

SELF- MANAGEMENT PROGRAM: AN INTERVENTION FOR SELF-EFFICACY AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF COLLEGE ADOLESCENTS OF SEPARATED PARENTS

Jean M. Cavalida, MAGC
San Pedro College-Davao City, Philippines

Abstract

The basic concern of this study was to determine the effects of a Self-Management Program among adolescents of separated parents enrolled during School Year 2008-2009 in terms of efficacy and academic performance. Likewise, this study sought to find out the significant difference of the self-efficacy and academic performance between the experimental group who underwent an intervention program and the control group with no intervention at all. Self-efficacy affects behavior and decision-making in several ways. Students having high beliefs in self-efficacy become productive and resourceful in completing tasks, particularly academic-related tasks. A true experimental design was used to compare the effects of a self-management program on the self-efficacy and academic performance of the two groups. Data were obtained from the pretest and posttest results of a self-efficacy questionnaire approved by the adviser and validated by experts and adviser-approved for the program used in the sessions, supported with focus group discussion (FGD) and grades from report cards. Purposive sampling was utilized in selecting 24 college students as participants of the study. Statistical tools employed were t test and ANOVA. The study reveals that there is a significant difference in the pretest and posttest mean scores of the experimental group compared with the control group. For the academic performance, data show no significant difference between the experimental and control group for 1st year, 2nd year, and 4th year students. However, the 3rd year level shows a significant difference in the pretest and posttest mean scores in the experimental group. Generally, the results of the study indicate that a self-management program is an effective way to increase the self-efficacy of adolescents with separated parents but does not significantly improve the academic performance at the moment.

Introduction

The world today is undergoing rapid changes brought about by modern inventions of science and technology, to which the young generation is inevitably exposed. Such exposure may lead to stressors, whether at home, school, or society, in general. These stressors are blocks to healthy and productive living, particularly in dealing with people.

These stressors have caused a significant effect on the various domains of the world, including rising divorce rates worldwide. This fostered continued interest to study and determine the impact of parental separation on children and functioning adolescents. Adolescence is the period where parental guidance becomes more crucial because of the series of physiological, emotional, and mental adjustments. Along with these transitions, the presence of both parents in a family is said to be an important factor that could bring positive influences on the attitudes, beliefs, and aspirations of adolescents in going

through the process of establishing a firm and productive self. This urges then, that a two-parent family is necessary for the successful development of the well-being of an adolescent (Amato, 1994).

Adolescence, with an age range of 15-21 years old, is a transitional phase, in which psychological development tasks toward autonomy and intimacy have to be accomplished. As a case in point, these important transitions make family functions a crucial reference based on those who live with secure emotional attachments.

Likewise, the strongest effects were found in the areas of psychological adjustment, self-efficacy, behavior-conduct, educational achievement, and social relations. Consequently, adolescents who underwent parental separation continuously struggle by experiencing a chain of circumstances or an ongoing problematic pattern, resulting in a continuing negative impact. Self-efficacy refers to the capacity of a person to organize and perform a certain given task. It influences a personal outlook in relation to personal capability and beliefs in doing a task. Pajares (2002) affirmed that self-efficacy projects high influence on academic performance.

Academic performance would refer to the Grade Point Average (GPA) of the basic subjects of the students. One college observed that the separation of parents is one factor that affects the self-development of the student. Personal data of students of separated parents show that some have difficulty adjusting to the parents' marital situation to the point that some would decide to quit school due to financial difficulty and lack of moral support. Some students developed poor self-beliefs expressed in difficulty in accomplishing given tasks. Some get easily discouraged when faced with problems. According to O'Keefe and Berger (1997), inappropriate negative emotions and sensations can make the individual more vulnerable to distorted thoughts and dysfunctional beliefs. Some students, mostly male, resort to alcohol and violence as part of coping mechanisms. These participants talked less during sessions and rarely discussed their relationship with parents. Although counseling helps in dealing with the problematic consequences of parental separation, the students need, however, to undergo a group process to help them improve their ability to handle emotions. These findings inspired the conduct of this study on the transitional issues within groups of adolescents from separated families, particularly to know whether parental separation affects the self-efficacy and academic performance of adolescents.

