

## **SINGLE PARENTING AND ITS EFFECTS ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN KUMBA III MUNICIPALITY, MEME DIVISION, CAMEROON**

**Asah Jacob Fotoh**

Department of civil engineering

Higher Technical Teachers Training College (HTTTC), Kumba

University of Buea, P.O. Box 63, Buea, South West Region, Cameroon

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**ABSTRACT:** *The main objective of this study was to investigate the effect of single parenting on students' academic performance in Kumba III Municipality, Meme Division of Cameroon. In order to achieve this aim, literature was reviewed under the concepts of study. The survey research design was used and the research approach was quantitative. Questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. Purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting the schools while the simple random sampling technique was used to select the participants of the study. The sample size of the study constituted of 370 students selected from a total student population of 8655 students drawn from four schools. The data was analysed using SPSS version 25.0 to produce descriptive statistics. Data were presented on tables and charts with frequency and percentages. The findings of this study reveal that single parenting influences the academic performance of the children as most single parents do not have a reliable source of income, do not always pay their children's fees on time, do not provide most of their school needs (textbooks, school bag and shoes) and do not regularly provide food for their children before and after school. Also, it was revealed that the educational attainment of single parents influences the academic performance of students as more than half of single parents in Kumba III Municipality were uneducated; do not always check their children's books at home; do not always create time to do assignments with their children at home; do not always attend PTA meetings in school and do not always create time to discuss with them about school. Findings also show that, single parenting is caused by unfaithfulness, marital violence, premarital pregnancy, poverty, divorce and death of spouse. Based on the findings, the researcher made some recommendations to the Ministry of Family and social welfare, school administrators and Parents*

**KEYWORDS:** Single parenting, income status of single parents, educational attainment of single parents, causes of single parenting and students' academic performance

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Agulana (1999) pointed out that the family lays the psychological, moral and spiritual foundation in the overall development of the child. The educational pursuit of every child is relatively determined by the pattern of family or home he/she comes from, be it wealthy or poor, educated or otherwise. Parents are primarily responsible for the educational and career development of their children (Salami and Alawode, 2000). Parents who failed in their responsibilities to assist and guide their children through every stage of development in life may likely have to contend with the poor academic performance of their children sooner or later. The development of wholesome

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behaviours, as foundation to success in any child is laid upon the home and at the initial stage in life. Parents therefore have a great role to play in seeing to it that students acquire the appropriate social, psychological, moral and academic development.

Single parenting can be defined as a situation in which one of the two individuals involved in the conception of the child is being responsible for the upbringing of the child (Henshin, 1985). Salami and Alawode (2000) have asserted that single parenting result from divorce, separation of various kinds, having children from wedlock or death of one spouse which leaves the roles in the hands of a single parent. Hence, children under such a family structure might not receive the necessary attention they required because the single parent might be overwhelmed by many responsibilities. According to Amato (1994) children from single parent homes are likely to suffer deprivation, and denial of some rights and opportunities. They are more exposed to anti-social behaviours and poor academic records.

The benefits of two-parents family far outweigh that of a single parent family, as mothers play the traditional role of child care and home-making while the father's role is that of economic responsibilities and discipline of children although these traditional responsibilities of parents are gradually changing. But in single parent families, double responsibilities are required of time, attention and money of the parent. Hence, less attention is given to the education of the child. Invariably the cost of receiving education today is higher to be financed only by a single parent who may be financially handicapped. In the case of the few wealthy single parents who are economically viable, the nature of their job will always affect adequate supervision of children's growth and development which may hamper on their academic performance.

Fadeiye (1985) and Uwaifo (2008) found that differences in academic performance of children exist in terms of those from single parent and those from two parent families. Fadeiye (1985) in particular found that in two parent homes, both parents have roles to play in child education. The father is to give the necessary tools for the educational advancement, while the mother is to supplement the father's efforts in this regard. Where the father is absent and the mother is not privileged enough to cater for all the basic needs as well as supervised the academic performance of the child, the child will have poor academic performance. Pittman (1993) found out that single parent family, Black or White and regardless of how adaptive a person may be, is associated with numerous problems. Compared with two-parent families, children of single parents are more likely to have lower educated goals and complete fewer years of school, have lower earnings, and poor in young adulthood, marry and bear children at an early age, get divorced and become involved in delinquency, alcohol abuse and drug addiction.

