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Examining adjustment in college students from single-parent and forced single-parent families

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Abstract

In the pursuit of holistic well-being, the role of psychological adjustment is indispensable. The present study focuses on the adjustment level of the college students belonging to Forced Single parent and Single-parent family. A sample of 120 college students from diverse fields completed self-report assessments, with 60 participants from forced single-parent families and 60 from single-parent families. Data was randomly selected from Kumauni region of Uttarakhand. The adjustment inventory developed by Sinha and Sinha (2012) was used. In the current study, 2x2 factorial (ANOVA) design was used for investigating the adjustment level in different groups by using SPSS. The findings revealed that the significant difference was found at 0.05 level between the type of family on home and educational level of adjustment. Furthermore, the findings indicate that there was significant difference at 0.05 level was found in male and female on the level of emotional adjustment. And non-significant differences were found at 0.05 level based on gender in other dimension of adjustment. Additionally, a significant interaction effect at 0.05 level between type of family and gender on social and educational adjustment level was also observed.

Keywords: Adjustment, college students, forced single parent, single parent

Introduction

In the dance of life, adjustment is the rhythm that allows us to move gracefully through its ever-changing melody. As humans, we are constantly facing with the task of adjusting to new environments, relationships, and circumstances. People adjust as a way to deal with the pressures and expectations in their lives ^[1]. Adjustment includes a range of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural strategies aimed at coping with stressors, managing emotions, and achieving a sense of balance and satisfaction in life. Adjustment is a person's reaction to demands and pressures brought on by changes in their surroundings ^[2]. Self-adjustment, according to Whiten, is a psychological process for coping with the rigors and difficulties of everyday life ^[3]. In developmental psychology, adjustment is frequently investigating in relation to how individuals navigate various life stages and transitions, including adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Delving into the impact of factors like personality traits, social support, coping mechanisms, and resilience on an individual's capacity to adapt to changing circumstances. The goal of adjustment in psychology is to foster psychological well-being and promote optimal functioning in various domains of life.

Adjustment is significantly influence by family dynamics, relationships, and the support system. Studies show that family support play very crucial role in their adjustment ^[4]. The presence of strong family support can serve as a crucial resource for individuals in navigating life's challenges and promoting psychological well-being. Moon-Sea *et al.* investigated the most effective parenting style for college students was one that emphasised self-worth, which in turn enhanced their overall social, emotional, and intellectual adjustment ^[5]. Attachment theory has led researchers to believe that the effects of parental sensitivity on the security of infant-parent attachment are mediating these developmental associations. In addition, they predict variations in a number of adjustment elements, such as sociability, persistence, and compliance ^[6]. Adjusting to college life is a vital process that helps students succeed academically, maintain their mental and emotional health, and grow personally and socially. Gray *et al.* added that individuals who make good progress in the adjustment process and build good relationships with the institution tend to be more successful during college ^[7].

Adjustment in college life refers to the process in which students adapt to the challenges and changes associated with transitioning into college life [8]. In many communities, children are raised in a highly structured and disciplined environment, where parents play a key role in instilling strong moral, spiritual, social, physical, and cognitive principles [9]. During transition from school life to college life fathers and mothers play critical roles in their children's psychological development, well-being and adjustments. A child tends to be morally, mentally, and emotionally well-balanced when both parents share in the caregiving responsibilities [10]. From a psychological standpoint, the presence and engagement of both parents make distinct contributions to many elements of a child's development and adjustment. This study explores the importance of having both father and mother figures throughout the formative years, emphasizing their complementary roles in promoting mental health and resilience by highlighting the important aspects of adjustment needed in one's life. According to the study children from mother-only homes face similar adjustment challenges to those with a mother and an unrelated partner or a stepfather [11]. The probability drops somewhat when another adult, such as a grandmother, is present in the household. From cognitive development to emotional support, the positive impact of both parents on a child's well-being and development creates an environment that is both supportive and enriching. As a result of inadequate parental care and guidance due to divorce, separation, or the death of a partner, children may be exposed to potentially harmful [12]. Understanding and recognizing the unique roles that fathers and mothers play in their children's lives is key to creating healthy families and good outcomes for children and future generations. DeFinnis *et al.* examined how people from single-parent household adjust to their first year of college that explained this transitional experience as a process of responding to shifts in support networks that takes place when a person develops a sense of identity and self-awareness [13].