The Problem and Hypothesis

The study aimed to determine the effects of a self-management program on the self-efficacy and academic performance of adolescents who are children of separated parents enrolled in college during School Year 2008-2009. Specifically, it sought to determine the demographic profile of the adolescents of separated parents; the components of a self-management program; how the self-management program was conducted; the pretest and posttest scores together with the General Weighed Average (GPA) in high school and college; the significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores, and GWA. With these endeavors, the research hypothesis stated that the self-management program, as an intervention in the experimental group, is an effective means of increasing self-efficacy and academic performance of adolescents with separated parents.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study was anchored on two theories, namely, the Self-Management Model of O'Keefe and Berger and the Social Cognitive Theory of Bandura. The first model theory stressed that self-management involves the personal systematic application of strategies that results in the desired modifications in behavior or the acquisition and practice of skills. Through the application of self-management principles, the student will acquire a foundation for becoming a self-directed and self-motivated learner. More importantly, self-management facilitates changes in emotional trauma experienced by the person.

The Social Cognitive Theory of Bandura stated that individuals possess a self-system that enables them to exercise a measure of control over thoughts, feelings, motivations, and actions. Consequently, the behavior of a person can be predicted by beliefs in personal capabilities, rather than the real aptitude of an individual. This would mean that people can accomplish tasks through self-determination and capabilities at the same time.

A number of academic and social adjustments have to be accomplished during middle school or tertiary education. Once parental separation is experienced at this stage, children become vulnerable to poor adjustments in school-related tasks due to the disrupted family structure (Hines, 2007). Parental separation is assumed to greatly affect the self-efficacy and academic performance among adolescents. These problems may have long-term effects, if not addressed or given an intervention to support the many changes (Amato & Keith, 1991).

The self-management program, as the independent variable of the study, is assumed to facilitate growth in self-efficacy beliefs as well as maintain a strong commitment to sustain the efforts in facing failures. This implies that the personal belief in the ability of an individual to perform a task will determine how much effort will be expended on an activity and the tolerance of an individual when confronted with obstacles. The self-efficacy and academic performance of adolescents, as dependent variables, show that the self-management program is identified as an intervention that may affect self-efficacy and academic performance of an adolescent.

Scope, Method, and Limitation of the Study

The study focused on the effects of a self-management program on college students who were identified as children of separated parents and their self-efficacy and academic performance. The participants were first year to fourth year college students, ages 15 to 21 years old. Participants were enrolled during the first semester of School Year 2008-2009. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the 24 college students through a group process approach. Twelve respondents were assigned to the control group, and the remaining 12 were assigned to the experimental group. The self-management program, as an intervention, has four modules with three subtopics each. The FGD was conducted on a Friday and a Saturday, when all the participants were free the whole morning, with a total of 12 sessions conducted for the experimental group.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a major component in the social cognitive learning theory of Bandura (1993). It is described as the confidence of an individual to control personal thoughts, feelings, and actions, and therefore, influence an outcome.

Personal confidence or self-efficacy affects behavior in many ways, one of which is influencing the choices and courses of action a person may pursue (Bandura, 1993). According to Lodewyk and Winne (2005), the extent of confidence in self-efficacy of students working on a learning task will affect their chosen tactics. Students become productive and resourceful in finding ways to complete the task. They are more willing to take more challenging tasks, apply more effort, and persist longer in hurdling obstacles (as cited in Pajares, 2002). However, the belief in self-efficacy by individuals of separated parents will be reduced when they are not given support to learn the appropriate skills to work productively. Therefore, these individuals need to be assisted in obtaining the skills for behavioral change and managing activities well. Implementing a self-management program may therefore help.

