

Influence of Father Absence on Self-Esteem of Secondary School Students in Keiyo Sub-County, Kenya

Magangi B. Agnes

School of education, University of Eldoret, P.O. BOX 1125, Eldoret

Email: agnesoseko@yahoo.com

Abstract

Secondary schools in Kenya are the abode of thousands of adolescents, whose needs cannot be ignored or wished away without future dire consequences to both the students and the world at large. The absence of the father in homes is an increasing trend in Kenya, and the belief that the absence of fathers is lined with a variety of social pathologies is gaining national momentum. This study was designed to investigate the effects of father absence on self-esteem among secondary school students. The study was based on John Bowlby's attachment theory (2009). Descriptive research design was used in the study and the study targeted two hundred respondents. Purposive sampling was used to select students from father absent families while random sampling was used to select the students from father present families. The subjects were required to respond to a self-esteem inventory as a measure of their self-esteem. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study revealed that students from father absent family have low self-esteem as compared to their counterparts from father present homes. Further, boys from father absent family had low self-esteem while those from father present homes had high self-esteem. Majority of the boys from father absent parent family scored less than 8 out of 25 in the self-esteem inventory, which was below average. A total of 13 boys from father present family scored above 20 out of 25 on the self-esteem inventory. None of the boys from father present family scored less than 15 on the inventory. This clearly indicates that there is a significant difference in self-esteem of father absent and father present boys. It was also established that girls from father absent family had low self-esteem as compared to their counterparts from father present family. Most of the girls from father absent family scored between 13 and 15 on the self-esteem inventory while their counterparts from father present family scored between 19 and 25 on the self-esteem inventory. Therefore, there was a difference between the self-esteem of father absent and father present girls. The study suggests that students should be helped by their teachers and parent (parents) to have a positive feeling of them. This will help teachers and school administrators to know how to help students from father absent families.

Key words: Father Absence, Keiyo Sub-county, Self-esteem, secondary school students

INTRODUCTION

Family formation has changed dramatically (Anderson, 2002). Cohabitation has replaced marriages as the preferred first union of young adults. Pre-marital sex and non-marital childbearing have become increasingly acceptable and common place; and divorce rates have escalated at very high levels. Not only have these changes affected adults, they also have altered the family experiences of children. These

changes might generate less concern if they did not appear to have deleterious consequences for the families involved and for society more generally. Unfortunately, the consequences are not so benign. Furthermore, a large body of research demonstrates that, while the effects are not large, children who grow up with only one biological parent are disadvantaged, relative to other children, across a wide range of outcomes in childhood as well as adulthood (Amato and Keith, 1991b and Amato 1993). If change in family formation undermines the ability of future generations to function effectively the costs of these changes to society could be extremely high.

Since 1970, the rate of single parenting has increased from one in ten families to one in three families in Kenya (Hetherington, 2002). This has led to parental absence in most homes. Parental absence denies children the warmth that propels them through to psychological and emotional maturity (Bowlby, 2009). Engler (2010) reveals that the child should experience a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his or her parents, in whom both find satisfaction and enjoyment, and that, not to do so, many children manifest significant mental health challenges later in life. The implication is that emotional presence of parents at an infancy stage provides the basis for secure development that could manifest in an individual with high self-esteem. To the contrary emotional absence of a parent at infancy stage and at adolescence could breed a child with low self-esteem. Parental presence therefore is significant in helping the child to grow trusting in the self and in others; being confident and viewing the world positively (Engler, 2010).

Raths (2007) established eight hierarchical emotional needs which are essential for the balanced growth of children. The first and most significant of these needs is the need for love and affection. Raths believed that parental presence was crucial and contributed largely in forming well rounded children. Lack of such parental presence makes the child insecure, weakens the bond between the child and the parent and could make the child emotionally unstable. Raths therefore encourages parents to be emotionally present to their children in order to avail to them that much needed love and affection which enables them to grow with emotional stability. Children who lack this basic component from their parents in their earlier years are prone to acquiring a disheveled character and may experience health problems (Raths, 2007). A caring, loving parent who is emotionally present to the child will definitely reinforce positive behavior to the child by showering love to the child, caring and rewarding the child's good behavior. Similarly, a parent who denies a child emotional love breeds an adult who lacks trust for self and others; bitter with life and less focused. Winkley (2002) found out that, children with more severe problems are those who have experienced serious failures of parenting which mainly involved lack of emotional parental presence.

