

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

This review focuses on studies that are concerned primarily with the impact of father absence on adolescent development in general and the effects of father absence on adolescent behaviour, adolescent self-concept, adolescent psychological adjustment and adolescent academic achievement in particular.

2.1 Impact of father absence on adolescent behaviour

Many studies have shown that adolescents from father absent homes are more likely to become deviant. Dusek (1987) defined deviant behaviour as antisocial behaviour that departs from the norm in a substantial way. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to engage in juvenile delinquency. Adolescents' delinquent acts not only include crimes like burglary, robbery, car theft, and the like, but also include truancy, running away from home, drug abuse and suicide. Ahlstrom & Havighurst (1971) revealed that the single best predictor of adolescent delinquency, particularly for boys, is the relationship between the adolescent and his parents. The better the relationship the boy has with his parents, the less likely he is to engage in delinquent behavior.

Studies by Patterson et al. (1989) revealed that the home atmosphere of delinquents tends to be characterized by a greater degree of parental rejection and a relatively lower degree of cohesiveness compared to that of non-delinquents. The researchers also found that parents of delinquents generally express little interest in their children's school performance and may have many personality and adjustment problems themselves.

Farnworth, (1984) reported that paternal absence is one aspect of the father-son relationship that has been demonstrated to be related to delinquency. Lynn & Saurey (1959) found that father absence may produce an overcompensating masculine personality in the adolescent male, particularly when father absence takes place before the child is five years of age.

Studies by Kelly and Baer (1969) showed that father absence is related to the rates of repeated crimes for adolescent males. The recidivism rate was 12% for those adolescents from intact homes and 39% for adolescents from father-absent homes if father absence occurs before the child is seven years old. However, the rate dropped to 10% if father absence takes place after the child is seven years old.

Statistics from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services revealed that fatherless children are at a dramatically greater risk of drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, suicide, teen pregnancy and criminality. For instance, the U.S. Department of

Justice (1988) revealed that 70% of juveniles in state-operated institutions come from fatherless homes and 85% of all youths sitting in prisons grew up in father-absent homes. Besides, 80% of rapists motivated by displaced anger are found to come from fatherless households and 90% of all homeless and runaway children are brought up in single-mother homes. It was also reported that 63% of adolescent suicides are from fatherless homes. The above statistics may be translated to mean that children from father-absent home are five times more likely to commit suicide, 32 times more likely to run away from home, 20 times more likely to have behavioural disorders, 14 times more likely to commit rape, and 20 times more likely to end up in prison.

In a longitudinal study of 1197 adolescents, Ialongo et al. (1995) observed greater levels of aggression in boys from single-mother families. Their findings were similar to the findings of Hetherington & Martin (1979) who found adolescents from father-absent homes to have less ability to delay gratification and to be more impulsive. According to Hetherington & Martin, adolescents from mother-only households have a weaker sense of conscience or sense of right and wrong.

Dornbusch et al. (1985) reported that youngsters living with both natural parents are less susceptible to peer pressure to engage in deviant behaviours. Lawrence Sternberg (1987) also reported that family structure exerts an impact on adolescents' susceptibility to peer pressure, and boys are more susceptible than girls. Besides, susceptibility scores are found to be higher among the eighth graders than among the younger or older adolescents.

The above review indicated that there is a significant relationship between father absence and adolescent deviant behavior. Boys appear to be more affected by father absence compared to girls, and father absence that takes place when the child is between five to seven years of age appears to be most detrimental to the adolescent.

2.2 Impact of father absence on adolescent self-concept

The self-concept, and its related constructs like self-esteem and identity, have been identified as an important aspect of adolescent development. Many social psychologists are of the opinion that the individual develops his or her self-concept through social interactions with others. From the way the others react towards him or her, the individual forms concepts of who he or she is and what he or she is capable of achieving.

Gecas & Schwalbe, (1986) identified the family as an important influence on self-concept because it is where the initial sense of oneself is formed. Parents are considered to be significant sources because they control the atmosphere in which children have their first experience as social beings. Therefore, a high degree of positive relationship with parents is crucial to the development of positive self-esteem. Adolescents who are deprived of paternal care and support are more likely to develop low self-esteem and negative self-concept.

Weigert & Rooney (1974) revealed that adolescent's perception of parental support, interest, and participation in their lives are consistently correlated with adolescent self-esteem.

Rosenberg (1965) suggested that self-esteem is a product of parents' appraisals of their adolescent, as reflected in the complexity of daily parent-child interactions. In his extensive study on the development of self-concept in adolescents from father-absent homes, he identified two factors which are critical to self-concept development in adolescents from single-parent homes: the age of the mother and the age of the child. His findings revealed that generally the impact of father absence are lessened if the mother is slightly older because older women appear to deal more effectively with the stresses of a single-parent family. In addition, the self-concept of younger children is more adversely affected compared to that of older children because older children are found to have a greater degree of self-concept stability and greater ability to cope with new situations.