In Cameroon, the existence of single parents which was as a result of broken home was unknown and where they existed, they were ignored as exceptional cases. However, nowadays, they are the fast growing family patterns as more children from single parent homes can easily be seen. This is supported by Nwachukwu (2008) who affirmed that nowadays, single parent family patterns both inside and outside Nigeria are on the increase. Some studies seem to neglect the issue of single-parenting as a variable. Generally such studies have tied academic performance of children to socio-economic status, parents' educational level, student attitudes to learning, school

environmental factors, housing and residential experience (Donkor, 2010; Farooq, Chaudhry, Shafiq and Berhanu, 2011; Mahama and Campion, 2011; Insah, Mumuni and Bowan, 2013). What these studies failed to realize is that single parenting is crucial in determining a person's academic performance. It becomes imperative to examine single parenting and its effects on students' academic performance in Kumba III Municipality, Meme Division, Cameroon as a case study.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To find out the extent to which income status of single parents influences the academic performance of their children in secondary schools in Kumba III Municipality, Meme Division, Cameroon
2. To investigate the level at which educational attainment of single parents influences the academic performance of their children in secondary School in Kumba III Municipality, Meme Division, Cameroon
3. To investigate the causes of single parenting in Kumba III Municipality, Meme Division, Cameroon.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Single parenting**

Literarily, parenting denotes the socialisation process of children by their parents, in other words, the rearing/training which parents' give to their children. It could be duo parenting where both parents take the responsibility to bring up their children as a couple or single parenting where just one of the parents brings up the children. It could be single male or female parenting depending on the type of family. Single parenting is a product of marital separation or death with a deleterious effect on the child exemplified by fluctuation in parental attention and a weakening social bond. Wagnat (1992) points out four major areas effecting children from single parent homes: Stability/structure, acceptance, adult attention and parental involvement. To her these are extreme areas of concern that are lacking in the lives of children with single parents.

Yongm and Yuanzhang (2008) makes it clear that in some cases children who experience parental separation do not always perform well or achieve academically. Schultz (2006) noted that if adolescents from unstable (single parent homes) homes are to be compared with those from stable homes, it would be seen that the former have more social, academic and emotional problems. Johnson (2005) asserts that children of separated families often fail in school and are at risk emotionally. Otite and Ogionwo (1989) argued that children from single parenthood rarely do well in school because of lack of appropriate care, love and attention. However, this may not be completely applicable in all instances of broken homes. Some children irrespective of their home background or structure may work hard and become successful in life.

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This study focuses on three dimensions of single parenting; the income status of single parents, the educational attainment of single parents; and how these affects their children's academic performance. The study also examines the causes of single parenting.

Family income has become education controlling factor globally. Kadushinn, (1967) argued that low income limits both educational attainment and academic performance of children. This is more visible in single parent homes where just one of the parents is in charge of providing the economic, social and emotional needs of children. The stress of having to find the basic necessity of life such as food, shelter and clothing for the family by a single parent consequently places them at risk of becoming detached from their children, and compromises their ability to succeed in their academics. Jensen (2013) found out that, some children from low income homes have difficulties to understanding and even learn as fast as others. Their vocabulary can be less and not much as the other children from high income background as well as their ways of learning and understanding because their parents may not have time to help them at home. This is common in homes with single parents who do the activities of both parents and may not have time to follow up their children academically. This is even worse when the single parent is financially poor, he/she will have to work all day and would have little or no time to help the children with school work. These may affect their grades because no one helps them or even sometimes, care about their success in schools. Good financial support for education is an essential stimulus in motivating children to perform better.

Kashen, (2003) stated that, students whose parents are well educated get higher in school work activities. Dale and Griffith (1985) found that a parent's education contributes to a child's performance and ultimately, where the single parent is educated the impact is felt on the children though not as much as if both parents were present and at the same time educated. A similar conclusion was reached by Douglas (1988) who emphasized the importance of a mother's education because her contact with the child is much greater than that of the father and so the impact is very much felt. According to Obe (2007) educated parents may not only motivate the children to learn, but also provides some incentives to reinforce the desire to learn. For example, higher levels of education may enhance parents' facility at becoming involved in their children's education, and also enable parents to acquire and model social skills and problem-solving strategies conducive to children's school success. This may not be the case with single parents who may not have enough time to guide and directly get involved in the education of their children due to lack of time. Students whose parents or parent have higher levels of education and are involved in the education of their children will enhanced the learning ability of their children.

Single parenthood arises because of Divorce. According to Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2006), divorce is the legal ending of a marriage between a man and a woman. The trend of increasing divorce rates has virtually continued for more than 100 years (Bumpass, 1990). Although not all single parenthood is due to divorce, marital dissolution is the largest contributor to the number of children living with one parent. Different social circumstances, personal attributes and even genetic aspects may contribute to the risk of divorce. There is agreement across diverse studies that marital instability is associated with premarital cohabitation and pregnancy, early marriages, economic hardship, high levels of residential mobility and growing up in a disrupted or divorced

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family (Wadsworth, 1979; McLanahom and Bumpass, 1988; McGue and Lykken, 1992; Amato, 1994; Tulisalo, 1999).

