

# A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE ACADEMIC JOURNEY OF STUDENTS WITH SOLO PARENTS

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## ABSTRACT

Children of solo parents tend to face severe challenges that can hinder their academic performance. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms and realizations on the academic journey of the six students with solo parents enrolled at Montevista National High School. The study which employed qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach was conducted at Montevista National High School. There were six Junior High School students who were chosen as participants. Findings revealed a wide range of positive experiences encountered in their academic journey as a student with a solo parent such as self-improvement through responsibilities, well provided, becoming more responsible and independent, being supported, lots of positive things, and able to find happiness. Positive qualities were developed growing up with solo parent that contributed to their academic success such as being resilient, independent, responsible and disciplined. Also, there were lessons learned growing up with a solo parent such as becoming independent, resilient and adaptable, learning to work hard, finding happiness, and becoming responsible. The challenges that were encountered included lack of financial resources, being teased, lack of time and pressure, and being asked uncomfortably. Other challenges were difficulty to balance house chores and studies, absent parents, disagreement with parents, and having illness. Negative Issues include hearing misconceptions about teachers, misunderstanding with parent, and feeling of inadequacy. The coping mechanisms utilized to address challenges were regulating emotions, focusing on goals and ignoring negativity, leisure activity, and expressing emotions. The study recommended that schools may include a more responsive, compassionate, and effective support program that does not just teach academics, but nurtures the whole child, recognizing and actively addressing the unique realities of students growing up with solo parents.

**Keywords:** educational administration, student with solo parent, academic journey, experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, insights, phenomenological design

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Family structure is important in determining a learner's growth and academic life. Children of solo parents tend to face severe challenges that can hinder their academic performance. Financial insecurity is common, as solo parents might lack the means to provide essential education resources, causing more absenteeism and poorer academic achievement among their children. In the study Perera (2021) it indicated that 88% of students who came from solo-parent families indicated lower confidence in teachers and parents, which corresponded with lower class rankings.

In Malaysia, research conducted by Mansor (2023) recognized some of the problems experienced by students with solo parents, which include lack of parental direction, loss, and sadness due to the loss of a parent, conflicts among divorced parents, financial limitations, and stigma. These issues are likely to cause poor academic achievement and influence the general welfare of the students. In addition, Mohammad and Masroom (2020) reported that students with solo parent are often subjected to adverse emotions such as sadness, anger, and depression, causing a hindrance in their psychological growth and academic concentration.

In the national setting, Domingo et al. (2024) conducted a study in Quezon City which highlighted that student who grew up with solo parents faced emotional and supportive challenges, including a lack of affection, limited help from family members, and feelings of isolation. The absence of one parent often leads to emotional neglect and a lack of understanding from others. Financial challenges were also a significant concern for participants, with many experiencing financial hardships and the burden of being a provider.

Locally, in Montevista National High School, teachers and school authorities often face significant challenges in supporting learners who grew up with solo parents. It is a recurring concern that frequently lands on the desks of school guidance advocates, with an average of five incidents being reported a month despite the strict implementation of school rules and regulations. These cases often involve learners who struggle with behavior issues, frequently break school rules, or experience a notable decline in academic performance. A closer look reveals that many of these learners share a common background: they come from solo-parented family settings due to separation, solo parenthood, or loss due to death of one parent.

Despite the growing body of literature, research on the experiences of students with solo parents was limited, especially within the Philippine context. Studies have explored the challenges faced by solo-parent families; they often focus on solo parents themselves rather than their children. For instance, Apostol et al. (2018) examined the dual roles of solo mothers as parents and students, highlighting their struggles in balancing responsibilities. Similarly, Pardillo (2023) investigated the challenges solo student mothers encounter in managing their dual roles, emphasizing the need for support systems to alleviate their difficulties.

However, these studies primarily center on the parents' perspectives. Specifically, it focuses on describing the personal perspectives, challenges, and difficulties of solo-parent families and the impact of solo parenting on their academic performance. Thus, there is a significant gap in understanding the lived experiences of students with solo parents, particularly through qualitative, phenomenological studies that capture their unique challenges and coping mechanisms within the educational landscape.

### 1.1 Research Questions

This study explored the lived experiences of junior high school students with solo parents in their academic endeavors as well as the difficulties they faced and how they coped with these difficulties. This was guided by the following questions.

