The Reality Behind Lines and Colours: Case Studies of Children's Drawings from Single Mother Families

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ABSTRACT

Children are supposed to grow up in a family setting where both the mother and father play their respective roles in the child's growth and personality development. In recent years, there has been an increase in the phenomenon of single mother families who attempt to ensure their family's sociocultural and economic survival as the head of the household. Therefore, this research intends to comparatively investigate the personality and self-development of children in single mother families and dual parent families. The main objective of this study is to recognize the differences in personality traits through children's drawings of children in dual and single mother families. This study is based on 02 single mother families and 02 dual parent families. Further, 04 class teachers of the children in respective families were selected as the sample of the study from Ratmalana DS division, Colombo district, Sri Lanka. As the major technique of this study the Kinetic Family Drawing Technique was applied the tool to measure the personality of children who lies between 05 years old to 10 years old of the sample. Additionally, the qualitative methods and techniques have been applied to collect data including interviews, case studies, focus group discussions and observation methods. Through the lines and colors used in the drawings of the children from dual parent families depicts healthy personality traits. They were able to drawing well organized manner with very detailed body parts, clothing, and accessories. But, children's drawings from single mother families were with a smaller number of colored with unorganized space usage. In view of the results of the study, it can be concluded that through the drawings of the children from disorganized families do suffer from emotional matters which leads to their personality development. Accordingly, few recommendations can be made as follow: Schools must establish guidance and counselling platforms to assist children from single- parent households in coping with academic work and completing on an equal footing with children from intact families. Furthermore, parents should be counselled so that they can confidently assume their responsibilities to raising children.

Key words: Children, Kinetic Family Drawing Technique, Single Parent Families, Socialization

INTRODUCTION

'Family' is one of the most widely used words in anthropological publications and discussions, yet its definition is not always clear or unanimous. It could refer to the domestic group or home, close kin who are not co-residents, such as parents and adult offspring, or a much larger network or deeper genealogy of kinship (Barnard & Spencer, 1996). Most definitions of family assume that there will be two (and only two) parents of different genders (Carter & McGoldrick, 2020). Due to the passage of time, defining family is more complicated at present in families with divorce, desertion, or separation (Dolch et al, 2007), where the approach leads to single-parent. According to Azuka-Obieke (2013), single parenting is a circumstance in which a mother or father cares for his or her children on their own, without the assistance of the other partner. He goes on to say that, while the exact proportion is unclear, practical experience has proven that there is an upsurge in single parenthood all across the world. Scholarly interest in the aforementioned family form has expanded dramatically as the number of single-parent families has increased (Sullivan & Jenkins, 2021). Concerns regarding single parent households have frequently shown themselves as concerns about a rising 'issue,' a problem that may jeopardize the family (Gongla & Thompson, 1987).

In many societies in Asia, the oldest male is designated as the head of household regardless of whether he is

the primary source of economic support, the authority figure, or fulfills other tasks purportedly performed by household heads (Ayad et al. 1997). At the meantime female-headed single parent households have become a steadily growing phenomenon in many countries, including South Asia. The highest percentage of female-headed households in South Asia could be observed in Sri Lanka where figures have increased from 19 per cent in 1990s to 20 per cent in 2000. In Sri Lanka, the growth is mainly due to political unrest and social conflict in the Southern areas of the country in the late 1980s, and the civil war in the North and East. Further, due to health issues including increasing mortal rate because of non-communicable diseases as well as the present Covid-19 pandemic, the number of single parents has been increased. As a result, a large number of young widows have increased to become household heads. Further in many countries, the incidence of divorce is increasing and the phenomenon is no exception in Sri Lanka which leads to single parenthood.

Despite the fact that their numbers are rapidly increasing, children of single parents play a faulty role in society. While the family is the basic unit of society, it is also the site of early socialization or the internalization of culturally important beliefs. The fundamentals of walking, talking, playing with other children, eating, and generally interacting with parents are learnt informally. The family is also a source of internalization of the child's important cultural vocabulary. The emotional introduction of the parents to the child initiates the learning of roles within the family. Both parents as role models produce less worry since the family situation provides security to the child and helps to build the child's identity and personality (Jones & Smith, 2022). As a result, parents are their children's most important role models and influences. Children always adopt their parents' values and behaviors. As a result, both parents are vital in official and informal learning, and children from single parent families are victims of the scenario (Martin & Thompson, 2023) .

