

THE EFFECT OF PARENTAL STATUS ON THE  
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF CHILDREN

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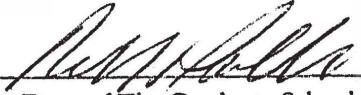
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of Problem

##### Need for Study

The problem to be investigated in this study is the academic achievement of students of one-parent families who live in one of the subdivisions of a large metropolitan school district in North Texas. There has been much criticism given to schools throughout the nation because the students graduated from these schools seemed to have had little more than certificates of attendance. It seems that a growing concern about the academic welfare of the child is becoming more a reality. Society has demonstrated its concern that years spent in the schools are not enough to insure an academically well balanced individual. The schools and their staffs are leaning more on the community for its help in the educational development of children's minds. Teachers are relying more on the parents for help in the classrooms with the children.

School districts have developed their own mechanisms and instruments for getting cooperation from the community in the growth and development of children's minds. One large metropolitan school district has its "Partners in Learning", also its school volunteers. The Nation has the "Reading Is Funda-

mental" program. Almost all programs designed to help children today have built into them a part which involves parents.

Hungerford and Paolucci (1977) found that one of every seven children in the United States today lives in a family without a father.

There seems to be some question concerning the effect on the child of one parent in the home or two parents in the home. Oshman and Manosevitz (1978) reported that the losing of one parent during early childhood can greatly complicate the development of children during adolescence. The loss of one's parent or the absence of one's parent for children of any age will have some effect on them. Schell and Courtney (1979) in their report stated the loss of the father when the children are between the ages of 6 and 9 had a negative effect on the academic achievement of these children. Chapman (1977) concluded that father absence was associated with lower SAT outcomes and that father absence may have general effects where their verbal and mathematical abilities are taken into consideration. Not all those who teach can predict the students who will go to college. Fowler and Richards (1978) said the chronic absence of the father decreases the quality of intellectual environment since one member of high mental age is no longer a part of the family configuration. If there existed a general slow down or breakdown in the academic achievement of students in the schools years ago, this breakdown was not as noticable as it is in the schools today.

Some of the smaller communities seemed to have had fewer problems because every male adult represented a father image for all children of that community. If there was a loss of a father because of death, there was an uncle, a grandfather or in some cases, there was an older brother who filled the void. Fowler and Richards (1978) noted that the sudden absence from the family of the father as a result of divorce, death, or a separation brings about changes involving the economic and of course the occupational status of that family. There are also changes in the parent-child relationship and social and emotional problems begin to surface. Hainline and Feig (1978) became aware of some of the devastation which may be caused by the parent who is left to maintain the household. Negative references of one parent of divorced to the children tend to have a negative effect on the children. Much of the research that relates to father absence is actually a measurement correlating the father's absence which came into being when there was a one-parent family left and its head was a female.

Depending on the ages of the children, some of them are faced with more problems than either of the adults in divorce cases. The number of children of divorce in the United States is on the rise. Assuming that marriage creates a new social unit, the identity and care of any children of that unit create dependence on the care and maintenance of that unit. No ample social provisions for the security and identity of the children from a broken marriage have been made by present society



(Friggens, 1975). It is customary for the mother to receive custody of the children unless the father can prove that to remain with the mother might be injurious to the children's health or morals. The only kind of maternal absence that is common is the absence caused by the mother's having to work to support her family (Theus, 1977). Reduced income, pressure on the mother to work and the total responsibility for a household may have more of an effect on the family than does the absence of the father per se. The sudden move from the home to an outside job leaves less time for the female parent to spend with her children who may be left to completely care for themselves (Hainline & Feig, 1978).

Maternal employment has been associated with low scholastic achievement. There is a saying that "woman's place is in the home". When woman and man have been separated by divorce, and when the economic condition of the two was not adequate, the woman has to leave the home for survival. Williamson (1970) found no significant differences in the academic achievement of children of working mothers and academic achievement of those children of non-working mothers as long as the mothers were happy in their work. Brown (1980) reported that one implication of the one-parent family's children is the problem these children have by scoring lower on achievement tests than do those children living with both parents. It was also reported that serious behavioral problems are found in the one-parent child. To determine the impact on schools of this new prob-

lem, the Kettering Foundation, and the National Association of Elementary School Principals, identified 18 items designed to measure school performance and initiated a study to compare the functioning of one-parent and two-parent children in 26 schools. Initially this research was designed to search for clues which would reflect the seriousness of the effect on the children affected by the trauma of seeing families split. It found differences in school achievement, tardiness, absenteeism, truancy, discipline problems, suspensions, expulsions, and dropouts comparing children of two-parent families with those living with a single parent.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) said that the schools should know about children who are going through divorce of their parents. Teachers who are aware of the temporary crisis these children are going through are said to be a source of potentially rich resource for these children. An empathic statement of understanding from the teacher can mean a lot to the child. Children are said to find no solace in numbers but if their classroom teaching atmosphere acknowledges and discusses the many variants of family life, one-parent home, both father-headed and mother-headed; remarried families, two-parent families, extended families, all the different family structures, one of these is likely to fit the child. Children would feel better knowing that the school and their own classrooms were not hostile toward them because of the position in which they happen to be at home with their parents. These children

would also feel better in their own family structures. Their receptivity to learning may be compromised by the stress they find themselves under as a result of divorce. The more aware of these changes the teacher is, the better he can meet these changes and the needs of this "changing individual".

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to compare the academic achievement of elementary students from one-parent families in grades four, five, and six in a large urban school district in North Texas with the academic achievement of selected students in grades four, five, and six who live with both parents. This study also isolated the one-parent families headed by females who were once battered wives. The academic achievement of the children of this group was compared with the academic achievement of each of the other two groups.