1. What are the experiences of the informants with solo parents in their academic journey?
2. What are the challenges of the informants with solo parents in their academic journey?
3. What are the mechanisms utilized by the informants in coping with the challenges encountered with solo parents in their academic journey?
4. What are the realizations gained from the experiences of the informants growing up with solo parents in their academic journey?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of related literature which provides a compilation of relevant information with regards to the focus of this study. It includes a discussion of related literature concerning experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and realizations of students with solo parents in their academic endeavors.

**Solo Parenting.** Solo parenting presents a multifaceted challenge that affects both the parent and the child, particularly in socioeconomically vulnerable communities. According to Aloro et al. (2022), solo parents in metropolitan areas of the Philippines frequently encounter economic obligations while simultaneously striving to meet their children's emotional and psychological needs, often without adequate external support.

**Academic Journey of Students with Solo Parents.** The academic journey of students with solo parents is not shaped by parental effort alone but also by external support systems. As Hock et al. (2017) pointed out, solo parents frequently rely on extended family, close friends, and community networks to share the burden of caregiving

and decision-making. These support systems not only help parents cope with their responsibilities but also expose children to a wider network of care and guidance, which broadens their social understanding.

**Experiences of Students with Solo Parents on their Academic Journey.** Students raised by solo parents experience a distinctive academic journey shaped by both challenges and opportunities. These children often navigate a path marked by emotional, financial, and social complexity. Despite this, research across various global contexts has demonstrated that students in solo-parent households can thrive when provided with the right support systems. In a U.S. study, Amato (2017) found that children in solo-parent families often develop strong adaptability, self-reliance, and problem-solving skills.

**Challenges of Students with Solo Parents in Their Academic Endeavor.** Students from single-parent households frequently face financial challenges because these families tend to live in poverty which restricts their access to educational resources and extracurricular activities while hindering school continuity all elements linked to reduced academic performance and increased dropout rates (Brown, 2010; McLanahan & Beck, 2015). Solo parents consistently experience high stress levels and poor mental health which results in diminished emotional presence and decreased participation in their children's educational activities (Jackson & Scheines, 2023). Students from solo-parent households face conditions that undermine their academic drive and emotional strength.

The Family Stress Model articulated by Conger, Conger, and Martin (2010) validates this perspective through its demonstration of how economic hardship combined with caregiver stress leads to parenting disruptions that subsequently affect children's academic development and emotional health. Even though certain children display remarkable resilience, the foundational and emotional setbacks associated with single-parent upbringing continue to obstruct their comprehensive development.

**Realizations of Students with Solo Parents in their Academic Journey.** Several students from single-parent families assume extra responsibilities, such as doing household chores and caring for younger siblings, which enhance their independence and time management skills (Demo & Fine, 2018; Amato & Patterson, 2017). Such an early sense of responsibility often carries forward into adulthood, fostering increased maturity and resilience. **Nonetheless**, the stress of these responsibilities can also be debilitating, leading to burnout and reducing the time available for academic and social activities (Brown & Shilling, 2021). Some students even experience social isolation as they devote more attention to family obligations than to interacting with peers.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014). In addition, according to Creswell (2013), phenomenology aims to describe what individuals experience during a particular phenomenon to uncover the essence of those experiences as perceived by the participants. Furthermore, this study utilized an In-Depth Interviews (IDI) to acquire information from research informants.

#### 3.2 Research Locale

This study was conducted at Montevista National High School, a public secondary institution located in the municipality of Montevista, in the province of Davao de Oro, Philippines. The school was deemed a suitable research locale as it represented a diverse range of student experiences. Some students were actively engaged in academics, extracurricular activities, and leadership roles, while others encountered academic difficulties, behavioral challenges, or recurrent school-related issues that required the intervention of teachers and school personnel over a period. These varied backgrounds offered a rich context for understanding the lived experiences of junior high school learners raised by solo parents.

#### 3.3 Research Participants

The study included six Junior High School students of Montevista National High School who were enrolled for School Year 2025–2026 as participants. Purposive sampling was employed for participant selection, as this non-probability sampling technique is widely recognized as appropriate for qualitative research. Through this method, the researcher intentionally selected participants who were most capable of providing rich, relevant data to address the central research questions. Given the study's objectives, the selected respondents were considered sufficient to achieve a data saturation point at which no new themes or significant information emerged from the data collection process. At this stage of the study, participants underwent in-depth interviews, allowing them to narrate their lived experiences, challenges, resilience strategies, and aspirations.

