

Title

**EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY STRUCTURE
ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS AT CHINSAPO
SECONDARY SCHOOL**

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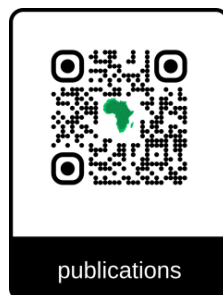
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of single parent family structure on the academic achievement of students at Chinsapo Secondary School in Lilongwe, Malawi. Adopting a comparative correlational research design, the researcher collected data from 48 students in Forms 3 and 4 (24 from single-parent families and 24 from two-parent families) and 4 teachers using structured and semi-structured questionnaires.

Key findings revealed a clear academic disparity: only 25 % of students from single-parent families reported “Excellent/Good” overall grades, compared with 58.3 % from two-parent families. Students from single-parent households faced significantly higher socio-economic and emotional challenges, including lack of school fees, heavy household responsibilities, emotional stress, and limited parental involvement. Support systems within the school and community were found to be inadequate, with 83.3 % of single-parent students reporting no external community/NGO support and over half lacking access to a dedicated school counselor.

Interpreted through Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, the results indicate that the observed academic gap stems primarily from resource deficits and weak linkages across the microsystem (family), mesosystem (home–school–community), and exosystem (parental employment and financial constraints), rather than family structure alone. The study concludes that targeted interventions are essential to close the achievement gap and recommends the establishment of formal school counseling and mentorship programmes, a dedicated bursary scheme, and strengthened collaboration with community organisations and NGOs.

Keywords: single-parent families, academic achievement, family structure, Chinsapo Secondary School, Malawi, socio-economic challenges, emotional challenges, support systems, Ecological Systems Theory, secondary education

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental driver of personal and national development. Students’ academic performance is influenced by a variety of factors,

including family background, socio-economic status, and the home environment (*Henderson & Mapp, 2002; re-emphasized by Jeynes, 2017*). Among these, family structure has been identified as a key determinant of educational outcomes (*Ashiabi & Olufemi, 2016*). The rise of single-parent families has drawn attention to how changes in family dynamics may affect students’ academic achievement.

Background of the Study

Globally, the landscape of family structures has undergone significant transformations over recent decades. The prevalence of single-parent families has increased worldwide, driven by various factors including rising divorce rates, separation, increased non-marital births, and the unfortunate death of a parent (*United Nations, 2019; Pew Research Center, 2019*). This demographic shift is not unique to Western societies but is a global phenomenon affecting both developed and developing nations, including countries in Africa (*UNICEF, 2021*). Research from various international contexts consistently indicates that children from single-parent households often face a distinct set of challenges, impacting their development and educational trajectories (*Ashiabi & Olufemi, 2016; United Nations, 2019*).

Family structure plays a significant role in the development and academic success of children. Traditionally, the two-parent family model has been considered the norm, providing children with emotional support, financial stability, and guidance. However, over recent decades, the rise in single-parent families has become a notable social phenomenon globally (*United Nations, 2019*) and in Malawi. This change is driven by factors such as divorce, separation, the death of a parent, and increasing numbers of unmarried parents.

Single-parent families often face unique challenges, including limited financial resources, increased parental responsibilities, and reduced availability of adult supervision and support (*Bradshaw & Finch, 2017; Cherlin, 2018*). These factors may adversely affect the academic achievement of children raised in such households. Several studies indicate that students from single-parent families tend to have lower academic performance, higher dropout rates, and less engagement in school activities compared to their peers from two-parent families (*Ashiabi & Olufemi, 2016; Lee & Song, 2019*).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The structure of a student's family is a critical factor that can influence academic performance. In Chinsapo Secondary School, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of students coming from single-parent families. While single-parent households may offer a loving environment, they often face unique socio-economic and emotional challenges that can hinder students' academic achievement (*Bradshaw & Finch, 2017*). These challenges include limited financial resources, less parental supervision, and emotional stress, which may affect students' motivation and concentration in school (*Lee & Song, 2019*).

Despite these concerns, there is limited research specifically focused on how the single-parent family structure impacts academic outcomes within the Chinsapo community. This gap in knowledge makes it difficult for educators and policymakers to design effective support systems tailored to the needs of students from single-parent households. Therefore, this study seeks to explore and understand the impact of single-parent family structure on the academic achievement of students at Chinsapo Secondary School.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Main Objective:

- To explore the impact of single-parent family structure on the academic achievement of students at Chinsapo Secondary School.

