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The Effects of Single-Parenting on Children's Educational Success

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Single-parenting as a result of divorce, hinders children's educational success. When living in a divorced single-parent household, children tend to disengage from school at an early age (Astone & McLanahan, 1991). Many studies show why and how single parenting can affect a child's educational success. However, there is little research on ways to reduce the negative affects single parenting has on children's educational success. In the current experiment, teachers in two schools will complete a survey over three years. Teachers in two schools will complete a scale based off student performance over two years starting in 7th grade. One school, P.S. 206, will implement an afterschool program for 6th, 7th and 8th graders, while the other school, P.S. 229, will not. Data collected from teachers, test scores and standardized test will be used to measure the effect of single parenting on children's educational success. All the children in P.S. 206 will have the program available to them but only data from children that come from divorced single parent families will be used. It is hypothesized that the children from P.S. 206 with the afterschool program, will do better academically compared to the children from P.S. 229 who did not participate in the program.

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In the United States, married individuals have better outcomes on a variety of measures of well-being compared to their single counterpart (Waite, Linda, Lehrer, & Evelyn, 2004). For example, married adults experience greater affluence, fewer substance abuse problems, less depression, lower suicide rates, better physical health, live longer and overall has greater rates of happiness (Gillmore, Lee, Morrison & Lindhorst, 2008). In addition, married couples tend to look out for each other and remind one another of medical and general appointments (Karasu, 2007), thereby increasing awareness about health. Marriage has positive affects on children and it affects many domains in their life, one of the most

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important being education (Waite et al., 2004). Children and adolescents do better in married households (Gillmore et al., 2008). They are less likely to be involved in accidents, drug or alcohol-related deaths, suicides, or crime. They are also less likely to have a child at a young age and out of wedlock (Karasu, 2007). In addition, children from single-parent households are four times more likely to be of lower socioeconomic status (SES) than children in married households (Karasu, 2007). Bisnair, Firesstone & Rynard, (1990) collected achievement records from 77 children (9-15 years of age) and their separated or divorced parent both before and after parental separation. They found that grades between children living with both parents or in single parent homes, may not differ in terms of gender, age, or amount of time spent at play (Bisnair et al.1990). The participants in this study came from

a high SES, which shows that it is one of the main factors contributing to low educational success.

While the above study does not show educational differences, divorce has been shown to have adverse effects on both children and parents (Orbuch, Thornton & Cancio, 2000). For example, divorce deprives children of parental resources (Orbuch et al., 20, 1990). Divorce is one of the main causes of poverty for women and children (Karasu, 2007). For example, children can experience a 70% drop in household income after divorce and unless there is remarriage, these children still experience a 40% to 45% decrease in household income six years after divorce (Karasu, 2007). Children who grow up in a single-parent home are more likely to demonstrate emotional and behavioral problems, to live in poverty and do poorly in school compared to children who live with both biological parents (Remez, 1992). Among the various forms of assistance parents can provide, parental involvement is most essential, as it has been demonstrated to significantly affect children's academic success in numerous ways (Berthelson & Walker, 2008; Fan, 2001; Hara, 1998). Ineffective or inadequate parental assistance may lead a child to feel overwhelmed and consequently to withdraw from school (Astone & McLanahan, 1991). In general, parental practices are related to all school achievement indicators: grades, attendance, attitudes, expectations, school retention, and degree completion (Astone & McLanahan, 1991). Stress the child experiences from parental separation may cause temporary interruption in the learning process, which leads to academic problems (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976, 1980). In one study, researchers found that "30% of the children experienced a marked decrease in their academic performance following parental separation, and this was evident 3 years later" (Bisnair et al., 1990). "There's reported deterioration that school performance and defiant behavior are among the most consistent outcomes associated with separation & divorce" (Roseby & Deutsch, 1985). Divorce usually leads to loss of income, happiness and delinquent behavior from children (Orbuch et al., 2000).

The nuclear family has decreased drastically due to an increase in divorce rates, separation and teenage pregnancy (Michelle, 2001). The probability of divorce declines in a population where both individuals in a marriage have a college degree (Cherlin, 2010). Women who get divorced within the first 10 years of their first marriage tend to not have earned a high school diploma. Next is women that earn a high school diploma or some college. There has been a reported negative correlation between children that come from divorced single-parent households

and their academic performance. Children from disrupted marriages were over 70% more likely to have been expelled or suspended from school than children whose parents was intact (Remez, 1992). Children from single parent and step-parent families are more likely to exhibit signs of early disengagement from school (Astone & McLanahan, 1991).

