

Perceived Effects of Parental Separation on Social Isolation among First-Year College Students' Academic Success

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ABSTRACT

Parental separation presents emotional and social challenges that may deeply affect young adults, particularly first-year college students undergoing major life transitions. Understanding these impacts is essential for developing effective student support systems. Although existing literature addresses the general consequences of family disruption, few studies explore its effects on both social isolation and academic success within the Philippine context, where divorce remains illegal, and family dynamics are culturally sensitive. This study aimed to explore the perceived effects of parental separation on social isolation and academic success among first-year college students at the State University in Bulacan. A qualitative, phenomenological approach was employed. Thirty students who experienced parental separation within the past three years were interviewed using semi-structured questions. Data were thematically analyzed to capture lived experiences and emergent coping strategies. The study found that parental separation led to increased loneliness, emotional distress, and withdrawal from peer interactions. Academic concentration and time management were negatively affected, particularly when students assumed new family responsibilities. However, positive coping mechanisms such as peer support, friendships, and extracurricular engagement, and helped reduce the emotional toll. Supportive environments in school and among extended family also contributed to emotional resilience and academic adjustment. These findings suggest that schools should offer counseling and peer support initiatives tailored to students experiencing family disruption.

Keywords: Parental Separation, Social isolation, Academic Success, College Students

INTRODUCTION

Parental separation has become an increasingly typical experience for young people, and its consequences frequently extend beyond the immediate family structure into students' academic and social lives. First-year college students face a transition filled with emotional, academic, and interpersonal challenges. When combined with the emotional impact of parental separation, these students may experience increased social isolation, which could adversely influence their academic success. Social isolation can result in low self-esteem, trouble building connections, and reduced engagement in activities beyond school. All these factors, in turn, can reduce students' motivation, focus, and overall academic performance. Understanding how parental separation affects social isolation and, therefore, academic success is critical to establishing effective support systems for affected students. This study sought to investigate the perceived effects of parental separation on first-year college students' intellectual well-being, highlighting the need for focused interventions to assist them in navigating both their emotional and academic journeys.

The quality of social interactions plays a crucial role in shaping academic achievement. According to Anam et al., (2024), students who grow up under authoritative parenting styles tend to develop stronger social skills, which directly benefit their academic life. In contrast, authoritarian parenting often restricts creativity, independence, and motivation, which are essential for thriving in a university environment. Their study emphasized that the home environment and the relational dynamics students experience early in life influence

not only their social capacity but also their academic resilience. For students from separated families, the absence of stable parental interaction can diminish opportunities for developing these important skills, contributing to feelings of alienation and difficulty adjusting socially in college. In the Philippine context, parental separation presents unique challenges that further complicate the experiences of young adults. According to Abalos (2020), divorce remains illegal in the Philippines, making annulment the only legal option to dissolve a marriage. However, due to the financial and legal complexity of annulment proceedings, many Filipino couples remain informally separated without the benefit of legal clarity. This socio-legal situation leaves many children in ambiguous and often stressful family arrangements. Furthermore, despite the rising number of separations, there is still limited research focused on the emotional and academic consequences faced by Filipino college students from separated families. Most existing studies are concentrated in Western contexts, making it difficult to directly apply their findings to Filipino students, who may experience additional cultural pressures surrounding family, education, and community reputation.

This study addresses these significant gaps by focusing specifically on first-year college students in the Philippine setting. Unlike prior research that predominantly concentrated on economic outcomes or broad psychological trends, this study delves into the nuanced, lived experiences of social isolation and academic adjustment following parental separation. It attempts to uncover how disrupted family structures shape students' abilities to form social relationships, manage emotional stress, and maintain academic focus during one of the most critical periods of their educational journey. While international research has established the link between family dynamics and student success, Filipino students encounter distinct cultural factors such as the high value placed on family unity, the stigma surrounding separation, and limited formal support structures, which can exacerbate the effects of parental separation. Thus, studying this issue locally is essential to developing culturally sensitive and effective interventions at the academic and policy levels.

The proposed study, "Perceived Effects of Parental Separation on Social Isolation Among First-Year College Students' Academic Success," is essential for understanding how family dynamics impact young adults' academic performance and social connections of young adults during a critical life stage. By examining the connection between social isolation and parental separation, this study clarifies how parental separation might impact students' capacity to establish and preserve relationships, cope with stress, and remain involved in their studies in college. This study holds significance as it may inform school policies, counseling programs, and academic support programs that address the unique needs of students from separated families. Additionally, this proposed study increases awareness of the connection between academic performance and family background while offering feasible solutions that promote students' general well-being and improvement of academic success.

RELATED LITERATURE

To aid the researchers, this part included cited literature that covered a variety of thoughts, generalizations, and conclusions about the topic, ranging from previous studies to recent findings.

