcher was to build a bond with participants, which increases the likelihood that they will be completely truthful in their answers. In this case I interviewed parents and teachers who spent most of their time with the children from separated families. I obtained information on the experiences of children in separated families that is to say psychological and social experiences and coping mechanism of the children in separated families.

3.8 Data analysis

Thematic analysis is a method for analyzing qualitative data that entails searching across a data set to identify, analyze, and report repeated patterns (Braun and Clarke 2006) this will be done through reading the data to mark or highlight the key points and classifying those major points in the key themes or subtopics.

Therefore I followed Braun and Clarke (2006) steps during data analysis and this involved ; becoming more familiar with the data collected, during this phase I started taking notes or making ideas for coding, transcription of the verbal data for example when working with verbal data such as interviews, the data will need to be transcribed into written form in order to conduct a thematic analysis, generating initial codes which involved the production of initial codes from the data ,searching for themes which refocuses the analysis at the broader level of themes rather than codes. It involved sorting different codes into potential themes and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and lastly final analysis and write up of the report.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in research are a set of principles that guide research designs and practices (Bhandari, 2021). As a result, permission was sought from the department of Social Work and Social Administration, to be able to conduct the study(Clearance letter attached in appendix I).

In addition, I obtained clearance from the community that is the people in charge of the children. More still, I obtained parent consent, (Appendix V) from the care takers of children involved in the study. Upon being allowed to interview a particular child by a care taker, I still went ahead to obtain assent from the child. The consent and assent involved explaining the background of the study, purpose of the study, benefits and risk of taking part in the study, rights of voluntary participation, issues of confidentiality and anonymity among others.

Chapter four: Data presentation and analysis

4.0 Introduction

This chapter contains the findings from data collected and analysis. The data that was collected responds to the research specific objectives. The data collected was analyzed through transcribing, coding and formulating themes.

4.1 Demographic characteristics of participants

This section presents the general demographic data as collected from the study participants and these include: the age of the study participants, education level, location, gender, and status of parents.

Study participant 1, Joan (Not real name) was a female aged 17 years who had never seen her father and grew up with a single mother. She dropped out of school in her senior two after losing interest in her studies. She lived in Nateete.

Study participant 2, Lisa (Not real name) was a female participant aged 17 years who grew up with her mother after the father rejecting her and leaving his responsibilities. Her mother fetched water and also carried garbage in order to earn a living. She lived in Nateete. Lisa dropped out of school because of lack of school fees.

Study participant 3, Alexa (Not real name) was a female participant aged 16 years who stayed with her step mother and biological father. She stayed in Nateete after her mother left due to domestic violence and lived with her step mother.

Study participant 4, Gift (Not real name) was a female participant aged 17 years who stayed with her mother after the separation. She dropped out of school after giving birth.

Study participant 5, (Joseph (Not real name) was a male participant aged 16 years who stayed with his grandmother after his father getting married to another woman. He stayed in Nateete Nakawuka road with his grandmother and brother.

Study participant 6, Joel (Not real name) was a male participant aged 17 years who stayed with his grandmother after the separation of his father and mother. This was after his parents fought and they decided to take the children in the village at Nateete kutano.

4.2 Psychological experiences of children from separated families

4.2.1 No interest in activities

In interviews conducted with study participants, it was revealed that children in separated families experienced loss of interest in activities. According to their accounts the separation caused them to lose interest in studying, eating and doing household chores. For example in a key informant interview, a participant disclosed that

Children lost interest in the things they did, they attended a few days at school and they were also unable to attend classes they were previously enjoying, as narrated below.

I notice that many of the children in my class seem to lose interest in the things they do. For instance a child may attend classes once in a while or four days in a week even though we have class for five days. When they do come, their self-esteem seems low and they are no longer able to participate actively in class, like they used to. They might be too afraid or depressed to speak up or offer help to their classmates. Sometimes, they can sit quietly for an entire day without saying a word (key informant interview, tailoring teacher).

A participant who stays with her mother said that she lost interest in studying because of her age and the failure by her mother in terms of providing for education.

I study but I do not have any interest because I feel like, at my age, I should be in a formal school studying like other children. Sometimes I come to study, but even the basic supplies I need for my studies are not provided for, which makes me feel frustrated and generates feelings of hatred (Lisa, 17 -year-old female).

A parent revealed that after separation, she saw a change in the behavior of her children and they lost interest in activities they did which included eating and doing house chores.

I noticed that separation affected the way they behaved including their habit around eating and willingness to do house chores. I could see that they lost interest in these activities.MF001

Children from separated families were not active in class while he was teaching as explained below.

First of all, when I am teaching children, I can observe their behavior in class. If they are not active as usual, I will approach them and ask them what is going on. Sometimes, they will want to share their thoughts and feelings with me while the other times they may not want to talk about it(key informant interview, electronics teacher).

A participant said that she dropped out of school because she lost interest in studying as a result of separation and the thoughts she had.

I failed to study because I lost interest and was often troubled. I didn't understand what was going on. I did study, but I didn't make it very far in my education. The highest level I reached was P7, and I only did that to help my mother. I never completed S4. I studied until S2 and then dropped out. I struggled with subjects like chemistry and eventually dropped out because things became too difficult for me. As a result, I hated school (Joan, 17 -year-old female).

The findings revealed that when children become aware of the separation, they lose interest in activities which is in line with Schrodts and Afifi (2007) where they said that children of divorce often experience a variety of negative emotional responses. They continued to say that ‘researchers have determined that parental separation has been connected to depression, anxiety and low self-esteem.’

4.2.2 Confused and frustrated

The data indicated that children in separated families were often frustrated and confused about the situation they found themselves in. Many of these children were young and were confused when they no longer saw their parents and had to grow up with people who were not their parents.

A participant said that he became confused when he saw that only his mother was taking care of him and his brother, and his father was not helping.

I was perplexed when I realized that my dad wasn't taking care of us or providing any help. It was my mom who was taking care of our education, buying things like clothes, and struggling to sustain us. It felt strange that my dad wasn't involved in our lives in the same way (Joseph, 16- year- old male).

Similarly, another participant who lives with her step mother said that she was confused about growing up with her step mother and instead of her biological mother.

