



Effect of Broken Families on School Attendance among Private Secondary School Students in Iringa Municipality, Tanzania

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Abstract: This study sought to establish the effect of broken families on school attendance among private secondary school students in Iringa Municipality, Tanzania. The study adopted the case study design which helped the researcher to study a smaller unit in terms of two schools with students from broken families. The methods of data collection involved a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, a focus group discussion and documentary review. Quantitative data was analyzed through descriptive statistics while the qualitative data was analyzed through the thematic approach. The study concluded that students from broken families faced unique challenges that affected their school attendance. They did not commence to school on resume days and they regularly missed classes because some were required to take parental responsibilities like taking care of their younger ones and others engaged in such activities like farming and casual works to enable their families to get necessities and school fees. Some students had missed school with reasons like financial problems including lack of school fees, inability to obtain school requirements and poor parental care. Furthermore, family structures in terms of broken families led to school dropout since students from those families were involved in illegal businesses like theft, robbery and prostitution as the means to meet their daily needs. Based on the conclusions, it is recommended that broken family parents should try as much as possible to provide basic needs that support school attendance and encourage their children to attend school regularly in order to avoid absenteeism which may hinder the intended academic achievement.

Keywords: Family; Family Structure; Broken Family; Students; Academic Achievement.

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Introduction

Family is a social unit that consists of people who are united by ties of blood, marriage or adoption that forms a household. A structural family is one that consists of one or both parents and their offspring. It is a common knowledge that family can be either intact or broken. The intact family is a household with both parents and their children while a broken family is one with single or no parents. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2022) defines broken family as a family in which the parents are divorced or separated. Nevertheless, broken families in relation to this study, is a family that is fragmented due to some instances including

separation, divorce, abandonment and death of one of the parents. It is usually considered as a family structure which has deviated from the ideal family structure.

Normally, this kind of family is expected to have adverse effects on a child due to lack of proper role models, failure to control the child, financial problems and insufficient paternal or maternal love and care (Nwamadi, 2018). Broken families are widely recognized and exist worldwide with negative effects on members, mostly school age children; there is a global awareness of the importance of the family environment on students' academic achievement. Due to broken families,

children tend to live in many different family forms the commonest pattern of which is where they live with their mothers and have less or no contact with their fathers. For example, in the United States, five of every six single-parent households are headed by a mother (Omoruyi, 2014).

In African context, Chauke and Olusegun (2019) from South Africa stated that Children from broken families usually lack the confidence to participate in class compared to their fellow students from intact families due to low self-esteem and depression that might be taking place in their lives as a result of marital dissolution of their parents. This kind of situation can affect children negatively in their studies which may lead to absenteeism and dropout.

Another study conducted in Nigeria by Azubuike (2015) established that broken family parents usually face multiple responsibilities in maintaining their families, needing time, attention and finance, hence less attention is paid to the education of the offspring. The author continued by saying that teachers usually describe most of students from broken families as more hostile, aggressive, anxious and distractive etc. than those from the intact families. However, these declarations may not be completely applicable in all broken family cases as some children may feel better when the family split than remaining in a family with constant conflicts or violence that can seriously harm them physically and mentally.

In East African situation, for instance in Kenya, Wanjiku (2010) stated that hardly a week goes by before it is reported in the media that a child or its parents or both have been hospitalized or killed as a result of family conflicts. Other cases reported are those whereby a woman packs and leaves her matrimonial home with her children because she can no longer tolerate her husband's behaviour. A study conducted in Tanzania by Bubelwa (2014) asserted that children from broken families are roughly two times more likely to perform poorly, drop out from school and some are more likely to turn to drug abusers or other negative behaviors than their peers who benefit from living in intact families with their both parents. The truth is that every child needs and deserves the love, care, attention and provision from both parents in order to develop successfully. Looking on all problems stated above, the implications of broken families may impact negatively on children's well-being

mostly on their academic achievement. Hence, this study therefore, aimed to look into the effect of broken families on secondary school students' academic achievement in Iringa municipality. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do broken families affect school attendance?
2. How do family structures in terms of broken families lead to school dropout?