Social Isolation and Its Effects on Student Engagement Children from separated parents frequently suffer from emotional discomfort, which makes it harder for them to establish social relationships and can impair their academic performance and school participation, according to a study by Amato (2022). The absence of a stable home environment often leads to emotional distress in children, making them more hesitant to form new relationships. The fear of abandonment or rejection can make it difficult for them to trust others, leading to social withdrawal. This isolation can also affect their participation in school activities, as they may feel out of place or lack the confidence to engage in class discussions and group projects.

The disruption of family dynamics can impair peer relationships, leading to social isolation (Sabillo et al., 2024). A family separation changes the way a child interacts with others, particularly their peers. When parents separate, children may feel ashamed or different from their classmates who come from intact families. This feeling of being "different" can make it challenging for them to connect with peers, leading to increased isolation. Over time, this lack of interaction can limit their social development and make it harder for them to navigate relationships both in and out of school.

Students may struggle with trust issues and feelings of abandonment, affecting their ability to engage socially and academically (Collantes et al., 2024). The emotional toll of parental separation often leaves children feeling abandoned, especially if one parent becomes less involved in their lives. These feelings can lead to deep-seated trust issues, making it difficult for them to form meaningful relationships with friends, teachers, or even future romantic partners. In the classroom, their reluctance to open can prevent them from asking for help, participating in group activities, or seeking guidance from mentors, further impacting their academic engagement and performance.

Psychological Impact of Parental Separation

When children experience emotional distress due to family instability, they may carry these unresolved issues into adulthood. This can influence their confidence in pursuing higher education, affect their ability to form healthy relationships, and even impact their career choices. If these emotional struggles are not addressed, they can limit personal and professional growth in the long run. Parental disagreement can increase the prevalence of depression and stress levels among adolescents, which sometimes leads to behavioral and emotional problems (Li, 2024). The emotional liability created by parents' separation can inhibit children from achieving success in their studies and increase school absenteeism (Suprianto et al., 2024). The changes in parental roles experienced by these respondents aligned with the findings of Karhina et al., (2023), who noted that children from divorced families often faced decreased school involvement due to instability stemming from altered parental roles.

Parental separation can lead to feelings of depression, anxiety, and emotional isolation, which are detrimental to students' mental health (Collantes et al., 2024). Children may internalize their struggles, leading to depressive symptoms that make it difficult for them to function both socially and academically. Anxiety can also cause them to feel overwhelmed by academic pressure, making even simple tasks seem daunting. Without proper emotional support, these mental health challenges can severely impact their overall well-being.

The lack of social engagement can ultimately hinder their academic progress and personal development. The emotional detachment noted by these participants aligned with the findings of Collantes et al., (2024), who suggested that parental separation resulted in increased feelings of depression, anxiety, and emotional isolation. Furthermore, Amato (2022) argued that emotional distress hindered students' ability to form social connections, including those with their parents. Additionally, Weisblum et al., (2024) highlighted that a lack of social connectivity intensified mental health problems, which further alienated students, thus elucidating the phenomenon of detachment.

Social Isolation and Emotional Adjustment

According to Sabillo et al. (2024), the disruption in family dynamics affected students' ability to form healthy relationships with peers and adults. Their inability to form deep connections with people may be a result of these emotional difficulties. Students may find it difficult to establish trustworthy relationships with teachers and other authority figures if they don't have positive role models at home. This can hinder their academic and personal development, highlighting the significance of a stable family environment in promoting healthy social interactions.

Somehow, some studies contradicted the negative impact of parental separation to their social relationships with others. Children of a broken family may have strong relationships with others because of the support they received (Ai'ni et al., 2023). Supportive relationships play a key role in protecting children's mental health. Social support helps lessen the negative effects of all hard experiences, such as parental separation (Butler et al., 2022). When children feel supported by family and friends, they are less likely to experience depression. Social support strengthens emotional resilience, helping them manage stress and challenges more effectively (Jain et al., 2022). While parental separation may be damaging, parental-child bonds coupled with support from family and friends usually help to buffer these negative effects. These relationships impart a level of stability, which in turn enables the child to meet emotional and social challenges. Emotional support from friends helps children from broken families cope with the challenges of parental separation (Natarajan et al., 2024). Having a strong social relationship that gives full support would ease the problem that the children are

facing. Strong friendships promote happiness in children and protect them from the negative effects of sadness, anxiety, and anger (Mak et al., 2022). Friendship is vital in early adolescence, coping with parental divorce, in helping with resilience and emotional support to build strength out of their calamity (Dilla et al., 2024).