#### Significance of the Study

This large urban school district is aware of wide differences in the achievement levels of its students. It administers tests of varying kinds. It holds its in-service training for the purpose of upgrading teachers who will be the liaison between district and children and does much of its "battle on ignorance" through a sort of "scatterbarrel" focusing of a guided learning which does not seem to have gained the desired goals of "every child on grade level." This study strove to get at the heart of the matter of so called slow learners in a particular district. It is hoped that its findings place

it in a position to help remedy the cause of some below level achievers. This would bring together one small community and one small school within the large district with interested individuals teaching; concerned about the general welfare of the learners and the parents of these learners to the extent that every potential learner would be inspired to learn to the fullest of his capabilities. This study would provide a basis for better rapport between the school and the community. The parents would feel more like taking an active role in the developmental process of all the children.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) pointed out that men whose parents were divorced did not concern themselves excessively with activities other than their own, while women, on the other hand, became strongly involved mothers, perhaps unconsciously anticipating their own possible status as single parents. They also said that some children improved simply by escaping a disturbed and cruel parent to be left in the custody of one concerned and loving parent.

#### Definition of Terms

This study used the term academic achievement to mean a demonstrated satisfactory completion of grade level basic subject areas as required by the district. The district presently requires every child to show one year's academic gain for each year spent in school.

The study used the term "one-parent family/A" to mean a family headed by a female who is separated or divorced because

she had been physically abused. The term "one-parent family/B" was used to mean a family headed by a female who is separated or divorced for any reasons except that of physical abuse. A "one-parent family" was used to mean all families with only a male head or a female head. The term two-parent families was used to mean all families where there was a male parent and a female parent living in the household regardless of whether either had been previously married.

#### Hypothesis

There are statistically significant differences in academic achievement of students from two-parent families and in academic achievement of the students from one-parent families/A (abused mother) or one-parent families/B (mother not abused).



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research has shown that much of the frustration and anxiety resulting from divorce falls on the children. The rate of divorce has risen in the United States, doubling between the years of 1965 and 1975. Divorce affects not only wives and husbands, but children as well. Children are involved in 60% of all divorce. According to 1975 statistics, divorce has affected 13 million children under the age of 18 (Hammond, 1979 (a)).

Teachers are called upon many times to act as surrogate parental overseers. The school is being called upon to demonstrate more involvement with the child than that of merely instructing the child. The teachers who do not know of changes in the home which affect the children cannot plan any courses of action to help these children. Teachers frequently did not know that a child's parents were divorcing. Teachers need to be informed of such major changes in a child's life so they can be as supportive as possible. The education of teachers needs to be expanded to include a more comprehensive complex view of the psychological development of children, including the effects of both temporary and prolonged stress (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1979).

Especially important for teachers are the findings that divorce need not cause academic and behavioral problems. In earlier research, there are the suggestions that teachers' expectations for their students' performances may be the outcome of their expectations of the students' achievement. Teachers need to become aware of research results such as these and be on guard against assumptions that children of "broken homes" have problems with learning and social adjustment. Teachers can provide extra time and attention, and opportunities for their children to talk freely about their feelings if they so desire. This personal attention from the teacher is crucial in schools where counselors are not available (Hammond, 1979 (b)).

Much concern about the welfare of others has been merely an expression of lip service. Educators, while recognizing ours to be a caring society, have failed to a large degree in providing support networks for a very vulnerable population whether it is through our social security system, our health care system, our community agencies, our divorce courts, or our schools. Schools do have an important role to play in the lives of single parents and, more particularly, their children. An important beginning is the mere recognition that they exist as a valid family unit. The one-parent family is here to stay every bit as much as the two-parent family. Next is surely a recognition of their special needs. Some of these needs are ongoing (extended day programs, for example); others re-

late more specifically to support for the child in the months (and sometimes years) following the change in family structure, when as a result academic achievement is apt to decline or behavior problems develop (Houts, 1979).

Kelly and Wallerstein (1979) found that teachers reported from a study of children of divorced that about  $2/3$  of the youngsters showed more notable changes in school following the separation of their parents. Responses affecting academic achievement were the most common. More than  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the students showed a high level of anxiety most often in the form of new and unaccustomed restlessness. Children who used to sit and do their work now seemed to roam about the room constantly, interrupting classroom activities. Nearly  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the youngsters had some difficulty concentrating on school work; for others, interruptions in the attention were evident but not totally disruptive. Parallel to the rise in concentration difficulties was a substantial increase in daydreaming. They found no significant age or sex differences in the youngster who engaged in daydreaming more after his parents' separation. Teachers also noted considerable sadness or depression in  $1/5$  of the youngsters. The combination of intense sadness, daydreaming and concentration problems resulted in a significant decline in academic achievement during the several months after the separation.

The teacher who knows about and is sensitive to indices of stress in children whose parents are divorcing is a poten-



tially rich resource for children and parents alike. The empathic teacher, recognizing the child's distress, can provide a setting that makes the most of the child's efforts to cope. Classroom teaching that acknowledges and discusses some of or more of the many variants of family life -- the one-parent in the home, father-headed and mother-headed; remarried families; two-parent families; extended families -- makes children feel secure with their own particular family structure (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1979).

Hammond (1979 (a)) studied 165 elementary school children in the Wayne County, Michigan Intermediate School District. The population for this study consisted of children in grades 3 through 6,  $\frac{1}{2}$  of whom had parents who were separated or divorced. The students were attending two neighboring elementary schools in a lower-middle to middle-class suburban community. The children from intact homes were matched with the children from divorced homes for grade level, sex, and teacher. Teachers provided information on reading and mathematics achievement and completed the Walker Problem Behavior Identification Checklist (WPBIC) for each student in the classes participating in the study. Students took the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale and other instruments designed to gather information on their attitudes toward family and their attitudes toward divorce. No significant differences were found in self-concept, mathematics and reading achievement, immaturity, withdrawal, or peer relations.