I was always puzzled because my stepmother didn't give birth to me. She may be a parent to me, but she treats me differently from her own children and discriminates against me. When I make a mistake, the way she punishes me is not the same as how she punishes her own children (Alexa, 16 -year -old female).

Additionally, participant who lives with her mother revealed that she became frustrated and confused about the situation and she eventually resorted to cannabis as a way to cope.

My mother struggles to make ends meet, and she ensured I go to school. Even though the school I attended wasn't very expensive, some of the children there had more money and would brag about the things their fathers bought for them. This made me feel envious because I often wondered why my father had left us and felt a mix of sadness and frustration. It was hard for me to express these emotions, and at times I turned to using cannabis as a way to cope with my loneliness and frustration (Joan, 17- year -old female).

The findings revealed that children in separated families become confused about the situation, which is in line with the study by Kerry (2012). In his study, Kerry found that children may feel caught between choosing one of the two parents and may feel like they are in the middle of two conflicting terms that they must choose between.

4.2.3 Feelings of sadness

The analysis revealed that children in separated families often experience feelings of sadness. This is because they may observe other families being together and feel a sense of longing or sadness, as well as not being able to get their needs met, which also contributes to feelings of sadness.

A participant said that he felt sad when he saw his neighbors together as a family and wished to be like them.

The situation affected me because when we went to visit my grandmother in the village, our neighbors were a family - a mother, father, and children. We would admire them and feel sad that we couldn't have a similar family at that moment. I would feel sad with my brother as we admired our neighbors and saw that they had everything that we didn't have (Joseph, 16 -year -old male).

A parent explained that her children felt sad when they didn't get what they needed.

It is true that the necessary resources were not available at home, and as a result, the family was unable to obtain them like they used to. I could see that the children were not happy. For instance, if the child was eating bread, I would give them leftovers, I would see that they were not happy but they were only eating because they were hungry. Their behavior also changed because they were not getting what they needed. They might ask for something they need for school, but at that moment I may not have it, even though they would have received it eventually in normal circumstances.MF001

A participant said that she could feel sad whenever she watched movies and saw families together yet she had never seen her dad.

When I was younger, there came a time when I couldn't see my dad very often. This often led me to cry because I felt like I didn't have a dad. I was carrying a heavy burden and feeling hurt inside. I would watch movies and see families together and thriving, and I would relate to them and I felt envious of the families' closeness and stability. I tried to cope with the pain by crying (Joan, 17- year -old female).

The study revealed that children feel sad after experiencing separation, which is consistent with the findings of Orok (2007, pg. 58), where one participant described feeling sad and stressed, saying, 'I felt very sad inside and stressed, in fact I feel sorry for my family. I still feel sad and when I feel that way, I just cry

4.2.4 Worry and nervousness

The research indicated that children in separated families experience worry and nervousness as they grow and start worrying about their lives.

A participant said that he got worried whenever he thought about his mother leaving.

Time came when I would worry about what would happen if my mom left us. I would wonder who would take care of us because my dad wasn't caring at all. I would also wonder what we would do if my mom had a problem and where we would go for help (Joseph, 16 -year -old male).

The study found that children in separated families experience worry and nervousness in their relationships with their parents, which is consistent with the study by Woods (2008) that found that fear and anxiety are common feelings among children of divorce. These children may also have difficulty forming relationships with others, fear commitment, and struggle with trust issues.

4.2.5 Anger and hatred

The analysis revealed that children from separated families often feel angry and hate their parents. This is because when they become aware of the separation, they blame their parents and become angry and hateful towards them. This was observed when the children expressed anger and hatred towards the parent they lived with or the parent who had left.

A participant stated that she wanted to have her father beaten up when she saw him because he had left her and her mother suffering

When I found out that he had gone abroad never returned, I wondered if he had got a problem or if something had happened to him but as time passed, I learned that he had

got another wife and had more children with her. When he returned, I felt like he didn't care about me and I resented him. When I met him while sober, without using drugs and I approached him, I had a lot in my mind and I wondered if he wasn't my dad, I would have had someone beat him up for leaving me and my mom suffering. I had a lot of anger towards him, but I reminded myself that he is my biological father and he might change. They say that a parent is always a parent, but I would have hired my friends to beat him up. It really hurts to feel this way about your own parent (Joan, 17 -year -old female).

A participant said that he was angry because his father never helped them, so he developed anger and hatred in his heart towards him.

Time came when I didn't want to see my dad because he wasn't available. He never helped us, so I became angry and developed hatred towards him. Till now, I don't want to see him because he never provided for our needs (Joseph, 16 -year -old male).

A participant pointed out that she was angry because her parents rejected her, refused to pay her fees, and could also embarrass her, which caused her a lot of anger.

As I grew older, my parents became embarrassing. They never respected themselves or each other and would constantly fight and argue. They refused to pay for our education and often denied responsibility for us, making it seem like we were a burden to them. This caused me a lot of anger and made me feel worthless, as if I had no place in the world because my own parents denied me (Lisa, 17 -year -old female).

A parent mentioned that her children often display anger and dissatisfaction when communicating with their father over the phone, blaming him for their frustrations.

When they talk to him over the phone, they often display anger and frustrations, expressing dissatisfaction with where he went and the fact that they do not receive what they are supposed to get in a timely manner. They also express feelings of being abandoned and unloved and their tone becomes hostile as they to talk to him.MF001

A participant who lives with her stepmother reported that she doesn't express her anger at home, but rather directs it towards other children at school.

Sometimes, I become angry and don't show it at home, but instead direct it towards other children at school if they annoy me. I tend to hold everything in and then end up quarreling or fighting with them (Alexa, 16 -year -old female).

Another parent revealed that after she separated from the father of her children, she noticed that her children became angry.

After I separated from their father, my two elder children were the only ones who seemed to understand the situation. However, I noticed a change in them. They became angry and the oldest one's grades declined. She directed her anger towards me and her fellow children. When they tried to play with their peers, it would often end in a fight because of their anger. Other parents would call me to report that my children had got into fights with their children. As a parent, I didn't think much of it at the time, but now I can see that the separation might have been the cause of their behavior. MMOO2

The study showed that children in separated families often express anger towards their parents. This is related to the findings of Hogan et al (2002 pg-34) who reported that one adolescent girl expressed her anger with the parents when she learned about the separation once the decision had been made. She had a sense that her family life had not been authentic and felt deceived when she learned of the seriousness of her parent's relationship problems although she had been aware of some problems between them.