According to a study by Van et al., (2023), adolescents who experienced parental divorce had many more emotional and behavioral problems, and these problems continued and even got worse over time. Interestingly, there was no rise in these issues before the divorce, indicating that the family disturbance itself is a major contributing factor to the adolescent's mental health issues. Additionally, Lin et al., (2020) examined the relationship between parental psychological control and adolescents' social isolation. The results showed an adverse cycle that may hinder social development. The study emphasizes how crucial it is for parents to provide their youngsters with emotional support and autonomy to encourage their healthy social development.

METHODOLOGY

It provided a brief description of the research design, participants, data collection methods, and analytical procedures used to address the research questions. The study adopted a qualitative approach, allowing for an in-depth exploration of students' personal experiences and perceptions. This methodology was chosen to capture the complexity of how parental separation influenced their social interactions and academic performance.

This study was conducted at the State University in Bulacan, a leading public university in the region. The institution served as a central hub for higher education, offering a variety of college departments to its diverse student body. Given its prominence, the State University in Bulacan provided an ideal setting to explore the impact of family dynamics, particularly parental separation, on students during their critical transition into college life. First-year college students were specifically chosen as participants for this study, as they were navigating both academic and personal changes, making them an ideal group to examine the effects of social isolation and academic performance resulting from parental divorce.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of students who have undergone parental separation. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it focuses on understanding and describing individuals' subjective experiences and how they make sense of those experiences. This method was appropriate for capturing the deep emotional, academic, and social impacts of parental separation on students.

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection technique. These interviews allowed for both consistency and flexibility—while a prepared set of open-ended questions guided the discussion, participants were also encouraged to speak freely and elaborate on their thoughts. This helped the researchers gather rich, detailed qualitative data that reflected the students' thoughts, feelings, and coping mechanisms. The interviews were conducted in a confidential and comfortable setting to encourage openness and trust, and all participants gave informed consent before the interviews began.

The use of a phenomenological approach helped to deeply understand how parental separation affected social isolation and academic achievement among college students. This method closely examined the personal experiences of students, revealing the emotional and academic challenges they faced. By focusing on what students went through, this approach provided valuable insights that could guide future support, counseling, and programs for students in similar situations.

Participants

The population for this study consisted of first-year college students who were enrolled at the State University in Bulacan and had experienced parental separation for at least the past three years. These students were considered suitable for the research due to their transitional stage in academic and personal development, which made them more vulnerable to the effects of family disruptions.

Additional demographic data was gathered to give context and enable a greater understanding of their experiences, including gender, the duration since the parental separation, and current living arrangements (e.g., living with one parent, with relatives, or independently). To enhance the diversity of perspectives, participants were selected from a range of college departments, representing a wide range of academic specialties and backgrounds.

Purposive sampling was used to identify 30 first-year college students for the sample. The non-probability sample technique was used to make sure that every participant had lived and directly relevant experiences of parental separation. The selection criterion centered on those who had experienced this parental upheaval in their early years and were currently adjusting to college life. By using this method, the researchers were able to collect detailed and insightful information unique to the phenomenon they were studying.

Instrument of the Study

The primary research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide, adapted from the related study entitled "Stolen Youth: Case Study on the Psychological Effects of Parental Separation" (Collantes et al. 2024). This referenced study employed semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data from young individuals who had experienced parental separation, focusing on psychological and academic impacts. The relevance of this instrument to the present study lay in its capacity to explore similar themes, particularly social isolation and academic challenges, within a different context and population. The format and flexibility of the original instrument served as a model for structuring questions that encouraged open expression while maintaining a clear focus on the key areas relevant to the study.

The researchers selected first-year college students at the State University in Bulacan as participants, with a total of 30 respondents drawn from various college departments. These individuals were specifically chosen through purposive sampling, as they had experienced parental separation, making them well-suited to provide meaningful insights into the study's objectives. The semi-structured interviews were designed to elicit comprehensive information on participants' academic engagement, emotional well-being, social connections, and coping strategies in response to their parental separation.

For this kind of qualitative research, the semi-structured interview approach worked well because it had provided both structure and flexibility. The researchers had been able to discuss important subjects such as academic motivation, time management, classroom concentration, peer interaction, and emotional reactions, and participants had been free to contribute personal stories and background information. This method aligned with the study's phenomenological approach, which had aimed to fully understand the participants' subjective experiences. Furthermore, participants had felt at ease with the conversational interview method, which had promoted honest and thoughtful answers that had enhanced the depth and dependability of the data gathered.