Literature Review

Broken families are families in which both parents are no longer living together where by either the father or the mother (in most cases) stays and cares for their children. Aktar (2013) stated that most children from broken families always live with their mothers but due to a wage discrimination based on gender, those women earn a very little amount of money. Oftentimes, these women have to work extra hours to earn enough money just for survival. They do not have enough time to work and at the same time taking care of their children, which can cause some children to drop from school without achieving their academic goals.

According to Zahir (2016), households led by female as the head cannot adequately benefit from job opportunities; women have to work hard labor at low wages and they experience greater social exclusion and poverty as a result of family breakdown. This is related with what Ann, Chris and Marjorie (2019) argued by saying that there are some differences between children from intact and non-intact families as children from broken families are likely to grow up in households with lower incomes and poorer housing, experiencing behavioural problems, performing less well in school and gaining fewer educational qualifications. Nevertheless, this assertion cannot be generally concluded in all cases of household of single mothers in terms of job or earning anyway because there are some mothers or women who earn high salaries or profits more than their partners.

With regards to academic achievement, students from broken families reported that they are having trouble with their academics because of their parents' frequent conflicts (Odenweller, 2014). For instance, Phukan, Dulu, Manalisha & Abu,(2021) revealed that *broken homes* can affect *student's regular attendance* to schools and decline their concentration in the classroom that leads to

poor performance and low grade or achievement. Rahal (2013) stated that failure to complete high school is related with lower lifetime earnings, weaker labor force attachment and marital instability. This is also related to the results of Omoruyi (2014) who asserted that socio-economic background of families is a factor that may negatively affect students' academic achievement.

This study therefore sought to establish whether financial instability that results from broken family may affect student's academic achievement.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted the case study design which helped the researcher to study a smaller unit in terms of two schools with students from broken families.

Population and Sampling

Iringa Municipality has the total number of 185 secondary schools, whereby 118 are government secondary schools and 67 are private secondary schools. The researcher purposely sampled two private secondary schools from two zones within Iringa Municipality. The two schools had a total of 801 students, school A having 278 students and school B having 523 students. The population was targeted after conducting a preliminary survey which identified the two schools as appropriate to suit the need of students and parents from broken

families. The sample size for this study was comprised of 30 students from broken families, 7 teachers from both schools and 8 parents from broken families which bring a total of 45 participants.

Instruments

The methods of data collection involved a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, a focus group discussion and documentary review.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Quantitative data was analyzed through descriptive statistics while the qualitative data was analyzed through the thematic approach.

Validity and Reliability of the instruments

The instruments were validated through discussion and constructive suggestions by fellow students and experts in research. Reliability was established through triangulation, the use of multiple instruments for data collection.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher obtained a letter of permission to collect data from the Iringa Municipality authority. Thereafter, respondents were given total freedom to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. They also filled consent forms to indicate their willingness to participate in the study. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained during the time of data collection.

Table 1: Teachers observations on Students' Regular School Attendance

SN	Themes under Investigation	Yes	No
1	Do students from broken families attend school without missing classes?	0%	100%
2	Is there absenteeism among students from broken families?	85.7%	14.3%
3	Do Students from Broken Families commence school on resume day?	0%	100.0%

Results and Discussion

This section presents findings of the study and it was guided by the research questions.

Participants

Participants in this study included 30 students from broken families, 7 teachers from two schools and 8 parents from broken families which bring a total of 45 participants.

Research Question 1: To what extent do broken families affect school attendance?

The first research question was to find out the effects of broken families on students' school attendance. Data for this question was collected from teachers, students of broken families and their

parents through focus group discussions, a questionnaire and interview. Table 1 presents findings from the teachers.