In the current study, the term Forced single parent family refers to a scenario where a father is physically absent from his family for extended periods due to job relocation This can trigger a range of emotions for the individual left behind. Feelings of loneliness, sadness, and even abandonment may surface as they grapple with the physical separation from a significant parental figure. This emotional turbulence can impact their mental health, leading to increased stress, anxiety, or depression as they navigate life without their father's daily presence and support. Whereas the term Single parent family refers to a deceased father who is unfortunately not present in the world. When one parent is solely responsible for raising children, it can create significant challenges for the whole family. The single parent often deals with financial pressures, limited time, and emotional strain, which can negatively impact their mental health. This emotional turmoil can create a cycle of stress that affects everyone involved.

Based on the literature review, the research objectives were: to assess the level of all dimensions of adjustment among

college students belonging to forced single parent family and single parent family. Additionally, to compare college students based on family and gender on different dimensions of adjustment. Furthermore, to find out interaction effect between type of family and gender for different dimensions of adjustment in college students.

Hypotheses

1. There would be no significant difference between the forced single parent family and single parent family on level of home, health, social, emotional and educational adjustment of college students.
2. There would be no significant difference between male and female college students on the level of home, health, social, emotional and educational adjustment.
3. Type of family and gender would not interact significantly for the level of home, health, social, emotional and educational adjustment in college students.

Sample

In the present study three districts Almora, Pithoragarh, and Bageshwar from the Kumaun region of Uttarakhand were selected through a random sampling process. Additionally, from each district, two tehsils were randomly chosen, and from each of these tehsils, two blocks were selected into the sample randomly. From these areas, 60 students from forced single-parent families and 60 from single-parent families (30 males and 30 females) were randomly selected based on a personal data schedule. The selection process aimed only students from families where the father was deceased in single-parent group whereas forced single-parent group includes those fathers who were absent for at least one academic year. Individuals living with guardians or relatives, those with frequent visits from their father, or those with separated or divorced parents, or a stepfather, were not included. A two-way analysis of variance was used to analyse the data.

Tools

- **Personal Data Schedule (PDS):** It was a self-developed tool for gathering preliminary information about the subjects including name, age, gender, and the type of family.
- **Adjustment Inventory for College Students (AICSS):** It was developed by Sinha and Singh (2012) used for measuring the adjustment level of college students. It contains of 120 items with 5 dimensions including home, health, social, emotional, and educational adjustment. In this inventory, higher score indicates the lower adjustment level and lower the score indicates high adjustment level. The coefficient of reliability was determined by split half method with 0.94, test retest reliability with 0.93 [14].

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

		Forced single parent		Single parent	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Home	Female	5.43	2.73	3.43	1.851
	Male	5.37	2.76	3.58	1.942
Health	Female	3.5	2.41	2.97	2.798
	Male	3.67	2.68	3.6	2.618
Social	Female	6.93	3.59	7.23	3.002
	Male	6.73	2.46	6.07	3.167
Emotional	Female	10.77	6.21	7.53	3.812
	Male	9.00	3.11	10.03	4.708
Educational	Female	6.53	2.20	5.72	3.076
	Male	7.27	4.40	6.63	2.35

Table 2: Analysis Variance of Home Adjustment

Source	df	SS	MS	F-ratio	Significance at 0.05 level
Family type	1	99.00	99.00	17.41	S
Gender	1	1.00	1.00	0.17	NS
Family type * Gender	1	0.40	0.40	0.07	NS
Error	116	659.56	5.68		

Table 3: Analysis Variance of Health Adjustment

Source	df	SS	MS	F-ratio	Significance at 0.05 level
Family type	1	0.008	0.008	0.001	NS
Gender	1	9.07	9.07	1.38	NS
Family type * Gender	1	15.40	15.40	2.35	NS
Error	116	758.5	6.53		

Table 4: Analysis Variance of Social Adjustment

Source	df	SS	MS	F-ratio	Significance at 0.05 level
Family type	1	17.63	17.63	1.93	NS
Gender	1	34.13	34.13	3.73	NS
Family type * Gender	1	48.13	48.13	5.26	S
Error	116	1059.8	9.13		