The inclusion criteria for participant selection were as follows: (1) students must be officially enrolled at Montevista National High School; (2) must be living with or primarily raised by a solo parent due to separation, death, abandonment, annulment, or voluntary solo parenthood; and (3) must express willingness to share their academic experiences and the challenges they faced. Conversely, the exclusion criteria included: (1) students residing in dual-parent households or under the care of guardians other than their biological parent; (2) students with limited capacity to communicate effectively; and (3) students who were not emotionally stable to participate in interviews due to recent traumatic experiences related to solo parenting.

### 3.4 Data Collection

The researcher first submitted the research manuscript to the Ethics Review Committee to secure an Ethics Clearance Certificate and sought endorsement from the Dean of the Graduate School. Upon receiving the endorsement, the researcher wrote a formal letter to the Schools Division Superintendent requesting permission to conduct the study. After obtaining the approval letter from the Schools Division Superintendent, the researcher then sought authorization from the school principal of Montevista National High School.

Following administrative approvals, the researcher prepared the necessary materials and tools for data gathering, including the interview guide, audio recorder, and field notes. In adherence to ethical standards, the researcher secured both informed consent and assent, given that the participants were minors. Informed consent was obtained from the parent or legal guardian to ensure they fully understood the nature, purpose, potential risks, and benefits of the study. Simultaneously, an informed assent was obtained from the student participants using age-appropriate language to confirm their voluntary participation. Both consent and assent documents clearly stated that participation was entirely voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Upon securing consent and assent, the researcher conducted in-person in-depth interviews at mutually agreed-upon times with each participant. A semi-structured interview guide, developed and validated by the researcher, was used to facilitate the interviews. As emphasized by Rucker (2017), such an instrument ensures that all relevant topics necessary to address the research questions are adequately covered.

After data collection, the researcher prepared the data for analysis by systematically processing it. This involved transcribing the audio recordings into written form with close attention to detail, ensuring that every nuance of the participants' responses was accurately captured. In cases where multiple languages were used, the researcher translated the transcripts with cultural and linguistic sensitivity, preserving the original meanings and contexts. Once transcription and translation were completed, the data were organized into preliminary themes, codes, and categories aligned with the research objectives, resulting in a structured dataset ready for rigorous phenomenological analysis.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Following transcription and, where applicable, translation, the researcher revisited the study's objectives and research questions to guide the structuring of the acquired data. The coding process involved organizing and categorizing the raw data to reduce it to the most relevant information aligned with the research objectives. This allowed the researcher to break down the data into manageable segments, from which meaningful themes could emerge.

Subsequently, a thematic analysis grounded in the descriptive phenomenological tradition was employed to generate rich descriptions of participants' lived experiences. This approach allowed the researcher to explore the meanings embedded in the narratives, while systematically organizing the data into significant patterns and thematic

clusters. A thematic map was developed to illustrate the relationships among themes, sub-themes, and codes, providing a visual and conceptual structure for interpretation.

Throughout the analysis process, the researcher maintained the philosophical stance that the goal was to uncover the lived experiences of the participants, rather than impose external interpretations. The meaning-making process was guided by the voices of the junior high school learners from solo-parented families, whose narratives shaped the identification of shared experiences, challenges, resilience strategies, and aspirations. These commonalities formed the core of the findings and were central to understanding the phenomenon under investigation.

### 3.6 Ethical Consideration

According to Bhashin (2020), ethical considerations reflect the beliefs and principles that should be upheld throughout the conduct of a research study. In this research, the ethical standards were strictly observed to ensure the protection and respect of all participants. The following areas were addressed:

In addition to the importance of selecting suitable research methodology and procedures, the significance of ethical considerations in performing the research was emphasized. As part of the research process, all participants were asked for their consent and were informed about the study's goals as well as the fact that no one would be affected because of their participation. All information collected was used solely for the study. The researcher promised to perform the study objectively and to prevent or mitigate bias or self-deception

Moreover, the confidentiality of the data and the anonymity of the research informants were observed by the researcher. With the collected data, the researcher used numerical marking and coding methods so that the informants remained to be anonymous. It is important to keep the identity of participants confidential or anonymous, and the assurances extended beyond protecting their names to also include the avoidance of using self-identifying statements and information.