Specific Objectives:

- To examine the academic performance of students from single-parent families at Chinsapo Secondary School.
- To identify the socio-economic and emotional challenges faced by students from single-parent households that may influence their academic achievement.
- To assess the support systems available for students from single-parent families within

the school and community.

- To compare the academic outcomes of students from single-parent families with those from two-parent families at Chinsapo Secondary School.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the academic performance of students from single-parent families at Chinsapo Secondary School?
- What socio-economic and emotional challenges do students from single-parent households face that may affect their academic achievement?
- What support systems are available within the school and community to assist students from single-parent families?
- How does the academic performance of students from single-parent families compare to that of students from two-parent families at Chinsapo Secondary School?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is significant because it provides insight into how single-parent family structures impact the academic achievement of students at Chinsapo Secondary School. Understanding this relationship is essential for several reasons:

The findings will help teachers and school administrators recognize the unique challenges faced by students from single-parent families and tailor teaching approaches and support programs to improve their academic outcomes (*Goodman & Hambleton, 2019*).

It will raise awareness for parents and guardians among single parents about the potential academic challenges their children might face and encourage them to seek appropriate support mechanisms to enhance their children's educational success (*Gonzales et al., 2015*).

By highlighting the influence of family structure on education, the research can inform the development of policies and interventions aimed at supporting vulnerable students, ensuring equitable access to educational resources and opportunities (*Burtless & Smeeding, 2019*).

For researchers it will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on family structure and academic

performance, particularly within the Malawian context, and may serve as a foundation for further research (Maxwell, 2013; re-emphasized by Yin, 2018).

The community members will find that the findings will promote community awareness of the importance of supporting single-parent families to foster a conducive environment for students' academic growth (Portes & Vickstrom, 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of existing literature relevant to the study's objectives, which explore the impact of single-parent family structures on academic achievement at Chinsapo Secondary School. The review synthesizes theoretical perspectives and empirical findings from various studies, ranging from global contexts to specific research in Africa and Malawi. This aims to establish a foundational understanding of key concepts, identify gaps in current knowledge, and highlight the significance of the proposed research. The chapter begins by defining critical terms, followed by an in-depth discussion of empirical evidence directly addressing each of the study's four objectives.

Empirical Evidence

This literature review chapter is structured to address four primary objectives critical to exploring the impact of single parent family structure on academic achievement.

The academic performance of students from single-parent families at Chinsapo Secondary School.

Research globally has consistently explored the relationship between family structure and academic performance. Many studies suggest that children from single-parent households, on average, tend to achieve lower academic outcomes compared to their peers from two-parent families (Ashiabi & Olufemi, 2016; Lee & Song, 2019). For instance, a meta-analysis by Amato (2010), while a foundational work, highlighted consistent findings across various

contexts that children experiencing family dissolution often demonstrate reduced academic performance, with more recent studies continuing to confirm these general trends and attribute differences to various mediating factors such as reduced parental time and financial resources (Pew Research Center, 2019). However, it's important to note that some studies find the direct effect of single parenting on academic performance to be non-significant when other factors like motivation and community support are considered (Agba & Onwuegbule, 2023).

The narrative surrounding single-parent families is complex, often influenced by diverse cultural norms, economic realities, and historical factors. Studies in various African countries largely corroborate the global trend. For example, research in Nigeria by Ashiabi and Olufemi (2016) found that students from single-parent homes experienced lower academic performance compared to those from two-parent homes. Similarly, a study focusing on junior high school pupils in Ghana noted that children from single-parent households or those experiencing family disruptions tend to exhibit lower academic achievement, often linked to emotional and psychological stress (Azumah et al., 2018). These studies underscore that while single-parenthood is increasingly common, it often correlates with academic challenges for children across the continent.

The socio-economic and emotional challenges faced by students from single-parent households that may influence their academic achievement.

Socio-economic challenges are frequently cited as a primary factor influencing academic outcomes in single-parent households globally. These families often experience lower income levels, higher rates of poverty, and less access to educational resources compared to two-parent families (Bradshaw & Finch, 2017; Cherlin, 2018). This economic disparity can limit access to essential learning materials, quality childcare, and extracurricular activities that support academic growth. Emotionally, children in single-parent homes may experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and behavioral issues due to parental conflict (if divorce/separation is the cause), reduced parental supervision, or the emotional toll on the single parent juggling multiple responsibilities (Puga, 2025). These emotional challenges can manifest as lower self-esteem, reduced classroom engagement, and difficulties with concentration, all of which

hinder academic achievement (*Lee & Song, 2019*).