While the children's personality and development have been severely affected by the single parent families, number of researches has been done with special reference to single mother families. According to the findings of the researches children who rose in single-mother families regularly develop unique personality traits prejudiced by various factors, including the quality of the inter relationship between the parent and the child as well as the economic and sociocultural context. Research concludes that these children may exhibit resilience, independence, emotional maturity, and adaptability due to their experiences in single-mother households (Amato & Keith, 1991; McLoyd, 1998; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). While the personality development has to be fulfilled by the socialization process by both parents, children in single mother families often show flexibility and adaptability due to the challenges they have to face in their daily life (Amato & Keith, 1991; McLoyd, 1998) Therefore, the children from single mother households may develop problem-solving skills and a capacity to cope with hardship (Brown & Green, 2024). Further, the studies reveal that the children from single mother families tend to live independent life. The studies conclude that children raised by single mothers tend to develop higher levels of independence and self-reliance, as they may need to take on responsibilities at an earlier age of their lives (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Hetherington et al., 1999).

Due to the absent of father in family leads to a tight maternal bonding and attachment of the children. In single mother families, the quality of the parent-child interaction can have a considerable impact on the personalities of the children. Strong maternal connection and bonding can promote both positive and negative emotional development and psychological well-being (Crouter et al., 2007; McLoyd, 1990). Because of their intimate bond with their mothers, children in single-mother families might acquire emotional maturity and an increased level of empathy. These children may become more sensitive to emotional cues and have improved emotional regulation (Demo & Acock, 1991; Hetherington et al., 2001). Culture makes roles. The role of a male and a role of a female in a particular society will be molded according to the culture which transferred through parents. But due to family disorganization, children raised in single-mother households may acquire more flexible gender roles and identities when they watch women manipulating traditional and non-traditional responsibilities (Nguyen & Patel, 2022). This exposure may result in broader views on gender roles in present society (Marsiglio et al., 2000; Hetherington et al., 1999).

It's crucial to note that the effects of growing up in a family with a single mother can differ greatly depending on the circumstances of each person and the support networks available. Because personality formation involves a complex interplay of genetic, environmental, cultural, and social factors, the research findings from the previous section are not always applicable to all situations. Therefore, this research intends to comparatively

investigate the personality and self-development of children in single mother families and dual parent families. The main objective of this study is to recognize the differences in personality traits through children's drawings of children in dual and single mother families. Hence, this study specific objectives attempt to identify the role of parents in personality development of children and to identify the survival strategies and supportive networks used by single mothers to fulfill the requirement of father in personality development of the child.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of the research was to examine the personality and self-development of children in single mother families compared to dual parent families. Therefore, a family where a female who had exclusive custody of and was raising one or more children (under the age of 18) by himself or herself at the time of the study was referred to as a "single mother family" in order to achieve the objectives of the research. As the sample of the study four case studies were selected to discuss. Two Single mother households which consist with children between 05 years old to 10 years old and two dual parent families which consist with children in same age group has been selected as the sample of the study. The sample was limited for the children between the age of 05 – 10 years; the stage 03 – Dimensional stage according to the neo-Piagetian theorist Robbie Case (1992). This age group was purposively selected by the researcher because; a healthy child has the ability to create a scene in this age group. Further, in this stage children can "introduce a "middle ground" as well as a foreground and background, and thus draw a picture in which space appears to have more continuous quality" (Case, 1992, p.178). Moreover, the parents from the selected four families and class teachers of these children have been selected from Ratmalana DS division by purposive sampling method as the sample of the study. Ratmalana is a suburb in Colombo District that marked high migrated population density which consists with multi ethno-religious groups. Therefore, the researcher benefited to identify the big picture of the effect of single parent families on children's development and personality.