Data Gathering Procedures

The validation of the questionnaire was the first step, and a semi-structured interview guide was developed to align with the research objectives. The document was validated by experts such as guidance counselors and educators, whose feedback contributed to refining the questionnaire. The result was a tool capable of collecting the lived experiences of those interviewed. Once the final questionnaire was constructed, formal permission from the university administration was sought. A letter of request was sent to the Deans' offices of each college department in Bulacan State University, describing the purpose of the research and the planned interviews with first-year college students. The study was approved to proceed after a series of follow-ups and clarifications.

After obtaining permission, an informed consent form was prepared for the respondents. This document explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the security measures in place to protect participant anonymity. The researchers approached several academic departments to identify potential participants and discuss the detailed specifications of the study before obtaining their consent. These data-gathering phases involved actively searching for eligible participants on the university campus. Demographic profiles were collected to ensure that individuals met the inclusion criteria for the study. Some agreed to

participate immediately, while others took time to consider before giving their consent. The availability of participants was noted, and interviews were scheduled accordingly.

After several days of data collection, 30 participants were successfully recruited. Follow-ups were conducted as planned, and in-depth interviews were held in quiet, comfortable settings to help respondents feel at ease. Responses during the interviews were carefully documented through notetaking and audio recording (with participant consent) to ensure accuracy. Once all interviews were completed, verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews was undertaken to preserve the integrity of participants' responses. These transcriptions were then subjected to a coding process, followed by thematic analysis to gain a clearer understanding of the effects of parental separation on social isolation and academic thriving.

This systematic and organized approach ensured that the data collection process was verifiable and comprehensive, providing authentic insights from the respondents. These insights served as a valuable foundation for the discussions and analyses presented in the latter sections of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants' personal perspectives, feelings, and coping strategies on how parental separation had affected their social interactions and academic achievement were revealed through in-depth interviews. The data presentation was arranged according to the study's problem statement in each section. A synthesis was provided after each section to summarize key insights and interrelationships in response to the research questions outlined in the statement of the problem.

The Results and Discussion section presents the findings of the study and provides an interpretation of these results within the context of the research questions. This includes descriptive summaries of the lived experiences of 30 first-year college students who experienced parental separation. Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews and analyzed through thematic coding.

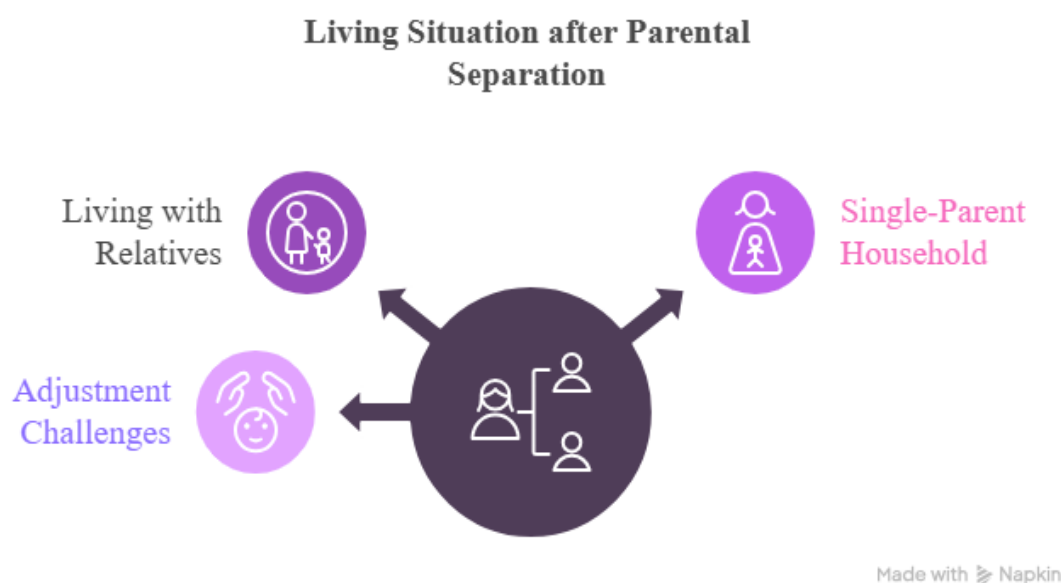


Figure 1 Current Family Set-Up of the Students

The figure presented different living arrangements following parental separation, including residing with extended family, living in a single-parent household, and adapting to blended family dynamics. It also highlighted the challenges individuals encountered, such as increased responsibilities, financial adjustments, role shifts, and emotional adaptation. These aspects collectively illustrated the significant adjustments and coping mechanisms necessary to navigate changes in family structure.

These are the following key statements from the participants:

S12: “Since my parents separated, I’ve been the one managing everything at home. I barely have time to study because I also must look after my siblings.”