Socio-economic and emotional challenges for single-parent families are often exacerbated by existing poverty and limited social safety nets. Research in Tanzania, for instance, highlights that single mothers face manifold challenges, including economic hardship, social stigma, cultural biases, and psychological stress, which collectively hinder their ability to adequately support their children's education (*Shitindi & Lubawa, 2019*). These challenges can lead to reduced parental supervision, fewer educational resources at home, and increased psychological strain on children, impacting their focus and motivation in school. Community-based support programs are often crucial in mitigating these challenges (*Sibanda et al., 2019*).

The support systems available for students from single-parent families within the school and community.

Schools and communities globally implement various support systems to mitigate the disadvantages faced by students from single-parent families. School-based interventions often include academic advising, tutoring services, counseling, and mental health support (*Generations College, 2024*). Some schools adopt collaborative and strengths-based approaches, focusing on building resilience and leveraging existing family and community resources (*Franklin & Kim, 2020*). Beyond academic support, schools may provide access to nutritional programs or referrals to social services. At the community level, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations, and local government initiatives often offer financial aid, mentorship programs, after-school programs, and family counseling services to single-parent households (*UNICEF, 2021*). These external supports are critical in filling resource gaps.

Similar to other African nations, Malawi, extended family support is a cornerstone for many single-parent households. Schools may offer general counseling services, but specific programs or targeted academic support for students from single-parent families might be limited due to resource constraints. Community initiatives, often spearheaded by NGOs or religious organizations, play a crucial role in providing support, including educational sponsorships, school feeding programs, and psychosocial support (*UNICEF, 2021*, on broader child well-being programs which would

indirectly assist vulnerable families). Understanding the extent and effectiveness of these existing formal and informal mechanisms at Chinsapo Secondary School and its surrounding community is a key focus of this study.

The academic outcomes of students from single-parent families with those from two-parent families at Chinsapo Secondary School.

Comparative studies globally overwhelmingly indicate an academic gap between students from single-parent and two-parent families. Children from two-parent households generally exhibit higher academic achievement, lower dropout rates, and greater educational attainment (*Ashiabi & Olufemi, 2016; Lee & Song, 2019*). This disparity is often attributed to differences in parental resources (time and money), parental involvement, and greater stability in two-parent homes (*Bradshaw & Finch, 2017; Cherlin, 2018*). Some research, however, emphasizes that policy interventions aimed at equalizing resources can reduce this gap, suggesting that it's not simply the family structure itself but the associated socio-economic conditions and support policies that drive the differences (*Amato, 2010; re-emphasized by Agba & Onwuegbule, 2023*).

Comparative studies also generally show that children from two-parent families tend to have better academic outcomes. For instance, research in South Africa indicated a strong correlation between home background (including the co-residence of biological parents) and children's educational outcomes, with children residing with both biological parents generally achieving better (*Resep, 2018*). A study in Ghana found that pupils from single-parent homes tend to exhibit lower academic achievement compared to those from intact families, attributing it to emotional and psychological stress (*Azumah et al., 2018*). These findings highlight that the family composition remains a critical factor in educational disparities across the continent.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ecological Systems Theory

Developed by *Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979; updated by Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)*, Ecological Systems Theory posits that child development is a complex interplay between an individual and their environment. It conceptualizes the environment as a

series of nested systems:

- **Microsystem:** The immediate environment where the child directly interacts e.g., family, school, peers. A single-parent family directly represents a specific microsystem.
- **Mesosystem:** The interconnections between different microsystems e.g., the relationship between home and school. Challenges in the single-parent home can affect parental involvement at school, a key mesosystem interaction.
- **Exosystem:** External settings that indirectly affect the child e.g., parent's workplace, community resources, local policies. Financial constraints faced by a single parent (due to workplace policies or lack of community support) can indirectly impact the child's academic resources.
- **Macrosystem:** The broader cultural values, laws, and customs that influence all other systems e.g., societal perceptions of single-parent families.