The qualitative methods and techniques have been applied to collect data including case studies, interviews, focus group discussions and observation methods. As the major technique of this study the Kinetic Family Drawing Technique was applied. KFD which has been developed by Burns and Kaufman in 1970 has been applied as the tool to measure the personality of children who lies between 05 years old to 10 years old of the sample. Thus, the children from selected families were told that they should include themselves along with his or her family members. Therefore, the pictures which were drawn by children are supposed to indicate the child'' personality, personal development and how the child feels about their overall family. The analyzing process of the pictures which were collected to KFD method has been done through four major categories as follow:

Placement of the figures

The arrangement of the figures in the artwork provides important information about the position of each family member in the family hierarchy.

Physical characteristics

The body parts, clothes, facial features and the colors which used examined as the physical characteristics of each person.

Figures' actions

This analysis tends to identify the interaction between the family members. The affection and alienation of family members can be identified.

Style of the drawing of the family

At this point, the family's ME figure was of particular concern. This is a reflection of the parents' attitude toward their child (Zlateva, 2019).

Additionally, interviews have conducted for teachers in order to get the fullest material possible that is needed

to address the research problem. The information got from interviews has been verified using observation and document analysis such as school attendance register, exercise books, and school report card and health records. Since the qualitative technique looks out real data and emotional responses rather, the research has become more viable. The researcher is free to pursue any response in order to add depth and complexity to the data being collected because the qualitative approach is flexible. Simple statistic approach is preferred in this anthropological research to approaching objective explanation to underlying cause of patterns and meaningful relationships. Therefore, the data analyzed process has been done by using Microsoft package.
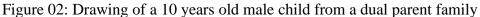
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Children who have typical intellectual, psychological, and physical development and who are at comfortable in their familial surroundings tend to draw their entire family.
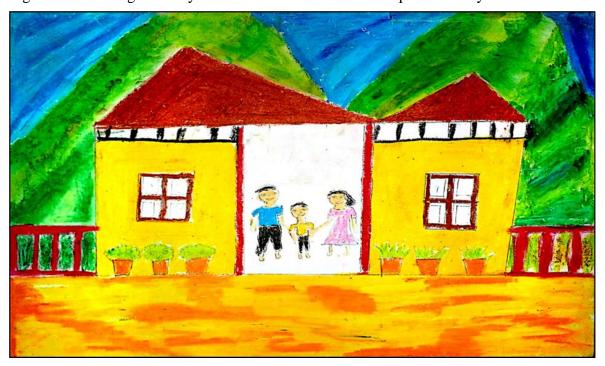
Figure 01: Drawing of a 12 years old male child from a dual parent family

A positive illustration of the child's favorable attitude toward his or her family is the drawing in figure 1. The description of pleasant gestures might demonstrate the family's upbeat attitude and welcoming environment. The child used oversaturated local coloring in this drawing, using eight to ten primary, modern colors. Usually, in addition to drawing the family's human members, artists will also portray the surroundings in which they live, but without giving it undue prominence. The size of the human figures in the drawing above corresponds to the child's perception of the family structure and comprehension of it. Further, the family members were drawn with very detailed body parts, clothing, and accessories. According to the drawing analysis, the picture consists with a well-organized composition, clear space orientation, all family members depicted, gestures of closeness, proportionality between figures, objects from the surrounding reality (such as trees, birds, sun), corresponding to the colours in real life, Thick and confident lines and drawing with no scratching or perforation of the sheet. Therefore, according to the analysis a calm and confident child aged 12 years are being raised in a healthy family environment. Further, this child academically performs well at school with daily attendance records.

Figure 02: Drawing of a 10 years old male child from a dual parent family

In figure 2, the composition of the drawing (middle, center) shows a practical, tangible style of thinking and a desire for security. In a nuclear household, a 10-year-old boy is the only child. Before beginning to sketch the family members, the boy spent a considerable amount of time drawing the landscape's components, showing an emotional response and some aversion to the subject of the family. By representing the family members in a warm gesture, the boy is expressing a strong desire for greater unity and connection between three of them. As he understood and accepted the family hierarchy, the child was satisfied with the existing relationship within the family. But the child has not drawn any other objects or creatures in his surroundings. According to the interview, the class teacher mentioned that, the child has individualistic ideas with some selfish behaviours. Further, he couldn't able to make friends at school and average performs academically. However, both parents are work in government sector with respective social status, but the exercise books reveal less supervision in homework.