## 4. FINDINGS

This chapter presents the result of the study about the lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms and realizations of students in with solo parents in their academic journey. This includes the responses of the participants of the study taken from the interviews conducted, which I analyzed thoroughly and eventually extracted the core ideas with the help of the experts.

### 4.1 What are the experiences of the informants with solo parents in their academic journey?

This section presents the results of the 1<sup>st</sup> major research question; 'What are the experiences of the informants with solo parents in their academic journeys?'. The questions were intended to gather information on the experiences of the research Informants regarding their academic journey as students with solo parents.

#### 4.1.1 Positive Experiences Encountered in Academic Journey as a Student with a Solo Parent.

The themes in this section emerged from the specific research question 1.1 'What positive experiences have you encountered in your academic journey as a student with a solo parent?' The responses created themes: becoming more responsible and independent, being supported, becoming resilient and adaptable.

**Becoming More Responsible.** Solo parent households often serve as crucibles for developing highly responsible, independent, and resilient individuals. These qualities, forged through necessity and mutual support, can be significant assets in a student's academic journey and future success.

Informant 3 exclaimed that because she witnessed the struggles of her mother in raising her, it helped her to become more responsible and independent. She proudly shared that;

Growing up with a solo parent made me more responsible and independent. Cause I have witnessed all the hard work my mother does for me to finish my studies or

to continue my studies and she also made sure that all my needs in school are provided.

**Being Supported.** Students raised by solo parents often face unique challenges, but the presence of supportive solo parents can significantly foster positive academic experiences and lead to remarkable success. Supportive solo parent acts as a powerful anchor, instilling values, resilience, and a deep appreciation for education. Their unwavering commitment, resourcefulness, and emotional support often become the bedrock upon which their children build remarkable academic success, demonstrating that family structure is less determinant than the quality of love, support, and guidance provided. This is what Informant 4 also experienced. He thoughtfully shared that;

I encountered that my mother continued to support me in my academic journey.

**Becoming Independent.** Students from solo-parent families often become independent at an earlier age compared to their peers from two-parent households. With one parent juggling multiple responsibilities (work, household, parenting), children often learn to handle tasks themselves, such as preparing simple meals, managing their belongings, or completing homework without constant supervision.

When asked about what she learned growing up in a solo-parent family affected her, Informant 2 reflected thoughtfully on her experience and shared personal insight. She plainly said that;

I learned to be independent. I learned how not to rely on my mother and father. I can live in a single day without my parents.

**Becoming Resilient and Adaptable.** The inherent resilience and adaptability of students from solo-parent households are powerful assets to possess. When these personal strengths are buttressed by robust governmental policies and well-implemented local and school-based support programs, these students are not only able to overcome adversity but are truly empowered to excel academically and build a successful future.

In line with this theme, Informant 1 talked about how she was able to adjust to problems by being resilient. She resonantly stated that;

You can adjust with problems and you need to continue despite the problems encountered and because I only have my father as my parent, I also learned from him.

The same sentiment was shared by Informant 2, where she highlighted how she persevered and practiced how to adjust and adapt in different situations. She beamingly discussed that;

My perseverance and adjustments in different situations.

#### 4.1.2 Positive Qualities Developed Growing Up with Solo Parent that Contribute Academic Success.

This section presents the results to the specific research question 1.2 ‘What positive qualities have you developed growing up with solo parent that contribute to your academic success?’ under the 1<sup>st</sup> major research question ‘1. What are the experiences of the informants with solo parents in their academic journey?’ Only one theme emerged as result which is resiliency, independence, responsible and disciplined.

**Resiliency, Independence, Responsible and Disciplined.** The academic journey of students with solo parents is deeply intertwined with the development of core character traits like resilience, independence, responsibility, and discipline. This outcome is parallel to the findings of Pandya (2023) who discovered that children subjected to extended solo parenting become more resilient over time and develop coping strategies like emotional maturity and independence, particularly if backed by stable environments and caregiving stability.

Informant 1 shared how she felt the need to strive for success despite the difficulty. She humbly verbalized that;

You must continue striving despite the hardships because you must be independent and you must trust yourself because no one can help me but myself, so I must work hard because I can only depend and rely on myself

Informant 3 also reiterated how her experience made her hard-working, independent and disciplined. She shyly stated that;

I became hard working, independent and disciplined.