This theory is crucial as it allows for an understanding of how the single-parent family structure can affect various aspects of a student's life. It highlights how challenges such as financial hardship or emotional stress within the family can cascade through the mesosystem and be influenced by the exosystem and broader macrosystem norms. By considering these interconnected layers, the study can analyze the holistic impact on academic performance rather than isolating the family structure as a sole cause.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach employed to investigate the impact of single-parent family structures on the academic achievements of students at Chinsapo Secondary School. It details the research design, setting, population, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, and analytical methods used to address the study's objectives. Furthermore, ethical considerations

inherent in conducting research involving human participants will be thoroughly discussed. The aim is to ensure the study's rigor, validity, and reliability, thereby providing robust evidence to inform an understanding of this complex issue within the Malawian context.

Research Design and Methodology

A comparative correlational research design will be employed. This design is particularly suitable as it allows for the examination of relationships between variables (family structure and academic achievement) and for the comparison of two distinct groups; students from single-parent families and students from two-parent families, on specific outcomes. While a correlational design can identify associations, it does not establish causality. However, it can provide valuable insights into the potential influence of family structure on academic performance.

This approach is supported by recent methodological discussions in educational research. For instance, *Creswell and Creswell (2023)* emphasize the utility of comparative designs in understanding differences between groups, while *Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2024)* highlight the strength of correlational studies in exploring the extent to which variables are related.

Research Setting

The research will be conducted at Chinsapo Secondary School, located in Lilongwe, Malawi. Chinsapo Secondary School is a public secondary school that serves a diverse student population from both urban and peri-urban areas. The choice of this setting is strategic due to its accessibility and the likelihood of finding a sufficient number of students from both single-parent and two-parent family structures, which is crucial for the comparative nature of this study. The school's administration has been approached and has expressed willingness to collaborate, ensuring practical feasibility for data collection.

Target Population

The target population for this study comprises 1062 students at Chinsapo Secondary School during the

2025/2026 academic year. This inclusive definition ensures that the findings are generalizable to the student body of the chosen school. From this broader population, the study will specifically focus on students in Forms 3 and 4, as these students are at a critical stage of their academic journey, preparing for national examinations, and are likely to have more established academic records.

Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique will be employed. This technique is appropriate because it ensures that subgroups (students from single-parent families and students from two-parent families) are adequately represented in the sample, reflecting their proportions within the target population.

Stratification: Dividing the target population of Form 3 and 4 students into two strata based on family structure:

- Stratum A: Students from single-parent families.
- Stratum B: Students from two-parent families.

Random Selection: Within each stratum, a simple random sampling method (e.g., using a random number generator from a list of eligible students) will be used to select participants. This ensures that every student within each stratum has an equal chance of being included in the sample, minimizing sampling bias.

This approach aligns with recommendations by *Etikan and Bala (2017)* for ensuring representativeness in comparative studies, and *Daniel (2023)* for its efficiency in handling heterogeneous populations.

Sample Size

Determining the optimal sample size is crucial for the statistical power and generalizability of the study findings. Based on similar studies in educational research and considering the practical constraints of time and resources, a sample size of approximately 48 students will be targeted. This will comprise 24 students from single-parent families and 24 students from two-parent families.

This sample size is deemed sufficient to detect

meaningful differences between the groups, assuming a moderate effect size, and is consistent with the recommendations for correlational and comparative studies in social sciences, as noted by (*Anderson et al., 2024*) regarding statistical power analysis.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument will be a structured questionnaire for quantitative data and a semi structured questionnaire for qualitative data.

Questionnaire

The structured questionnaire and semi-structured questionnaire will be designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data relevant to the study's objectives. It will consist of several sections:

Demographic Information: Age, gender, academic stream, and crucially, family structure (to identify single-parent vs. two-parent households).

Academic Performance: Self-reported academic grades for the previous two terms in core subjects (e.g., Mathematics, English, Sciences) will be collected, and cross-referenced with school records where parental/guardian consent is obtained. This directly addresses the first and fourth objectives.

Socio-economic and Emotional Challenges: Likert-scale items and open-ended questions will explore perceived financial difficulties, emotional well-being, feelings of loneliness, stress, and access to resources, addressing the second objective.

Support Systems: Questions will assess the availability and perceived effectiveness of support from family, teachers, school counselors, community organizations, and peers, addressing the third objective.

The design of the questionnaires will be informed by existing literature on the impact of family structure on academic achievement, drawing on validated scales where appropriate. The use of a structured questionnaire is supported by (*Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014*) for best practices in survey design.