Figure 03: Drawing of a 10 years old male child from a single mother family

The figure 03 depicts a case study, where the 10-year-old male child lives in a single mother family. The individuals left to right depicts by the drawing are grandmother, grandfather, ME figure, Mother and Mother's younger sister. Even though his mother's sister has lived with them for a while, the child first forgoes sketching her. The mother claims that the boy feels bad for his mother's sister. In this instance, this was an emotional conflict and dissatisfaction that was being expressed. All of the people in the drawing have "blind eyes," which can represent aloofness, hazy perception of the outside world, avoiding visual stimulus, challenging adaption, emotional immaturity, anxiety, and communication issues. Further, the rectangular torso is the other important element in the drawing of this 10-year-old male child. It can mean an inclination towards aggression, hostility and uncertainty. The figure 03 shows several times of erasures which can mean strong emotional attitudes towards depicted object or a certain part of it. According to the class teacher, this male child does not perform well academically, as well as always shout to get the attention of the teacher. Further, the register document analysis found that the child does not attend school regularly. Furthermore, the class teacher mentioned that, mother does not attend to parent's meetings and always send a member of the kindred.

Figure 04: Drawing of a 10 years old male child from a single mother family

The figure 04 is a drawing of a 10-year-old boy who lives with his mother all alone due to a divorce between his parents. When the child understands and accepts the family arrangement, he no longer feels incomplete, and as a result, he is prepared to exclude his absent father. The mother of the boy, however, claimed that the boy would occasionally display violence and have fits of rage alternate with periods of feeling unhappy and anxious. The drawing process begins with the ME figure which is a sign of a good self-esteem, egocentrism and a significant pretentiousness towards the other figure. The ME figure is situated very close to the mother's figure and see the attempt to hold the hand. Of significant interest in this drawing is the strongly marked impassive face in the image of the mother which shows a feeling of lack of understanding and security and the boy is not satisfied with the interrelationship with his mother. According to class teacher, the child is a very calm student who is good at his studies. But the mother states that she is working at a garment factory where she gets less time to spend with her child. Therefore, the child always tends to find love, affection and care from the mother in every time.

CONCLUSION

Children often enjoy emotional stability and security in a happy family. They can build trust, self-confidence, and a positive self-image thanks to this feeling of security. Children benefit from their families showing them attention, warmth, and love. Such emotional assistance can help a youngster develop positive interpersonal skills and traits. Furthermore, children's emotional intelligence and empathy are fostered via open and effective family communication. It teaches students how to communicate their emotions, settle disputes, and comprehend the sentiments of others. Clear and consistent norms and boundaries are frequently established in healthy families. This gives kids a feeling of structure and aids in their development of self-control and a sound moral compass. Children look up to their parents and other adults as role models. Pleasant role modeling can inculcate beliefs, actions, and attitudes that help develop a well-rounded and pleasant personality in a healthy family. It's important to note that a healthy family can take various forms and structures, including nuclear families, extended families, and complex nuclear families, and other contemporary formation of families. What matters most is the presence of love, support, and positive interactions within the family unit. But, with the time of passage, the family disorganization occurs due to a death of a spouse, migration, divorce, separation and etc. While the personality of a child basically rely on the first institution of socialization is the family, family disorganization severely effect on individual personality of a child.

According to the analysis of the drawings which were collected according to the Kinetic Family Drawing Technique disclose the personality matters and the self-development issues of the children in comparatively with the drawings from dual parent families. According to the Placement of the figures, physical characteristics, figures' actions, style of the drawing of the family depicts that the children's drawings from single mother families shown some issues in their personality and self-development while compared to the drawings with the dual parent families. In view of the results of the study, few recommendations can be made as follow: Schools must establish guidance and counselling platforms to assist children from single- mother households in coping with academic work and completing on an equal footing with children from intact families. Furthermore, all the parents should be counselled so that they can confidently assume their responsibilities to raising children as a single parent.

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