

Rowan University

Rowan Digital Works

---

Theses and Dissertations

---

5-8-1997

## Comparison of academic success between students who live in single parent households and students who live in two-parent households

Susan A. Ficco  
Rowan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd>



Part of the [Educational Psychology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ficco, Susan A., "Comparison of academic success between students who live in single parent households and students who live in two-parent households" (1997). *Theses and Dissertations*. 2061. <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/2061>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact [graduateresearch@rowan.edu](mailto:graduateresearch@rowan.edu).

COMPARISON OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS BETWEEN STUDENTS  
WHO LIVE IN SINGLE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS AND  
STUDENTS WHO LIVE IN TWO-PARENT HOUSEHOLD

by  
Susan A. Ficco

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree in School Psychology  
of Rowan University  
May 1, 1997

Approved by

Dr. Roberta Dihoff      Professor

Date Approved 5-8-97

## ABSTRACT

Susan A. Ficco  
Comparison of Academic Success Between Students  
Who Live In Single Parent Households And  
Students Who Live In Two Parent Households  
May, 1997  
Dr. Roberta Dihoff  
School Psychology

The purpose of this study was to compare the impact household composition has on the academic achievement of elementary school students. The sample contained 83 third and fourth grade students from a small Southern New Jersey school district, 22 from single parent households, and 61 from two parent households. The grade point averages for reading, language and mathematics were recorded, for two consecutive marking periods, and the measuring device used was a paired sample t-test. The results of the study show a high correlation between household composition and academic achievement. The grade point averages of the students in two parent households were significantly higher than the grade point averages of the students in single parent households. The conclusions of the study show that household composition does have an impact on student academic achievement.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Susan A. Ficco  
Comparison of Academic Success Between Students  
Who Live In Single Parent Households And  
Students Who Live In Two Parent Households  
May, 1997  
Dr. Roberta Dihoff  
School Psychology

A comparison study of grade point averages for reading, language and mathematics was done based on single parent or two parent households. The grades of 83 third and fourth grade students were averaged for two marking periods, and based on parental presence in the home, it was determined that students who live in a two parent households have more academic success than those students who live in single parent households.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, JOHN, my children, JONATHAN, ANDREW and JULIANNE for their support, patience and love for me throughout this entire study. I also dedicate this thesis to my parents, MR. & MRS. MURRO for their faith in me and their support, and my sister ROSEMARY, for her constant belief in my ability.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. John Klanderma and Dr. Roberta Dihoff for their patience, and guidance throughout this project.

I would like to thank NAOMI and KAREN for their steadfast patience and support of me during this project. I would like to thank the staff and students of the Merchantville School for their help and participation in this study.

I would like to thank my friends, Christine and Fran, for their patience and belief in me, and for their encouragement throughout this project.

## CHAPTER I

The nation's educational system and the children taught by it are at a crucial time in our history. The most stable unit of society, the family, has undergone tremendous changes. Along with these changes are the problems that accompany them, and the structures that were in place before must be redesigned. The family, once the bedrock of our communities, has been rattled and what once was the foundation of our society has crumbled. The impact has been felt particularly in our schools. Students come to school every day, unsure of where they will be living by the end of the week, and people come and go in their lives so quickly, that the idea of stability is unknown to them. This researcher has seen the impact this domestic upheaval has had in my position as a teacher at an elementary school. Roberts (1987) states that children commonly suffer a loss of self-esteem during a parental separation or divorce, and feel rejected by one parent. The child is most affected by these changes in his school work and behavior. The classroom, and the teacher become the only stabilizing factor in the student's life. The existence of single parent families is a fact of modern life, and research suggests that children from these families will suffer

academically as compared to children who live in two parent households. There are several reasons for this difference and this study will explore those reasons and provide research which proves conclusively that parental separation has a detrimental effect on the student and society in general. The research will be taken from 84 third and fourth grade students from a small southern New Jersey K through 8 school district.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine whether there are differences in school performance between students from single parent families as compared to students from two parent families. The focus will be, if differences are found, on the cognitive and emotional problems that exist in single-parent children, and research suggests that schools are structured around a traditional family situation and school administrators need to adapt to more non-traditional family situations. It is clearly proven, that parental involvement in the child's school lends a profound measure of confidence in the student and the academic performance is enhanced regardless of familial situation.



## Hypothesis

There is a significant positive difference in the school performances for students from two parent families as compared with students from single parent families.

## Theory

Alfred Adler developed the basic concept of his therapy on the family constellation, which includes the child's pattern of interaction during his early years, and his situation within the his family. The procedure of therapy used by Adler is psychodrama, where reenactment of family relationships are evaluated by the therapist and the client. The common element is the interfamilial relationship, and a sociogram is depicted to show how positive and negative choices affect the entire family's behavior (Starr, 1973).