This situation emphasized the importance of having a supportive family environment, but it did not elaborate on the involvement or impact of extended family members, such as grandparents or aunts and uncles, in the subject's life. Extended family members might have played a crucial role in providing emotional support and stability during times of parental separation (Sabillo et al., 2024). According to Kurata et al., (2024), students reported emotional challenges such as feelings of abandonment and lower self-esteem due to father absence. Financially, they faced increased difficulties, leading to poverty and limited access to educational resources, which further complicated their adjustment to the absence of a parent. The absence or loss of one parent led to emotional challenges such as mental health issues and behavioral problems in children (Chavda et al., 2023). Parental separation created challenges in adjusting to new family dynamics, as individuals often constructed moralistic narratives about the separation, navigated co-parenting relationships, and faced constraints from heteronormative social norms, complicating their ability to rebuild lives and family structures (Galbally, 2021).

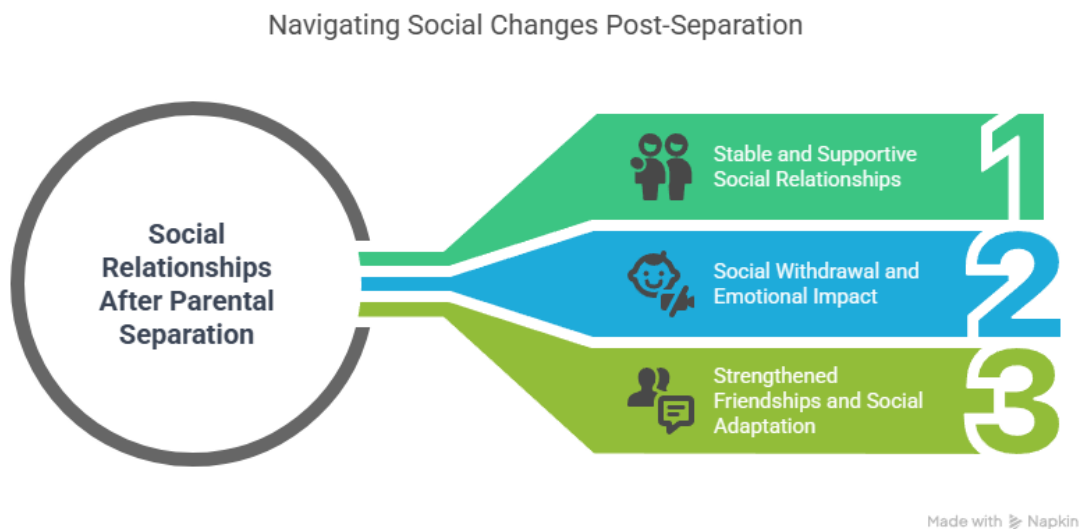


Figure 2 The Interaction of the Students in terms of Relationships with Friends or Classmates has Changed Since Parental Separation

The figure illustrated the dynamics of social relationships following parental separation, highlighting three key outcomes. First, it emphasized the importance of stable and supportive social relationships, which provided essential stability and support to individuals affected by the separation. Second, it pointed to the tendency for some individuals to withdraw socially, experiencing a range of emotional challenges because of the separation. Lastly, the figure noted how some individuals strengthened friendships and adapted socially, finding resilience and new connections despite the changes. Overall, it conveyed the complex interplay of social changes that emerged in the aftermath of parental separation.

These are the following key statements from the participants:

S5: “I stopped talking to most of my classmates. I felt like they wouldn’t understand what I was going through.”

S19: “My best friends became my support system. I didn’t have that kind of support at home anymore.”

Stable and supportive social relationships among children from broken families were fostered through mutual support and remaining motivation, which positively influenced their socialization process, helping them adapt

to changes in personality, education, and habits (Ai'ni et al., 2023). Some students struggled to open about their situation, leading them to distance themselves from their peers. Trust issues, feelings of loneliness, and emotional distress made it difficult for them to form or maintain relationships. Parental separation could lead to social withdrawal and significant emotional impacts, including anxiety and tension (Sabillo et al., 2024). Children from broken families often faced difficulties in social relationships, which hindered the development of stable and supportive social connections (Dioquino, 2024). According to Natarajan et al., (2024), peer groups play a crucial role in helping children from broken families cope with emotional distress, highlighting the importance of fostering strong relationships to buffer against negative emotions.

