



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY BREAKDOWN AND PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN'S LEARNING OUTCOME IN KIAMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:

The rising number of family breakdown worldwide is a great concern for children and families. Divorce and separation destroy the relationship between parents and children. Due to family conflicts and breakdown the child may be pre-occupied with worries at home, withdrawn and not able to fully get involved in school activities hence affecting his/her learning outcome. The purpose of this study was to establish the relationship between family breakdown and a child's learning outcome in Limuru Zone, Kiambu County. The Humanistic theory by Abraham Maslow guided the study. The study employed the descriptive survey design using a sample size of 10 (63%) public primary schools, 20 (49%) preschool teachers, 134 (10%) parents who divorced or separated with their spouses in the last 6 months to 5 years during the study period and 134 (10%) children of these parents. Questionnaires for parents were used to find out the prevalence of broken families in Limuru Zone and its effects on pre-primary children's learning outcome while interviews were administered to teachers. A pilot study was conducted in two 3-streamed primary schools using six teachers, 10 parents and 10 children. Validity of the instruments was determined using content validity while reliability was tested through split half technique at a coefficient of 0.7. Analysis of quantitative data was done using means, tallies, frequencies and percentages while inferential data was tested using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at 0.05 level of significance. The study concluded that family breakdown has significant effects on preprimary children learning outcome and recommended that MoEST should employ trained counselors in all public pre-primary schools to offer help to children as well as parents coming from broken families.

Keywords: family breakdown; outcome; pre-primary children; learning outcome

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1. Introduction

Family breakdown due to divorce or separation has become a major problem worldwide and its effects negatively influence children's holistic growth and development, including school outcome. The family is the foundation of a child's knowledge, providing its physical as well as intellectual needs and acting as the teaching foundation for its moral development.

According to Pong and Hampden (2003), children in such circumstance are not likely to achieve educational attainment and are likely to show behavioral problems as well. However, children from intact families usually have greater educational attainment and are not likely to show behavioral problems in their school.

Barona (2013) further explains that single or divorced parents however committed they may be, are not able to help their children realize their full potential in life more so their learning outcome. Flenderson (2009) reports that due to family conflicts and breakdown the child may be pre-occupied with worries at home and may not be able to fully get involved in school activities which negatively affect their learning outcome.

In Kenya, there are rising cases of family breakdown. Children from such families are the most affected socially, emotionally and many have low learning outcome (Bigombe & Khadiagala, 1996). Limuru Zone which is in Kiambu County in Kenya is one among many areas affected by arising cases of marital conflicts and family breakdown. However, there is no documented information showing the prevalence of family breakdown in the Zone, factors responsible for family breakdown, to what extent family breakdown has influenced children's growth and development in the Zone, let alone their learning outcome, the extent of family breakdown on the outcome of boys and girls and the role of the teacher in assisting children from such families. Consequently, there was need for the current study to be conducted.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find out the relationship between family breakdown and learning outcome of pre-primary school children aged 4-8 years in Limuru Zone, Limuru Sub-county, in Kiambu County, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

According to studies conducted by Pong and Hampden (2003), family breakdown can affect children's learning outcome. Learning outcome in this study will be narrowed to focus on social interactions skills and cognitive skills of pre-primary children. Social interactions skills of children from broken family are affected as revealed by Fagan (2009), who explains that when parents' divorce, the disagreement between them leads them to present less affection, they become less responsive towards their children making them feel emotionally insecure. As a result these children are likely to have poor social skills which leads to direct rejection by peers or tend to have fewer friends.

Lines (2011) supports that conflicts and violence at home can make a child model the behavior and turn out to be a bully due to imitating parents' fights or because of not dealing with parental attachment issues resulting to few or no friends. Cognitive development of children from broken families is also affected. Fagan (1999) writes that in family life, divorce destroys the connection between parents and children. It leads to negative ways of solving conflicts. Most children who see their parents' divorce are disturbed. When parents' divorce, mini-divorce also takes place with their children. There is a decline of the relationship between parents and their children. Divorced mothers despite their efforts are less able to give the same level of emotional care than married mothers. In case where the father will be denied legal custody of the children, he is more likely to drift away.

The relationship of children with both parents change after divorce. There is emotional distance between children and their parents, it can last well into adulthood, and it can become permanent. Children whose parents divorced during their childhood have more difficulties than children whose parents divorce in their teenaged hood or early adulthood.