4.2.6 Self-blame

The data showed that children in separated families never blamed themselves for being responsible for the separation, but instead blamed their parents. Children either pointed fingers at the parent who left or at the parent who stayed. We can notice this from the participants' responses.

The participant said that she holds her parents responsible for having children when they were not ready and therefore blames them.

I don't blame myself for my parents getting attracted to each other or for giving birth to us. But I blame them for giving birth when they were not ready. It looks like we were mistakenly produced (Lisa, 17 -year -old female).

The participant living with her stepmother stated that she holds her father accountable for his drinking habits and physical abuse towards her mother."

I blame my dad, to a certain extent, for the domestic violence at home. He would drink alcohol and whenever he came home, he was abusive towards my mom. My mom reached a point where she was tired of it, so she got angry and left (Alexa, 16- year -old female).

The findings unveiled that children in separated families never blamed themselves for the separation, but instead blamed their parents, similar to the findings of Orok (2007), where he stated that participants blamed their parents for not working things out in the marriage and a participant said that, "I blamed them for putting us through all that, we hated them: they could have just worked things out, I did not want to talk to them ever.

4.2.7 Loneliness

The findings of the study indicated that children from separated families were lonely and missed their parents who had left.

One parent reported that her children frequently expressed a longing for their absent father and inquired about him regularly.

They miss having their father in their lives. They ask me about him and I tell them that he left on his own terms and I don't know where he went. The good thing is that they communicate with him over the phone, but it's natural for them to want to have both a mom and a dad to grow up with and experience all kinds of situations with. MFOO1

A participant, who resides with his grandmother, expressed that he longs for his father's presence, particularly when he is by himself at home.

I miss my dad, especially when my grandmother and siblings are not around. I think about him a lot and miss his presence (Joel, 17- year- old male).

A participant mentioned that she only misses her father whenever she observes her mother struggling to pay bills.

I don't often miss my dad, but there are times when I do. One of those times is when rent is due and my mom hasn't got the money yet. I hear her complaining about how frustrated she is to handle all the household bills on her own, and that's when I wish my dad was around to help. It's in moments like these that I miss him the most (Gift, 17 - year- old female).

A participant who lives with her stepmother reported feeling lonely and thinking about her mother, who left, causing her to miss her.

Whenever I feel lonely, I start thinking about my mom. I think about how she left and wish she was here with me (Alexa, 16 -year -old female).

A participant stated that he misses his father, especially when it comes to sharing his experiences, as he finds it difficult to open up to his mother.

I miss my father. As boys, we love to talk and share with our fathers more than our mothers because they understand us as boys in a way that mothers don't (Joseph, 16 - year -old male).

A participant stated that she misses her father and feels a significant gap left by his absence.

There's a big gap my father left in my life. I feel that there is something missing in my life. I think about how things would have been different if he had been there for me. I would have completed my senior four (Joan, 17- year -old female).

The study revealed that children in separated families were lonely and missed the parent who left which is also in line with Johnson et al (2000) where he said that children with divorced parents may experience feelings of rejection due to emotional distance between parents and themselves which may result in feeling lonely.

4.2.8 Reactive attachment disorder

The research indicated that some children do not have an emotional connection to the parent who left, possibly because they harbor resentment towards that parent and do not want to

communicate with them. If the absent parent tries to initiate contact, these children may not show any interest.

A participant stated that she does not feel love towards her father because when he was present, he never gave them attention. Instead, he was always in conflicts.

I don't miss dad's love because when he was there, he never gave us time or love. Instead, he was always in conflicts with my mom. On top of that, he even rejected us, and now I resent him (Lisa, 17-year-old female).

A participant stated that he has no relationship with his father because when he had an accident, his father never bothered to visit him. Now he holds resentment towards him, which has resulted in a lack of connection.

My relationship with my dad is strained. Personally, I have hatred towards him in my heart. For instance, when I had an accident and fell off a tree, I spent a month bedridden. But my dad never came to check on me or make sure I was being treated. When I called him, he said that he came to see me, but he lied. Since then, I don't see any connection with him (Joseph, 16-year-old male).

Additionally, participant stated that she does not feel any love for her father and only engages in minimal conversation with him when he calls her on the phone.

I don't love him at all because when he calls me on the phone, I only engage in minimal conversations. I only greet him. I speak anything beyond that (Gift, 17-year-old female).

The participants didn't have any emotional bond with the parent who left them and never wanted anything to do with them. This is similar to the findings by Orok (2007) who explained that some of the participants were subject to hiding from their fathers because of the constant animosity between parents, even after the actual divorce had taken place.

4.2.9 Aggressive behavior

The study findings indicated that children in separated families often exhibit aggressive behavior, such as name-calling, fighting, and ignoring others. This may be because they bring anger from their homes to school and direct it towards their peers.

The teacher revealed that children from separated families tend to give other students nicknames and also isolate themselves.

Children from separated families may exhibit aggressive behavior, such as bullying or isolating themselves from others. For example, some children may engage in nicknaming their peers (key informant interview, electronics teacher).

Additionally, another teacher observed that when children from separated families are in pain, they often express it through abusive and profane behavior towards their peers.

Some children endure painful experiences and suppress their anger, which they later take out on their peers and express it through abusive behavior and profanity. For instance, if one of their peers annoys them, they may start a fight and use abusive language towards them (key informant interview, tailoring teacher).

The findings show that children in separated families exhibit aggressive behavior towards their peers, which is consistent with the study of Johnson et al. (1987), who found that children of divorce may struggle to manage their feelings and may exhibit behavioral issues such as aggression and anti-social behavior. Johnson et al. also noted that the longer parental conflict persists, the greater the risk that children will suffer from behavioral issues.

4.3 Social experiences of children in separated families

4.3.1 Toxic relationship

The research showed that children in separated families often have strained relationships with either the parent they live with or the parent who left. This may be due to the parent who stayed engaging in abusive or profane behavior towards the child.