Self-Management Program

A self-management program is used as an intervention procedure to create behavior change or to maintain a behavior after experience with systematic external reinforcement. It is a decision about how the students manage motivation, time, personal relationships, and the like. The major foci of a self-management program are first, to provide the students with an introduction to behavior principles and skills. Second, to establish data about the target behavior to eventually teach procedures for self-assessment. Third, to teach skills in how to manage problems, which may eventually lead to behavioral change. The model can facilitate changes in the emotional problems that have a negative impact and somehow affect academic achievements (O’Keefe & Berger, 1997).

Similarly, it is stated that self-management provides a framework for the construction of a successful self-monitoring program. First is selecting a goal, which means allowing the students to define the problem areas where a change is derived. Second is translating a goal into target behavior, which allows the student to focus on specific behaviors for change. Third is allowing a student to do self-monitoring, to reflect on the behaviors and have an opportunity to modify any undesirable tendencies through active contemplation. Fourth working out a plan for change—this is where an actual plan is devised and implemented (as cited in Ritchie, 1994).

Self-efficacy beliefs affect the learning strategies and cognitive processes of individuals experiencing family disruption. A family disruption is a threat to the self-development of an individual and causes other adjustment problems.

Parental Separation

Parental separation is a common dilemma in the society today. Data show that parental separation represents a series of stressful experiences for the entire family that starts with marital conflict followed by a multitude of life changes afterwards. Its effect is

certainly detrimental especially to adolescents. Similarly, the studies made by Amato and Keith revealed that parental separation leads to increased academic underachievement, psychological maladjustment, low self-efficacy, and interpersonal difficulties from childhood to early adulthood (as cited in Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000). Among 18 to 22 year old adolescents from disrupted families, statistics show that 65 percent had poor relationship with fathers, 30 percent had poor relationship with mothers, and 27 percent dropped out of high school. In addition, 41 percent received psychological counseling and 19 percent had behavior problems (Mod, 1993)

Jaffe (1997) stressed that adolescents whose parents recently separated display a variety of academic and emotional problems and anti-social behaviors that interfere with normal adolescent transitions. Since it is the period of difficult transition, a time of confusion which will more often than not, lead to high risk of school failures with emotional adjustment.

Adolescents

According to Tumangday (2001), adolescence marks a major and important transition from childhood to adulthood, and teenagers want to be seen and treated as autonomous adults, wanting to know how to take charge of a task and get it done. Teenagers are considered marginal beings, wavering between adult and child behavior, showing patience but acting like children at other times.

During this period, struggles and depression set in when loss is experienced and changing relationship between the adolescent and parents become a crucial part. Adolescents of separated parents are often found to have lower psychological well-being, more emotional problems, negative self-image, and lower performance at school compared with adolescents living with intact families (Vandervalk, 2004). Adolescents affected by parental separation will greatly suffer on academic endeavors and self-evaluation in relation to the ability to do tasks.

Academic Performance

The efficacy belief of a person is an important predictor to academic competency. In fact, the family structure has been identified as the main cause for a lower grade point average among adolescents of divorced parents. A study by Fan (2001) revealed that parental involvement factors, specifically communication and education aspiration has a longitudinal effect on the academic growth of a student. Moreover, programs that include parental involvement in the education of adolescents were reported to have positive influence on academic performance (Paratore, 1999).

Results and Discussions

The Components of a Self-Management Program

Self-belief can be strengthened by regularly reflecting on past achievements as well as on problems that were overcome. This approach has the obvious advantage of helping sustain belief in the ability to do a task. The first module is the Enhancement of

Self-Concept, a process which measures the general level of personal competence and the feelings of self-worth associated with the behaviors. The subtopics are self-esteem, self-confidence, and support system. The second module is Reprogramming Self-Talks and Beliefs, which is concerned with the beliefs/ perceptions/ judgments of a person in certain things/ situations that can greatly affect thoughts and feelings. It therefore evaluates and reprograms the irrational beliefs of the participants into positive and healthy views. Subtopics are self-encounter, self-belief, and self-criticism. The third module is Enhancing Adjustment Capacity, which focuses on handling difficulties/ problems and keeping the self-system intact amidst the challenges in life. The module includes topics that can explain the dynamics of enhancing an adjustment capacity. These are life difficulties, failures, and courage. Finally, the fourth module is Crisis Management. This module deals with handling the sensitivities and limitations of an individual to become positive in managing thoughts and feelings. The topics of the module investigate effective ways and techniques in confronting crisis. These are life struggle, handling emotions and difficulties, and unfulfilled expectations.

