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Stressors and coping mechanisms of students with single parents

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Abstract

This study investigates the stressors and coping mechanisms among junior high school students with single-parent guardians. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational design, the research identifies emotional, financial, and academic stressors, with students predominantly seeking social support as a coping mechanism. Findings reveal a moderate and significant positive correlation ($r = 0.468$, $p < 0.01$) between stressors and coping strategies, emphasizing the role of social connections in managing challenges. The results underscore the importance of fostering strong support systems within schools and communities, as these networks play a significant role in helping students navigate personal and academic difficulties. By shedding light on the interplay between stress and coping among junior high school learners in single-parent contexts, this study provides valuable insights that can guide educators, policymakers, and parents in designing interventions and support programs that strengthen student well-being, build resilience, and promote positive mental health outcomes.

Keywords: Coping mechanisms; Single-parent families; Stressors; Junior high school students

1. Introduction

Recent developments in the study of single-parent households highlight the growing recognition of the challenges faced by children, particularly during adolescence. Research from the last decade has underscored the unique stressors experienced by adolescents in single-parent families, such as financial difficulties, emotional strain, and academic struggles. These challenges have been found to significantly affect the well-being and academic performance of junior high school students (Amato, 2010; Buchanan et al., 2015). Adolescence is a critical developmental phase, and students in this stage must cope with various stressors, including peer pressure, academic demands, and the transition into adulthood. For students from single-parent households, these challenges can be compounded by the absence of one parent, leading to feelings of loss, anxiety, and increased responsibilities at home (Kelley et al., 2002). As such, the coping mechanisms these students employ are of particular interest, as they play a significant role in how these students manage stress and develop resilience.

Despite the increasing awareness of these issues, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the specific stressors and coping strategies of junior high school students from single-parent households. While studies have explored these factors in younger children and young adults, there is limited research on the unique experiences of adolescents in this age group. Preliminary data from observations and informal interviews with junior high school students in single-parent families indicate that academic pressure, financial stress, and lack of emotional support are key stressors. Additionally, these students employ a variety of coping strategies, such as seeking social support, engaging in extracurricular activities, and using emotion-focused techniques like mindfulness or avoidance. However, the relationship between these stressors and coping mechanisms remains underexplored, leaving a significant gap in the understanding of how these students navigate their academic and emotional challenges.

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This study aims to address this gap by investigating the specific stressors faced by junior high school students with single-parent guardians and the coping mechanisms they utilize. By examining these aspects in depth, the research will contribute valuable insights to the field of education, particularly in the context of supporting students from single-parent households. The findings will help identify strategies to support these students academically and emotionally, offering a basis for targeted interventions and support programs. Furthermore, understanding the relationship between stressors and coping mechanisms will aid in the development of more effective educational policies and practices tailored to this demographic.

The primary objectives of this study are to identify the specific stressors experienced by junior high school students with single-parent guardians, to examine the coping mechanisms they employ to manage these stressors, and to explore the relationship between the two. The benefits of this research extend beyond academic knowledge, as the findings will provide practical recommendations for educators, counselors, and policymakers. By gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by these students, schools and communities will be better equipped to offer the necessary support and resources to help them succeed both academically and emotionally.

The hypotheses guiding this research are: (1) Junior high school students with single-parent guardians experience various stressors, including emotional, financial, academic, and social stress; (2) These students utilize a range of coping mechanisms, such as social support, problem-solving, avoidance, and emotional regulation; and (3) There is a significant relationship between the stressors and coping mechanisms of junior high school students with single-parent guardians.

2. Methods

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design aimed at exploring the stressors and coping mechanisms among junior high school students from single-parent households and determining the relationship between these variables. The research was conducted at schools in Midsayap, Cotabato and at Labungan, Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao del Norte. The participants of this study are junior high school students, specifically those living in single-parent households, selected through random sampling to ensure representation across different grade levels (7th to 10th grades).

To gather data, a self-administered questionnaire (Cronbach alpha of 0.79) was used as the primary research instrument. The questionnaire consists of two main sections: the first section focuses on the stressors faced by the students, including emotional, academic, financial, and social stressors. Respondents are asked to rate the intensity of these stressors on a Likert scale, ranging from "Never" to "Always." The second section addresses the coping mechanisms employed by the students to manage their stress, including strategies such as seeking social support, problem-solving, emotional regulation, and others. Data collection was conducted with the informed consent of both students and school authorities.