Pilot Study

A pilot study will be conducted with a small group of approximately 6 students from a similar secondary school in Lilongwe, but not Chinsapo Secondary School, to avoid contamination of the main study sample. The purpose of the pilot study is to:

Assess the clarity and comprehensibility of the questionnaire items: Identify any ambiguous or confusing questions. Estimate the time required to complete the questionnaire: Ensure it is a reasonable length for students. Identify any unforeseen logistical challenges: Such as issues with data collection procedures. Test the reliability of the instrument: Using internal consistency measures like Cronbach's Alpha for Likert-scale items. Refine the data collection protocol: Based on feedback and observations from the pilot.

The insights gained from the pilot study will be used to revise and refine the questionnaire and data collection procedures before the main study commences. This adheres to standard research practices as advocated by Bell, *Bryman, and Harley (2022)*, who emphasize the importance of pilot testing for improving the quality of research instruments.

Data Analysis

The collected data will be analyzed using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

Descriptive Statistics: Frequencies and Percentages: To describe the demographic characteristics of the sample and the prevalence of different challenges and support systems. **Means and Standard Deviations:** To summarize academic performance and scores on various scales.

Inferential Statistics will be used. The choice of statistical tests is guided by the nature of the data and the research objectives, consistent with guidelines provided by Field (2023) for statistical analysis in social sciences.

Ethical Considerations

The research will adhere to the highest ethical

standards throughout all stages of the study, recognizing the vulnerability of the student population and the sensitivity of the topic. **Informed Consent:** Prior to data collection, written informed consent will be obtained from the parents/legal guardians of all participating students. Additionally, students themselves will provide assent, indicating their willingness to participate after being fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. They will be assured that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time without penalty. **Anonymity and Confidentiality:** All collected data will be treated with strict anonymity and confidentiality. Participants will not be identified by name in any part of the study, and their responses will be kept secure and accessible only to the research team. Any identifiable information will be de-linked from the data during analysis. **Minimizing Harm:** The research will be designed to minimize any potential psychological distress or discomfort to participants. Questions will be phrased sensitively, and support resources (e.g., school counselor contact information) will be provided if any student expresses distress during or after participation. **Beneficence:** The study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the challenges faced by students from single-parent families and to identify effective support mechanisms. The findings will be shared with Chinsapo Secondary School and relevant educational stakeholders in Malawi, with the potential to inform policies and interventions that support student well-being and academic success.

These ethical guidelines are in line with the principles of research ethics outlined by Orb, *Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2000)* in the context of research involving vulnerable populations. The commitment to these principles ensures that the research is conducted responsibly and respectfully.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis, presentation, and interpretation of the data collected from students and teachers at Chinsapo Secondary School. The study, titled "*Exploring the Impact of Single-Parent Family Structure on the Academic Achievement of Students at Chinsapo Secondary School*", utilized a structured student questionnaire and a teacher questionnaire.

The findings are organized according to the specific research objectives that guided the study.

The interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative data is systematically linked to the theoretical framework of the study, the Ecological Systems Theory, and the existing literature review, thereby contributing to the discussion on family structure and educational outcomes in the Malawian context.

Response Rate

The study employed a stratified random sampling approach, targeting an equal number of students from single-parent and two-parent families, as well as a small group of key teachers at Chinsapo Secondary School.

The study achieved a 100% response rate across both student and teacher populations. This high rate of participation eliminates the risk of non-response bias and ensures that the findings are representative of the sampled groups at Chinsapo Secondary School.

Demographic Information

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents, which are essential for contextualizing the research findings.
Student Demographics

The stratified sampling technique resulted in an even distribution of respondents by family structure (50% each) and by class level (Forms 3 and 4).

Table 4.3: Living Arrangements of Single-Parent Students (n=24)

Among the students from single-parent homes, the vast majority (79.2%) reported living with their mother only. This observation is consistent with global and regional trends where single-parent households are predominantly female-headed (*United Nations, 2019*).

Presentation of Research Findings

The findings are presented thematically in line with the study's four research objectives.

Academic Performance of Students from Single-

Parent Families

The first objective aimed to examine the academic performance and related indicators of students from single-parent families. This was addressed by looking at self-reported overall grades, homework completion, and class attendance.

The findings suggest a clear disparity in academic outcomes. Only a quarter (25.0%) of students from single-parent families reported having "Excellent" or "Good" grades, compared to over half (58.3%) of their counterparts from two-parent families. Conversely, students from single-parent homes were four times more likely to report "Below Average" or "Poor" grades (33.3% versus 8.4%).