This is similar with the response of Informant 4, who expressed how her experience as a student with solo parent molded her to be independent and responsible. She meekly added that;

I became independent and responsible.

## 4.2 What are the challenges of the informant with solo parents in their academic journey?

This section presents the results of the 2<sup>nd</sup> major research question ‘What are the challenges of the informant with solo parents in their academic journey?’ Three specific research questions were used to collect data for this question highlighting the understanding of the research informants on the challenges faced by the students with solo parents in their academic journey.

### 4.2.1 Common Problems Encountered in Academic Journey Growing Up with Solo Parent

The themes derived from the responses of the research informants to the specific research 2.1 ‘What are the common problems encountered in your academic journey growing up with solo parents?’ are presented in this section. The themes were: lack of financial, lack of time and pressure.

**Lack of Financial.** Students of solo parents often have a clearer understanding of financial constraints, and the hard work required to earn resources. This can translate into a stronger motivation to make the most of opportunities, including their education, as they recognize the investment being made in them. This is in consonance with the study of Sanborn et al (2024) noted that single-parenting students were nearly twice as likely to have debt and five times as likely to depend on food stamps as non-parents, indicating financial struggles that can negatively influence academic achievement.

Informant 4 shared their financial difficulty that;

Financial constraints.

Informant 6 shared how his father faced challenges in financial aspect of raising them. She sadly reiterated that;

During our transfers, it was always a hassle because we did not really know the people we were staying with. When I lived with my aunties, every time my father sent money, it became complicated because different people were also taking care of my younger brother. My brother was living in Bukidnon with our maternal grandmother. Every month, my father would send ₱2,000 to me and ₱2,000 to my brother. Sometimes, my father experiences financial difficulties because he also lives in a boarding house and has a vice he smokes. I told him to stop smoking because if he gets sick, who will take care of him? We are still studying and depend on him.

**Lack of Time and Pressure.** The combination of lack of time and pressure forms a significant hurdle in the academic journey of students from solo-parent households. Often, parents in these households must work long hours of hold multiple jobs to provide for their children, leaving less opportunity for meaningful interaction and support.

Informant 3 verbalized how her mother lacks time to spend with her. She sadly admitted that;

Because of her job as a teacher, we experienced a lack of time together. There are times when I must be responsible and independent, I also feel pressure, but not

from my mother, it is from myself. I just do not want all my mother's hard work to go to waste.

#### 4.2.2 Some Situations Encountered Growing Up with Solo Parent that Hinder Plans in Pursuing Academic Journey

The themes derived from the responses of the research informants to the specific research 2.2 'What are some of the situations you encountered growing up with solo parent that hinder your plans in pursuing your academic journey?' are presented in this section. The themes were: difficulty balancing house chores and studies, and having disagreement with parents.

**Difficulty in Balance House Chores and Studies.** The challenge of balancing house chores and studies is a particularly prominent and impactful factor in the academic journey of students from solo-parent households. This is not merely a matter of time management but often involves significant responsibilities that can genuinely impede a student's ability to focus on their education. Informant 4 honestly shared that;

When I am very busy at school, and I still have work to do at home, everything piles up, and I struggle with time management. My younger sibling is lazy, so I end up doing all the house chores, washing the dishes, sweeping the floor because he does not help or pay attention to what needs to be done. That is why the plans I make for my studies often do not get accomplished, because I am overwhelmed with responsibilities at home.

This was agreed upon by Informant 6 when she sadly stated that;

Sometimes, I cannot clean the house because I have assignments to do. There are days when I have two or three assignments. I usually go to sleep around 9 PM. I even told my grandfather that I'll get my cellphone at 8 PM because I still need to use it for things like doing research, especially for ICT. And when I do not feel like eating, my father encourages me to eat so I will not get sick.

**Having Disagreement with Parent.** Having disagreements with a parent is a normal part of adolescence and development, but for students in solo-parent households, these disagreements can carry a different weight and potentially have a more pronounced impact on their academic journey. With only one parent present, there can be heightened expectations and stronger emotional reactions, which sometimes make conflicts more challenging to navigate.

Informant 5 verbalized how his mom gets angry and how they sometimes have disagreements which can affect his emotions in school. He gloomily expressed that;

I do not have any situations or anything but sometimes we have some disagreements because my mom gets angry very quickly. I do not like it when she yells at me in the morning and when I get home. I do not know if her anger comes from their breakup or our lifestyle right now. Whenever I go with my friends for example, my mother wants me to go straight home instead. And when I arrived home late in the afternoon, my mom gets angry and nags me.