Every child has the capacity to succeed in school and in life. Yet, many children from divorced single-parent households, do not receive adequate supervision during the after school hours (Fashola, 1998). "Self-care, sometimes called latchkey care, comes in multiple forms. Children can be home alone, or they can stay with older or younger siblings. Some children go to public places such as libraries or shopping malls where adults are nearby but not charged with monitoring their safety or well-being. Others spend afternoons together with peers, away from any adult supervision" (Alter, 1998; Vandell & Posner, 1999). "The National Child Care Survey, which asked parents to report the child's primary care arrangement excluding school, estimated that 10% of 10- to 12-year-olds were in self-care (Hofferth, Brayfield, Deich & Holocomb, 1991)." Interest in after-school programs increased following reports that juvenile crime peaked between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. on school days (Apsler, 2009). Research documented an association between the presence of parental supervision and lower levels of delinquent behavior, substance use and high-risk sexual behavior (Apsler, 2009). In direct interviews with children, other researchers found that 44% of third graders spent at least some of their after-school time in unsupervised settings (Vandell, Posner, Shumow & Kang, 1995). Additional research demonstrated an association between lack of adult supervision and an increased likelihood of risk-taking behaviors, victimization, and poor academic performance (Apsler, 2009). Children may face academic or behavioral obstacles reaching for success during school hours and these after school hours can be a time to attempt and eliminate these barriers (Fashola, 1998).

After school programs are seen as a means of improving academic achievement and providing opportunities for academic enrichment (Fashola, 1998). For example, Hofferth et al. (1991) grouped after-school programs based on six goals that the programs were trying to achieve: (1) providing adult supervision and safe environments; (2) providing a flexible, relaxed, and homelike environment; (3) providing cultural or enrichment opportunities; (4) improving academic skills; (5) preventing behavior problems; and (6) providing recreational activities. Fashola (1998) surveyed

after-school programs and grouped them according to five content-based categories: (1) language arts, (2) study skills, (3) academic programs in other curriculum areas, (4) tutoring for reading, and (5) community-based programs. Scott-Little, Hamann, and Jurs (2002) counted a program as an after-school program if it operated during the hours after school dismissal and provided supervision for participants. Apsler (2009) found that some after-school programs focused on a single area, such as academics, while others presented comprehensive experiences for participants. The individuals supervising students could be regular school teachers who received extra pay or individuals with no other connection to the school (Apsler, 2009). Some programs incorporated one-to-one mentoring experiences, while most relied entirely on much larger student-to-staff ratios (Apsler, 2009). Many programs operated in the buildings where participants attended regular school because of transportation issues (Apsler, 2009).

We hypothesize the children that complete the after school program who come from divorced single parent homes, will have higher educational success than children who do not complete the program. With the growing evidence that self-care poses risks for some children, parents, policymakers and educators have turned to after-school programs as a way to meet children's needs. Low-income children, children in urban or high-crime neighborhoods, younger children, and boys show most beneficial effects (Vandell & Shumow, 1999). Organized sports, piano/dance lessons, comp classes and individual tutoring are considered out-of-school-activities and are usually paid for by parents. These enrichment activities are more common in children living in a higher SES (Pettit, Laird, Bates & Dodge, 1997; Hofferth et al., 1991). Things that prevent children from participating in these activities, being that they come from a low SES, are transportation and cost (Miller, O'Connor & Sirignono, 1995). For this reason, an afterschool program will be implemented in a neighborhood where the children live in a low SES free of cost.

PROPOSED METHOD

Participants

Sixth graders from two public schools (grades 6-8) in Brooklyn who come from divorced single parent households will be the participants in the study. Parents will sign and return informed consent forms. Upon children's yearly participation in the study, parents will be given a

\$20 gift card as an incentive to complete participation.

Measures

In this quasi-experimental study, for all participants researchers will obtain all academic grades from the children's 5th grade year to serve as a baseline. Upon receipt of these grades, researchers will conduct a study on 6th grade students and will follow these students until they complete 8th grade. The researchers will contact the administrators to set up an extended after school program for the school P.S. 206 in Brooklyn. At P.S. 206, the program will be implemented starting at the beginning of 6th grade and will last for 2 years. For the purpose of this study, at the beginning of each academic year we will administer a survey to ensure divorced single parents did not remarry or plan to marry within the year. All students in the school will be able to participate in the extended after school program; but, researchers will only use data from children in grades 6-8 from divorced single parent households. This after school program will achieve certain goals such as: adult supervision, structured sessions, improvement in academic skills and providing snack and recreational activity. On the contrary, P.S. 235 will not have this program. However, teachers from both schools will fill out the Academic performance rating scale weekly for students throughout 6-8th grade (See Appendix A)(DuPaul et al., 1991). This scale has been used for the evaluation of students' academic success. Data from these surveys will be assessed to determine whether students' academic success has decreased, remained the same or increased with participation in the academic extended after school program.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Significance