A study by Kiyingi (2012) found out that, boys who lacked parental emotional presence missed the parental warmth which has a unique role in their lives. The parents' presence, according to Kiyingi, enhances in the boy child the confidence and masculine skills which are crucial for adult life. On the contrary lack of a warm relationship between the parent and his children could breed adults who are less confident and with an insecure personality. In Kenya, a study by Bui (2011) established that the parental emotional absence to children may cause them serious psychological imbalances. Bui (2011) asserts that there is need for parental

presence in molding a holistic adult. According to Biu (2011), Kenyan parents have become so preoccupied in the pursuit for wealth that being present to their children has become a huge challenge. Of concern therefore in this study was to establish the influence of father absence on the self-esteem of students in the selected schools in Keiyo sub-county. This research therefore aimed at achieving the following specific objectives:

- i. To establish the difference between self-esteem of father absent and father present students.
- ii. To determine the difference between self-esteem of father absent and father present boys.
- iii. To establish the difference between self-esteem of father absent and father present girls.

The following null hypotheses were derived from the research objectives:

Ho₁ : There is no significant difference between self-esteem of father absent and father present students.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference between self-esteem of father absent and father present boys.

Ho₃: There is no significant difference between the self-esteem of father absent and father present girls.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-esteem is the liking and respect for oneself, which has some realistic basis. McDougall (1973) conceives self-esteem as various simple which form the nucleus of an individual's self regard. Such feelings might be either positive in nature, derived from praise or by achievement or negative resulting from criticism or underachievement. Self-esteem is the attitude (positive or negative) towards the self. He further goes on to state that self esteem as reflected, is the feeling that one is good enough, the individual simply feels that he is a person of worth, believes in himself, he respects himself for what he is. This implies that self-esteem represents generalized feelings of adequacy or inadequacy on the part of an individual. A study done by Hetherington (2003), established that children in divorced and remarried families show an increased risk for internalizing problems, including higher levels of depression and anxiety, and lower levels of self-esteem compared to children in non-divorced families. A study by Elfhag *et al.* (2010) also found out that children have lower self-esteem living with a single parent than those raised by two parents. Another study by Amato and Keith (1991) found out that children from divorced families are on "average" somewhat worse off than children who have lived in intact families. These children have more difficulty in school, more behavior problems, more negative self-concepts, more problems with peers, and more trouble getting along with their parents. Naderi *et al.* (2009) found that there is significant relationship between self-esteem and gender. It was found out that male adolescents had higher self-esteem than female adolescents.

Ermisch (2001) believes that there are five major factors, which influence self-esteem: These are:-The reaction of others; Comparison with others; Social roles; Identification and Parents and peers. Rosenberg (1965) studied a large number of adolescents and found that those with the highest self-esteem tended to be of higher social class, to have been leaders in their clubs, were happy, believed in

themselves, enjoyed the world around them were confident, encouraged others all of which represents the basis for a favourable comparison between self and others.

Children with high self-esteem identify themselves easily with others while those with low self-esteem are withdrawn and isolated. It has been found that social support and skills are predictors of the growth of self-esteem (Nancy, 1993). Among the sources of social support, which have been found contributing to the enhancement of self-esteem, are perceived support from classmates or peers and perceived support from parents. Children who are cherished by their parents usually see themselves as being worthy of love. They are likely to learn to love, accept themselves hence develop self-esteem (Gmter, 2000).