When parents' divorce, they frequently shift their way of relating with their children. They change from being rigid to permissive. During the first years of divorce, mothers are less likely to be less communicative, less affectionate, discipline them more inconsistently and more harshly. Father's especially non-custodial fathers do not fare well with their children. The fathers contact decline over time. When there is a higher level of conflict during divorce, there is likely the possibility of having distance between the fathers and his children.

Henderson (2009) stated that an angry or a frustrated parent can result to use the child so as to manipulate the enemy parent to seek revenge. This is called Parental Alienation Syndrome. The angry parent will therefore speak negatively about a loving parent in presence of the child. This causes lot of pain to the child. This is a form of abuse to the child and can make them to start showing fear or unjustified anger towards the loving parent resulting to disrespect. Henderson further points that children who come from families experiencing conflict may be occupied with worries at home, usually arrive late at school, experience frequent absenteeism and displays violent temper which makes the teacher find it difficult to control them hence resulting to lower learning outcome. Dukes and Smith (2009) emphasized that children from families experiencing conflicts experience emotional problems. They try to seek attention at school and when the adults or a teacher around them is busy they frequently display disruptive behaviour. This makes the teacher feel deskilled, exhausted psychologically, physically and emotionally. When children become withdrawn, they may be afraid of adults or teachers. They are afraid of making mistakes as they are working. This inhibits them from reaching their full potential, are not able to make relationships and they become socially isolated. Teachers find it difficult to deal with these children. Children from families experiencing conflicts are likely to have deep seated anger or very low self-esteem. These children can turn out to

be destructive. They can destroy their work if they feel it's not good enough. This affects the relationship of a child with the teacher as helpful critics are needed for learning.

Pong and Hampden (2003) clarifies that children in intact families compared to those from broken families have greater chances of having educational achievements this is because parents from intact families tend to be more involved in their children's school activities and have higher expectations for their children. They also observed that children with one parent had lesser scores in spoken and logic skills than children with two parents. Fagan (1999) further reveals that when there is family breakdown, the nonexistence of a father decreases intellectual test scores for young ones more so for girl's Maths scores. A girl's verbal capacities are likely to rise when her father is present and most likely when he reads to her audibly when she is a juvenile.

Apothecary (1999) found that withdrawn children may be afraid of teachers or adults and may be afraid of making a mistake as they are working. This makes them not to be able to reach their full potential. Those children may be socially isolated. They are unable to make relationships, has no one to talk to or play with. It is upsetting for most teachers to deal with these children. These children can turn out to be destructive pupils. This is an indication of deep-seated anger or very low self-esteem. For some their work especially in class can never be good enough and fear of comment on their work by someone or else leads them to destroy it rather than have it seen. This behavior affects teacher- pupil relationship as constructive criticism necessary for learning which is designed to assist growth may not develop.

Children from broken families have behavioral and emotional problems resulting them to being offensive or insolent pupils. Their offensive language and gestures or insolent attitude is most wearing to the teacher, making the teacher feel angry and frustrated. They experience tension and tiredness caused by managing difficult behavior. Children suffer from a similar range of mental illness as adults. Many of these can be mild and show themselves in different forms of abnormal behavior which can be misinterpreted by teachers as deliberate. Children from broken families feel that adults around them cannot be trusted. These children assume no adults including teachers can be trusted and so they behave in ways that can be very challenging. A study done by Chebogut and Ngeno (2010) in Kapkitony Sub Location, Keiyo South District, Kenya reveals that children from broken families who had experienced conflicts between parents or have themselves been mistreated by either of the parent are likely to show health and behavior shortcomings, problems with their weight, eating and their sleep. They may have difficulty at school, exhibit truancy, try to run away or even display suicidal tendencies while in school all of which may result to low learning outcome. During the study, the circumstances surrounding family breakdown and its influence on children's learning outcome were examined, with the view of making tangible recommendations to ease their pain and possibly ways to mitigate the negative learning outcomes.

3. Research Methodology

The descriptive survey design was used due to its ability to gather information without altering the surroundings. It also provided information from parents and teachers of pre-primary school children from broken families on the relationship between family breakdown and pre-primary children's learning outcome.

The target population of this study was all the 15 public primary schools with preprimary schools attached to them, 41 preprimary teachers, 1348 children and 1327 parents of preprimary school children aged 4 to 8 years in Limuru Zone.