Divorce is something that many children go through today (Remez, 1992). Many children are born outside of marriage and are faced with the negative aspect of having to grow up in disrupted homes (U.S. national center for health statistics, 2005, 2009b; Remez, 1992). Further research should be done on genetic factors and same sex marriages as well to see if these components contribute to a child having a lower level of educational success (Amato, 2010). There are many things that can be done to help these children growing up in single-parents households such as the after school program or having a mentor. Parents are an important resource that

can be used to target the root of the problem. We can urge parents to become more active in their children's academics as well as look to resources for help if needed. Making sure children attend school regularly is something schools can become strict about, forcing parents to become more involved.

Limitations

Some states do not annually report statistics on the actual amount of divorces in the U.S. that affect children, making it difficult to obtain accurate results for how single parenting can effect children's educational success (Amatto, 2010). Another limitation to our study is that, it is hard to isolate if the program directly caused grades and academic achievement to increase. This is also because this was a quasi-experiment and the data is correlational. Students may switch schools throughout the school year and we have a small sample size. In addition, generalizability is another factor and we may not have an accurate number of students from the school that are reared from divorce single parent households. Relying on information from teachers and grade fluctuation as a result of something besides the afterschool program are also limitations to our study.

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Academic Performance Rating Scale

APPENDIX A

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE RATING SCALE

Student _____ Date _____

Age _____ Grade _____ Teacher _____

For each of the below items, please estimate the above student's performance over the **PAST WEEK**. For each item, please circle **one** choice only.

1. Estimate the percentage of written math work completed (regardless of accuracy) relative to classmates.	0-49% 1	50-69% 2	70-79% 3	80-89% 4	90-100% 5
2. Estimate the percentage of written language arts work completed (regardless of accuracy) relative to classmates.	0-49% 1	50-69% 2	70-79% 3	80-89% 4	90-100% 5
3. Estimate the accuracy of completed written math work (i.e., percent correct of work done).	0-64% 1	65-69% 2	70-79% 3	80-89% 4	90-100% 5
4. Estimate the accuracy of completed written language arts work (i.e., percent correct of work done).	0-64% 1	65-69% 2	70-79% 3	80-89% 4	90-100% 5
5. How consistent has the quality of this child's academic work been over the past week?	Consistently Poor 1	More Poor than Successful 2	Variable 3	More Successful than Poor 4	Consistently Successful 5
6. How frequently does the student accurately follow teacher instructions and/or class discussion during <i>large-group</i> instruction (e.g., whole class) instruction?	Never 1	Rarely 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Very often 5
7. How frequently does the student accurately follow teacher instructions and/or class discussion during <i>small-group</i> instruction (e.g., reading group) instruction?	Never 1	Rarely 2	Sometimes 3	Often 4	Very often 5
8. How quickly does this child learn new material (i.e., pick up novel concepts)?	Very Slow 1	Slow 2	Average 3	Quickly 4	Very Quickly 5
9. What is the quality or neatness of this child's handwriting?	Poor 1	Fair 2	Average 3	Above Average 4	Excellent 5

10. What is the quality of this child's reading skills?	Poor	Fair	Average	Above Average	Excellent
	1	2	3	4	5
11. What is the quality of this child's speaking skills?	Poor	Fair	Average	Above Average	Excellent
	1	2	3	4	5
12. How often does the child complete written work in a careless, hasty fashion?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
	1	2	3	4	5
13. How frequently does the child take more time to complete work than his/her classmates?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
	1	2	3	4	5
14. How often is the child able to pay attention without you prompting him/her?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
	1	2	3	4	5
15. How frequently does this child require your assistance to accurately complete his/her academic work?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
	1	2	3	4	5
16. How often does the child begin written work prior to understanding the directions?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
	1	2	3	4	5
17. How frequently does this child have difficulty recalling material from a previous day's lessons?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
	1	2	3	4	5
18. How often does the child appear to be staring excessively or "spaced out"?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
	1	2	3	4	5
19. How often does the child appear withdrawn or tend to lack an emotional response in a social situation?	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
	1	2	3	4	5