Other factors that influence self-esteem include: Hostile parenting is a consistent and significant predictor of child psychiatric and social difficulties. The combination of lone mother status and hostile parenting is particularly noxious for child psychiatric social and academic difficulties not seen in two-parent families. This finding is consistent with other work done associating parental stress, parenting difficulties and poor child outcomes (Patterson, 2002). There is evidence that positive parenting practices can have an important influence on a child's well being, for children at risk situations (Waithaka, 2005). Close and loving relationship with others later in life does contribute positively to self-esteem. But the likelihood of forming and sustaining successful relationships of these kinds is itself higher when self-esteem is higher in the first place (Muchiri, 2006).

Although self-esteem has been defined in a variety of ways (Elli, 1996) the term has typically been used to refer to an evaluating judgment which individuals make of themselves. In relation to self-esteem, a number of studies have shown that in non-western setting, self-esteem is composed of and influenced by quite different components to those suggested by conventional western measures, e.g., a study by Watkins (1988) found that although family, friends and school were important aspects in determining self-esteem of Filipino young adolescents, factors such as food money and clothes were also relatively important but are ignored by western instruments (Watkins & Regmi, 1993).

Similarly it is conceivable that if the self-esteem of adolescents in western societies is contingent on physical appearance and social acceptance as recent research suggest (Harter, 1990), access to money and clothes may also contribute to the self-esteem of western adolescents. Thus it is possible that these scales ask about things which are not pertinent to the self-esteem of target groups (Ellis, 1996; Watkins, 1988) raising questions as to the appropriateness of western models and measures for assessing the self-esteem of both western and non western adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

The study was descriptive research design because it investigated the influence of father absence on self-esteem. The independent variable was father absence and dependent variable was self-esteem of secondary school students in Keiyo sub-county, Kenya.

The study was conducted in ten secondary schools. Two single sex schools were used; one girl's boarding school, one boy's boarding school and eight mixed day schools. Only form two and three students of the selected schools were included in the study. One hundred students were used in the study, fifty boys and fifty girls. Only students who had been in the selected schools for one year and above were used in the study. The students were selected through purposive and random sampling. Self-esteem inventory was used to ascertain the self-esteem level of students. The scores were designed to the various levels as follows: - 0-12- low self-esteem; 13-25- High self-esteem.

RESULTS

Background Information of Respondents

Data was analyzed from 100 students out of which 50(50%) were male and 50(50%) were female. Form Two (50) and three (50) students constituted the sample from the student population. It was not possible to use all the students in form two and three especially in schools where there was more than one stream. In such cases, students were selected purposively based on as to whether the father is present or not. Only twelve respondents were used in the schools visited. Students without fathers were selected purposively for the study. Fifty students (50%) without fathers were selected for this study. Fifty students with fathers were also included in the study. They were randomly selected from the sample of form two and three students in every school visited. Fifty father absent students were used in the study where 25 boys and 25 girls. Fifty fathers present also participated, where 25 were girls and the other 25 were boys. This was done for purposes of comparing self esteem of the two selected groups in the study. The findings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Gender of the respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Male	50	50
Female	50	50
Total	100	100
Class		
Form 2	50	50
Form 3	50	50
Total	100	100
Father present or Absent		
Father Present	50	50
Father Absent	50	50
Total	100	100

Self Esteem Scores of Father absent and Present Students

To be able to determine the self-esteem of the respondents, an inventory was used with twenty five items. If the respondent scored 13 and above on the inventory it meant that his/her self-esteem was high and if the respondent scored 0-12 it meant that his/her self-esteem was low. Table 2 above shows the various scores of the students on the inventory.