A participant disclosed that her mother hates herself and takes out this hate on her children by beating, abusing, and embarrassing them.

She beats me, abuses me and embarrasses me she usually says that if it wasn't for me and my siblings she would have a better life, she actually loves no one at home (Lisa, 17 - year- old female).

A teacher reported that most relationships between parents and children are not good, but parents often pretend that their relationships are.

The relationship between mothers and children, healthy most of the time is not good, but they hide it. During home visits, parents put on a façade, but when the children begin to speak about what happens at home, we get a completely different picture. And if we talk about children who live with their fathers, especially girls, we receive cases where they accuse their fathers of sexual abuse (key informant interview, tailoring teacher).

A parent stated that the relationship she has with her children is not as good as it was before the separation.

They say that I chased their dad, and this has changed the way they speak to me. Sometimes, the way they respond to me is hurtful and rude, and lacks respect.MFOO1

The findings revealed that children in separated families often have strained relationships with the parent they live with, frequently communicating with bitterness and experiencing abuse. This is related with the research conducted by Umberson (1987), who noted that parents struggle to maintain positive relationships with their children.

4.3.2 Closeness

The data revealed that children from separated families often do not develop close relationships with their parents, making it difficult for them to confide in their parents about their problems. This was because, in the past, when they tried to share their problems with their parents, they were judged and held responsible, leading them to seek support from people outside.

A participant stated that she is unable to share her problems with her mother because, in the past, when she attempted to confide in her, she was met with blame rather than support. As a result, she prefers to seek support from someone else rather than her mother.

The lack of closeness between her and her mom was a result of lack of trust, failure to offer support and understanding.

I found that I am unable to confide in my mom about any problems. For example, when I confided in her that I had been raped, she blamed me and said it was my own fault. She also physically harmed me and refused to provide medical care or consider the possibility that I may have been infected with HIV or become pregnant as a result of the assault. Because of this, I have had to seek support from people who are not my parents (Lisa, 17- year -old female).

A teacher reported that some children from separated families struggle to open up to him due to low self-esteem and negative treatment from their parent.

Some children may have low self-esteem and may not feel comfortable telling us about their problems. Girls, in particular, are hesitant to share concerns about things they lack, such as access to menstrual hygiene products. This can depend on the way the children are treated and handled. We have heard reports of parents speaking to their children in hurtful ways, saying things like if I hadn't given birth to you, I would be well off or you want to spoil your siblings and take my man. These kinds of statements cause children mental trauma and depression. When children do come to us seeking support, it is often because they are dealing with a great deal of stress and pain (key informant interview, tailoring teacher).

A participant who lives with his grandmother stated that there are things he cannot share with either his grandmother or his friends, so he chooses to keep his struggles to himself.

As I grow, there are things that I go through and experience that I can't share with my grandmother and friends. I would prefer to share these things with my dad or uncle, but unfortunately, I don't have contact with them. As a result, keep quiet and hold the pain in (Joel, 17 -year -old male).

A participant who lives with her stepmother disclosed that when she was raped, she did not tell anyone and instead sought medical attention at a hospital.

When I was raped, I didn't tell anyone, not even my mom or dad. Instead, I went to the hospital to seek help (Alexa, 16 -year- old female).

A participant stated that she only feels comfortable opening up to her friends, rather than her mother, because whenever she shares her problems with her mother, it leads to arguments.

I was always frustrated and disturbed, and whenever I approached my mom about my frustrations, she would quarrel with me. So, I decided to stop telling her anything and now I share my frustrations with my friends (Joan, 17 -year -old female).

A participant reported that she is unable to communicate with her mother because they are not friends.

My mom is not really my friend, so I can't sit down with her and have deep conversations. Our conversations are always fairly superficial (Gift, 17- year -old female).

The study revealed that children in separated families are not close to their parents because when they tried opening up to them, they were blamed and parents quarreled. This led them to become closer to other people, like their peers, keep quiet and also share their problems to other people who are not their parents. This study agrees with the study by Hartup (1976) who said that children's interaction with peers plays an important role in modifying their problem behavior.

4.3.3 Isolation

The study discovered that children from separated families tend to isolate themselves, particularly after their parents' separation. However, over time, these children start to socialize when they are engaged in certain activities.

A teacher stated that the home environments for children in separated families were not conducive, which could lead to isolation.

Children from separated families often isolate themselves because their households are not always supportive and positive. You may see them isolating due to the difficult situations at they face home (key informant interview, tailoring teacher).

A participant who lives with his grandmother stated that he isolated himself whenever other children talked about their fathers because he felt that he did not fit in.

I isolate myself from the children because when they have conversations about their fathers, I don't fit in. It hurts me a lot because I don't have anyone to call 'dad (Joel, 17-year -old male).

A parent disclosed that her children isolated themselves after their father left, but over time, they became accustomed to living with their mother alone.

My children mostly isolated themselves when their dad had just left, but eventually they got used to the situation of not being with both their mom and dad. Although it still happens sometimes, they have learned to cope with the absence of one parent. MFOO1

The findings revealed that children in separated families often isolate themselves because of the separation and the difficult situations at home. This aligns with Erickson(1980), study on the 8 stages of psychosocial development intimacy versus isolation which found that young adults struggle in developing interacting skills resulting in isolation and loneliness throughout adulthood.

4.3.4 Reactive attachment disorder

The results of the study show that children from separated families had no emotional bond with the parent who left them and did not want to know or do anything with that parent.

A participant revealed that she doesn't have love or any relationship with her father because he never provided for their family.

I don't have a relationship with my father because, when I was growing up, he didn't fulfill the responsibilities of a father. He never provided basic necessities, such as food, school fees and I don't feel any connection towards him (Lisa, 17 -year -old female).

Another participant said that she has spent four years without talking to her father and therefore they don't have a relationship.

I don't have any relationship with my dad. We haven't spoken for four years, and the only communication he has with me is through my mom. He will just call and ask how I'm doing, and that's it (Gift, 17 -year- old female).

A participant stated that she does not need anything from her father.