The mother provides the child with the experiences of love and guidance and caring for others. The father shows the family the way to be a responsible and productive member of the existing society. It is valuable in the development of children that they learn the family is a unit of a larger society of trustworthy human beings, and each unit

contributes to the quality of that world. A father's influence is so vitally important to the development of a child, that many children feel their fathers are their ideal or their worst enemy.

The relationship of the mother and father is like an umbrella over the family (Starr, 1973). If that relationship is cooperative and respectful, the children will model this behavior with each other and within the larger society. If the relationship is unhappy, the children will model this behavior and have similar problems in their relationships among themselves and with others. The approach for therapy for this condition is to work only with the parental conflicts in psychodrama, and eventually, include the children in the therapeutic process. However, when the relationship ends in separation and divorce, the child must again adjust his place within the family. This adjustment will distract the student from his work at school, because he might go from being a child to the "man" of the house, where he must become like his father. If his father was abusive, he might behave this same way as the "man" of the family. Also, the power of this position within the family can inhibit the child from conforming to the regulations of the school and the authority of the teacher.

Albert Bandura seeks to explain learning in the context of the natural environment of the child. The social

atmosphere of the child provides numerous learning opportunities to develop complex skills and abilities through observation and modeling (Griedler,1992). The social-cognitive learning theory is based on the nature of the learning process in a naturalistic setting, the relationship of the learner to the environment, and a clear definition of the information that is learned. Bandura proposes three factors that explain the social-cognitive learning process. These are behavior, the environment, and internal events that influence perceptions and actions. Specifically, behavior, cognitive and other personal factors, and environmental influences all operate interactively as determinants of each other. An example would be after therapeutic measures have been taken to correct low self-esteem, the behavior activates new environmental reactions to the behavior, the individual feels more confident, and this incurs future behavior. This relationship among these three factors is called *reciprocal determinism*. The term determinism is used to mean that effects are produced by certain events rather than preexisting causes.

Bandura defines learning as the acquisition of internal codes of behavior that may or may not be performed at a later time. Learning and performance are regarded as separate events, where learning is the gathering of symbols in the form of visual and verbal codes, and these guide

future behavior. The importance of symbolic codes, both visual and verbal, is that they include information in an easily stored form.

In a naturalistic setting, learning of new behaviors through observation of models directly effects behavior. The elements that are present in every act of learning are the behaviors enacted by the models, the environmental factors that contribute to the observer's acquisition of the modeled behaviors, and the learner's internal processes (Gredler, 1992). When a child is in a situation where the models or parents are unhappy and angry, the child will model this behavior, and become angry and frustrated. The environmental factors of stress and dysfunction will impede the student's learning ability, and the internalization of the these factors will inhibit the child from concentrating on school work. Therefore, the student's ability to learn has been seriously blocked by emotional factors.

Another important factor in the learning process is the degree to which the learner attends to the model. Some models are more effective than others, and parent models are the first and most important role models children have in the learning process (Gredler, 1992).

In the social-cognitive learning theory, Bandura(1971) states that the cognitive processing of events and potential consequences closes the gap between the child's behavior and

the outcomes of that behavior. Four important processes responsible for learning and performance are attention, retention, motor production, and motivation. Attention and retention aid in the acquisition of observed actions, and the later performance of these actions by observation are governed by motivation and motor production mechanisms.

According to Gredler (1992), the acquisition of complex skills and abilities depends on other components such as self-efficacy and the learner's self-regulatory system. Bandura defines self-efficacy as the conviction that behavior can be executed successfully to produce the required outcome. It is a judgment about how well one can organize and implement effective strategies that contain unpredictable, and often stressful situations. The self-regulatory system refers to the cognitive structures that provide a reference for the behavior and its outcomes, and the cognitive subprocesses that comprehend, evaluate and control behavior. The self-regulatory system includes standards of behavior that make it possible to self-direct and promote feeling of self-worth, while avoiding situations that result in punishment.

According to Gredler (1992), individual differences, readiness, and motivation for learning are the student characteristics that interact with instruction. The observation of a variety of models (families, television)

and the reinforcements by peers and family members are important influences on learning. Therefore, if a student has observed dysfunction within his/her family models, Bandura proposes that the consequences received by the model, will contribute to the learner's behavior which includes vicarious reinforcement, vicarious punishment, and the absence of anticipated punishment. In the single parent household, punishment for actions is absent and the child does not differentiate between behavior that is social or antisocial.

#### Definitions

1. Single-parent family - family that consists of one parent or guardian and one or more children.
  
2. Intact or traditional family - family that consists of two parents, either biological or adopted, and their children.
  
3. Non-traditional family - consists of biological parent and nonbiological parent, formerly married single parent, and unwed mother.

### Assumptions of the Study

This research assumes that:

1. The teachers of the third and fourth grade classes had no prior knowledge of this study.

2. The teachers' abilities are equal to those of the teachers in the prior grade levels.

### Limitations

The study is limited to a small southern New Jersey school district, for the 1996-1997 school year. The scores reflect grades only in math, language and reading for two consecutive marking periods. This study reflects the school progress on students only in third and fourth grade and may not reflect achievement scores of students in other grade levels. Only students with one parent or two parents were examined. Blended families and stepfamilies were not examined.