The Process of Conducting the Self-Management Program

The self-management program was conducted using a group process approach, which was reinforced each session with journal writing supported by FGD to determine the effectiveness of the program. Results show that 12 participants realized the extent of the disturbance of negative emotions. At present, these participants are learning how to tame these harbored negative feelings, and at the same time learning to accept the situation of having separated parents without being bothered by the opinion of other people. However, only eight realized that positive attributes were appreciated, and resulted in having responsible choices and actions which are controlled by emotions and outside circumstances. The self-management sessions helped the participants undergo the process of discovering the real “self.” All of the participants affirmed that the sessions helped in self-assessment. Journal entries state that increasing the opportunities for self-disclosure and sincere affirmation ranked as the first step in the healing process.

It was during the FGD that the participants expressed anxieties about the effects of separation. One participant experienced poor academic performance during high school due to parental separation. This participant felt empty and disinterested in studying. One other participant was shattered after the separation and felt everything was lost. Still another participant felt anxious during the sharing. It turns out that the experience was traumatic.

Having all those negative experiences, the respondents undoubtedly manifested the intention to make changes. Journal entries reflected the main concern of most of the participants, which is to maintain focus on what needs to be done and how to go about it. Consistent results showed that the participants recognized the importance of facing life difficulties.

In the ninth until the twelfth FGD, all participants showed positive responses in handling negative issues. Despite recognizing pains, the intensity was no longer high compared to the previous sessions, although at first, one participant displayed poor self-esteem, particularly in reacting to rumors. But eventually, after the series of sessions, when asked to react to negative feedback, the participant stated that the sessions have

helped in identifying the positive aspect of the experience. Another participant also shared similar sentiments, having learned to appreciate even the small things.

The results revealed that sessions helped the participants feel more confident and empowered. Considering the emotional struggle, it was not easy to let go, but presented with an avenue for change, the participants were guided to be open to possibilities. Moreover, the 12 sessions, journal entries, and the FGD have helped enhance the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of the participants. These interventions provided the participants with some tools to move on, despite difficulties in life.

Data from the self-management program show that students from the experimental group manifested an increase in self-efficacy compared to the control group. The self-management program taught the students to identify the different styles of the distorted thinking process, recognize the process when a situation occurs, and the capability to change eventually. This program taught them to change dysfunctional and problematic beliefs (O'Keefe & Berger, 1997). Furthermore, the program also demonstrated that students with a strong sense of self-efficacy profit in several ways. Participants seem to regulate more productively, take on challenging tasks more willingly, apply more effort and persist longer despite obstacles (as cited in Lodewyk & Winne, 2005; Pajares, 2002).

The experimental group has a pretest result of *low* and posttest result of *high*. This implies that there is a significant difference between the groups of students who underwent the self-management program and those who had no treatment at all. Further analysis show that the low posttest mean score indicates that getting ahead of others is not important but finding resources for the solution of the problems are; managing difficulties with self-confidence and willingness to be corrected are highly considered.

It was observed during the sessions and FGD that the length of separation of the parents greatly influenced the ability to adjust to the situation. It reveals that the onset of parental separation would much affect the well-being of the person. Similarly, Jaffe (1996) pointed out those adolescents, whose parents recently separated display a variety of academic and emotional problems, which interfere with normal undertakings. However, with time and maturity, they would slowly overcome these difficulties, eventually accepting the situation. Maturation plays a role: as adolescents mature, coping resources would also increase (Amato & Keith, 1991). It was confirmed during the FGD that the separation was a shattering experience, but eventually they learned to accept the fact and lived with it. There may be acceptance, but the distorted beliefs persist, thus the need for reprogramming.