It's clear that my father doesn't care about me, as he is focused on the children he has with another woman. He has no interest in our relationship. I think he also realized that I didn't care about him and so he stopped putting effort into it. I don't want anything to do with him (Joan, 17 -year -old female).

The participants didn't have any emotional bond with the parent who left them and never wanted anything to do with them. This is similar to the findings of Orok (2007), who explained that some of the participants were subjected to hiding from their fathers because of the constant animosity between parents, even after the actual divorce had taken place.

4.3.5 Attendance to school and performance

The research indicated that children from separated families often do not attend school due to problems at home that may prevent them from going, or because they have declined in performance due to the separation, as some participants reported.

A teacher revealed that the children's attendance to school is most times hindered by their parents at home. For example; a parent might chase the child away from home and tell them to find somewhere else to sleep.

The children's attendance at the center has generally been good. However, there are times when problems at home prevent them from coming to the center. For example, if a parent tells a child to leave home, it prevents them from attending the center (key informant interview, tailoring teacher).

A parent revealed that the separation had a negative impact on the children's studies due to the lack of financial resources for school which hindered the children's education and future success.

The separation affected the children's studies because they were constantly being chased for school fees. Their father was no longer providing the necessary funds, which made it a difficult and disruptive situation for them. They wanted to study and work towards a better future for themselves.MFOO1

A parent shared that since the separation; she noticed a significant decrease in her child's academic performance at school. This revelation came as a result of paying closer attention to her child's grades and behavior in the classroom following the separation.

I observed that my child was struggling with studies. In an effort to find a solution, I reached out to the teachers for guidance. Unfortunately, the teachers were also unaware of the reason for my child's decline in performance. MMOO2

The study also revealed that children in separated families had poor attendance at school because most times the parents they stayed with stopped them from studying. There was also a problem with school fees because one parent couldn't handle all the bills, which forced the children to stay at home until the parent obtained the necessary funds. This finding is not documented in any literature.

4.4 Coping mechanism of children from separated families

4.4.1 Engaging in early relationships

The data revealed that children in separated families may engage in sexual relationships at an early age. They may do this in search of comfort that they are unable to receive from their parents, or as a way of obtaining personal needs that their parents are unable to provide.

A participant who lives with her stepmother revealed that she did not engage in a sexual relationship because she loved the boy, but rather, she was seeking someone to provide her with comfort and emotional support.

When my mom separated from my dad, I engaged myself in a relationship, but it wasn't out of love. It was a way of coping with the situation. I was seeking comfort from him, because I never wanted to turn to alcohol to deal with my feelings. Instead, I engaged in activities of sexual immorality, and I accepted this because he could give me money (Alexa, 16 -year -old female).

A teacher reported that girls from separated families may engage in commercial sex as a way to fulfill their basic needs if their parents deny them the resources they require.

It is common for girls who do not receive support from their parents to seek it from men and young people. It is not uncommon for them to have multiple sexual partners, each of whom provides a particular item or service. The actions of these girls are often driven by the difficult circumstances they face at home, rather than by happiness. In some cases, girls may engage in commercial sex work, viewing their bodies as a means of obtaining the things they need. They may see their friends wearing nice clothes or having new hairstyles, and decide to sell their bodies in order to get the money they need to keep up with them (key informant interview, tailoring teacher).

A participant said that she got a boyfriend in order to obtain the things that her parents were unable to provide for her. She explained that she was struggling to meet her basic needs and felt that her boyfriend was able to help her in this regard.

The separation prompted me to seek out for a boyfriend as a source of emotional and financial support, as my parents were unable to provide for me and I was unable to provide for myself but this did not make my parent happy (Lisa, 17- year- old female).

The findings of this study revealed that children in separated families engaged in early relationships in search for comfort and also getting needs parents could not give the children this agrees with the research carried out by Afifi and Mcmanus (2006) where he talked about children taking advantage of the outside support to help children learn to cope with problems associated with separation. The implications of this behavior can be significant and far-reaching for instance it can expose individuals to risks such as sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, and physical violence. It can also lead to feelings of shame and stigma.

4.4.2 Drugs and theft

Many children in separated families turned to using drugs as a way of coping with the trauma of separation and dealing with the problems they faced.

A parent reported that her children had started consuming alcohol. She noticed this early on and found evidence of it in the form of discarded polyethylene in the trash bin.

I noticed that my children were bringing small polyethylene bags of alcohol and drinking them. I found discarded bags in the trash bin and realized that they were the ones consuming the alcohol. When I confronted them about it, they started disposing off the bags elsewhere, but I could still observe changes in their behavior and noticed that their eyes looked like they had been drinking.MFOOI

A teacher reported that some of the boys in separated families could turn to drug use.

You will find boys taking drugs. They pretend as though they have gone to play football, but when they get there, they take drugs instead. They do this as a way of escaping the reality of their parent's separation. We often see cases like this at the center (key informant interview, tailoring teacher).

A participant mentioned that she used cannabis as a way of coping with the challenges she was facing. She claimed that the drug helped her to manage her emotions and deal with the difficulties she was experiencing.

I always had a lot of thoughts and didn't understand what was going on. I was so frustrated and wanted to commit suicide. I only have my mom around, my dad abandoned us and I'm the only child, so I always felt like I had no value. Then my friends introduced me to cannabis. It's the only thing that keeps me calm (Joan, 17- year -old female)

A participant reported that he would consume khat leaves (a type of drug) when his grandmother was not around to help pass the time.

When I was 14 years old, I joined a gang called Kasolo. A friend who was already in the group influenced me to join, and I learned about khat leaves. I started hanging out with

the group and i would chew khat leaves to pass time. I would chew them all the time, especially during school holidays, and I couldn't notice how the day ended (Joseph, 16 - year -old male).

A participant disclosed that she used drugs and also stole money to buy cannabis for herself.

Firstly, I tried smoking cannabis but couldn't handle it. It would affect me so badly that I would cough. Someone suggested that I try intravenous drug instead. It works for about two weeks or a month in the body, but it was expensive to afford. So, I stole money from my neighbor, who was also my uncle, and went to get injected with the drug. At first, it weakened me and I couldn't eat except drinking water. Eventually, I became used to it and if I didn't consume it, my whole body would start to shake (Gift, 17- year -old female).