Table 2: Self esteem scores of father absent and present students

Score on inventory	Father Absent		Score on inventory	Father Present	
	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
3.00	2	4.0			
4.00	4	8.0	15.00	3	12.5
5.00	6	12.0	16.00	2	8.3
6.00	2	4.0	17.00	1	4.2
8.00	1	2.0	18.00	4	16.7
10.00	3	6.0	19.00	1	4.2
11.00	1	2.0	20.00	3	12.5
12.00	2	4.0	21.00	5	20.8
13.00	14	28.0	24.00	3	12.5
14.00	11	22.0	25.00	2	8.3
15.00	4	8.0			
Total	50	100	Total	50	100

From the table, it is clear that majority of the students with father absent scored below 15. Fourteen students (28%) with father absent scored 13 out of the possible 25. This is synonymous like saying majority of the students with father absent had average to low self-esteem. Their counterparts with father present scored highly with 3(6.0%) scoring a maximum of 25 out of 25.

Self Esteem Scores of Father Absent Boys and Father Present Boys

The study sought to establish the difference in self-esteem scores between father absent boys and father present boys. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Self esteem scores of father present boys and father absent boys

Score on inventory	Father Absent boys		Score on inventory	Father Present boys	
	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
4	3	12.5	15	3	12.5
5	4	16.7	16	2	8.3
6	8	33.3	17	1	4.2
10	1	4.2	18	4	16.7
11	1	4.2	19	1	4.2
12	1	4.2	20	3	12.5
13	1	4.2	21	5	2.8
14	4	16.7	24	3	12.5
15	1	4.2	25	2	8.3
Total	25	100	Total	25	100

Self esteem of boys with father present was high compared with father absent boys, with two boys scoring 25 out of 25 on the inventory. This is a clear indication that presence or absence of a father had some influence on the self-esteem of the students. Majority of father absent students scored less than 8 out of 25 on the inventory, which was a below average performance. A total of 14 boys with father present scored above 20 out of 25 on the inventory, which indicated presence of father to boys, was very significant on their self-esteem. None of the students with father present scored less than 15 on the inventory.

Self Esteem Scores of Father absent Girls and Father Present Girls

Table 4 shows the scores on Self-esteem of father present girls and father absent girls.

Table 4: Self esteem scores of father present girls and father absent girls

Score on inventory	Father Absent girls		Score on inventory	Father Present girls	
	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
3	2	7.7	14	1	3.8
4	1	3.8	15	4	15.4
5	2	7.7	16	3	11.5
6	1	3.8	17	1	3.8
8	1	3.8	18	3	11.5
10	2	7.7	19	4	15.4
12	1	3.8	20	4	15.4
13	6	23.1	21	2	7.7
14	7	26.9	23	2	7.7
15	3	11.5	25	2	7.6
Total	25	100	Total	25	100

Most of the girls (16) with father absent scored between 13 and 15 on the inventory. This was almost half of the maximum score. Almost the opposite happened for girls with father present who scored between 14 and 24 on the inventory. Fourteen girls (53.8%) scored between 19 and 25 on the inventory.

When girls with father present were compared with boys with father present on self-esteem, 13 boys scored more than 20 compared to 10 girls who scored the same. Thus presence of the father has more effect on boys than girls in the present study. Similarly when father absent boys were compared with father absent girls, 19 girls with father absent scored between 10 and 15 while only 9 of the boys with father absent scored the same. This again is in agreement that girls were not affected as much, compared to boys with the absence of the father.

Hypotheses Testing

Based on the objectives of the study, three hypotheses were tested the student t-test was used to test the Hypotheses. The null hypotheses were rejected at $p < 0.05$. the output is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Mean Scores and t-values for Self-esteem

Students		Parent Family	
		Father Absent	Father Present
Boys & Girls	7.53	36.78(8.0)	50.84(9.87)
Girls	2.59	40.96(6.17)	48.01(9.7)
Boys	1.989	36.08(5.51)	50.84(9.8)

Note: Parenthesized entries are the standard deviations. Unparenthesized figures are the mean scores. * $P < .05$

The first hypothesis was:

HO₁: there is no significant difference between self-esteem of father absent and father present students.