Impact of Parental Separation on Students

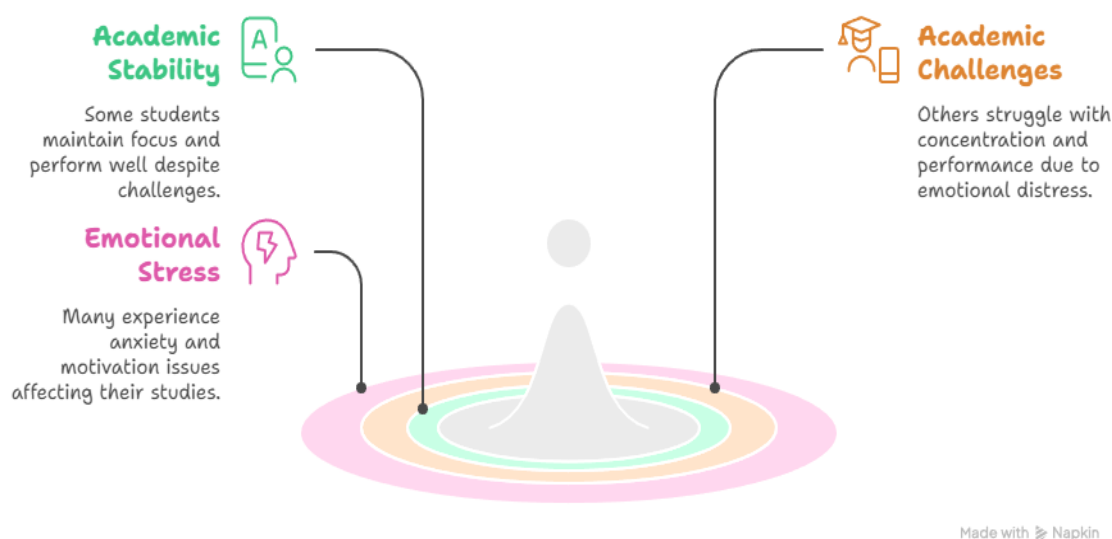


Figure 3 Parental Separation Affects the Academic Performance of the Students

The figure illustrates how parental separation affects students in different ways. Some students maintain academic stability, staying focused and performing well in their academics despite challenges; others face academic challenges due to emotional distress, struggling to concentrate and being motivated. Additionally, many students experience emotional stress, such as anxiety, which further impacts their academic performance. This highlights the varied emotional and academic responses students must changes in family structure.

These are the following key statements from the participants:

S3: "There were times I couldn't focus on class because my mind was at home, wondering how my mom was doing."

S21: "I used the pain as fuel to do better in school. I told myself I had to succeed for my mom and siblings."

According to Kailaheimo et al., (2023), parental separation negatively affected children's education and had remained unchanged over time, even as society's views on separation evolved. High-achieving students managed their emotions effectively, achieving academic excellence despite experiencing negative emotions related to their parents' separation (Balogun et al., 2023). According to Tadios et al., (2024), parental separation significantly impacted participants' academic behavior and school lives, indicating that their academic performance was indeed affected. This highlighted the diverse responses to family separation, emphasizing the role of individual coping strategies and external support in shaping academic outcomes.

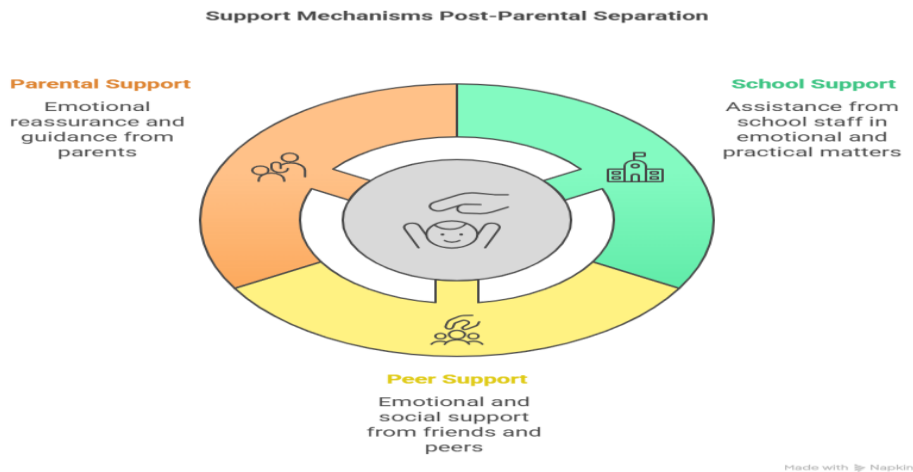


Figure 4 Support Mechanisms Post-Parental Separation

The three primary support systems for students following parental separation are depicted in this figure: peer support, which entails social and emotional support from friends; school support, which offers help from school personnel in practical and emotional issues; and parental support, which offers emotional assurance and guidance. The circular design's interconnection highlighted how various support systems work together to help young adults.

These are the following key statements from the participants:

S8: "I didn't talk about it much, but just knowing my guidance counselor was available helped me feel less alone."

S14: "My grandmother took me in after the separation. She made sure I never felt abandoned."