Abraham (1979) recognized the child's whole world as consisting of mother, father and home. The single parent has to hold this together for the young child. Most single parents have all that is needed to create a well-adjusted, healthy intact unit. Having two parents around is of course important, but it is not essential. According to Abraham, "There are all kinds of 'broken homes' and whether yours is really cracked, temporarily cracked, wrecked, or perhaps even more solid depends on the strength of the parent left behind, the help of family and friends and the ability to ease children through the change" (p. 54).

The single parent may be a great help to the child when and if this parent will remember to refrain from trying to keep the separation a secret. This only increases the anxiety. The single parents should not let the child feel responsible for the break up. The love of the other parent should be kept in the mind of the child. Single mothers should never place the responsibility of the "head of household" on the youngster.

Brown (1980) reported a study of one-parent families and the achievement of the children of these families. The early results of the study indicated that there was a disproportionately low number of children from one-parent families in the high achievement group at the elementary level and a disproportionately high number in the low achievement group. Differences among high school students are less dramatic in both the high achievement and the low achievement areas. The inci-

dence of tardiness in the elementary school level by students from one-parent homes was found to be excessive when compared with the other two groups. These data are based on reports from 11 selected elementary schools in 9 states and 4 high schools in 3 states, with a total enrollment of 8,556 students. The data reflected differences in school achievement, tardiness, absenteeism, truancy, discipline problems comparing children of two-parent families with children living with a single parent, and with students living with a relative or in a foster home.

Some principals expect a sizeable group of parents to do something which would hinder efforts to offer additional programs to deal with problems resulting from increased drug use, crime, and family disintegration. Lacy Alexander, the Black principal of the Woodworth Elementary School in Inglewood, California became dissatisfied with the passive attitude and approach of his district (Kohn, 1979). Woodworth is large, with an enrollment of more than 1,000 children, 90% of whom are in one-parent families. The population is predominately Black, and incomes are generally low. Not satisfied with a passive approach to school administration, Alexander took several positive steps to help the one-parent families who entrusted their children to him daily. He has:

1. Set up inservice training programs to sensitize his predominately White teaching staff to the psychological and social needs of their students

2. Involved parents in the school's activities, partly by adjusting meeting schedules to suit those of working mothers, partly by making himself available to parents until 5:00 p.m. each day

3. Made an effort to give the children as much contact as possible with male teachers, in order to compensate for the absence of male role models at home.

4. Offered parent education classes at times convenient to working mothers

5. Worked closely with the school counselor and parents in monitoring student behavior and performance.

In short, Alexander assumed that the role of the school in his community is largely that of surrogate parent and he told the teachers just that: "During the time of day that you have children in class, they are yours, and you have responsibility for them" (Kohn, 1979, p. 46).

Broken homes have been associated with juvenile delinquency. Not all broken homes are those where there has been an interruption in the pattern of living. Any attempt to sever the relationship between two parents will have some effect on the child. There is evidence (Harmon, 1959) that children from broken homes develop health problems and show underachievement and retardation more frequently than do those from normal ones.

Children maintain a confidence when they have a male image to rely on that appears not to be present in the father absent situations. Chapman (1977) found that father absence

is associated with depressed cognitive performance. The step-father compensates in part for the effects of father absence in third and sixth grades. Boys with step-fathers tended to have higher IQ and achievement test scores than those without step-fathers or fathers.

The loss of either parent can have a devastating effect on the child. The severity of the effect may depend on the age of the child at the time of the separation and the length of time the absence has to be endured by the child. A child who is severely deprived may be led to delinquency or anti-social behavior (Caplan & Douglas, 1969).

Blanchard and Nemzek (1942) studied children in a Protestant Children's Home in Detroit, Michigan. Not all of these children were children with only one parent living. Many of them were there as a result of broken "intack" homes with the two parents living in the same household. In this regard, it was more of a boarding home where parents paid what they could afford, rather than an orphanage. The study was made to compare school achievement of children who lived in orphanages with the achievement of children in normal homes. There were 77 matched pairs used according to age, sex, mental rating, grade status, teacher, language spoken in the home and physical defects.

The 15 variables used in the study for statistical comparison were

1. Age in months on June 30, 1939.



2. Average number of citizenship demerit marks per semester.
3. Average number of half-days absent per semester.
4. Average number of times tardy per semester.
5. Arithmetic honor point averages.
6. English honor point averages.
7. Literature honor point averages.
8. Reading honor point averages.
9. Spelling honor point averages.
10. Social science honor point averages
11. Handwriting honor point averages.
12. Art honor point averages.
13. Music honor point averages.
14. Manual arts honor point averages.
15. Health education honor point averages.

The data revealed no significant differences when age and academic achievement were considered. Statistically significant differences were found to exist between the groups in citizenship marks and attendance and punctuality records. The last two were in favor of the orphanage children.

Jantz and Sciara (1975) made a study to examine the effects of children living with a male or female head-of-household upon the arithmetic performance of fourth graders. They found that the father absent child performs more poorly in school than does the child with the father present. No significant differences were found in mean scores between male and

female pupils. Significant differences were found favoring those pupils living with male heads-of-households, particularly for female pupils and for pupils with IQ scores greater than 100. Perhaps one of the worst acts a teacher could commit against the child is label and then teach the child in a way to make the youngster fit the predetermined label. Teachers should know the children who are results of divorce and are living with one parent but they should avoid being or becoming over sympathetic toward these children. Palker (1980) believes some children are luckier because they have only one parent. Overly sympathetic teachers could do more harm than good when they bend too far for the child. "I think teachers should take the attitude that, 'yeah, your dad's not there anymore; you're not the first that's ever happened to. I realize you feel bad. It's a loss. Now let's get to work'" (p.54).