Consistently, the mean scores of all the indicators in self-efficacy for the experimental group increased after the group underwent the program. This supported the studies of Mitchem (2000) who also saw that self-management assisted students to become responsible in managing and controlling thoughts, feelings, and behaviors so that the desired things may be accomplished. Data from the FGD show that positive emotional attachments to significant others promote healthy emotional and intellectual functioning. It was affirmed when all participants recognized loved ones at this stage and appreciated the time spent and effort exerted despite living in a disruptive family. These ideas support the finding of Wetzel and Caldwell (2004), which stated that the feelings of relatedness and belongingness are believed to directly contribute to the positive feelings

of self-worth and self-esteem. The intervening positive relationships can foster a healthy development in spite of the negative experiences due to parental separation.

Results from the *t*-test show that there is a significant difference in the pretest and posttest mean scores in the self-efficacy of the experimental group compared to the control group. The data indicate that the self-management program helped increase the self-efficacy of adolescents with separated parents (Table 1).

Table 1

Test on the Significant Difference in the Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores of Self-Efficacy

Groups	Mean		<i>t</i> -value	df	<i>p</i> -value
	Pretest	Posttest			
Control	2.25	2.27	.494	22	.626*
Expt'l	2.19	3.38	-10.231	22	.000**

* -Not significant; **- significant

Table 2 shows no significant difference in the mean scores between the control and experimental groups. This is related in the *p*-values of all the mean scores ranging from .090 to .575. The data indicate that the self-management program does not significantly improve the academic performance of the students. The effects of poor academic performance are only prevalent during the first stages of parental separation, and strongly manifests during elementary and high school, as commonly shared during the FGD. This supports the findings of Amato (2001) that there will be stronger negative effects on the academic achievement of younger children and stronger negative effects on the psychological adjustment of adolescents.

Ultimately, the outcomes of parental separation are comparably negative for children of different age groups. According to Wallerstein (2000), the acute phase begins with the formal separation or departure of a parent from the household. Most children can recall vividly, some for the longest time, both the day of the announcement of the separation, and the day a parent would leave home. Children have greater maturity and can more accurately grasp the meaning of parental separation. However, the understanding of what parental separation entails may lead to grief for the loss of the family as it was; feelings of sadness and depression are common (Amato, 1994).

Table 2

Test on the Significant Difference in the Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores of Academic Performance

Groups	Mean		<i>t</i> -value	df	<i>p</i> -value
	Pretest	Posttest			
Control					
First year	84.47	80.7	.042	6	.968*
Second year	84.25	79.2	-1.967	6	.097*
Third year	2.31	2.52	-1.281	6	.148*
Fourth year	1.71	1.43	-1.919	6	.103*
Experimental					

First year	84.32	85.33	1.308	2	.321*
Second year	88.00	83.85	-.664	2	.575*
Third year	1.72	3.51	8.655	2	.013**
Fourth year	2.63	2.62	-3.105	2	.090*

* -Not significant; **- significant

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that a self-management program is an effective intervention for adolescents with separated parents in increasing the level of self-efficacy or restoring the beliefs in the self and in the ability to do tasks. Data show that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest mean scores of the experimental group. The only variable that has no effect is the academic performance, considering that the participants are already mature and the separation occurred many years ago, which indicates their adjustment to the situation. This implies that students from the experimental group have been emotionally and psychologically helped as shown in the mean scores in self-efficacy compared to those who have not been exposed to the program. Therefore, a self-management program can also be designed and implemented among not only adolescents with separated parents, but also among other students identified with poor self-efficacy. Likewise, the program can also be given to children of different age groups, preferably around the time of the separation of parents.