Many students either did not feel comfortable discussing their struggles or were unaware of the available resources. Schools often lacked understanding and accommodation for separated parents, which resulted in inadequate support (Desmarchelier, 2022). Many students did not disclose their family situations to school authorities, which resulted in a lack of necessary support for their educational needs. Many students did not disclose their family situations to school authorities, which resulted in a lack of necessary support for their educational needs (Tong et al., 2023). According to Want et al., (2024), the lack of disclosure contributed to the challenges faced by both the young people and their families.

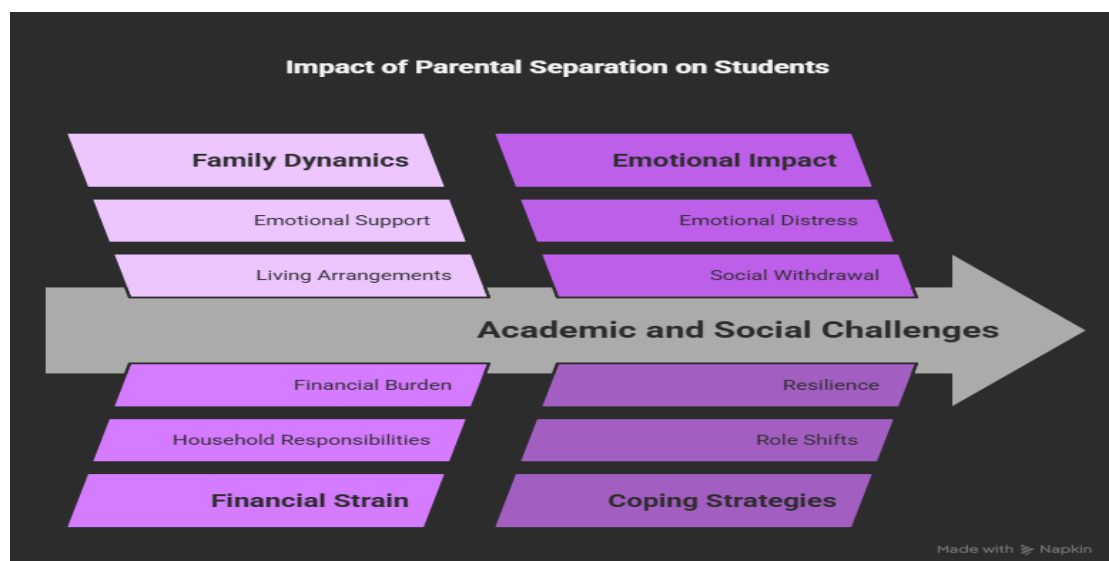


Figure 5. Overall Synthesis Impact of Parental Separation on Students

This graphic shows the main areas of influence and the effects of parental separation on students. Living arrangements and emotional support were altered because of the separation's impact on family dynamics. Additionally, it sets off emotional reactions like social disengagement and distress. As students deal with mounting household duties, emotional strain, and financial strain, these issues exacerbate social and academic issues. Coping mechanisms like role-shifting and resilience, however, assisted students in overcoming these obstacles. All things considered, parental separation caused complicated difficulties, but it also helped students become stronger and more adaptive.

The family set-up of the students was significantly affected by parental separation. Students' living arrangements and family structures had undergone considerable changes. Many had to adapt to new family situations by living either independently, with extended family members, or with a single parent. These changes often required students to take on additional responsibilities, which in turn affected their emotional and financial stability. Many students lived with only one parent after the separation, which led to adjustments in family roles and responsibilities. Some students received emotional and financial support from extended family members, such as grandparents or other relatives, helping them cope with the challenges brought by the separation. Meanwhile, a small number of students had learned to live independently due to their family circumstances, which impacted their daily routines and personal duties.

Parent separation affects every child's socialization in a certain way regarding making friends and relating to classmates. Other children maintained constant friendships, even when there were problems at home. These friendships provided them with emotional comfort, belonging, and support because they had suffered from changes within their family dynamics. For others, parental separation has brought emotional problems, and some students withdraw socially and find it hard to create or maintain friendship ties. However, some would respond by becoming more socially engaged, using their friendships as a coping mechanism. They learned to create strong ties to other people's lives and develop resilience as they adapt to new environments.

According to the findings, respondents encountered three primary consequences of parental separation: coping strategies, emotional and psychological difficulties, and adjustments in family connections. Many of them became closer to one parent while becoming more estranged from the other, indicating a shift in their connection with their parents. Based on studies, these changes had an impact on their academic achievement and emotional growth. A few showed emotional development and commitment in the face of adversity. Others experienced emotional and psychological difficulties, with some suffering from depression and others feeling nervous, alone, or distant. These conclusions were confirmed by research, which revealed that parental separation exacerbated emotional anguish and strained social ties. Respondents used a variety of coping mechanisms, including avoiding emotional strain, asking others for help, or going to counseling. Their ability to adjust was also impacted by financial difficulties and communication challenges, although those with robust support networks fared better. In general, respondents' reactions to parental separation varied; some coped with it by becoming resilient and supportive, while others experienced emotional challenges.