Teachers should not assume that their children have both parents living at home. The chances are that every class has some children from one-parent families. If a class is one with 25 members and they are all White, it may have at least two children from a one-parent family. If the 25 are Black, the chances are there are 10 children from one-parent families (Smith & Scales, 1975). The question of why is raised by this alarming difference. The welfare system and its favoring of females may be one reason. "Unwed mothers, teenage parenthood, and economic deprivation are common in one-parent families" (p. 83).

According to the findings of Sciara and Jantz (1972), father absence was not found to be a factor in the academic achievement of Black children from low income families. The mother centered family system for Blacks became the norm in slavery not by choice, but because it was forced on them and they accepted this arrangement to survive. There is a favoritism that is shown to females by the welfare system which may or may not be a carry-over from the long standing role of the Black matriarch. There are those males who will abscond to give the female an opportunity to get whatever she can from welfare. An issue of foodstamps is a part of the regular income to some women with a father figure who is in the household only when night falls.

Long ago, there was a code regarding such as divorce and maintenance, alimony, property rights and desertion. This was the Code of Hammurabi. Today the irresponsible male can leave his family to struggle without fear of anything. When marital ties are severed by divorce, and there are children in the family, there are serious financial, emotional and social enigmas left (Rice, 1970).

The schools provide emotional support to a large number of children of divorced parents. The school may play a vital role in offsetting some of the negative impact of family disruption that accompanies divorce. Teachers can be careful observers, look for behavioral cues that help understand how a child is feeling and what problems and strengths the child



might have. Teachers can be good listeners to both verbalization and body language. Teachers can help children recognize and acceptably express their feelings; allow them the solitude and privacy they sometimes need and provide opportunity for a child to be successful in controlling his or her life. Teachers can also remain consistent in their expectations for children and avoid overprotecting them, but they should be as firm as they are concerned and set reasonable limits for the children's behavior. Teachers can love their children and it is good that they should; but love and understanding do not imply they are to become father and mother to these children. Teachers may help children grow as they learn to accept the divorce of their parents (Skeen & McKenry, 1980).

The boy who lives with his mother could become so much like his mother until he loses the male identity and becomes an unacceptable social being. Some children become resentful of the parent who has abandoned them and become withdrawn or go into deep depression. Severely deprived children are prone to delinquency and antisocial behavior (Caplan & Douglas, 1969).

According to Parish and Taylor (1979), some children of divorced parents have been known to blame themselves for the divorce. Some children have been known to think less of themselves because their parents are divorced, than did children from intact families. The presence of a step-father tends to fill the void created by the absence of the natural father to

some extent. These authors studied 406 grade school and junior high school students and assessed their self-concepts. The children and adolescents who had experienced father loss through divorce and whose mothers had not remarried demonstrated significantly lower self-concepts than those who were in intact families. The children and adolescents who had experienced father loss through divorce and whose mothers had remarried were found to possess lower self-concepts than those from intact families, but the difference was not statistically significant.

Divorce does different things to different people. The father may feel a certain way toward the mother, the mother may feel another way toward the father but it is not always known how the children feel. Friggens (1975) has expressed the feelings of children by declaring that they are bound to have more problems as a result of their parents divorcing, in their growing up and later in their own marriages. He suggests we are raising a generation of children from broken homes and creating a time bomb at the same time. Parents should let the children know that they, the parents, are parents always. In leveling with their children, they should not show their ill-will for the other mate. Children should never be used as weapons.

If the single parent is to become a successful parent, not only the school but also the community has to assume some responsibility in understanding the plight of the parent. It

can encourage flexible work schedules for these mothers who need to keep their jobs, by setting examples and delivering their own services - health, child care, public assistance, education - these on flexible schedules and in decentralized locations. Single heads of households are usually poor. They become poorer upon becoming a single parent regardless of the previous family income. Very often, the court approved allotment to the mother who has also been given custody of the children, is never paid. The median income for female heads of households as reported for 1974 was less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  the income of husband-wife families. The working mother can rarely attend daytime school meetings nor does she have time to visit her children's classes unless she takes off from her work which is costly (Hungerford & Paolucci, 1977).

Two completely opposite reactions to their parents' divorce was cited by Kelly and Wallerstein (1976). One young boy was reported to be frightened and often had outbursts of crying. A note reporting his actions was sent to the mother but the child was too frightened to give it to her. This child at home was moody, irritable and forlorn at the loss of his father. A second youngster was described as being at the head of his class and a perfectly delightful child. He was called a terror, however, at his home. He found in school a seeming gratification which he felt he had lost at home.

Some children become so angry with one or both parents who are divorced until they begin to act out their frustra-

tions by doing poorer work in school. This is especially the truth when children feel the education is the one thing their parents wanted most for them. They take an attitude that the parents have failed the children, so why can't the children fail the parents ? There is the child the child who attempts to meet dependency needs through his relationship with teacher. The teacher becomes a substitute parent in the child's eyes and can encourage an association beyond acceptable limits. The child may become so close to the teacher until he finds it hard to accept a new teacher the next year (Pecot, 1970).

Santrock (1972) said the most debilitating age for the boy whose father is absent because of divorce or desertion is the initial two years of the boy's life. "Achievement scores frequently were related to the onset of father absence for boys, and particularly were depressed in the third grade. For achievement only, girls whose fathers became absent in the 10-11 year period scored higher than girls whose fathers became absent in the 12-13 period because of divorce, desertion, or separation" (p. 462).