In a while, Informant 5 was silent. He reminisced about what happened, and sadly, he continued sharing that;

I do not know where her anger comes from. Her anger is directed at me. In my mind, I do not like to go home anymore. And in school, my mind is wandering about how my mother nags me and then I get distracted because when I get home maybe my mother will nag me again.

#### 4.3. What are the mechanisms utilized by the informants in coping with the challenges encountered by the students with solo parents in their academic journey?

This section presents the results on the mechanisms utilized by research Informants of the challenges encountered by the students with solo parents in their academic journey. This was the gist of the 3<sup>rd</sup> major research question, what are the mechanisms utilized by the informants in coping with the challenges encountered by the students with solo parents in their academic journey?'

#### **4.3.1 Ways to Deal with Negative Issues Encountered Growing Up with Solo Parent Outside and Inside the School**

In this section, the themes that emerged were from the responses to specific research question 3.1, 'How did you deal with the negative issues you encountered growing up with solo parent outside and inside the school?' The following were the themes: regulating emotions, focusing on goal and ignoring negativity.

**Regulating Emotions.** Managing emotions well is vital for students from single-parent families to succeed. Emotional regulation controls how and when emotions are felt and shown. Informant 2 described how she dealt with negative issues she encountered in growing up with a solo parent outside and inside the school. She proudly reiterated that;

For this question on how I face challenges I believe that whenever there are negative issues or experiences coming from outside, you just must stay strong and not let those things affect you. If you let them get to you and end up reacting or fighting back, you will be the one labeled as the bad person. That's why it is important to control yourself. Just let them be.

This was contended by Informant 6 when she shared that she controls herself to not be affected. She pompously stated that;

I just must control myself so that I will not be affected. I try not to let those things get to me. My auntie also reminds me to stay strong and control my emotions, especially since they have been the ones taking care of us like a mother would. Sometimes we would ask, 'When will Mama come home?' and they would say, 'She will come home on your birthday.' But she never came. That is why now, I only call her when I really need something or when I miss her.

**Focus on Goal and Ignore Negativity.** For students raised by a solo parent, keeping their attention on personal goals and tuning out negativity from others is an important way to cope with life's challenges. This strong focus serves as a shield, helping them avoid being influenced by criticism or unfair comparisons.

Informant 3 stated her experience of focusing on her dreams and goals. She dreamily said that;

I just focus on my dreams and goals. When people say negative things about me or my mother, I do not listen to them. I do not really have any negative issues at school. Sometimes, people say I should be grateful because my mother is a teacher, and I get to experience things others do not. And yes, I do get angry at times.

#### **4.3.2 Support Systems or Personal Strategies Helped in Growing Up with Solo Parent Thrive in Academic Journey**

Presented in this section are the themes drawn from the responses to the specific question 3.2, 'What support systems or personal strategies have helped you growing up with solo parent thrive in your academic journey?' The following themes were established: thrive in academic journey, study hard, and moral and emotional support.

**Thrive in Academic Journey.** Students with solo parents face unique challenges that can affect their education. However, with strong support and good strategies, they can thrive, excelling, staying engaged, and growing fully despite their circumstances.

Informant 1 revealed how she looks at the hard work of her father and makes it her motivation to study hard. She beamingly proclaimed that;

My father is working hard even if he is alone. I focus on my studies so that I can help him.

Informant 3 also shared how her mother, though alone, gives her the biggest support from teacher her with her studies and assignments. She proudly expressed that;

My mother gives me the biggest support. Though she is alone, she still helps me in studying and doing my assignments. We also bond at times, but not always.

**Study Hard.** This theme is often the most direct and seemingly obvious response to academic challenges, but for students growing up with a solo parent, this simple directive belies a complex reality. While a strong work ethic is vital, it's not always just a matter of willpower.

Informant 2 responded that she will do her best to study. She expressed that;

I will strive hard to study well to succeed.

Informant 5 jubilantly shared that;

I made my situation my motivation to succeed in my academic journey. I will not let it affect me. I want to prove to others that I can be successful and grow into a strong person despite my parents' separation. I do not judge, but I have seen others end up in a bad situation, and I tell myself, 'Why should I end up like that?' Instead, I use it as motivation to do better. Even though I do not have a father by my side, I still acknowledge that he brought me into this world, and for that, I am thankful. But honestly, there were times when I wished he was not my father, because he never really supported me, he only started doing so after they separated.