A participant reported that she would steal her friend's property to obtain things that she needed.

I learned to steal, and I could steal people's properties. My mom always promised me that my dad would deliver necessities, but he never did. As a child, I saw that my friends had things that I didn't, so I figured out ways to get them myself. I started hustling and stealing to get them (Joan, 17- year -old female).

A parent disclosed that their child joined a group and began stealing other people's property due to the difficulties of raising them as a single mother.

My first born child joined a gang and they would steal people's shoes in the community. I heard about this and I couldn't believe it.MMOO2

The finding of the study revealed that children in separated families used destructive behavior to cope with the separation such as drug abuse and alcohol use to disconnect from reality and also to turn to theft to get what they need. This is in contrast to the research conducted by Compas et al (2017), where he stated that children's coping behaviors can be protective leading to better adjustment for children who experience a range of stressors which is contrary with the findings in this study.

Chapter five: discussions, conclusions and recommendations

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the research on children's experiences of separation, as well as a summary of the key findings from the study. The chapter also includes recommendations on how to support and improve the experiences of separated children.

5.1 Summary of the findings

Data was collected from children aged 14-17 whose parents had separated. The findings indicated that these children often experienced psychological and social problems, including missing the absent parent, sadness, attachment issues, and difficulty maintaining relationships with the parent they live with. As a result of these challenges, some children turned to harmful behaviors such as drug abuse, theft, and commercial sex work in an attempt to cope with the emotional and social deficits they experienced. These behaviors were used as a way to fill the gap created by the separation.

During interviews with key informants who spent significant time with children from separated families that is to say the parents and teachers, they reported that these children engaged in harmful behaviors such as drug abuse and commercial sex work. They also noted that these children experience psychological issues as a result of the separation and related events in their home environment.

Overall, the participants had an understanding of what separation means and were able to share their experiences of it, including the psychological and social experiences and the coping mechanisms they used

5.1.1 Psychological experiences of children in separated families

Under psychological experiences, my study revealed that children in separated families often lose interest in activities due to the frustration that comes with the separation. The participants reported losing interest in studying, doing household chores, and even eating.

Other participants in my study reported feeling confused and frustrated about the separation, particularly when they saw that they were not living with both of their biological parents and instead were growing up with a single parent and a step parent.

Some participants reported feeling sad when they saw other families together but were unable to have a similar experience for themselves. Some also mentioned feeling sad when they were unable to obtain what they needed due to one parent being unable to provide for them. These experiences highlight the impact that the lack of family structures can have on children from separated families.

Some participants in the study reported feelings of worry and nervousness regarding the separation of their parents, and expressed fear of being abandoned by the parent who remained in their life.

Some of the participants revealed that they became angry with their parents, particularly with the parent who had left them. They did not want anything to do with that parent or to see them again. A few participants were also angry with the parent who stayed.

The study found that the participants did not blame themselves for their parents' separation, but rather attributed responsibility to their parents. This indicates that the participants were able to recognize and acknowledge the role that their parents played in the separation, rather than internalizing blame or responsibility for the event.

The study found that the participants experienced feelings of loneliness and missed the parent who left them. Some participants reported that they missed their fathers and felt a sense of loss, while others mentioned that they missed their mothers, particularly when they needed someone to talk to. This finding suggests that the separation of parents can have a significant impact on children, leading to feelings of loneliness and loss.

Based on the findings of this study, it was evident that some participants had no emotional bond with their parents. This was reflected in their responses, as they reported not loving the parent who had left or feeling any desire for a relationship with them.

Another significant finding of this study was that some of the participants reported exhibiting aggressive behaviors towards their peers as a result of the challenges they were facing at home. These behaviors included fighting, abuse, and nicknaming others. This finding suggests that the participants were unable to effectively cope with or express their emotions related to their home lives, and instead turned to aggression towards their peers as a means of coping or releasing their frustrations

5.1.2 Social experiences of children in separated families

The study revealed that some of the children did not have a good relationship with the parent they lived with. This was reported by a teacher who visited the children's homes and observed that, in some cases, parents would often pretend to have a good relationship with their child, but in reality, the relationship was strained. The teacher further noted that many of these parents were abusive and physically violent towards their children, and the children struggled to communicate effectively with them. These findings highlight the challenges that children from separated families face in building and maintaining healthy relationships with their parents.

The study found that many of the participants had difficulty forming close relationships with their parents and were hesitant to confide in them when faced with problems or concerns to them. This was often due to negative experiences when attempting to communicate with their parents, such as being blamed or getting into arguments. As a result, many of the participants turned to friends or chose to keep their problems to themselves.

Findings revealed that children isolated themselves due to difficulties at home, particularly when conversations with their peers involved topics related to the parent they no longer lived with. Some of these children began isolating themselves after the separation, while others continued to isolate even after the separation had occurred, implying that parental separation can have a negative impact on a child's social connections and sense of belonging.

In this study, the participants did not have an emotional bond with their absent parent and reported feeling no love or connection with that parent, as they had never grown up with them implying that the absence or lack of contact with a parent makes it difficult for children from separated families to develop emotional bonds and relationships.

The study found that children from separated families struggle with attendance at school due to problems at home. It was reported that parents ejected their children from the home, making it difficult for them to maintain regular attendance at school implying that children from separated families may face additional challenges in their education and addressing these issues could be important for improving their academic outcomes.

5.1.3 The coping mechanism of children in separated families

The study found that the participants engaged in relationships at an early stage, often seeking comfort and material resources that their parents were unable to provide. In some cases, they involved themselves in commercial sex work, where they exchanged their bodies for material goods. These behaviors were driven by the participants' search for fulfillment and security in the absence of their parents' support.

The study also found that children from separated families were at risk of engaging in drug abuse and theft. Some resorted to stealing money or saving up to buy drugs, which helped them cope with their feelings and pass the time. The drugs commonly used included alcohol, cannabis and khat leaves. These behaviors were often driven by the children's desire to escape their difficult circumstances and find relief from their emotions.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Parents

When parents separate, they often don't consider the impact it has on their child. Based on this, parents should make an effort to support their children during times of separation and to educate themselves about the effects of separation on children. This could involve seeking out resources or seeking guidance from trusted sources, such as a therapist or school counselor.