### Summary

The review of the literature reveals that children from one-parent families do not always nor do they need to become the lowest achievers. For some children, the absence of the father in the home was thought to be the incentive the children needed to feel free for the first time and begin to show some academic gain. Schools have responsibility in the life

of the one-parent child without becoming the parent, although teachers are called upon to be surrogate parents. The working mother has the right to expect opportunities to provide for her children through her own efforts from the community. Breaking of a home by divorce or separation does not mean the children will become delinquent. Children of divorced do not inherit adulthood and therefore should not be told they are now the head of the household.



## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH DESIGN

#### Subjects

A canvassing of the cumulative record cards of students in grades four, five, and six, who were living in the school area of a division in a large metropolitan district in North Texas made possible the selection of participants in this study. Only those students were selected whose cards indicated they lived with only one parent. Telephone calls were a part of the procedure used in alerting parents to the questionnaire relating to the study and to verbally request from them their cooperation. They were asked how they preferred the delivery of the questionnaire be made to them with the options being their children or the mail. Fewer than 10% requested the use of the mail. Cover letters of explanation were included with the questionnaires.

Altogether, 95 students were identified as members of one parent families. There were 41 fourth graders, 36 fifth graders, and 18 sixth graders in the one-parent group. These families were all headed by a female, Black, and ranging in age of 25 to 35 years. They were lower middle income background. Because all persons contacted by telephone promised answers, it is not known why 41 of the subjects chose neither

to return nor respond to the questionnaire. No payments were promised or made to any of the subjects for their participation in the study. Those parents who admitted having been abused physically were isolated from the ones who had not been victims of abuse. A random sampling of students from each of the three grade levels was made and matched with the students whose parents had answered the questionnaires. This sampling came from students of two-parent families. The academic achievement of the students from the two-parent families was compared with the academic achievement of the students of the one parent families, abused and not abused.

As the one-parent families were selected from the cumulative record cards, their names were copied and the names of the students which belonged to that family were numbered. As the questionnaires were sent out to the parents, each of them was numbered with the same number that had been assigned this parent's child. The names of the students on the ITBS report sheets for 1981 were numbered in the same manner. After all questionnaires were returned, the one-parent families/A numbers were circled in red. The one-parent families/B names were circled in blue. This procedure enabled the experimenter to identify at a glance one-parent families/A, one-parent families/B, and also those one-parent families who chose not to make a response to the questionnaire.

A comparison of all subjects from one-parent families/A and one-parent families/B, was made with randomly selected sub-

jects from two-parent families of all three grades, four, five and six. The same matching procedure was used to make comparisons of the students' achievement.

### Instrumentation

#### Questionnaire

The experimenter-designed questionnaire consisted of 19 questions. The word "achievement" was specifically mentioned in five of the questions. This instrument identified present or past heads of households who were physically abused at some time. From this information, the academic achievement of the children of the abused heads of households was compared with the academic achievement of other students on their grade levels who were living in two-parent households. The instrument also identified the heads of households who were not abused. It enabled the parents in both groups to express their thinking concerning academic progress of their children and learning conditions in the school which their children attended.

Validity. This same instrument was administered to 20 persons who lived outside the immediate school area. These persons agreed that the questionnaire appeared to be valid and asked what it was supposed to ask regarding the progress of the school children.

Reliability. The Kuder-Richardson method of determining reliability was used to test the reliability of the instrument,  $(r = (K)(SD^2) - \bar{X}(K - \bar{X}) / (SD^2)(K - 1))$ .  $K$  = the number of items in the test.  $SD$  = the standard deviation of the scores.



$\bar{X}$  = the mean of the scores. Through the use of this formula, reliability coefficients of .99 and .96 for the two subsets were obtained.

### ITBS

The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills are designed and constructed by the professional staff of the College of Education at the University of Iowa (Pyrchak, 1978). Income from the sale of the tests is used for research in test development and utilization. This measurement project has been a continuous endeavor since 1935.

Validity. The validity of ITBS is discussed intelligently in the manuals. The testmakers supply evidence which suggests that they have gone to great lengths to represent the curricular goals of elementary schools in the United States. Test users are encouraged by the testmakers to compare the general objectives of their instructional program to the stated objectives of the ITBS to judge the validity of the battery for their purposes.

Reliability. ITBS is considered to be not only a very excellent measure of basic skills, but it is said to be one of the most carefully constructed achievement tests available. The reliability coefficients of this test are .97 - .98.

### Procedure

Each year, the large metropolitan school district from which the subjects of this study were taken, tests its student population in all elementary schools to determine the extent

of its students' achievement. To make the determination, the district uses the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. The principal of the school in which the study was made, very graciously gave his blessings and permission for the investigator to use the cumulative record cards of the students in the pursuit of this study. Letters, explaining the nature of the study, were sent to the parents. In compliance with the requirements of the Human Research Committee of Texas Woman's University, statements of consent and other information were printed on the face of the experimenter-developed questionnaires. The parents, themselves, gave permission by telephone for the experimenter to send to them the instruments by their children.

#### Definition of Terms.

This study used the term academic achievement to mean the demonstrated satisfactory completion of grade level basic subject areas as are required by a large metropolitan school district in North Texas. This district now requires every child to show one year's academic gain for each year spent in elementary school.

The study used the term "one-parent family/A" to mean a family with female head of household who was separated or was divorced as a result of having been physically abused. The term "one-parent family/B" was used to mean female head of household who was separated or divorced for any reasons except that of physical abuse. The term "one-parent family" was used to mean all families with only one parent, male or female.

The use of the term "two-parent families" meant all families where there was a male parent and a female parent living with-in the same household regardless of whether one of the two was a result of re-marriage.

Hypothesis 1. There are no statistically significant differences in ITBS scores of 4th. grade children from one-parent or two-parent families.

Hypothesis 2. There are no statistically significant differences in the ITBS scores of 5th. grade children from one-parent or two-parent families.

Hypothesis 3. There are no statistically significant differences in the ITBS scores of 6th. grade children from one-parent or two-parent families.