According to the findings, respondents reported three major repercussions of parental separation: financial difficulties, emotional and psychological issues, and changes in family and social dynamics. Many students had become financially reliant on a single parent and frequently struggled to fulfill their academic and personal needs, prompting others to take on a part-time job or cut vital expenses. Emotionally, some had grown estranged from one parent and had to adjust to living with extended relatives, causing feelings of isolation, melancholy, and alienation. However, a lot of respondents noted personal progress as they gained resilience, independence, and emotional maturity while adjusting to their new circumstances. Existing research indicated that parental separation increased emotional discomfort and disturbed students' academic attention and social interactions. To cope, students used a variety of tactics, including emotional detachment, seeking support from trustworthy individuals, and focusing on self-improvement. Those with greater support systems were better able to adjust and manage the effects of separation. Overall, responses varied—some students struggled with emotional burdens, while others used their experiences to motivate and strengthen themselves.

CONCLUSION

The effects of parental separation on first-year university students were studied to explore the emotional, educational, and social consequences. The findings in Chapter IV discussed how living arrangements with a single parent versus an extended family member contribute to various emotional struggles. Many students now face a very difficult situation. They suffer from feelings of fear, loneliness, and a lack of motivation to study. The psychological distress resulting from parental separation became strongly correlated with losing focus and engagement, which all affected their performance in studies. Whilst some students used resilience to keep their studies intact, others found the lack of emotional and social support very challenging.

Findings from the study suggested that students react to parental separation differently and that their adjustment was highly influenced by such factors as resilience, coping skills, and systems of support. It emphasized the need for the creation of an emotionally supportive school atmosphere and resources for learning for students undergoing family crises. This must cover the development of peer support networks, teacher awareness, and counseling to minimize the negative effects of parental separation. More active communication and emotional stabilization, both stressed in this research, can benefit students in times of transition and show the clear need for cooperation between families, educators, and mental health professionals to foster such an environment of inclusiveness and support within the educational framework.

This study examined the perceived effects of parental separation on social isolation and academic success among first-year college students from different college departments currently enrolled at the State University in Bulacan. The academic performance of a student was an important part of education, and many factors could affect it, such as parental separation, which could lead to social isolation. The study was limited to this institution and excluded students outside the age range or whose parents had been separated for more than three years. The focus was strictly on the students' experiences and academic outcomes in a localized context.

The research involved students aged 18 and above who had experienced parental separation, using a semi-structured interview guide to assess social isolation through peer relationship difficulties, feelings of loneliness, and social participation issues. Academic success was assessed by the students' experiences of difficulties with class involvement and motivation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the study's findings, a multi-level response is necessary to address the emotional and academic challenges faced by students who experience parental separation. Their struggles with loneliness, motivation, and academic concentration call for interventions not just at the individual level, but also across institutional and policy structures.

For school counselors and mental health professionals, it is essential to develop structured emotional support systems anchored on regular assessments and counseling sessions. Many students in this study disclosed emotional detachment, academic fatigue, and internalized pressure to "stay strong" despite struggling silently. Initiatives such as Project GABAY (Guidance and Behavioral Assistance for Youth) can serve as a school-based model for responding to such concerns. This proposed program can include group counseling, peer mentoring, and early intervention strategies tailored to students experiencing family disruption.

For schools and administrators, building emotionally inclusive environments should be a priority. Faculty and staff must be trained to recognize emotional distress and refer students to support services. A crucial finding of this research is that many affected students feel alienated from their peers, while those with strong peer support often show higher academic resilience. Comparing this to students from intact families, who tend to experience more stable emotional support at home, it becomes clear that school-based interventions can fill a significant gap.

At the policy level, educational institutions and government agencies like CHED or DepEd may integrate these findings into national mental health frameworks. For example, revising institutional guidance programs to include modules on family diversity and emotional adjustment can normalize experiences of parental

separation and reduce stigma. University offices of student affairs may also create transition programs specifically for students from disrupted families.

For future research, there is a pressing need to explore the long-term academic and emotional trajectories of these students. Future studies should consider longitudinal designs to assess how coping strategies evolve over time and how early experiences of separation influence graduation rates, mental health stability, and career pathways. Comparative studies with students from intact families can provide additional context and highlight resilience factors that might buffer negative outcomes. Moreover, studies examining how institutional policies support or fail these students would enhance the paper's policy relevance and practical impact.

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