**Moral and Emotional Support.** This theme is the core of resilience and well-being for students in solo-parent households. When these students face negative issues, both inside and outside of school, the presence or absence of this support significantly shapes their ability to cope, regulate emotions, and ultimately, succeed academically. Informant 4 expressed how she received moral support and how she studied hard. She shyly stated that;

Moral support and study hard.

Informant 5 also shared how he was provided with emotional support by his parents because they expressed how proud they are of him. He emotionally exclaimed that;

Emotional support. He tells me that he is very proud of me. I am happy when he congratulates me for my success.

#### 4.4 What realizations were gained by the informants growing up with solo parents in their academic journey?

The results in this section were from the responses to the specific research questions used to gather data for the 4<sup>th</sup> major research question, 'What realizations were gained by the informants growing up with solo parents in their academic journey?'

##### 4.4.1 Important Life as a Student Raised by a Solo Parent

The themes created in this section were from the responses to the specific research question 4.1, Looking back on your academic journey, what important life lessons have you realized as a student raised by a solo parent?' The themes were becoming independent and strong, focusing on studies, and observing parent choices.

**Becoming Independent and Strong.** For students from solo-parent households, independence is not always a choice; it's often a necessity forged by circumstances. This early exposure to self-reliance is a profound life lesson. Meanwhile, Strength, in this context, refers to emotional resilience, mental toughness, and the ability to persevere through adversity.

Informant 2 expressed the need to be independent and strong as an important life lesson she learned as a student raised by a solo parent. She eagerly stated that;

The lesson that I learned is to be independent and strong.

**Focus on Studies.** This theme is not just an academic pursuit, but an important life lesson and often, a core survival strategy. This realization is deeply intertwined with the unique challenges and resilience developed in solo-parent households.

Informant 5 has gained clarity about the importance of not allowing these feelings to hold him back and happily informed that;

I realized that it's not that I do not need my father, but ever since before, I have not really felt his love because he was never on my side. He prioritized his vices like drinking, smoking, and spending time with his friends and now, he's focused only on his own interests. So, as my mother always tells me, I shouldn't let these things affect me, especially when it comes to my goals. I am still young, and I need to focus on my studies because my mother is there to help and support me. I should not let anything hinder me from achieving my dreams.

**Observing Parent Choices.** Watching a solo parent's choices teaches students valuable life lessons that shape their values and decisions. These lessons come from observing their parent's struggles and sacrifices, not from direct instruction. Informant 6 expressed that she does not want to marry early like her parents. She thoughtfully shared this decision;

I will not emulate them, getting married at an early age. There is a big gap between the ages of my mother and father, almost six years.

#### 4.4.2 Overcoming Challenges in School Shaped Perspective on Hard Work, Resilience, and Personal Growth

This section presents the themes for the specific question 4.2, 'How has overcoming challenges in school shaped your perspective on hard work, resilience, and personal growth?' This is under the 4<sup>th</sup> major research question '4. What realizations were gained by the informants growing up with solo parents in their academic journey?' From the responses, the following themes were drawn: becoming more hardworking through adversities, and becoming more resilient by masking emotions.

**Becoming More Hardworking through Adversities.** This theme is an influential and often overlooked aspect. The adversities faced by students growing up with solo parents can forge incredible strength and lead to a heightened sense of hard work and determination.

This is displayed and can be asserted based on the answer given by Informant 1 which focused on how they developed the value of working hard. She thoughtfully recapped that;

I became hardworking since my mother left us because it was only our father who took care of us. That is why we worked together, and we helped each other.

**Becoming more Resilient by Masking Emotions.** This theme is often seen as a protective mechanism and it's essential to understand both its adaptive and potentially detrimental aspects, particularly for a student's academic journey. For a student in a solo-parent household, the realization to mask emotions often stems from a deep-seated desire to protect the parent.

Informant 5 expressed how he would mask his emotions and make sure that when he feels the need to cry, he would not cry in front of other people. He emotionally stated that;

Sometimes when I cannot stand it anymore, I would go to the bathroom to cry but I always try to carry it with a smile. I do not show them that I have a problem because if I show them that I have a problem, I will become dependent on them and that I need to be comforted by them. Or that I must be dependent on them, but I just carry it behind a smile.