Hypothesis 4. There are no statistically significant differences in the ITBS scores of children of abused mothers and children of non-abused mothers.

#### Statistical Treatment.

The t-test for nonindependent samples was used to test hypotheses 1-3 and the Mann-Whitney U was used to test hypothesis 4 of this study. The K-R 20 was used to measure the reliability of the experimenter-developed questionnaire.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The participants of this study were selected by canvassing the cumulative record cards of students who were enrolled in grades four, five, and six at an elementary school in a large metropolitan school district in North Texas. Students who were selected were living with only one parent. ITBS test results from the current and the previous year provided the achievement scores of the students. The parents were grouped as (a) one-parent abused, (b) one-parent not abused, and (c) two-parent families. An experimenter-designed questionnaire was developed and used with all the one-parent families.

The academic achievement of all students in grade four from one-parent families was matched with a randomly selected group of students in grade four from two-parent families. The parents of the fourth grade group were selected because of the small number of respondents who gave physical abuse as one of the factors in their becoming single parents. Since there were fewer parents in grades five and six who reported themselves as having been physically abused than there were in grade four, all students from one-parent families in both grades five and six were matched with randomly selected students from two-parent families for these grades. Only four people in each of the two grades said they had been abused.

### Findings

Hypothesis 1. There are no statistically significant differences in ITBS scores of 4th. grade children from one-parent or two-parent families. Not rejected.

Hypothesis 2. There are no statistically significant differences in the ITBS scores of 5th. grade children from one-parent or two-parent families. Rejected.

Hypothesis 3. There are no statistically significant differences in the ITBS scores of 6th. grade children from one-parent or two-parent families. Not rejected.

Results of the statistical analysis of the tests of null hypotheses 1-3 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

#### T-Test Analysis of ITBS Scores of All Subjects

No. Parents	N	M	SD	T
Fourth Grade				
1	42	1.54	.43	-1.54
2	42	3.50	.65	
Fifth Grade				
1	35	1.69	.83	2.37
2	35	2.83	.70	
Sixth Grade				
1	20	.65	.78	.60
2	20	.96	.49	



Six parents of fourth-grade students gave "yes" responses to the question on the experimenter-designed questionnaire regarding physical abuse. The same six parents also listed the reason for their becoming single parents as physical abuse. The ITBS comprehensive scores of these students for 1980 were compared with their 1981 scores. The academic achievement of these students was matched with the academic achievement of six randomly selected students from two-parent families whose scores appeared on the same years' test result sheets. The results of this comparison, though not adequate for statistical use, showed the students from the one-parent families had a greater numerical gain for one year than did the students from the two-parent families (see Table 2).

Table 2  
Mann-Whitney Analysis of ITBS Scores  
Of Abused Fourth-Grade Subjects

No. Parents	N	M	SD	U
1	6	.52	.58	17
2	6	.22	.21	

Hypothesis 4. There are no statistically significant differences in the ITBS scores of children of abused mothers and children of non-abused mothers. This hypothesis was not rejected.

There were 18 items on the experimenter-developed questionnaire which required a "yes" or "no" answer. The number seven item had a third response, "sometimes". Any responses to this item were considered to be "yes" for purposes of calculation. The number of "yes" responses were added as were the number of "no" responses. The means and standard deviations of the sums of both responses were determined (see Table 3).

Table 3  
Means and Standard Deviations of Items  
On Experimenter-Developed Questionnaire

	M	SD	r
Yes	28.56	16.06	.99
No	24.25	12.81	
Yes <sup>a</sup>	6.64	13.56	.96
No <sup>a</sup>	8.56	4.6	

<sup>a</sup>Questionnaire used outside school area (these data were correlated with those from questionnaire used within the district)

In the fourth-grade responses, 70% of the parents said they believed their children were working on grade level. In reality, only 50% of the children from this group were working on grade level, or at a point where their academic gain

for one year was 1.0 or better. Within this same group of parents of fourth graders, 70% expressed satisfaction with the academic achievement of their children. Only 10% of this group said they were active in PTA and 50% of these respondents expressed belief that the school was doing a superior job in the education of their children.

In the responses of parents of fifth-grade children, 61% believed their children were working on grade level but 74% of the fifth graders in this group showed a gain for one year of 1.0 or better. Among those parents who responded, 52% expressed satisfaction with the academic achievement of their children, but only 4% of them were active in PTA. Of those parents of fifth-grade students who responded, 87% believed their school was doing its best to educate their children.

In the sixth grade, 36% of the parents who responded said they believed their children were working on grade level, but 64% of these students showed a gain in one year of 1.0 or better. None of the sixth-grade parents who responded said they were active in their school's PTA and only 36% of them believed their school was doing its best to educate their children. Of all the parents who responded to the questionnaire, 93% of them said they were not active in their school's PTA but 63% of this same group expressed belief that parental involvement affects the academic achievement of children.

From the entire responding group of fourth; fifth; and sixth-grade parents, 67% said they believed that parent-teach-



er relationship on a one-to-one basis affects the academic achievement of the children and 67% said they believed a second "parent" image in a teacher would improve the academic achievement of children. Only two of the parents who responded did not work outside the home; 96% did work outside the home but 100% of them did find time to help their children with homework. Altogether, 33% of the parents said they had experienced some difficulty with their children as a single parent which they did not experience before becoming single. In this group, 36% noticed changes in the grades of the children and only 15% said this change was not an improvement in academic achievement.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Problem and Hypotheses Tested

The population of this study came from the families who live in and have children attending an elementary school that is located in a large metropolitan school district in North Texas. The students who attend this school were also a part of the population in that the selection of the parents for the study was contingent on their marital state. It was necessary to inspect the cumulative record cards of all students in the grades selected to determine whose parent was single.