It is recommended that a replication of the study be conducted to focus on a wider representation of students in a secondary and an elementary school that have students with separated parents. The length of parent separation has to be considered. The utilization of the self-management program should be encouraged and must be included in the guidance program for adolescents with separated parents. Likewise, it should be used not only with children with separated parents but also with those with low self-esteem and negative self-beliefs. Moreover, the program should be utilized to facilitate increase in social skills and self-efficacy of college students to promote positive relationships with people. Lastly, the program should be conducted within a more extensive time frame to ensure the durability of effects.

REFERENCES

- Amato, P. R. (1994). Life-span adjustment of children and adolescents to their parents' divorce. *The Future of Children of Children*, 4(1). *Children and Divorce* (143-164). Retrieved February 12, 2008, from <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1054-8289%28199421%3A13C143%3ALAOCTT%3E2>
- Amato, P. R. (2001). Family structure and problem behavior of adolescents and young adults: A growth-curve study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. Retrieved, January 17, 2009, from <http://www.ecnext.com/>
- Amato, P. R., & Keith, B. (1991). Parental divorce and adult well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, 43-58.
- Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive function. *Educational Psychologist*, 28, 117-148.
- Fan, X. (2001). Parental involvement and student's academic achievement: A growth modeling analysis. In Hong, S. and Ho, H.Z. Direct and indirect longitudinal effects of parental involvement on student achievement: Second-order latent growth modelling across ethnic groups. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 97(1), 32-42.
- High emotional price kids pay for parents' divorce. (1993). *Mod* 25(1146), 31.
- Hines, M. T. III. (2007). Adolescent adjustment to the middle school transition: The intersection of divorce and gender in review. RMLE On Research in Middle Level Education. Sam Houston University, Huntsville.
- Jaffe, M. L. (1997). Marriage, divorce, and new family configurations. *Understanding Parenting*, 101-121.
- Lodewyk, K. R., & Winne, P. H. (2005). Relations among the structure of learning tasks, achievement, and changes in self-efficacy in secondary students. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 97(1), 3-12.
- Mitchem, B. S. (2000). *A classwide peer assisted self-management program*. Retrieved May 11, 2008, from http://www.isec2000.org.uk/abstractpapers_m/mitchem
- O'Keefe, E., & Berger, D. (1997). *Self-management for college students: The ABC approach*. New York: Partridge Hill Publishers.
- Pajares, F. (2002). *Self-efficacy beliefs in academic contexts: An outline*. Retrieved June 27, 2008, from <http://www.des.emory.edu/mfp/efftalk.html>

- Paratore, J. R. (1999). Parental involvement and student's academic achievement: A growth modeling analysis. In Hong, S. & Ho, H. Z. Direct and indirect longitudinal effects of parental involvement on student achievement: Second-order latent growth modelling across ethnic groups. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 97(1), 32-42.
- Ritchie, W. F. (1994). *Personal growth: Taking control of what you know an academic self-management program*. Pacific Grove, CA. Books/Cole.
- Tumangday, M. S. (2001). Family forum: Teaching teens their 3Rs. *Health and Home*, 44, 7.
- Vandervalk, I. (2004). Family structure and problem behavior of adolescents and young adults: A growth-curve study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence ONLineAccess*, 2005. Retrieved May 15, 2008.
- Videon, T. (2002). The effects of parent-adolescent relationships and parental separation on adolescent well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64(2), 489-503.
- Wallerstein, J. S. (2000). The long-term effects of divorce on children: A review of the American Academy of child adolescent psychiatry. In Vandervalk, I. & Meeus, W. Family structure and problem behavior of adolescents and young Adults: A growth curve study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence ONLineAccess*, 2005. Retrieved May 15, 2008.
- Wentzel, K. R., & Caldwell, K. A. (2004). Friendships in middle influences on motivation and school adjustment. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 96(20), 195-203.
- Woodward, L. & Fergusson, D. M., & Belsky, J. (2000). Timing of parental separation and attachment to parents in adolescence: Results of a prospective study from birth to age 16. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62(1), 162-174. Retrieved June 5, 2008, from <http://www.jstor.org/satble/1566695>