#### 4.4.3 Realizations Gained About the Role of Solo Parent in Academic Success

The themes in this section were drawn from specific research question 4.3, 'What realizations have you gained about the role of your solo parent in your academic success?' under the 4<sup>th</sup> major research question '4. What realizations were gained by the informants growing up with solo parents in their academic journey?' The theme drawn was very hard and lots of sacrifices.

**Very Hard and Lots of Sacrifices.** Students growing up with solo parents, particularly in contexts where resources might be tight, witness firsthand the sheer effort, resilience, and often quiet suffering of their parents. They see their parent working long hours, making difficult choices, and sacrificing personal needs to provide for the family.

Informant 1 shared how he pitied his father, that is why he works and helps him and makes sure that he contributes to doing his share of household chores. He compassionately said that;

I feel pity for my father. That is why I always make sure to help him, so he does not lose his strength. Unlike others who go straight to using their cellphones when they get home, I fetch water, cut firewood since we use it for cooking, and help in the wet market selling meat. I even have a sideline on Saturdays and Sundays. It's not easy not having a mother. Other students just change their clothes when they get home and have their parents take care of everything. But for me, I still must wash my own clothes. Sometimes, when my father arrives home, he goes straight to sleep because his eyes hurt.

Informant 3 expressed deep gratitude for her mother's significant role in her life, recognizing that her mother's dedication has helped shape her values and determination to succeed. She lovingly uttered that;

My mom played the big role in my life. Her sacrifices, support and many more inspired me to do my best.

Another Informant who agrees with this idea is Informant 5, who articulated that he realized that his mother is a solo parent and that she has a lot of sacrifices and he wants to repay her by being responsible and successful in school. He affectionately said that;

I realized that my mother is a solo parent, and she has a lot of sacrifices for me, and I want to repay her by being successful in school and being responsible for her.

Informant 6 has also seen the sacrifices of her parents and She caringly voiced out.

My father and mother are different. My mother had many partners, while my father only had a few. Right now, my father has a girlfriend who is working

abroad, and she is the one providing for us. She bought my school uniform and even gave us allowance for school.

**Lots of Contribution.** Students growing up with a solo parent often develop profound realizations about their parent's role in their academic success. These insights are not merely intellectual understandings but are deeply felt, shaping their motivation, gratitude, and future aspirations.

Informant 2 shared how she realized the big contribution her mother has made to her success in school. She radiantly stated that;

My mother has the biggest help and contribution in the success of my studies.  
That's it.

**Appreciating Parents Effort.** Gaining realizations about the immense effort their parents put in is a profound and often transformative experience. These realizations are crucial for their personal development and significantly impact their academic journey, often fostering a deeper sense of motivation, responsibility, and gratitude.

Informant 4 noted how her mother gives maximum effort in teaching how to live their lives independently. She joyfully expressed that;

My mother works hard for us. As for her, our problems are our own, and we should be the ones to solve them. Maybe that's her way of teaching us. Because if she always helps or solves things for us, we will not learn anything, and we might become too dependent on her. That is why she lets us handle our own problems, including those we face in school.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on the lived experiences of the students with solo parents in their academic journey. In-depth interview was used to gather substantial data and participants expressed their coping mechanisms, and insights. Based on the study findings, I concluded that even though students with single parents face many challenges in their academic journey but still they are striving to perform well in their studies. Furthermore, the research has identified the factors for the positive performance of students from single parent during their academic journey in school including self-improvement through responsibilities, working hard, being resilient, increasing perseverance, and being strong and independent among others.

Nevertheless, even with all the difficulties that the participants encountered, they are still optimistic to continue and striving harder for them to finish their studies successfully. In fact, each of them is constantly finding ways and means to counter these problems in their academic journey. After conducting this study, I find myself being encouraged to develop more as a teacher and support my students with the best of my abilities, knowing that they may be facing various difficulties at home that could hinder them from performing well in school. I will make sure to internalize the insights that the participants shared in this study and keep them in mind in dealing with different kinds of students.

Lastly, considering that the current study viewed the phenomenon through the lens of school heads, future research may focus on examining the lives and school-based experiences of teachers to gain a holistic understanding of the educational environment and its influence on students with solo parents.

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