From the results of the inspection of the cumulative cards, the parents of children in grades four, five, and six who were one in number and listed as heads of households were selected to be parts of this study. The study sought to determine the effect a one-parent head of household had on the academic achievement of the children. The academic achievement of the children of single parents was compared with the academic gain of children from two-parent families. Academic achievement of students of one-parent families in this elementary school area was the problem of this study.

The primary responsibility of educating children in any school area lies with the parents. Since the school has no

control over the backgrounds from which its students come, an alternative it has is to take what it gets and do the best it can with these children, with the help of their parents. All parents, it seems, should do as much as humanly possible from the time their children first enter school, to help the school in the education process of their children.

The schools must give more than mere lip service to the recognized needs of its students. The schools may be forced to assume the role of surrogate parents to some of its young people who are victims of existing circumstances; especially if these are having to exist without parents. The schools in our society must recognize some of the differences in students and they should be prepared to go a step further than this. The students without parents may need counseling and understanding; maybe more so than some to whom the loss of a parent is not as frustrating.

This study sought to decide the degree to which parents are actively engaged in helping their children to learn. The large metropolitan school system is more dependent than ever, on the involvement of parents to lend assistance in educating its children. Questions were asked of the parents in one-parent families relative to the preparation they put into the development of their children. Another purpose of this study was to point out weak points in the elementary school area which could be improved by the school when these weaknesses are known to the school officials.

A questionnaire was prepared and sent to all parents who were single and female. These parents were called by telephone and were informed of the purposes of the questions. They were asked to participate in the study. As each questionnaire was returned, it was numbered with the same number which had been previously assigned to the student. The reason for this kind of numbering system was to maintain a record of those parents who were answering the forms.

All the homeroom teachers of grades four, five, and six were contacted and asked to verify the lists of names of their students by grade levels. These names had been taken from the cumulative record cards. This verification was done to make certain that all students who were eligible for the study, those of one-parent families, were included in the study. A small number of parents who responded asked if it were all right for them to say something other than "yes" or "no". When given the freedom to elaborate, many of them volunteered much more information than had been expected.

### Findings

It was hypothesized that there are no statistically significant differences in the ITBS scores of 4th-grade children from one-parent families or from two-parent families. This hypothesis was not rejected. It was hypothesized that there are no statistically significant differences in the ITBS scores of 5th-grade children from one-parent families or fifth graders from two-parent families. This hypothesis was rejected.

It was found in some isolated instances that the children who were living with formerly abused parents, were making greater gain than were those of the same grade level who were living with both parents.

From this investigation, it was found that many parents did not know what, or how poorly, or how well their children were doing academically. Responding to the question relating to reasons for divorce, 7% of the parents listed physical abuse although 26% said they were physically abused when they were married. There were 96% who said they work outside the home but 100% said they had time to help their children with homework. In the fourth grade, 61% of the parents believed their children were working on grade level but only 35% were showing gains of 1.0 or better.

In the fifth grade, 70% of the parents believed their offsprings were working on grade level and only 40% of these were showing a gain of 1.0 or better. Sixth grade parents believed somewhat less of the performance of their children. Of their responses, 36% said they believed their children were working on grade level but 73% were actually showing gains of 1.0 and better. It seems the better the children became, the less the parents thought of their performances. This did not mean the parents did not think highly of their children; it means they, the parents did not know of the abilities of their children.

In both fourth and fifth grades, 70% of the parents had noticed no change in the children's grades after they became



single parents. Regarding responses to the question concerning satisfactory achievement, fourth grade parents answered 63% "no", 35% "yes". Fifth grade parents answered 35% "no" and 61% "yes". Parents in the sixth grade group answered 25% "no" and 73% "yes". Responses to the question regarding activity in their school's PTA, 10% of the fourth graders' parents were active, 17% of the fifth graders' parents were active but no percent of the parents of sixth-grade children were active in their school's PTA. There were 73% of sixth graders' parents who did not believe the school was doing its best to educate their children. Fifth graders' parents answered 87% "yes" to the question about the school doing its best to educate their children. The fourth graders' parents responded 50% "yes" and 50% "no" to this question. Taking into account all parents surveyed, twice as many believed a second parent image would improve the child's academic achievement as those who did not believe this to be the case.

### Conclusions

This study found a significant difference in the academic achievement of fifth-grade students of one-parent families and fifth grade students from two-parent families. These differences were not found in grades four and six. These differences could have been the result of the amount of time parents spent aiding their children with home assignments, but there were a greater number of parents giving assistance to their children in grade six than there were in the other two grades.

The findings of this study showed more parents of fifth-graders who believed their school was doing its best to educate their children than either of the other two grades. This outcome may have been that fifth-graders' parents verbalized to a greater extent, their feelings concerning their school and its teachers more than did the parents of children in fourth and sixth grades. It may have been that the fifth graders acted out, unknowingly, what they had heard expressed by the parents. Children apparently do reflect the feelings and some attitudes of their parents.

The study revealed that more parents of students in grade five believed a parent-teacher relationship on a one-to-one basis affected the academic achievement of the children. It is quite likely that positive parental attitudes toward school and teachers are mirrored in the child's thoughts and actions. Children learn positive thinking and positive actions from their parents and act out what they have learned in their own ways.

There should be more encouragement given to parents of the present fourth grade students. The interest they seem to have in their institutions which help them set educational objectives and foundations for their children could do a great service for next year's fifth graders.

Educators need to do more than merely teach the children who come into their buildings as students. They need to send their representatives to the turf of the parents for informal

dialogue about their children before "the child gets into an unpleasant situation". Not enough of the parents of children in grades four or six believed in the school to which they allow their children to attend everyday. Of the parents of sixth graders who responded, 73% did not believe the school was doing its best to educate their children. Within this same group of parents, 55% were negative about involvement in their school and its effect on the academic achievement of children. This was clearly demonstrated since none of the parents of the sixth graders were active in PTA. In their responses to the question concerning the "second parent" image, 73% said "yes" a second parent image would improve the academic achievement of their children.