Purposive sampling method was used to select Limuru Zone which is in Kiambu County. Random sampling was used to select 10 (63%) public schools by rotary method, out of the total 15 targeted schools. Fifteen small pieces of papers with names of schools written on them were folded and placed in a container. The researcher then shuffled them and randomly picked out 10 papers each with a name of a public primary school that formed the sample. Twenty (20) preschool teachers of the sampled schools were purposively sampled. Where there were more than two teachers in a preprimary school, random sampling was used to select only two.

In order to get children of parents who had separated or divorced in the last 6 months-5 years to participate in the selection, the teachers were also requested to provide a list of names from the 1343 children of these parents in the target group. Thereafter, random samplings of 10% (134) of them were selected which translated to 13 children from each of the 10 schools.

Data analysis involved qualitative and quantitative methods because the two complement each other. Data obtained were summarized, organized and analyzed using means, tallies, frequencies and percentages. Tables, pie charts and bar graphs were utilized in presentation of the findings. With regard to inferential data, hypothesis number one was tested using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at 0.05 level of significance.

4. Findings and Discussions

The objective of the study was to find out from parents of pre-primary school children, the relationship between family breakdown and pre-primary school children's learning outcome. The findings from parents who gave information in the questionnaires on their children's outcome after their separation or divorce are shown in Figure 1.

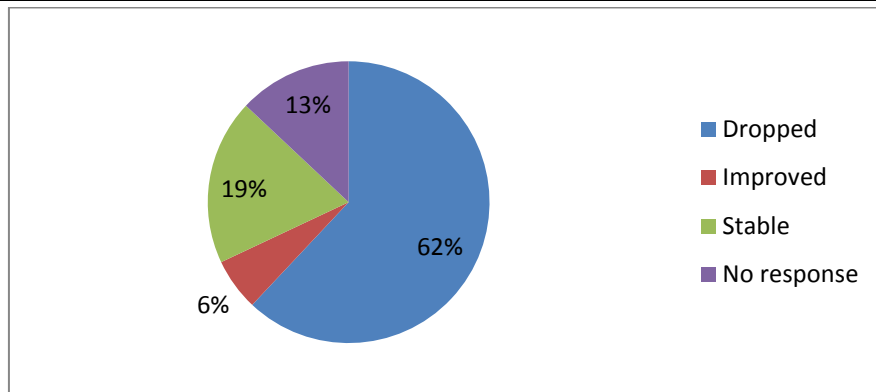


Figure 1: Learning Outcome of Children in Activity Areas after Separation/Divorce

Figure 1 shows that majority of the children (62%) dropped in their outcome after separation/ divorce. 6% improved while 19% remained stable. 13% of the parents did not respond about their children outcome after divorce/separation. The findings agree with a study done by Mooney et al. (2009) who found that children with secure attachment to both parents have high chances of becoming happy, achieve higher educational attainment and become well-adjusted children and adults.

These findings further supports Henderson (2009) who pointed that children who come from families experiencing conflict may be preoccupied with worries at home, usually arrive late at school, experience frequent absenteeism and displays violent temper which makes the teacher find it difficult to control them hence resulting to lower learning outcome. A study done by Chebogut and Ngeno (2010) in Kapkitony Sub Location, Keiyo South District, Kenya reveals that children from broken families who had experienced conflicts between parents are likely to have difficulty at school, exhibit truancy, try to run away or even display suicidal tendencies which may result in low learning outcome.

Lines (2011) supports that conflicts and violence at home can make a child model the behavior and turn out to be a bully due to imitating parents' fights or because of not dealing with parental attachment issues resulting to few or no friends. Cognitive development of children from these broken families is also affected.

Pre-primary school teachers were asked to rate the relationship between family breakdown and learning outcome of children from broken families. This is by comparing children's outcome before and after family breakdown. Findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Relationship between Family Breakdown and Learning Outcome of Pre-primary School Children

Children's State of Learning	Before Family Breakdown		After Family Breakdown	
	Frq	%	Frq	%
Excellent	56	42	45	34
Good	39	29	31	23
Average	22	16	28	21
Below Average	17	13	30	22
Total	134	100	134	100

The teachers reported that 42% of children were performing excellently before family breakdown but after breakdown the outcome in excellence dropped to 34%. Those who were having a good outcome were 29% before divorce but after divorce the number dropped to 23%. The average performers increased from 16% to 21%. Those below average also increased from 17% to 30%. This shows that the outcome of children in Limuru Zone was negatively affected by family breakdown.