The Table 1 shows the responses from teachers concerning school attendance by students from broken families whereby all teachers indicated that students from broken families miss school. Majority of teachers further agreed that there is absenteeism by students from broken families.

Finally, they disagreed that students from broken families commence to school on resume days. Through Focus Group Discussion, one respondent indicated that "they do miss classes because some are required to take parental responsibilities like

taking care of their younger ones. Some engage in other activities like farming and casual works to support their families to get their necessities and school fees." Another teacher said, "They are not always available at school all the time because of missing basic needs, school requirements and losing hope for school."

Still another teacher had this to say,

Sometime they lack school fees. Also they can be used as cheap laborers in their home farms or in other peoples' farms; they use school hours to find source of living (money) for basic needs. Also, they fail to attend classes because they lack someone to encourage them on the importance of schooling.

It was further revealed through FGDs that "they lack some requirements like Uniforms, reading and writing materials and they miss some of the school contributions like papers for examinations and tests." Still another stated that they always delay, due to lack of school requirements and lack of someone to reinforce them to go to school." Some students reported that since the term began, they had missed school with reasons like financial problems including lack of school fees, inability to obtain school requirements and poor parental care. One student reported that "my father spends his money to care for his children outside the family and he does not pay my school fees."

Teachers had similar opinions with regards to factors that hindered students from broken families to attend school regularly. The reasons include lack of school requirements and poor reinforcement and motivation. Similarly, findings from parents revealed that majority of students from broken families missed school since the beginning of the term with different reasons but the common reason was they were sent back home for school fees and/or other school requirements. Only one parent said the student missed school due to health issues.

The implication here is that students from broken families do face unique challenges that affect their school attendance. These findings concur with that of Phukan, Dulu, Manalisha & Abu (2021) who argued that students from broken families are likely to miss school. Likewise, Yakubu (2017) found that the average number of days of absence from school by students from broken families was 12 as compared to an average of 6.8 days by students from intact families.

Research Question 2: How do family structures in terms of broken families lead to school dropout?

The second question was to establish how family structures in terms of broken families lead to school dropout. Data was collected from teachers and from documents.

Teachers indicated that students from broken families drop out of schools. Through FGD, one teacher, for instance, indicated that "yes, some of them drop out from school and get married as a way to solve their social problems. Others are involved in illegal businesses like theft, robbery and prostitution as the means to meet their daily needs." Another teacher added, "though there are few others who continue, the students who lose a parent or relative who was caring for them tend to drop out from school since they lack necessities of life and school." Another teacher had this to say: "there are many problems that lead to this situation such as economic issues and failure to properly take care of children and so on."

Information from the reviewed documents including attendance registers, log books and cash books revealed some information regarding student's dropout. The documents revealed that 62% of students who had missed schools and 70% of students who had dropped out were from broken families. The documents further revealed that reasons for dropout included lack of ability to clear school fees. Therefore, financial challenges for students from broken families contributed toward students' absences and dropout.

The findings relate to that of Ann, Chris & Marjorie (2019) who established that children from broken families are more likely to leave schools and dropout. Furthermore, Bubelwa (2014) established that children in single-parent families are three times more likely to drop out of high school than children from two-parent families

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is concluded that students from broken families faced unique challenges that affected their school attendance. They did not commence school on resume days and they regularly missed classes because some were required to take parental responsibilities like taking care of their younger ones and others engaged in such activities like farming and casual works to enable their families to get necessities and school fees. Some students had

missed school with reasons like financial problems including lack of school fees, inability to obtain school requirements and poor parental care. Furthermore, family structures in terms of broken families led to school dropout since students from those families were involved in illegal businesses like theft, robbery and prostitution as the means to meet their daily needs.

It is recommended that broken family parents should try as much as possible to provide basic needs that support school attendance and encourage their children to attend school regularly in order to avoid absenteeism which may hinder the intended academic achievement.

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