## Overview

In Chapter 2, the literature will be reviewed, in Chapter 3, the design of the study and the operational measures will be described. The hypothesis will be tested and in Chapter 4 the results will be analyzed. The literature clearly points to the fact that children who live in single parent families are more likely to experience lower achievement in school. The reasons are plentiful and some of the measures needed to correct this discrepancy must come from lawmakers and educators, since statistics show that 50% of children by the year 2000 will live in single parent families.



## CHAPTER II

### Review of the Literature

The topic of single parent families has been researched for many different sociological reasons. While these studies were conducted, the effect of single parent households on children were cited and studied. Several of the studies conducted were done on school age children, and the effects their family structure had on their academic performances. The conclusions of these studies point to the negative effect living in a single parent household can have on a student's academic performance. Many reasons were given for the poor academic performance, but it would be unfair to predict academic performance solely on living arrangements. One positive conclusion was that a student's performance will be enhanced with parental involvement, regardless of whether they live in a single or dual parent household. Clearly, a need for understanding and change is necessary for these students, and administrators need to consider this family structure and the special needs of the students and parents in their policy making efforts.

A study by Shreeve, et al, (1986) conducted in 1984 by the Eastern Washington University concludes that single-parenthood had an adverse effect on children's academic success in school. The study included a homogeneous

population of 7th through 12th grade students, whose economic, racial, ethnic and cultural factors were constant, with only a few Oriental and Mexican-Americans. The California Achievement Test was administered to 201 students as well as grade point averages. At each grade level, children from single parent families consistently scored lower than those students from intact families. The only factor that was different was family structure. Several factors were mentioned that caused these findings. Statistics show that 50 to 90% of all single parent households are headed by females, and fall below the poverty line. This situation creates tension, poor physical health, absenteeism and a lower quality of life. Emotional stress caused by a divorce can impede student achievement, especially in younger children. Self-esteem is lowered and the children experience depression and sadness as well. Stereotyping the students from single parent families by the teachers, and lower teacher expectations are also a factor in poor student performance. Parental involvement is a key factor in whether the student will strive to achieve, and single parents are limited to the amount of time they can attend school conferences and homework sessions, due to work and family responsibilities. The conclusions from this study are as follows:

1. Schools begin to address the unique situation of the single-parent family,

2. An operational definition of "single parent family" would help identify the unique characteristics of the family.
3. Educators study single-parent families where children have demonstrated school and social success.
4. Educators begin testing academic and counseling methods designed specifically to improve scholastic achievement in children from single parent families.

Statistics show that by the year 2000, more than 50% of all American children will be raised in a single-parent family, and to ignore the potential impact of the family structure on academic performance would indeed be tragic for the next generation.

Teachers and administrators need to be more aware of stereotyping students in single-parent families and self-stereotyping by the student who uses the single parent circumstance as an excuse for academic indifference. This study clearly shows that students from single parent families are consistently scoring lower than students from two parent families.

Milne, et al. (1986) researched the effect family background has on academic achievement. The background variables that are analyzed in this study are family

structure, and parents' work patterns. Shinn (1978), in a recent study found that many studies have shown detrimental effects of father-absence on school achievement. Shinn used 28 samples in her study, and the results showed 16 negative effects of father absence, 9 had not negative effect, and 3 had minimal positive and negative effects. Herzog and Sudia (1973) found there is no difference in school achievement between children from father-present homes and children from father-absent homes. Heyns (1982) cites a number of reviews of the effects of the mother's employment, and found this to have very little effect on their child's academic achievement. Milne et al (1986) examined the effects of the number of parents on achievement for both elementary students and high school students. Then they examined the effects of mother's employment on student success. In general, students with two-parents scored higher on reading and math achievement test than students with one parent. The conclusions of the study are as follows:

1. Students having two parents in the home are more likely to show academic achievement than students who live in a one parent household.
2. Variables such as family income may explain why students who live in a single-parent family have less academic success.

3. The effect of mother's employment on academic achievement varies by student's age, race and the amount of time the mother works.
4. The significant effects on mother's employment is negative for academic achievement.

Hetherington, et al., (1981) also found consistent differences in academic achievement and grade point averages between students from one-parent families to those from two-parent families. Other factors that might account for the differences in scores are socioeconomic status, educational resources in the home, and the time a parent spends with child, also have an impact on academic performance. A study by Emery (1984) found that children in a single parent family performed with less success on a variety of academic indicators, and the difference was greater in performance tests than on standardized tests. Therefore, it is possible that the time constraints placed on a single parent who is working may be the factor that determines the success or failure of a student. Finn & Owings (1994) found that children living in a single-parent household and in stepparent families were given less parental supervision. Children living in a single parent or stepparent household

have experienced the trauma of divorce, living with a single parent and the parent's remarriage. The emotional upheaval of these experiences can cause difficulty with the students' academic performance. Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1985) state that the emotional effects are more pronounced in girls. According to their findings, boys show long-term problems in adjustment to a divorce, and girls show problems in response to remarriage. Emery (1984) found that boys showed greater deficits than girls. Children who live with only their biological father have more academic problems than those who live with only their mother, especially in the areas in math and science.