These findings agree with a study done by Chebogut and Ngeno (2010) in Kapkitony Sub Location, Keiyo south district, Kenya reveals that children from broken families who had experienced conflicts between parents or have themselves been mistreated by either of the parent are likely to show health and behavior shortcomings, problems with their weight, eating and their sleep. They may have difficulty at school, exhibit truancy, try to run away or even display suicidal tendencies while in school all of which may result to low learning outcome.

Teachers were also asked if they agree that separation and divorce negatively affect learning outcome of children and the findings are shown in Figure 2.

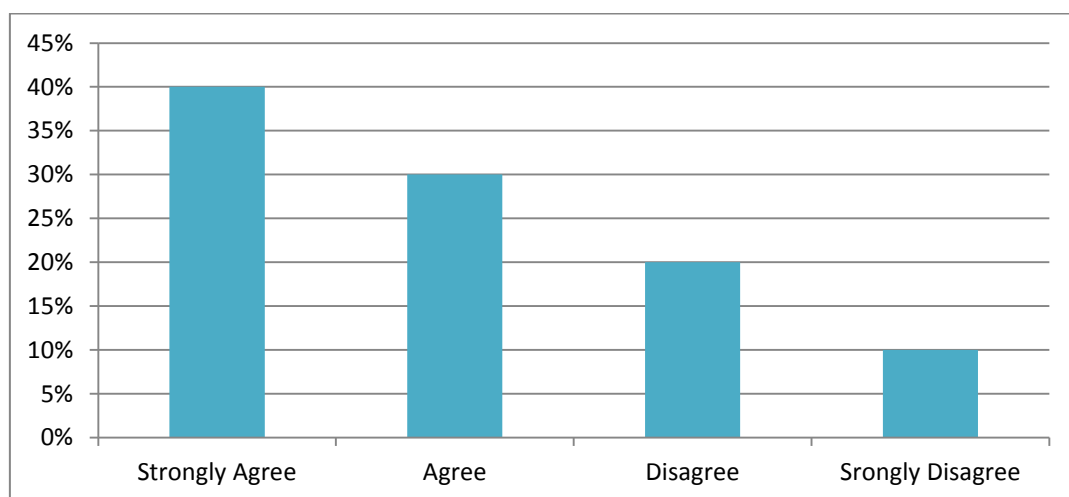


Figure 2: Teachers Response on Effect of Divorce on Children's Learning Outcome

Figure 2 indicate that majority of teachers (40%) strongly agree that family breakdown negatively affect the outcome of preprimary school children. While few teachers (10%) strongly disagree that family breakdown does not affect children's learning outcome. These findings also agree with Pong and Hampden (2003) who advances that family breakdown can affect children's learning outcome.

The study further sought to establish whether there was a statistically significant relationship between family breakdown and learning outcome of preprimary children in which case, hypothesis one which stated, "There is no significant relationship between Family breakdown and pre-primary children's level of learning outcome" was subjected to Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient test and the findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation between Family Breakdown and Pre-Primary Children's Level of Learning Outcome

		Family Breakdown	Level of Learning Outcome
Family Breakdown	Pearson correlation sig. (2 tailed)	1	.019**
	N	128	122
Level of Learning Outcome	Pearson correlation sig. (2 tailed)	.019**	1
	N	122	117

**correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The results presented in table 3 indicated that the mean difference for correlation between family breakdown was 122 with a p value of 0.019 level of significance (2 tailed). These results imply that the relationship between family breakdown and level of learning outcome in Limuru sub-county was significant $p=0.019 < p=0.05$. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected and it's alternate which stated that there was significant relationship between family breakdown and level of learning outcome accepted.

These findings are in agreement with Pong (2003), who reported that children from broken families are not likely to achieve educational attainment and are likely to show behavioral problems as well. However, children from intact families usually have greater educational attainment and are not likely to show behavioral problems in their school.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher concluded that family breakdown greatly affect children's learning outcome with 62% of the children having dropped in their outcome after separation/divorce coupled with statistically significant correlation between family breakdown and learning outcome.

Therefore, the study recommends that MoEST should employ trained counselors in all public pre-primary schools and recommend the same for private schools. This will be of great help to children as well as parents coming from broken families. The school counselor can help children who are affected to cope with their parent's separation or divorce. Parents or guardians who are experiencing conflicts should also consider counseling options specifically family therapy so as to avoid negative effects on their children.

The present study focused on effects of family breakdown up to ECDE level but there is need for a longitudinal study to establish long term effects of family breakdown on children's learning outcome.

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