Raising a child after separation can be challenging, particularly for parents who may be navigating issues such as co-parenting and child care. In view of this, parents should get access to resources and support to help them navigate these challenges and to effectively raise their children. Parent groups can provide a range of resources and support, including information on co-parenting and child care, as well as a supportive community for parents to discuss their experiences and challenges.

5.2.2 Non –Government Organizations and schools

Research has shown that children who experience parental separation are at increased risk of a variety of negative outcomes, including anger, confusion, abandonment academic difficulties, and social isolation. In light to these challenges, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should design programs that can help children cope with their emotions and experiences in a healthy and positive way. These programs can be implemented in schools, providing a safe and supportive space for children to open up and share their feelings and find solutions. By providing targeted support and resources, Non-Government Organization can help children navigate this difficult experience and emerge stronger and more resilient.

Non-Government organizations should offer training programs for parents on positive parenting styles to help them effectively support children who have experienced parental separation. Techniques like authoritative parenting, which involves listening to children and being responsive to their needs, can be particularly beneficial.

Non-Government organization and schools should promote conflict resolution and management among parents, both married and divorced, to ensure that children are not caught in the middle of disputes that only concern the parents. This can be achieved through various methods such as providing mediation services, educational workshops, and support groups for parents to learn effective communication and conflict resolution skills.

Non-Government organization and schools should prioritize providing immediate attention and support to children from separated families, particularly during the early years following the separation of their parents. This is important in order to prevent negative behaviors such as drug abuse, commercial sex, and theft from developing as the children grow. Schools, in particular,

can play a crucial role in identifying and supporting these children, as they have regular contact with them and can provide them with psychosocial support.

NGOs and schools should work to establish more robust peer leadership programs. The programs should focus on training a group of students to serve as counselors and mentors for their peers, particularly those who struggling with issues related to separated families to provide a safe and confidential space for children to discuss their experiences and seek guidance. Peer leaders should be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to provide counselling and support to their peers, as well as the ability to document and report on the matters discussed in order to come up with solutions to help children from separated families. By fostering a supportive and compassionate environment through these programs, schools and NGOs can help to mitigate the negative impacts of separated families on children and promote their well-being and success..

5.2.3 Communities

Communities can also provide psychosocial support to children who have experienced parental separation. This can be done by local leaders collaborating with community members and NGOs to identify and support these children. Village meetings with local leaders can be a useful forum for discussing ways to help children from separated families and prevent negative outcomes such as involvement in commercial sex work, drug use, and theft. By working together, communities can create a supportive environment for these children and reduce the impact of parental separation on their well-being.

The community should always be vigilant and protect the children from engaging in criminal behavior like drug abuse and theft. This can be achieved through providing support and guidance to children, collaborating with local authorities and non-governmental organizations to address any issues that may arise, providing children with positive role models, offering educational and recreational activities that keep them engaged and out of trouble.

5.2.4 Recommendations for further research

Longitudinal research should be conducted to assess the coping mechanisms of children from separated families as they continue to grow and develop. This can help identify any challenges that arise over time and allow for interventions to be put in place to support these children.

5.3 Conclusions

The study concludes that children from separated families experience psychosocial problems following the separation of their parents. These problems may not become apparent in the immediate aftermath of the separation, but may emerge as the children grow older, typically around the age of 10-11 years. These difficulties can include negative coping mechanisms such as drug abuse, theft, partying, commercial sex, and early relationships, which may be risky for their age. These can be also be influenced by children's inability to express their emotions and can be detrimental to their well-being.

To improve the well-being of children from separated families and prevent risky behavior, training programs should be implemented for both children and parents. These programs should include peer educators, chosen from among the children themselves, who can provide a safe and supportive space for their peers to share any problems or concerns. Additionally parents can play a crucial role in supporting their children's social and psychological well-being by creating a comfortable and supportive home environment, and by actively listening to and engaging with their children. This can help their children cope positively with the challenges they face following the separation of their parents.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I : Approval of research proposal



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL ADMINISTRATION

Tuesday 05th July, 2022.

UGANDA YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
.....
LINK - NATEETE SAFE SPACE
.....
.....

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: **Undergraduate Research**

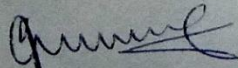
Topic CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE OF SEPARATION: A STUDY OF
.....
SEPARATED FAMILIES IN NATEETE PARISH, KAMPALA DISTRICT
.....
.....

This is to introduce Mr./Miss/Mrs. NANKINGA CATHERINE CAROL
.....
Who would like to carry out research in your area as part of the requirements
of the Social Work and Social Administration course.

I am requesting you to give him/her the necessary assistance to enable
him/her accomplish his/her research.

Your cooperation in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,


Dr. Laban Musinguzi Kashaija,
Lecturer In-charge of
Research and Dissertation.



Appendix II- Informed consent form

NANKINGA CATHERINE CAROL

catherinecarol02@gmail.com

CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE OF SEPARATION: A STUDY OF SEPARATED FAMILIES IN NATEETE PARISH, KAMPALA DISTRICT

Introduction

Hello, my name is Nankinga Catherine Carol a third year student from Makerere University pursuing a bachelor's degree in Social Work and Social Administration. I would like to invite you to participate in my research that I am conducting" Children's experience of separation: A study of separated families in Nateete Parish, Kampala district" which is a partial fulfillment of the requirements for my degree.

Background information

Separation is caused by various reasons for example religious reasons, economic, domestic violence, sexual incompatibility, extra marital affairs, medical reasons, addiction, unrealized expectations.

Failure of children to adapt with the changing structure of the family leads to negative ways of the child's adaptation to the parental divorce or separation for example drug abuse, street children, crime, sexual behavioral disorders and other abnormal behavior.

What the participants would be asked to do

Participants will be interviewed on their experiences they went through when their parents separated and how they coped up with the situation and the participants shall be interviewed for about 20-30 minutes.

Risks and benefits of being in the study

There shall be no major risks but there are questions that may cause discomfort however it is not my intention.

There is no direct benefit for participating in this study; however your participation will help me in the fulfillment of my degree in Social work and social administration.