Table 5: Analysis Variance of Emotional Adjustment

Source	df	SS	MS	F-ratio	Significance at 0.05 level
Family type	1	0.67	0.67	0.03	NS
Gender	1	343.40	343.40	17.06	S
Family type * Gender	1	78.40	78.40	3.89	NS.
Error	116	2334.3	20.12		

Table 6: Analysis Variance of Educational Adjustment

Source	df	SS	MS	F-ratio	Significance at 0.05 level
Family type	1	42.00	42.008	4.05	S
Gender	1	12.67	12.67	1.22	NS
Family type * Gender	1	57.40	57.40	5.54	S.
Error	116	1201.50	10.35		

When analysing table 5, there was no significant difference found at 0.05 level based on the type of family. Therefore, relative hypothesis 1 was accepted on the level of emotional adjustment. However, a significant difference was found based on gender at the 0.05 level, resulting in the rejection of related hypothesis 2. Additionally, in the interaction between the type of family and gender, showed no significant difference at the 0.05 level. Consequently, related hypothesis 3 was accepted on the level of emotional adjustment.

Table 6 revealed a significant difference at the 0.05 level based on single-parent families and forced single families, leading to the rejection of related hypothesis 1 on the level of

educational adjustment. However, no significant difference was observed based on gender, resulting in the acceptance of relative Hypothesis 2. Additionally, a significant difference was found in the interaction between family type and gender, which led to the acceptance of Hypothesis 3 on educational adjustment

Discussion

The studies shows that on the level of home adjustment in college student it was found that no difference between the forced single parent and single parent exists. The presence or absence of a father can significantly impact a student's life

adjustment, as fathers influence their children at every stage of development, and their absence can lead to lasting consequences^[15]. Students with an actively involved father living away may still benefit from emotional and financial support, whereas those without a father may lack these resources altogether. This may affect their ability to cope with, social demands, relationship issues, and trust issues with others. However, both groups of children may experience a diminished sense of belonging if they perceive their family structure as different from the norms. Furthermore, the difference on the female and male on the level of home adjustment was not significant. As despite of male and female, the students with absent or distant fathers may face same social challenges, such as difficulties forming relationships, feeling isolated or same level of emotional turbulence. In contrast of the study, Manoranjan *et al.* studied the influence of family structure on teenagers' adjustment levels shows a considerable difference between girls and boys in terms of their level of adjustment in different household structures^[16]. There were no significant differences found in home adjustment across the gender, which is directly supported by our current result of the study Mahmoudi^[17]. The interaction between gender and type of family found to be non-significant at 0.05 level because both are equally influencing the level of home adjustment.

In relation to health adjustment among college students from single-parent and forced single-parent families, it's important to consider how the unique dynamics of single parenting can shape a student's ability to adapt to health challenges. While the study suggests no significant difference in health adjustment between these groups, it's worth noting that both environments might expose students to stressors such as limited parental attention, financial constraints, and emotional burdens due to the dual role single parents must play^[18]. These stressors can influence health by increasing the risk of anxiety, depression, or other mental health concerns, which in turn may affect physical health. Azuka *et al.* work emphasizes the connection between family structure and the well-being of children, suggesting that such circumstances might lead to difficulties in education and social interaction^[19]. Among college students, the absence or loss of a father figure can introduce unique challenges, potentially impacting various facets of their lives, including their physical and mental health. Both single parent and forced single parent family often face the challenge of balancing multiple responsibilities, which can limit their involvement in their children's daily lives, potentially impacting their mental and physical health. When a mother is absent from the home, children are more vulnerable to various health issues, such as poor nutrition, neglect, and a higher susceptibility to diseases and illnesses^[20]. Additionally, these children may experience emotional disturbances like fear, insecurity, and anxiety, stemming from a lack of stability and parental support. This combination of physical neglect and emotional strain can significantly affect the overall well-being of children in single-parent households. Furthermore, Gender-based similarities in health adjustment was observed that may stem from a variety of factors, including biological differences, societal norms, will power and the personal experiences. Gender -based health adjustment may be the same if both male and female college students experience similar levels of support and coping mechanisms. When factors such as access to healthcare, emotional support, and financial stability are equal for both

genders, their ability to adjust to health challenges can be similar. Also, the interaction effect between type of family and gender, found to have no significant difference significant because both are equally influencing the level of health adjustment.