The effect of single parenthood on gifted students has been explored by Gelbrich and Hare (1989). The study indicates that gifted students are negatively affected by living in a single-parent household. Research suggests that there is a correlation between single parenthood, gender and academic achievement in the gifted population. The study subjects were parents of identified gifted students. They were given a questionnaire that rated their feeling of agreement or disagreement with statements relating to their child's academic achievement, peer relations and giftedness attributes. The data was collected over a three week period and the results indicate there was a negative relationship between school achievement and

single parenthood in the gifted population. Poor self-concept and teacher stereotyping were cited as possible reasons for these results and interventions are suggested such as counseling and teacher support. The research of Shreeve et al, (1986) also provides conclusive evidence that children from single parent households are less successful in academic achievement than student from intact families. Zilli (1971) notes that 90% of all referrals relating to underachievement were boys where there was an absent father.

Edgar & Headlam (1982) explored some of the reasons for the difficulties children from one-parent families experience in school. One major obstacle is financial, where lone mother families have the lowest incomes. Other difficulties are health problems because the living situation is less equipped with many household amenities and lack of medical insurance. Single parents who work outside the home cannot supervise their children as closely as a two-parent household. Teachers' perceptions of children from single-parent families are that the child is no different than a student from an intact family. Edgar & Headlam (1982) polled teachers in an elementary school district about what differences they saw in the children from single-parent families and intact families. The only significant difference they saw was poverty. After the initial disruption of the divorce or separation, the children were able to perform up to academic standards.

Another area that was mentioned as a difference was self-esteem. Students from one parent families were expected to have lower self-esteem than those students from intact families. However, Edgar & Headlam (1982) report their findings from a standardized self-esteem test given to students from one-parent families and two-parent families, and the results of the scores showed no significant difference between the two groups. The conclusions of this study are that children from single-parent families do have some difficulties, but those difficulties, may or may not have an effect on the academic progress of the student. It is the factor of poverty alone that can cause a child to lose time from school, to feel ashamed, and the lack of time from the parent that can lead to poor academic performance.

Finn & Owings (1994) found children of single parents actually spend more time talking to their parents than children from intact families. Children develop close relationships with their lone parent, in contrast to the two-parent family where the verbal interaction with an adult may be diminished.

Milne et al., (1986) analyzed achievement test scores to contrast one-parent students and two-parent students. On the average, students from two-parent families had higher reading and mathematics scores than those from one parent families. Some of the reasons for this difference were family income, parental educational expectations, and



maternal employment. This study sees the mother's employment as having a primarily negative effect on student's academic progress except for black elementary students. In this case, the more the mother works, the more positive the effects are because of the poverty that exists within this group. Student success is a direct result of parental encouragement, time spent reading, studying and homework. A parent either working or not working should encourage these behaviors.

Telia Y. Chilton, of the U.S. Department of Education, conducted a study to determine the effect of dual parents and single parents on school readiness of preschool children. A stratified sample of 29 students receiving average or above average scores on a readiness for preschool test were used, and pretest scores were observed to determine the effects of family structure on the readiness level of the students. The examination of student records and cumulative folders indicates that family structure showed differences in readiness scores obtained by preschool students who were given the Dial Pre-school Readiness Test for this study. The findings of this study indicate that the sample had a statistically significant level of confidence, showing that students who are raised in a dual parent family scored higher on a readiness level test than those students raised in a single parent family.

The findings of this study also suggest that family involvement contributes positively to the child's pre-school readiness through parent/child home activities and learning experiences outside of a classroom.

Sandy Garrett, Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Schools, in a speech delivered in July 1995 at the Oklahoma Annual Administrators' Conference in Tulsa, feels that a factor in student success is the presence of two parents in the home. However, even if only one parent is actively involved in their child's education, the result is greater student success. Divorce should not give a child the excuse for underachievement, and both parents should still be involved in their child's education. Both parents can mean grandparents, stepparents, or any caring adult to the child. His message is a plea for parents, one or both to get involved with a child's education, and for schools to make an effort to create an environment in the schools where parents and the community can take an active part in their child's education.