Qualitative data from teachers confirmed this trend. When describing the academic performance of single-parent students, teachers generally used terms like "inconsistent," "below average," or "struggling with follow-up". One teacher noted:

"The main difference is in commitment. Students from single-parent homes often start well but attendance drops, and homework completion becomes sporadic, leading to poor grades."

Interpretation and Link to Theory:

This finding supports the wider literature that links single-parent family structures to lower academic performance (*Puga, 2025*). The interpretation through the Ecological Systems Theory focuses on the Microsystem. The reduced number of parental units often means less supervision, fewer educational resources at home, and decreased time available for parental involvement due to the single parent's increased burden, directly limiting the learning environment within the home.

Socio-Economic and Emotional Challenges

The second objective was to identify the specific challenges faced by students from single-parent households. Students rated various challenges on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all, 5 = Extremely).

Demonstrates that students from single-parent homes consistently experience significantly higher levels of all measured challenges. "Lack of school fees/financial support" (Mean = 4.4) and "Household responsibilities affecting study time"

(Mean = 4.1) were the most severe challenges reported. Furthermore, 45.8% of single-parent students admitted to sometimes missing school due to home-related responsibilities.

Teachers largely confirmed the socio-economic difficulties, citing:

"The biggest issue is always financial. These students are frequently sent home for fees or lack basic necessities like books and uniforms."

The emotional difficulties observed by teachers included "signs of withdrawal," "low concentration," and "visible anxiety," suggesting that students carry family-related stress into the classroom.

Interpretation and Link to Theory:

The prevalence of financial strain links to the Exosystem level of the Ecological Systems Theory. The limited employment opportunities or insufficient income of the single parent (the parent's work environment is the exosystem) indirectly create a resource deficit for the child, which affects their learning. The high score for household responsibilities is a Microsystem issue, where the child assumes roles traditionally held by the absent parent, infringing on study time, a finding echoed by *Shitindi and Lubawa (2019)* in Tanzania.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The comparative analysis revealed a clear and measurable academic disparity: students from single-parent families reported lower grades and lower self-confidence compared to their peers from two-parent homes. This disadvantage is strongly linked to prevalent socio-economic strain, which was identified as the highest-rated challenge, alongside the burden of increased household responsibilities that directly limit dedicated study time. Furthermore, the study confirmed that emotional stress, worry, and anxiety are significantly higher among students from single-parent backgrounds.

The research also highlighted a severe deficiency in the support systems available to these vulnerable students. While families generally offer support, the external institutional network is weak; the majority of students reported a lack of accessible personal

counseling at the school, and almost all respondents indicated receiving no support from community organizations or NGOs. These combined factors illustrate that the challenges are rooted in systemic failures to support the resource-constrained single-parent family unit.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that single-parent family structure presents a significant barrier to academic achievement at Chinsapo Secondary School, primarily due to resource deficits and systemic support vulnerabilities rather than the structure itself. This conclusion aligns perfectly with the Ecological Systems Theory, which frames the issue across multiple environments. The poor academic performance in the student's Microsystem is a direct result of financial and time limitations in the parent's Exosystem (e.g., job instability, lack of resources). The ultimate failure lies in the Mesosystem, where weak or non-existent connections between the home, school, and community fail to provide the essential buffer needed for student resilience and academic success. Effective intervention, therefore, requires a multi-level social work approach that restores resources and strengthens these institutional linkages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- For Chinsapo Secondary School: The school must immediately formalize and staff a counseling and mentorship program to provide reliable emotional and academic support. Furthermore, it should implement flexible, targeted academic support sessions that accommodate the domestic responsibilities of single-parent students, ensuring they have equitable access to learning resources.
- For Local Government and Community Stakeholders: There is an urgent need to establish a dedicated, subsidized financial aid or bursary scheme specifically for students from financially challenged single-parent families at the school. Community-based organizations and NGOs must actively collaborate with the school to provide external resources like tutoring and material donations, thereby strengthening

the Mesosystem.

- For Single Parents/Guardians: Parents should be encouraged to utilize school communication channels to report difficulties and to implement strategies for **protected study time** at home, even if brief, to maximize the student's academic focus.

Area for Further Study

Based on the findings, it is recommended that future research shifts toward intervention and evaluation. A longitudinal study is necessary to objectively assess the effectiveness of proposed interventions, such as the introduction of a dedicated bursary scheme or a mentorship program, on hard metrics like academic pass rates and attendance over time. Furthermore, a qualitative study should be conducted to explore the resilience factors and coping strategies employed by single-parent students who *do* achieve academic success, providing asset-based models for targeted support.

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