Assurance of confidentiality

Information collected from you will be kept confidential (secret) by me. Your name will not be linked to your views, I will report about the participants' views in general and no attempt will be made to link the views to those who shared them.

Voluntariness

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time or decline to participate in the interview altogether. You can decide not to participate or withdraw from the study at any point.

Compensation

You will not be paid to participate in this study, participation will be purely voluntary.

Refreshment

You will not be given any refreshments; however the interview will not take a lot of time (20-30 minutes)

Dissemination

The results of the study will be put in my dissertation which is a partial the fulfillment of my degree in Social Work and Social Administration

Ethical consideration

The study has been approved by the department of Social Work and Social Administration, Makerere University.

Questions or point of contact

If you have any questions for me about the study or the consent process, please ask before consenting, and I will do my best to answer them.

I'm requesting to record this conversation if it is okay with you. Relax take a deep breath once you are comfortable we can start

You can also contact me on

+256750423715

catherinecarol02@gmail.com

If you want to talk to someone other than the researcher please contact my supervisor

Professor Eddy Walakira Joshua

Department of social work and social administration Makerere University

ewalakira@gmail.com

+256772490330

Statement of consent

I have read the above information or had the above information read to me. I have received answers to the questions I have asked. I consent to participate in this research.

Relationship with the child.....

Signature or thumbprint of participant.....

Date.....

Age of the child.....

Name of person obtaining consent.....

Signature.....

Date.....

Appendix III: in-depth interview guide for children (14-17 years) in separated families

My name is Nankinga Catherine Carol an undergraduate student from Makerere University. I am conducting a research study on Give the experience of separation: A study of children in separated families in Nateete Parish, Rubaga division, Kampala city. You have been identified as a key participant for this study and your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from it at any time. It is purely for academic purposes. Your information will be treated with utmost confidentiality. I am kindly requesting you for your valuable time and respond to the following questions.

SECTION A

BACK GROUND INFORMATION

Date of interview

Time of the interview

Venue of the interview

Gender of the interviewee

Age of the interviewee

SECTION B

The psychological experiences of children in separated families

1. Do you stay with a single mother, single father or a relative?
2. When did you realize that you're staying with a single mother, single father or relative?
3. When you became aware of the separation, did you get confused and frustrated about the situation?
4. Did you undergo any stress, worry and nervousness due to the decrease in contact with the parent who left? i.e. (feeling less close to the parent who left)
5. Did you experience low mood, feelings of sadness, loss of interest in activities, worry and nervousness about the new structural change and size of the family?

6. Do you ever feel lonely and miss one of the parent figure in your life?
7. When you communicate with the parents who left, do you feel angry or hatred towards him or her?
8. Do you ever find yourself blaming the parent who stayed being responsible for the separation?
9. Do you ever feel angry with the parent who stayed?
10. Did you go through any feelings of sadness, loss of interest in activities, low mood, worry, loneliness, anger /hatred and self-blame when you realized that your parents separated?

The social experiences of children in separated families

1. Is the relationship with the parent you stay with healthy?
2. Do you find it easy to communicate with the parent you stay with?
3. In case you have a need, for example personal basic needs, are you able to tell the parent you're staying with to provide for you?
4. How is the relationship with the parent who left, do you find ease communicating with them?
5. How is your relationship with your friends, are you able to share with them what you're going through in case of any difficulties?

The coping mechanism of children in separated families

1. Did you ever find yourself engaging in any risky behavior like substance abuse like alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, commercial sex to get money and other basic needs, early childhood sexual relationships, delinquent behavior in order to distract yourself from the stress and also fill the gap of the parent who left?

Appendix IV: In depth interview guide for teachers

My name is Nankinga Catherine Carol an undergraduate student from Makerere University. I am conducting a research study on Give the experience of separation: A study of children in separated families in Nateete Parish, Rubaga division, Kampala city. You have been identified as a key participant for this study and your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from it at any time. It is purely for academic purposes. Your information will be treated with utmost confidentiality. I am kindly requesting you for your valuable time and respond to the following questions.

SECTION A

BACK GROUND INFORMATION

Date of interview

Time of the interview

Venue of the interview

Position at UYDEL

SECTION B

Psychological experiences of children from separated families

1. Do these children from separated families show any signs of sadness, low mood, loss of interest in activities, worry and stress?

Social experiences of children in separated families

1. During the home visits, how do you see the relationship of the child and parent in separated families is it healthy?
2. Do the children from separated families exhibit aggressive behavior towards their peers?
3. Do you ever notice children from separated families lonely and isolating themselves at the center?

4. In case of any difficulties that the child is going through, are they able to open up to the trainers at the center and ask for any help?
5. How often do they engage in co-curricular activities like sports?
6. How is their attendance at the center?

Coping mechanism of children in separated families

1. On your observation when the children from separated families came at the center, what was their coping mechanism from the separation?

Appendix V: In depth interview for parents of the children in separated families.

My name is Nankinga Catherine Carol an undergraduate student from Makerere University. I am conducting a research study on Give the experience of separation: A study of children in separated families in Nateete Parish, Rubagadivison, Kampala city. You have been identified as a key participant for this study and your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from it at any time. It is purely for academic purposes. Your information will be treated with utmost confidentiality. I am kindly requesting you for your valuable time and respond to the following questions.

SECTION A

BACK GROUND INFORMATION

Date of interview

Time of the interview

Venue of the interview

Relationship with the child

SECTION B

Psychological experiences of children in separated families

1. Did the child show any signs of sadness, low moods, loss of interest in activities, worry, anger, loneliness and hatred after the separation?
2. In case she talks to the parent who left, does her exhibit hatred or anger towards the parent?

Social experiences of children in separated families

1. Is your relationship with child healthy after the separation?
2. In case of any need, is the child able to communicate to you and tell you what they need?
3. From the time of separation, how is the child's interaction with the peers?

4. Is the relationship of the child and the parent who left healthy, is the child able to communicate to the parent in case she or he needs help?
5. How did the separation affect the academics of the child?

Coping mechanism of children in separated families

1. After the separation did you notice any unusual changes in the life of your child as way of distracting themselves from the separation?