The school staff will have to make the first move toward bridging the gap of mistrust between parents and teachers. A follow-up of the fifth graders in this study could be the beginning of a better sixth grade next year. More dialogue is needed between parents and teachers of all grades. Among the fourth graders' parents, 70% were not satisfied with the achievement of their children and 70% believed involvement with the school affects the academic achievement of their children but something apparently kept them from being as active as they seemed to have desired to be. The staff should not wait for the parent to make every move. It may become necessary for a teacher within a certain school to spend some of the time not normally designated as "school time", to see some parents.

### Implications

It was found in this study that there are statistically significant differences in the academic achievement of fifth-grade children of one-parent families and fifth-grade children from two-parent families. Because more of the fifth graders' parents indicated that (a) a "second parent" image with some teacher would improve the child's academic achievement, (b) a parent-teacher relationship on a one-to-one basis affects the academic achievement of children, (c) involvement with their school affects the academic achievement of their children, and (d) the school is doing its best in the education of children; it is suggested that other teachers and persons working with fifth grade students capitalize on the ideas and seize the opportunity to become a second parent.

Other fifth-grade teachers may find it to their advantage to attend school functions where parents are also in attendance and get to "know" more of them. If children know that their parents and their teachers have something in common, this may be nothing more than conversation between the two; the children will get the feeling they must do well because "my parents are friends of my teachers".

It is assumed that the thoughts and actions of the people in this study, students and their families, greatly improved the academic achievement of the children. This assumption is well worth sharing with others who may benefit from the outcomes

conditions. The findings of this study suggest further study and research be done in some district where the predominance in ethnicity is other than Black. Further research is recommended using some variable which is affected by the home environment other than ITBS scores. The selection of teachers with similar interests and industry is recommended to follow through with the formal instruction of this one group of students in the fifth grade through middle and high school. The busy parents who do not have the feeling they are wanted and needed in the education process would change their minds and become involved with education if they were invited.



## APPENDIX A

Dear Parent:

I am engaged in a study of this Elementary School Community to determine what effect if any, the marital status of the parent has on the academic achievement of children in grades four, five, and six.

I am seeking information about the marital status of parents by going directly to the parents. Nothing about the interview with parents will be revealed in my report which would identify my source of information. Incidents and cases will be cited but at not any time will a name be used to identify persons.

If you are willing to be a subject in this research, please fill out the enclosed questionnaire.

I thank you.

Yours truly,

General T. Reed, Jr.  
Math Teacher

I UNDERSTAND THAT MY RETURN OF THIS QUESTIONNAIRE CONSTITUTES  
MY INFORMED CONSENT TO ACT AS A SUBJECT IN THIS RESEARCH.

1. Are you the head of your household ?

\_\_\_\_\_1. Yes

\_\_\_\_\_2. No

IF YES, PLEASE SKIP QUESTION 2, IF NO, PLEASE CONTINUE WITH #2

2. Were you ever head of household ?

\_\_\_\_\_1. Yes

\_\_\_\_\_2. No

3. How did you become head of household ?

\_\_\_\_\_1. Death of spouse

\_\_\_\_\_2. Separation

\_\_\_\_\_3. Divorce

4. When you were married, were you ever physically abused ?

\_\_\_\_\_1. Yes

\_\_\_\_\_2. No

IF THE RESPONSE TO QUESTION 3 IS ITEM 1 OR 2, SKIP QUESTION 5

5. Was your divorce a result of physical abuse ?

\_\_\_\_\_1. Yes

\_\_\_\_\_2. No

6. Do you work outside the home ?

\_\_\_\_\_1. Yes

\_\_\_\_\_2. No

7. Do you find time to help your children with their homework ?  
\_\_\_\_1. Yes  
\_\_\_\_2. No  
\_\_\_\_3. Sometimes
8. Do you believe your children are working on grade level ?  
\_\_\_\_1. Yes  
\_\_\_\_2. No
9. Have you experienced any difficulty with your children as a single parent that you did not experience before becoming a single parent ?  
\_\_\_\_1. Yes  
\_\_\_\_2. No
10. Have you noticed any change in your children's grades since you became a single parent ?  
\_\_\_\_1. Yes  
\_\_\_\_2. No

IF NO, PLEASE SKIP #11, IF YES, PLEASE CONTINUE WITH #11.

11. Was this change an improvement in academic achievement ?  
\_\_\_\_1. Yes  
\_\_\_\_2. No
12. Do you find it necessary to encourage your child to do homework ?  
\_\_\_\_1. Yes  
\_\_\_\_2. No

13. Are you satisfied with the academic achievement of your child ?
- \_\_\_\_1. Yes
- \_\_\_\_2. No
14. Do you spend as much time with your children as you desire ?
- \_\_\_\_1. Yes
- \_\_\_\_2. No
15. Are you active in your school's P. T. A. ?
- \_\_\_\_1. Yes
- \_\_\_\_2. No
16. Do you believe that your school is doing its best to educate your child ?
- \_\_\_\_1. Yes
- \_\_\_\_2. No
17. Do you believe parental involvement with the school affects the academic achievement of the child ?
- \_\_\_\_1. Yes
- \_\_\_\_2. No
18. Do you believe parent-teacher relationships on a one-to-one basis affect the academic achievement of the child ?
- \_\_\_\_1. Yes
- \_\_\_\_2. No
19. Do you think a "second parent" image in some teacher would improve your child's academic achievement ?

\_\_\_\_1. Yes

\_\_\_\_2. No

No medical service or compensation is provided to subjects by the University as a result of injury from participation in research.



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