Parental involvement in their child's education is the key to the child's success in school, and should be actively sought by parents. Some parents fail to get involved with their children's education because the parents feel that their right to be involved in school policy--to be full participants in the learning process--is ignored, frustrated

and sometimes even denied. They do not feel that their opinion is valued, and too often they find education language to be a put-down. This situation can deter parents who are less educated or poor to shy away from school activities with their children, and appear to be disinterested in their children's education. David Elkind (1995) writes that school is a mirror of society and of the family, and as society and family values change so must the school. The school must adapt to the changes in family structures where a nuclear family, consisting of two parents and children, has been replaced by a permeable family, which is one of many different family forms providing high-quality child rearing. Single-parent, remarried, adoptive families are some of these structures. Schools provide support groups for children whose parents are divorced or separated, and shared parenting plays an ever increasing role in the child's school life. Full-day kindergartens, extended day care, and school subsidized child care are provided for children as young as six weeks of age. Schools reflect the postmodern concept of child competency. In many school districts, the curriculum is being pushed downward, where what was taught in sixth grade is now being taught in fourth grade. Self-esteem has become important to education because it can be the critical determinant of success or failure, and reflects the new idea that autonomy is desirable and necessary for an individual to go it alone if.

Parents believe that high self-esteem in their child is the answer to school success, however, it is largely seen as the child's problem, and not the joint responsibility of the school and the parents. Margaret Carlson (1992) writes about single motherhood, that even when the mother is mature and moneyed, a child coming into the world with one parent is handicapped emotionally.

Judith Wallerstein (1985) states that children of divorce are overburdened by responsibility, and several large scale surveys have shown that there is a higher incidence in absenteeism between children from divorced families than children from intact families. Some reasons cited are that the child, from an early age, come home to an empty house, get their own suppers, put themselves to bed, and get themselves up in the morning. Many times the child fails to get up in time and cannot get to school. The difference in attendance has far-reaching consequences for the child's learning, and reflect the absence of parental availability and supervision of the child's daily activities. Wallerstein also states that children of divorce, whether in sole or joint custody, face a bewildering array of childcare settings, and multiple caregivers in a week. A carefully designed study of kindergarten children who live in single-parent families as a result of divorce, were likely to have significantly lower

academic and social competence when entering school. Wallerstein calls the children of divorce "overburdened" because in clinical terms, they have a wide range of symptomatic behaviors that result in sleep disorders, fear of abandonment, fears of impending disasters, disinterest and underachievement in school, suspiciousness, hyperalertness, emotional restraint, and poor peer relationships. Clearly, the climate for a child of divorce is one of confusion and fear. It is in this climate that a child comes to school, and has a limited interest in academic matters.

Studies show a direct relationship between a child's family structure and academic performance, where the divorce experience may consume the child's world (Allers, 1982).

Changes in family life have made parents less available to schools and when a crisis arises some parents appear to be uninvolved with the child and the school. Home life is so closely tied to school, that 70% of elementary principals keep formal records on family configuration of their students. Teachers view children from dysfunctional families as never having been read to or talked to and can only interact by hitting other children. Schools across the United States report that students will disappear for weeks without explanation, which makes it hard to teach any subject in sequence. As a result, the student's learning has been seriously impaired. The only answer for single

parents to help their children academically is to work closely with the school and become as actively involved with their child's education as time will allow.

### Summary of Reviewed Literature

The structure of the family has changed over the course of the last thirty years, and statistics show about half of all American marriages now end in divorce, and a high percentage of these marriages involve children. Shreeve, et al (1986) analyzed scores of California Achievement Tests and grade point averages for a homogenous population and consistently at each grade level, students from single parent families scored lower than students from intact families. The National Association of Elementary School Principals think children from single-parent homes pay the price academically. Many kindergarten children from dysfunctional families do poorly in school because they have not been read to or even talked to and can only interact by hitting others. Many of the single parent families are headed by females and economically, the family is at the poverty line. Statistics show that by the year 2000, more than 50% of all American children will be raised in a single parent home, and the impact this living arrangement will have on the future of education must be addressed by school administrators. Shinn (1978) reports on studies that have shown the detrimental effect of father absence on school achievement. Other factors that might account for the

differences in scores are socioeconomic, educational, and time spent with the lone parent. A study by Finn & Owings (1994) suggests that children living in single parent families are given less parental supervision, and the emotional upheaval of the divorce can be traumatic and cause difficulty in academic performance.

Gifted children of single-parents also have been negatively effected by living in a single-parent household. Gelbrich & Hare (1989) found a correlation between single parenthood, gender and academic achievement in the gifted population. A questionnaire was given to parents of identified gifted students, and they rated each statement with strong agreement to strong disagreement about their child's academic achievement, peer relationships and giftedness attributes. The data was collected and results indicated that there was indeed a strong negative relationship between single-parenthood and school achievement in the gifted population. Poor self image and teacher stereotyping are possible reasons for this correlation. It is documented that 90% of all referrals relating to underachievement were boys with absent fathers (Zilli, 1971).

Some of the reasons for this negative correlation between single parent families and academic achievement are



cited as financial, physical and parental supervision. Edgar & Headlam (1982) polled teachers from an elementary school district and were asked what they saw as the single defining difference in students from single parent families and intact parent families. Their response was only one, poverty. Milne, et al. (1986) used achievement test scores to contrast one-parent students and two-parent students, and their findings show on the average, students from two-parent families scored higher in reading and mathematics scores than those from one parent families. Some of the reasons for this difference were parental educational expectations, family income and mother's employment.

