

THE EFFECT OF PARENTAL DEATH ON CHILD

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Analysis

It is an undeniable fact that the presence of a mother and father figure plays an important role in children's development process. The contribution of both mother and father to children's emotional and psychological development is irreplaceable. Sadly, this ideal paradigm of a family is not always available for the children. More often than not, children would have to go through their lives without their parents. This article will elaborate on how losing one, or both parents, would affect children, and what can be done to minimize the effects.

While some children have to lose both parents early, other children live as part of single parent families. A single parent family is a family with one or more children which consists of only one parent (a mother or a father) due to reasons such as; the death of one of the parents, long term or permanent absence of one of the parents from divorce, illness, and choice.¹

The Impacts of Parental Death

Children who lose one or both parents from aforementioned reasons and have to grow up without a complete family structure and are bound to be met with difficulties especially during their adolescent period, when they are trying to form an identity, and this would potentially lead to psychological challenges in their lives. Of course not every child who lost their parent/s will have psychological or social problems but the unfortunate fact says that living without a mother and a father can lead to obvious negative impacts in their childhood or when they are entering their adulthood process.

Therefore, when children face paternal deprivation, many, and sometimes all their physical and spiritual needs come to a stop and many problems are more probable than not, would emerge.



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Some of the problems might emerge in the form of:

1. Behavioral Problems

Lack of Life Skills

Children observe their parents over time to learn how to love, how to stand strong against hardships in life, how to respect their environment, how to trust, how to protect themselves

and their loved ones, how to be successful, how to earn money and other life skills. If the father figure – whose role is to support their children’s academic and social skill - is no longer present, then regression and deceleration in learning these types of skills would show.

Many studies found that orphans often have lower grades and act timidly and are more introverted compared to their peers.

Involvement in Criminalities

Orphans often express their feelings through anger, and they also develop fragility in their emotions. This would make them have higher potential of committing crimes compared to

other children. The children who are angry due to disappointment and the feeling of being deserted might vent their feelings harshly to their surroundings. This anger would lead them to become antisocial, and this would mostly result in their involvement with the wrong environments such as gangs, in which they usually exhibit violent and anarchy behaviors in terms of disregarding the authority and social incompatibility, and they also might involve into gang fights; all of these problems might develop into criminal acts.²

Substance Abuse

Even with the massive information about the negative impacts of drugs and other substance to physical, psychological and social health, many of today’s young people still fall into the trap of substance addiction. And this fact is even more worrying among orphan youth. The

consumption rate of cigarette, alcohol and drugs among orphan youth and victims of “social orphanhood” in particular is high. According to studies, the percentage of cigarette consumption of individuals from broken families is around 14% while the same percentage in individuals from unbroken families is 9%. Alcohol addict percentage of individuals that come from broken families is 18.2 %, while the same percentage in individuals from intact families is 13.1%.³

Another study also shows that 50% of heroin addicts come from broken families.⁴ So looking at the facts of how the “mere” absence of a parent could create this kind of effect, imagine the percentage of these substances in orphans.

Sexual Problems

Male and female orphans’ reactions to the issue of sexuality differ in some ways. Girls generally tend to look for love. They might even have extramarital sexual intercourses as a result. Flirting in early ages, being involved in sexual activities, early marriages or early pregnancy can be seen more in orphaned girls compared to their peers. However, in the opposite direction, some would suffer from sexual disorders. As for male orphans, the absence of a father figure might affect their sexuality development and might lead to sexual identity problems.

- o Psychological Health Problems
- o Orphans often show psychological health problems such as:
 - o Disruption in language development
 - o Speech difficulty
 - o Being uncomfortable from physical and eye contact
 - o Eating and sleeping disorders
 - o Psychosomatic disorders
 - o Depression, anxiety, phobias, anger, stress
 - o Asthma, headache, stomach problem
 - o Feeling suicidal

In addition, thumb sucking, bed wetting, abusive towards the mother or father, excessive dependency to the mother or father, excessive crying, and talking like a baby can be seen as regression symptoms.