Young & Parish (1977) examined self-concept development of adolescents in intact, reconstituted, and single-parent families. The results showed that adolescents from intact families have the highest self-concept scores, followed by adolescents from reconstituted families. Adolescents from divorced families have the lowest scores. They therefore suggested that growing up in single-parent family may have detrimental effects on the development of self-concept of adolescents.

Amato (1986) found that only adolescent boys' self-esteem in single-parent families was correlated with indices of fathers' involvement. However, in two-parent intact families, self-esteem and father involvement are significantly correlated for adolescents of both genders.

Clark & Barber (1994) explored adolescent self-esteem in post-divorce, single-mother families and in two-parent intact families. Their findings indicated that adolescents whose fathers' interest in them is low may have a more difficult time preserving self-esteem in two parent families than in father-absent homes. It appears that in two parent families, a low level of paternal interest is harder for an adolescent to "explain away" or view as beyond his or her control than would be the case for an adolescent whose parents are divorced.

Ho, Lempers & Clark (1995) investigated the relationship between economic hardship, family relationship and adolescent self-esteem in 387 families. The results showed that economic hardship has an adverse effect on adolescent self-esteem. Since most single-parent families have been found to encounter economic hardship, it is therefore not surprising for adolescents from father-absent homes to suffer from low self-esteem.

Dusek (1987) was of the opinion that adolescents with low self-esteem are more vulnerable to criticism and rejection because these reinforce their feelings of low self-

worth and negative views of the self. Therefore, low self-esteem adolescents tend to avoid social activities which might result in rejection or failure.

Studies by Ahlstrom & Havighurst (1971) revealed that there is a causal relationship between self-concept and juvenile delinquency. Their findings showed that delinquents are more socially assertive, hostile, destructive, and lacking in self-control than non-delinquents. They suggested that this behavioural pattern actually represents a defence mechanism against a negative self-concept. The researchers suggested that delinquents tend to perceive themselves as lazy, bad, and useless, just as the way they thought they were perceived by others. This build-up of negative feelings about the self causes some adolescents to seek the company of those who reject traditional values and standards, which often involves delinquency.

This review indicated that adolescents from father-absent homes tend to develop negative self-concept and have lower self-esteem due to economic deprivation. However, the age of the mother and the age of the child at the onset of father absence are both important determinants of self-concept formation.

2.3 Impact of father-absence on adolescent psychological adjustment

Many studies have found that adolescents from father-absent homes display psychological maladjustment and personality problems. Luckman & Regan (1966) reported that personality problems of children referred to an outpatient psychiatric

clinic are related to the type of homes the children came from. Children from widowed homes are more likely to show anxiety and neurotic symptoms, whereas children from divorced homes often display abnormally high aggression and antisocial behaviours. Therefore, it was suggested that children's affective development is related to the type of father-absence they experienced.

Zill (1983) found that boys in father-absent homes are at significant risk for antisocial behavior problems. Both teachers and parents reported a higher incidence of behavioral problems among children from single-mother families, including temper tantrum, fighting, bullying, cheating, lying and stealing.

Harter (1989) suggested that people with low self-esteem tend to exhibit more symptoms of unhealthy psychological adjustments like nervousness, insomnia, and other psychosomatic illnesses. Adolescents from father-absent homes are therefore more vulnerable to psychological disorder like depression and anxiety. That explains why fatherless children are more prone to suicide.

Hetherington (1989) investigated the effect of divorce and remarriage on adolescent adjustment. The results showed that during the first two years following divorce, most children and parents encounter emotional distress and psychological problems. After that, the majority of parents and children are adapting reasonably well towards their altered family situation. However, the researcher found that boys from father-absent homes tend to show more antisocial, acting-out, non-compliant

behaviours in the home. In school, they tend to exhibit difficulties in peer relationships and school achievement.

Hetherington, Cox & Cox (1985) also revealed that the long term adjustment of children towards their paternal loss is determined by individual characteristics like IQ, age and gender. More intelligent children are found to be more resilient and older children are more affected than younger children. Besides, marked gender differences are found in response to divorce and remarriage: boys are more adversely affected than girls by divorce and life in a mother custody single-parent household, but girls has more long-term difficulty than boys in adjusting to the introduction of a stepfather.

Studies by Hetherington (1972) on 72 adolescent girls showed that daughters from divorced homes are more anxious and aggressive, tend to be more outgoing and initiate more proximity seeking and physical contact with male peers. They are also reported to have more conflict with their mothers.

However, studies by Hainline & Feig (1978) reported no significant differences between girls from intact families and single-parent homes in terms of social adjustment, anxiety and sex-role stereotyping.

Rosenman, Shulman, & Levine (1984) revealed that adolescent adjustment in father-absent home is affected by maternal mood and the parenting style of the

psychological upset than do mothers in intact families as a result of having experienced personal trauma, loneliness, and the stress associated with added responsibilities. These feelings usually interfere with the quality of parenting which in turn exert an impact on the adolescents' psychological adjustment.