However, Herzog and Sudia (1973) reported no difference in school achievement between children from father-present homes and children from father-absent homes. Heyns (1982) cites a number of reviews of the effects of the mother's employment on student's academic achievement, and found that it had very little effect on student's progress. Self-esteem was also mentioned as one of the differences in children from single-parent families and children from two-parent families. Edgar & Headlam (1982) report that when standardized self-esteem tests were given to both groups, there was no significant difference found in self-esteem.

Children of single parents spend more time talking with their parent than do children with intact families where many times verbal interaction is diminished Finn & Owings

(1994). The child becomes an advisor and companion for the lone parent, and relationship is almost one of a peer.

The single definitive difference in children from one-parent households as compared to children from two-parent households was financial. The next factor in diminished academic achievement was parental involvement. If a parent is involved in their child's education, even if they are a single parent, it will have a beneficial effect on the success of the child. Parents who head single families are restricted for time, and schools administrators must accommodate these parents, who would be involved if the school hours were made available to them. Schools are changing somewhat, by having later hours for conferences, school activities, child care available, and parent-teacher communication. Parents need to feel there are options available to them from the school, so that they can be involved with their child's education, and might make the difference in the academic achievement of their children, even though they live in a single parent household.

## CHAPTER III

### Design of the Study

#### Sample

The sample population for this study was 83 elementary students ranging in ages from 8 and 10, with the median age being 9 years old. The sample is the entire third and fourth grade students from a small, southern New Jersey school district. The socioeconomic status of the students ranges from upper middle class to lower middle class. There are total of 37 girls and 46 boys in the sample, that includes twelve girls (32%) and 13 boys (28%) from single parent families. The data was taken from the two marking periods from September through February, focusing on math, reading and language.

#### Measures

The grades for mathematics, reading and language were recorded for each student for two consecutive marking periods from September through February. The grades were valued from 1-5, where 1=A. The information was then averaged and mean scores were compared between those

students who lived in single parent families and those who were living in intact families.

#### Procedure of the Study

The participants of this study were the third grade and fourth grade students in a small, southern New Jersey school district. The grades utilized were from the entire student population of third and fourth grades, and no names or particular students were cited. The grades for Mathematics, Reading, and Language were documented for two marking periods, and the mean scores were computed to test for student achievement based on home environment.

#### Testable Hypothesis

This study hypothesized that students who live in single parent households will consistently have lower grade point averages in mathematics, reading and language than those students who live in intact family households. The evidence will suggest that environment plays a factor in student's success in school.

#### Analysis

Small-sample parametric inference, the t-test was used to analyze the differences in the grade point averages of

two groups of students (Mendenhall, et al.,1977).  
Significance was computed at the .05 level.

#### Summary of the Design of the Study

The study utilized 83 third and fourth grade students who attend a small southern New Jersey school district. There were 37 girls and 46 boys in the entire sample. The subjects grade point averages in Mathematics, Reading and Language, for two consecutive marking periods, were totaled and the mean scores were written down. The subjects were unaware of the study, and since there were no students' names used, the information was taken only for statistical purposes and will be analyzed using an matched pairs t-test.

## CHAPTER IV

### Analysis of Results and Discussion

#### Review of Research Purpose and Hypothesis

The study was done with 83 third and fourth grade students from a small, southern New Jersey school district. The sample included 22 students (27%) who lived in a single parent family, and 61 students (73%) who lived with two parents or intact households. The purpose of the research was to examine whether there are differences in the school performances between students from single parent households as compared to students from two parents households. The focus will be on the academic differences that exist in single parent children as compared to two parent children, and the reasons for the differences.

The researcher hypothesized that there is a significant, positive difference in school performance for students from two parent families as compared to students from single parent families. The null hypothesis states that there would be no difference in student academic performance between one and two parent families. The grade point averages were based on a 1 through 5 scale, where 1 = A, etc.

Summary of Results

An independent t-test indicated that there was a significant difference between the household type of the student, two parent or single parent, and the grade point average over two consecutive marking periods.

TABLE 4.1

<u>FIRST MARKING PERIOD</u>					
	<u>N</u>	<u>GPA</u>	<u>CORR</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>P</u>
Single	21				
Reading		2.8095	.7289	.981	.005
Language		2.3333	.3495	1.155	.222
Mathematics		2.3333	.6075	2.3333	.004
Two-Parent	62				
Reading		2.0806	.7289	.816	.005
Language		1.9839	.3495	.967	.222
Mathematics		1.7258	.6075	1.7258	.004

TABLE 4.2

<u>SECOND MARKING PERIOD</u>					
	<u>N</u>	<u>GPA</u>	<u>CORR</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>P</u>
Single	21				
Reading		2.9048	.7289	.995	.001
Language		2.6190	.3495	1.161	.012
Mathematics		2.4286	.6075	.746	.000
Two-Parent	62				
Reading		1.9677	.7289	.923	.001
Language		1.8710	.3495	.877	.012
Mathematics		1.5806	.6075	.691	.000