To test the first null hypothesis (HO₁) the mean scores, standard deviations and t-values were computed as indicated in Table 5. The mean for the father absent students was 36.78, the standard deviation was 8.0, while the mean for the father present students was 50.84, and the standard deviation was 9.87. The t value obtained was 7.54 which were statistically significant, meaning that the statistic was higher than the critical value. This meant that there was a significant difference between the self-esteem of father absent and father present students. The father present students were significantly superior in self-esteem than the father absent students. This analysis corroborates the analysis of other researchers such as Antecol (2002) that children from father absent families are more likely to suffer psychological problems compared to their counterparts from father absent families. The psychological problems are a manifestation of low self-esteem among children from father absent families.

The second hypothesis was stated as:

HO₂: There is no significant difference between self-esteem of father absent and father present boys.

To test the second null hypothesis (HO₂), the mean scores, standard deviations and t-values were computed as indicated in Table 5. The mean for father absent boys was 36.08, the standard deviation was 5.51, while the mean for the father present boys was 50.84, and the standard deviation was 9.8. The t value obtained was 1.989. The t statistic obtained was higher than the critical value. This therefore means that there was a significant difference between the self-esteem of father absent and father present boys. According to Coppersmith (1967) boys from father absent families were confident about their own perception and judgment, were expected to succeed at new tasks and to influence others and readily expressed their opinions. They were also doing better in school and more often chosen as friends by other children. By contrast the father absent boys had low self-esteem. They were a sad little group, isolated, fearful, and reluctant to join in self - conscious, over sensitive to criticism, consistently underrated them, tended to underachieve in class and were pre occupied with their own problems. All these were effects that followed divorce or separation of parents.

The third hypothesis was stated as:

HO₃: There is no significant difference between the self-esteem of father absent and father present girls.

To test the third null hypothesis (HO₃) the mean scores, standard deviation and t-values were computed as shown in Table 5. The computed mean for the father absent girls was 40.96, the standard deviation was 6.17, while the computed mean for the father present girls was 48.01, and the standard deviation was 9.7. The calculated t value was 2.59, which was higher than the critical value meaning that the t-value was significant at $p < .05$. The third null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative accepted. This meant that there was a significant difference between the self-esteem of father absent and father present girls.

The girls from father present families were significantly superior in self-esteem than girls from father absent families. It is evident from the result of null hypothesis three that girls from father present families had high self-esteem because of the social support from both parents (love, support) while those from father absent families had low self-esteem that is why they were withdrawn and isolated because of lack of social support from both parents. The remaining parent (mother) is normally very busy trying to perform tasks for two people in the family; she therefore does not have time to show love and acceptance to her children. This is supported by the work done by (Ginter, 2002).

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that students from father absent family have low self-esteem as compared to their counterparts from father present homes. This finding tally with a study done by Bassuk and Rosenberg (1990) in Boston Massachusetts who stated that students who feel that are worth work hard and excel in studies while those who feel that they are unworthy do not care about their studies for they may see no reason for working hard and they perceive themselves as failures that cannot succeed. The findings revealed that boys from father absent family had low self-esteem while those from father present homes had high self-esteem. Majority of the boys from father absent family scored less than 8 out of 25 in the self-esteem inventory, which was below average. A total of 13 boys from father present family scored above 20 out of 25 on the self-esteem inventory. None of the boys from father present family scored less than 15 on the inventory. This clearly indicates that there is a significant difference in self-esteem of father absent and father present boys. This is because boys from father absent homes do not develop good personality because of lack of a role model and they have complex problems because they are not secured in the love of both parents. They are not taken care of well and are not socialized in the best way possible, leading to low self-esteem as compared to the father present boys.

It was also established that girls from father absent family had low self-esteem as compared to their counterparts from father present family. Most of the girls from father absent family scored between 13 and 15 on the self-esteem inventory while their counterparts from father present family scored between 19 and 25 on the self-esteem inventory. This showed that there was a difference between the self-esteem of father absent and father present girls.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of the study were made based on the findings as follows:-

1. Guidance and counseling services should be strengthened in schools to help students improve their self-esteem.
2. Families should try to remain intact if possible and where not possible a father figure should be introduced or a guardian.

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