Furthermore, the results indicate no significant difference in social adjustment levels between college students from forced single-parent families and those from single-parent families may reflect the crucial role fathers play in fostering their children's openness to the world and encouraging their exploration of new experiences^[21]. Another reason could be the children from single-parent and the forced single parent families may face greater challenges, particularly in terms of deprivations and denied opportunities, which can negatively impact their psychological and social development during their school years. Azuka *et al.* Study found that children raised by a single biological parent tend to have poorer social and economic outcomes compared to those raised by both biological parents^[19]. Another possible reason could be a significant amount of time may had passed since the event, individuals may have adjusted to the situation, reducing any observable differences between the groups. The absence of active paternal involvement, whether through absence or death, can create a similar emotional landscape, impacting their social adjustment. Moreover, differences in the male and female found to be non-significant on the level of social adjustment. This result consonance with the study conducted by Suthar showed there is no significant difference found between the social adjustment level of male and female^[22]. The impact of a distant or deceased father on their social adjustment will vary depending on factors such as the child's temperament, resilience, support network, and cultural context. Additionally, the interaction between the forced single parent and single parent family and gender is found to be significant because both may not equally influence the level of social adjustment.

The result observed that the difference between the forced single parent and single parent on the level of emotional adjustment in college student is statistically non-significant. The possible reason could be children with distant fathers may have lower expectations for emotional support or connection, whereas those who have lost their father may have had a closer relationship and thus feel the void more acutely. Distant father may still be physically present but emotionally unavailable, whereas a deceased father is completely absent. Children with a distant father may struggle with feelings of abandonment or neglect, while those whose father has passed away may grapple with grief and loss. In accordance with the present study studies found that on the basis of gender, the results obtained are statistically significant on their emotional adjustment^[23]. As both the gender have different ways to express emotions it can also vary on the individual personality, support system and coping mechanism adding on the availability of other supportive parent. In contrast with the result of present study, studies had found that there is no significant difference found in male and female on their emotional adjustment as both regardless of gender, may experience feelings of abandonment, insecurity and difficulty forming the relationship during father's absence^[24-25]. The interaction between the family type and gender statistically non-significant observed as both are equally influencing the level of emotional adjustment.

On the level of educational adjustment, the result observed between the type of family, forced single parent and single

parent family is statistically different. The level of parental involvement, particularly in educational matters, can significantly influence a child's academic performance and adjustment. The same is reflected in the study that parents hold primary responsibility for their children's education and career development [26]. The studies revealed that the family pattern affects the emotional development and school progress of children [27]. Single parents often have to balance multiple responsibilities, which may affect their ability to be as involved in their child's education as two-parent households. However, many single parents are highly dedicated and find ways to actively support their children's learning. Balancing educational adjustment in children with a forced single parent i.e. father involves a combination of factors aimed at providing support, stability, and resources to help mitigate the challenges associated with the father's distance. The educational adjustment in female and male was found to be non-significant, the possible reason could be school climate that influences peer relationships, which can be significant sources of support for children of both type of family. Positive peer interactions and friendships can buffer the effects of family-related stressors and contribute to children's well-being and adjustment. The result aligns with the studies which indicated no significant difference in educational adjustment between male and female [28]. This consistency suggests that both genders experience similar levels of adjustment challenges and support within educational settings. Factors such as teaching methods, classroom environments, and available resources may impact all students equally, regardless of gender. The interaction between the family type and gender statistically significant because both may not equally influence the level of educational adjustment.

Conclusion

From the results presented in this study, it is evident that there is a significant difference found at 0.05 level between the type of family on home and educational level of adjustment. Furthermore, the findings indicate that there is significant difference at 0.05 found in male and female on the level of emotional adjustment. And non-significant differences were found at 0.05 level based on gender in other dimension of adjustment. Additionally, a significant interaction effect at 0.05 level between type of family and gender on social and educational adjustment levels also observed.

This study highlights the critical role of parents in supporting their children's coping mechanisms and healthy adjustment. By examining single-parent and forced single-parent families, it aims to deepen understanding of adjustment dynamics and inform interventions that foster healthy development within diverse family structures. The research amplifies the voices of these families, acknowledging their resilience in facing unique challenges. It also seeks to contribute to more inclusive healthcare strategies for college students from such backgrounds. Addressing the unique emotional, financial, and identity challenges these families face is essential for shaping better policies and reducing societal stigma.

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