Table 4.1 shows that in the first marking period, single parent students had a grade point average in reading of 2.8095 as compared to the two-parent students who had a grade point average in reading of 2.0806.  $P < .05$ . The single parent students had a grade point average of 2.333 in mathematics as compared to the two-parent students whose grade point average was 1.7258,  $P < .05$ . Table 4.2 shows that in the second marking period, single parent students had a grade point average of 2.9048 in reading, as compared to the two-parent students whose grade point average was 1.9677 in reading,  $P < .05$ . The single parent students had a 2.4286 grade point average in mathematics as compared to the



two-parent students whose grade point average was 1.5806,  $P < .05$ . Clearly, in reading and mathematics, the grade point averages for two-parent students showed a positive difference in academic performance as compared to the grade point averages of the single parent students. The correlations of the reading and mathematics scores were high. Reading correlation was .7289, and mathematics was .6075. The subject of language, however, showed no significance and a very low correlation.

#### Additional Research and Findings

A t-test for paired samples (Table 4.3) was used for the total sample ( $N=83$ ) to analyze the mean grade point of the two marking periods and determine in which marking period did the students perform more successfully. The mean in reading was 2.2651 and 2.2048,  $P < .05$ . The means for language were 2.0723 and 2.0602,  $P < .05$ . The means in mathematics were 1.8795 and 1.7952,  $P < .05$ . These results indicate that students performed more successfully overall in the second marking period.

TABLE 4.3

FIRST MARKING PERIOD	SECOND MARKING PERIOD	
Reading		
2.2651	2.2048	P=.000
Language		
2.0723	2.0602	P=.000
Mathematics		
1.8795	1.7952	p=.000

An independent t-test was run that compared grade point averages of the total third grade students, (N=42) and total fourth grade students, (N=41) in the areas of reading, language and mathematics for both marking periods. The results were, for third grade the means were 1.9762 and 2.0000 in reading, 1.6905 and 1.8333 in language, and 1.7857 and 1.8095 in mathematics. The fourth grade means were 2.5610 and 2.4146 in reading, 2.4634 and 2.2927 in language, and 1.9756 and 1.7805 in mathematics,  $P < .05$ . Overall, the third grade students had higher grades than the fourth grade students for two marking periods in the areas of reading, language and mathematics.

## CHAPTER V

### Summary and Discussion

#### Conclusions

The research hypothesis dealt with a comparison of academic performances of students from two parent families and single parent families. The study was done to examine how household composition can impact the academic success of students. The research suggests that children from a single parent family suffer academically as compared to children from two parent families.

The study compared the reading, language and mathematics grades of third and fourth grade students for two consecutive marking periods. There were 22 students from single parent households and 61 students from two parent households. The hypothesis stated that there will be a significant positive difference in school performance between students from two parent households and students from single parent households. The results of the research showed that the students from two parent families had higher grade point averages in reading, language and mathematics as compared to the grades of the students from single parent families.

### Comparisons to Other Research

The results of this research study of the comparison of grade point averages of students from single parent households and two-parent households show that students from single parent families had significantly lower scores in mathematics, reading and language than those students from two parent families. The results of a study conducted by Shreeve, et al. (1986) produced similar findings that showed that single parenthood had an adverse affect on children's academic success in school.

Students who have two parents in the home are more likely to show academic achievement than students who live in a single parent household. Some of the reasons for this difference are family income, time restraints, especially on the single parent, and maternal employment. A similar study was conducted by Milne (1986), where he researched some of the variables that would impact academic success for the single parent child, and the conclusions of his study were that family income, mother's employment and time constraints had an effect on the success of the student in school.

The conclusions of this research study show a difference in grade point averages on classroom work and

homework for children who live in single parent households. A study by Emery, et al. (1984) produced results that suggest that students in single parent families performed with less success on a variety of academic indicator tests, where the differences were greater for performance tests rather than on standardized tests.

The results of this study found consistent differences in academic achievement between students from two parent household and students from single parent households. Some reason cited for these differences were economic status, educational resources at home, and the amount of time the parent spends with the child. These factors can have a detrimental effect on student achievement. A similar study by Heatherington, et al. (1985) produced the same results.

#### Implications

The importance that household composition plays on the academic success of students has been established through researching the literature in this field. Educators must take the family backgrounds of their students into consideration when making educational decisions. If a student does poorly on an achievement test or is performing below their ability in the classroom, a teacher can review that student's family make-up before making recommendations to the child study team. Also, children from single parent families need to be given every opportunity to be academically successful. Perhaps one of the reasons that

these children do not perform as well as the students from two parent families is because they receive less praise and reinforcement from home and suffer from low self-esteem. Teachers and administrators need to make a conscious effort to give these students as much extra support and encouragement that they can, and to encourage parental involvement with the school.