Academic Failure

Psychology professor Hetherington along with Camara and Fatherman made 58 studies about the link between losing one's parent and academic success; their findings show that the children of single parent family have lower grades compared to children with complete families.⁵

2. Emotional Problems

Broken Trust

In many families, a father provides protection to his family. Therefore, the loss of a father leads to major emptiness and distrust in orphaned children. These children may not know how

to protect themselves or how to face the challenges in life. Dealing with questions like who is going to earn money for the house, how should livelihood in the house be maintained, who will protect their mother and siblings might cause these children to develop anxiety disorder caused by these fears, not to mention the emptiness and distrust.

Lack of Love

One of the fundamental needs of human beings is love. Babies, children and adults who receive love from their parents always depend on this special bond. However, the failure in meeting the need of love, which is caused by the absence of parents, might resort to problems on orphans. Girls particularly who ideally are fond of their fathers might try to meet this need

by filling the gap with a stranger or with a much older person. Or oppositely, they might feel challenged when it comes to loving or making connection to others.

Inferiority Complex

Another problem that might occur on orphaned children is that they tend to think that they are weaker, more defected and have less worth compared to their peers. These thoughts might cause inferiority complex one way or another and when they compare themselves with other children, where lack of self-confidence might take over. Unless these thoughts are treated, these children are prone to continue to feel unworthy and unhappy.

Low Self Esteem

One of the problems of children with single parent is self-blame, worthlessness, feeling incapable and helpless than other children. These thoughts can cause them to compare themselves with others which leads to, aside from inferiority complex, low self-esteem. Unfortunately, if these cognitive distortions are not corrected, these children would continue to feel unhappy and worthless.

3. Social Problems

Difficulties in Following Social Rules and Laws

In an ideal setting, parents play an important role as caregivers, role models and leaders who discipline their children's lives. Children learn their first rules and values through their parents first. If they have faults, mistakes and weakness, it is their parents who would empower and correct them. However, children of single parents are prone to face difficulties in adhering to social norms, laws and regulations. This is particularly more obvious in boys without a father. They might become non-compliant, maladaptive and rebellious especially with the emergence of new authority figures and systems. This is due to problems in adapting to the new authority figures, where most of the time, this problem would lead to maladaptive acts.

It should be noted that, the aim of these maladaptive actions is to attract attention



the wrong way, what they actually look for is love and attention because of their traumatic experience and psychological problems.

Child Abuse and Neglect

The absence of a mother or a father, especially the absence of a father when the children are still very young serves serious risk in regards to child abuse. This situation often forces underage children to bear the responsibilities of an adult. Many children who have been orphaned since birth would be found working, care for their other siblings, bear excessive chores and so on. All of these are considered to be child abuse, while neglect might lead them to become victims of other abuses.⁶

Abuse can be seen mostly in families of single parent, divorced parents and families with problematic mother or children.⁷

Conclusion

The relationship and bonding of children with their parents are so important for healthy emotional, behavioral and social development process. Therefore the absence of either one parent can have very disruptive effects upon children.

However mothers can minimize or completely prevent the negative effects of absence of a father with some precaution and fathers can also do the same.

In this process, relatives, friends, teachers and the whole society have really important roles and responsibilities. Therefore when children do not have a certain role model then other people might take this position to save the children's future. This might somehow assist these children in learning about significant values of life and survival skills, as well as having at least a little bit of the experience that other children have with their parents.

If an orphan child feels that he/she is not alone, they can learn to trust, love themselves and others, have higher self-esteem, able to respect themselves and others and have communication skills. With this, they can cope with grief more easily and their lives will be protected from the upsetting effects of being an orphan.

Finally, it should be noted that, not every motherless and fatherless child is troubled, and when the society is responsible enough to fill in the role of a parent for these children, then they might be able to have peace with their sad past and they too could become the hope of the future generation.

Risk Factors of Child Abuse⁸

Social / Institutional	Familial
High crime rate	Sexual or physical abuse in childhood
Absence or lack of social service	Become young parent
High poverty rate	Become single parent
High unemployment rate	Become step parents
	Emotional disability
Infantile	Weak communication skills
Premature birth	Low self-respect
Low birth weight	Become alcohol and substance addicted parents
Physical or mental disabled child	Lack of social support
Hyperactive or crusty child	Domestic violence
Stay separated for a long time from mother after birth because of various reasons	Lack of familial skills
	Lack of preparing to stress of having a new baby
	Family with more than one child
	Lack of education
	Psychological disorders in family
	Unwanted pregnancies
	Unaccepted child

Endnotes

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