For data analysis, statistical techniques were used to determine the relationship between the stressors and the coping mechanisms. The analysis primarily focuses on identifying correlations between the intensity of stressors and the coping strategies utilized by the students. This approach helps in understanding the ways in which students cope with the various challenges they face and provides insights into the effectiveness of these coping mechanisms in reducing stress.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Stressors

Table 1 shows the mean of statements describing different stressors experienced by junior high school students with single-parent guardians. The results reveal that the highest mean (3.74) is associated with "feeling worried about your parent's health," categorized as "Often." The findings show that the stress of junior high school students is most often associated with concerns about their parents' health (mean = 3.74). As highlighted by Leckman (2008), parental health significantly contributes to adolescent stress and anxiety. This aligns with Hooper et al. (2014), who noted that adolescents with ill parents are at a higher risk of emotional challenges such as anxiety and depression. The study implies that students' emotional responses are tied to fears of losing their parents or adjusting to changes in family dynamics. Conversely, the lowest reported stressor was "feeling like you don't have enough support from friends or family" (mean = 2.38), categorized as "Rarely." This finding supports Friedman et al. (2006), who observed that strong familial and social support reduces student stress.

Table 1 Stressors Among Junior High School Students with Single Parents

Statements	Mean	Description
Emotional Challenges		
Feeling lonely or isolated	2.94	Sometimes
Feeling responsible for taking care of younger sibling	3.41	Often
Feeling like you don't have enough time for yourself	3.00	Sometimes
Feeling worried about your parent's health	3.74	Often
Academic Pressure		
Feeling overwhelmed with schoolwork	3.06	Sometimes
Feeling pressure to succeed academically	3.03	Sometimes
Financial Strain		
Feeling pressure to contribute financially to the family	2.94	Sometimes
Feeling worried about your parent's financial situation	3.65	Often
Social Stigma		
Feeling like you don't have enough support from friends or family	2.38	Rarely
Experiencing conflict with your parent	2.76	Sometimes
Overall Mean	3.09	Sometimes

Interval Description

1.00 – 1.80: Never

1.81 – 2.60: Rarely

2.61 – 3.40: Sometimes

3.41 – 4.20: Often

4.21 – 5.00: Always

3.2. Coping Mechanisms

Table 2 presents the coping mechanisms employed by junior high school students. The highest mean (4.06) was for "talking to a friend or family member," categorized as "Often." Students most frequently coped with stress by talking to a friend or family member (mean = 4.06). Lee et al. (2017) identified social support as one of the most common coping strategies, emphasizing its role in reducing stress and improving mental health. Similarly, Kiecolt-Glaser and Glaser (2010) noted that social support buffers against stress, enhancing overall well-being.

However, students rarely sought professional help (mean = 2.44). Eisenberg et al. (2009) and Kessler et al. (2018) found that despite mental health challenges, many students avoid professional services, instead favoring informal strategies such as seeking support from peers or family.

Table 2 Coping Mechanisms Among Junior High School Students

Statements	Mean	Description
Seeking Social Support		
Talking to a friend or family member	4.06	Often
Seeking Professional Help		
Talking to a counsellor or therapist	2.44	Rarely

Engaging in Extra – Curricular Activities		
Engaging in hobbies or activities you enjoy	3.74	Often
Exercising or engaging in physical activity	3.09	Sometimes
Reading or writing	3.76	Often
Emotional Regulation		
Spending time in nature	3.21	Sometimes
Listening to music or watching movies	3.76	Often
Praying or meditating	4.03	Often
Problem Solving		
By thinking of practical solutions	3.41	Often
Avoidance		
Avoiding problems or responsibilities	2.76	Rarely
Overall Mean	3.43	Often

Interval: Description

1.00 – 1.80: Never

1.81 – 2.60: Rarely

2.61 – 3.40: Sometimes

3.41 – 4.20: Often

4.21 – 5.00: Always

3.3. Correlation Between Stressors and Coping Mechanisms

The correlation coefficient of 0.468 suggests a moderate positive relationship between stressors and coping mechanisms. The moderate and significant positive correlation ($r = 0.468, p < 0.01$) suggests that as stressors increase, students are more likely to engage in coping strategies. This finding is consistent with Compas et al. (2001), who noted that adolescents with higher stress levels employ a range of coping mechanisms, though these responses are influenced by other personal and social factors.

Table 3 Correlation Between Stressors and Coping Mechanisms

		Coping Mechanisms	Stressors
Coping Mechanisms	Pearson Correlation (r-value)	1	0.468**
	p-value		0.005
	N	34	34
Stressors	Pearson Correlation (r-value)	0.468**	1
	p-value	0.005	
	N	34	34

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4. Conclusion

Students with single parents as guardians experience moderate stress levels, particularly linked to concerns about their parents' health. This emotional burden underscores the challenges they face in balancing personal and academic responsibilities while addressing familial concerns. Furthermore, students tend to rely heavily on social support as their

primary coping mechanism, with a high mean score of 4.06. This indicates their recognition of the value of social connections, such as friends and family, in alleviating stress. Lastly, the study reveals a moderate positive correlation between stressors and coping mechanisms. This relationship highlights that as students face higher stress levels, they increasingly utilize coping strategies, emphasizing the critical role these mechanisms play in managing stress effectively.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

This study has no conflict of interest.

Statement of informed consent

Respondents were duly informed and were sought consent before the conduct of the study.

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