#### Limitations

This research study was limited to a small southern New Jersey school district for the 1996-97 school year. The scores reflect grades for two marking periods in the areas of reading, language and mathematics. This study reflects the academic progress of students in third and fourth grades and may not reflect the same results in other grade levels.

The research was limited to only those students who lived with one parent or two parents. Stepfamilies, blended families, guardianship families, and foster families were not cited.

#### Implications for Future Research

The research conclusions of this study clearly show the impact of family configuration on student academic success.

However, further research should be done on single parent families where there is high academic success.

One result of this research that might prove valuable would be to predict possible learning problems at an early stage, and put measures in place to offset the problems. This is not to say that household composition is the only predictor of student achievement, however, when assessment of student's learning problems are done, this might be a helpful piece of information to view the whole child.

An area that should be researched further is parental involvement. This factor has been suggested as a solution to the every growing population of single parent children in our schools. Research points to parental involvement as a predictor of student success in either an intact family household or a single parent household. Further research needs to be done on this topic, and would be helpful to educators and parents in guiding the student to academic achievement. Parental involvement shows the student that what happens in class matters to the parents or caretakers and becomes equally as important to the student.

## References

- Allers, R.D. (1982). *Divorce, children, and the school*, pp 147. Princeton Book Company, Princeton, New Jersey.
- Bandura, A. (1971a). *Psychological modeling, : Conflicting theories.* :Aldine-Atherton, Chicago.
- Bandura, A. (1971b). *Social learning theory.* Prentice-Hall, New Jersey.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *A social cognitive theory. Social foundations of thought and action:*, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey.
- Carlson, M. (1992) *Why Quale has half a point.* *Time Magazine*,v139, n22, June 1992. New York.
- Chilton, T. Y. (1991) *Effect of family structure on school readiness.* US Department of Education. Washington, DC
- Edgar, D., Headlam, F. (1982). *One parent families and educational disadvantages*, Working paper No. 4, ERIC, ED 229-693.
- Elkind, D. (1995) *School and family in the postmodern world.* *Phi Delta Kappan*,v77, pp84. September 1995
- Emery, R.E., Hetherington, E.M., & Dilalla, L.F. (1984). *Divorce, children, and social policy.* In H.W. Stevenson & A.E. Siegel (Eds.), *Child development research and Social Policy* (Vol. 1, pp. 189-226). University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois.
- Finn, J.D. & Owings, M.F. (1994). *Family structure and school performance in eighth grade.* *Journal of Research and Development in Education*; v27, n3, pp 176-87. Spr 1994.
- Garrett, S. (1995) *America's smallest schools: families* (address, July 10, 1995), *Vital Speeches of the Day*, v61, pp 742-8. October 1, 1995.



### References (continued)

- Gelbrich, J.A. & Hare, E.K. (1989). The effect of single parenthood on school achievement in a gifted population. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 33, 3. 115-117.
- Griedler, M.E. (1992). Albert Bandura's Social-Cognitive Theory. *Learning and Instruction, Theory Into Practice*. 303,307 - 339.
- Herzog, E. & Sudia, C. (1973) Children in fatherless families. *Review of Child Development Research*, pp.141-232, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois.
- Heatherington, E.M., Camara, K.A. and Featherstone, D.L. (1981) Cognitive performance, school behavior and achievement of children from one-parent households. National Institute of Education, Washington, DC
- Heatherington, , EM, Cox, M. and Cox, R. (1985) Family interaction and the social emotional and cognitive development of children following divorce. *The Family; Setting Priorities* ed.v Science and Medicine Publishing Company, New York.
- Heyns, B. (1982). The influence of parents' work on children's school achievement. *Families That Work; Children in a Changing World*, Chap 7, National Academy Press, Washington, DC
- Mendenhall, W., McClave, J., Ramey, M. (1977). *Statistics for Psychology*, Second Edition. 237-238. Duxbury Press, Massachusettes.
- Milne, A.M., Myers, D.E., Rosenthal, A.S., and Ginsburg, A. (1986) Single parents, working mothers, and the educational achievement of school children. *Sociology of Education*, 59, 125-139.
- National Association of Elementary School Principals, (1989) Adjusting to changing families. *USA Today*, v118, December 1989.

### References (continued)

- Roberts, F. (1987). Parental separation and school problems. *Parents Magazine*, 62, pg. 53. December 1987. New York, New York
- Shreeve, W., Goetter, W.G.J., Burr, A., Norby, J.R., Stueckle, A.F., Midgley, T.K., & Michele, B. (1986). Single parents and students achievements--a national tragedy. *Early Child Development and Care*, 23, 175-184.
- Starr, A., (1973). Sociometry of the Family. *Alfred Adler, His Influence on Psychology Today*. Noyes Press, New Jersey
- Wallerstein, J.S. (1985). The Overburdened Child: Some Long Term Consequences of Divorce. *Social Work*, March-April 1985.
- Zilli, M.J. (1971) Reasons why the gifted adolescent underachievers and some of the implications of guidance and counseling to this problem. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 15, 279-292.