Athrons (1980) revealed that adjustments are more difficult for adolescents from divorced families than for bereaved families. Compared with bereaved families, divorced families have greater financial problems, more social stigma, and less support from the community. In addition, adolescents from divorced families are likely to have experienced a period of prolonged inter-parental conflict.

However, Dusek (1987) was of the view that instead of living with two parents who are hostile and bitter towards one another, adolescents are better off living with one parent in a relatively harmonious home atmosphere. In fact, adolescents from single-parent homes are found to have fewer psychosomatic illnesses, lower delinquency rates and better emotional adjustment compared to adolescents from intact but unhappy homes.

The above review indicated that harmonious home atmosphere is crucial for the adolescents' psychological health. Adolescents from father-absent homes will encounter lesser adjustment problems if the mother is older and emotionally more stable. Likewise, older adolescents who are more mature and independent can adapt better to paternal loss.

2.4 Impact of father-absence on the academic performance of the adolescents

Many studies corroborate the claim that children from single-parent families are outperformed in the classroom by their counterparts from two-parent families. Santrock (1972) compared 286 children from father-absent homes with 57 children from intact two-parent homes. The findings showed that father-absent boys consistently scored lower than father-absent girls and father-present boys. The findings of the study also strengthen the contention that cognitive changes are affected strongly by social influence. Therefore the effect of father absence should not be considered in isolation from the onset and the type of father absence. Father absence due to divorce or separation in the first five years of the child's life is found to be most detrimental to the cognitive development of the child and children from divorced homes are found to be more inferior academically than those from intact families. However, father absence due to death is most disruptive if it occurs during pre-adolescence. Adolescents who lose their father during pre-adolescence tend to perform poorly in school.

Downey (1994) compared the school performance of 409 children in single-father, 3 483 children in single-mother, and 14 269 children in two-parent families. Children from single-father and single-mother families performed rather similarly in school, but both were outperformed by children from intact two-parent families. He

attributed the relatively poor school performance of children from single-mother families to the lower economic standing of single mothers.

McLanahan & Booth (1989) revealed that living in a mother-only family decreases the likelihood of completing high school by about 5% for White children and 13% for Black children. They found the higher dropout rate to be strongly correlated with lower grades in school. They attributed the poor academic performance of these adolescents to economic hardship of the families. Single mothers are generally poorer and have limited means to provide the necessary amenities like private lessons and home computers that can facilitate their adolescents' academic success. The lower socio-economic status of single mothers may also force these families to live in neighbourhoods where school programs are poorly financed and services are inadequate. Besides, adolescents from father-absent homes may feel compelled to drop out of school in order to take a job and contribute economically to the household.

Hetherington et al. (1992) analyzed the grades and standardized test scores of high school students. Their preliminary analysis revealed that children from single-father families outperform their counterparts from single-mother families but still score lower than children from two-parent families.

Milne et al. (1986) found that children from father-absent households have lower test scores in vocabulary and reading. Thompson et al. (1988) indicated that ethnic

differences should be taken into consideration when comparing the impact of father-absence on academic performance of the adolescents. They found that father absence lowers the scores of verbal and quantitative achievement test of Black children but not of White children. Zimiles and Lee (1988) also indicated that White single-parent families have smaller negative effects on adolescents' academic performance.

Mulkey, Crain & Harrington (1992) indicated that both father absence and mother absence reduce students' grades significantly. However, they found that the effects of father absence on students' academic performance are transmitted through the intervening variables like ethnicity, economic hardship and psychological adjustment of the adolescents.

Darling (1994) examined the relationship between challenging and supportive parental roles and the academic performance of 74 adolescents. The results showed that adolescents who described their same-gender parents as challengers and supportive performed better on cognitive tests than those who did not. Therefore, it was suggested that father absence will have a more negative impact on the academic performance of adolescent boys than that of adolescent girls.

Andrew et al. (1991) examined the relationship between substance use and academic achievement of 464 adolescents aged 12 to 16 years. The results supported the earlier findings which revealed that the direction of the causal relation between substance use and academic achievement is bi-directional. Adolescents with lower

academic achievement are more likely to initiate substance use. On the other hand, adolescents who are involved in substance use tend to show diminishing interest and motivation in their studies. Since the earlier reviews indicated that adolescents from father-absent homes are more likely to be involved in substance use, therefore it appears that their school performance will also be jeopardized as a result of father-absence.

Sarason et al. (1960) in their review of research literatures reported that there is a negative correlation between anxiety and academic achievement. Children with high anxiety tend to perform poorly in schools. According to Philips et al.(1972), anxiety is elicited by psychological stress. Since the parenting styles of single mothers are found to be more negative, more domineering and more hostile than their coupled counterparts (Zelkowitz, 1982), it is inevitable that children brought up by single-mothers will suffer from higher level of anxiety, which may in turn result in their poorer academic achievement.

This review indicated that father absence has a negative impact on adolescents' school performance, and boys are more adversely affected than girls. However, the impact of father absence on the academic achievement of adolescents are found to be dependent on other variables like gender, ethnicity, onset of father absence, and maternal socio-economic status and the parenting style of the mother.