Death of a spouse automatically causes single parenting. Losing a partner is very stressful for the parent. The psychological well-being of single parents in most cases is very poor especially when harsh cultural practices such as seizure of properties of the deceased and social exclusion of the widow or widower as the case may be are involved. This has forced many children out-of-school or resulted to poor academic performance in the latter years. Teenage Pregnancy has become a reliable way of single parenting in most societies nowadays. This has made many girls single thereby leaving them with the option to look for ways to support their children. This has made them vulnerable to indulge into risky activities such as prostitution and trafficking.

Artificial insemination was identified as another cause of single parenthood especially in relation to the women. It was a technique developed for livestock which has been adapted for use in humans. This is the process by which sperm is placed into the reproductive organ of a female for the purpose of impregnating the female without sexual intercourse. Among the humans, artificial insemination was originally developed as a means of helping couples to conceive where there were male factor problems of a physical or psychological nature affecting the male partner which prevented or impeded conception. This has caused more harm than good for women in the later years when the children start schooling as just the mother will embrace the process of upbringing (Wikiped 2010).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this study, the survey research design was used. According to Amin (2005), a survey design is used to gather data from a sample of a population at a particular time. The researcher used the survey design because the population of study was wide, making it difficult to reach all the elements of the population at a particular time. As such, the researcher decided to collect and analyze data from a sample considered representative of the entire population. The population of study consisted of all the four functioning secondary educational institutions (Cameroon College of Arts and Science, Government Technical High School, Kumba, Government Technical High School, Kang-Barombi and Government Secondary school Kang-Barombi) in Kumba III Municipality with 8655 students (Divisional Delegation of Secondary Education Meme, 2020). Two sampling techniques were used in this study: The purposive sampling technique and the simple random sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique was used to hand-pick schools that are functioning in Kumba III Municipality since most schools have shutdown due to the socio-political upheaval plaguing the Kumba III Municipality, Meme Division, South West Region, Cameroon. Purposive sampling technique is a non-probability sampling method that occurs when elements selected for the sample are chosen by the judgment of the researcher (Kerlinger, 1973). The simple random sampling technique on the other hand was used to select the students who participated in the study. According to Kerlinger (1973) simple random sampling is that method of drawing a portion (or sample) of a population or universe so that each member of the population or universe has an equal chance of being selected. This sampling technique was used in order to guarantee an equal chance to all the participants as well as to justify the appropriateness of the findings. The sample of the study was made up 370 students drawn from

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four secondary schools in Kumba III Municipality, Meme Division, South West Region, Cameroon.

The research instrument used for this study was a questionnaire addressed to students. The questionnaire was structured following Likert scale format of SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree with the item on the last objective being open-ended in order to give respondents the opportunity to freely express their opinion on the issue under study. The construction of items in the questionnaire was done following the objectives of the study and literature reviewed. The questionnaire was divided into four sections with the first section containing demographic information and the other three sections corresponding to the various research objectives.

To ensure the validity of the instrument, appropriate care was taken during the construction of the questionnaire so that all necessary information could be extracted from respondents. This was done by pivoting around the dependent and independent variables and also making sure that the language is unambiguous. After constructing the questionnaire, copies were first distributed to colleagues who made some adjustments before been taken to the field for administration. In order to ensure the reliability of the instrument, test-retest reliability was done through a pilot study conducted with 30 students, from two secondary schools. The results from these studies were correlated and the reliability coefficient of 0.82 was gotten using the spearman brown formula which proved that the instrument was reliable.

In order to ease the process of administration of instrument, several contact visits to meet with Principals, teachers, and student to explain to them the purpose of the study and to seek consent were made. The questionnaire was administered after explanation to the participants on what is required of them. Each instrument was accompanied by a covered letter assuring the respondents that the information needed from them will be treated confidentially and that it will be used for research purposes only. This enabled the researcher to create a good rapport with respondents before administering the instruments. Issues of confidentiality, voluntary participation and other ethical considerations were raised and discussed with participants. The data collected from the field by means of questionnaire was analysed using SPSS version 25.0 to produce descriptive statistics. Data were presented on tables and charts with frequency and percentages.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Table 1: Income status of single parents and the academic performance of their children**

In order to solicit information on the extent to which the income status of single parents influences the academic performance of their children in secondary schools in Kumba III Municipality, respondents were asked the following questions as shown on table 1 below.

Items	Responses				
	SA	A	D	SD	N
My parent always pay my fees on time	72(19.4%)	71(19.1%)	125(33.7%)	102(27.5%)	370
My parent provide most of my school needs (textbooks, school bag and shoes)	67(18.1%)	78(21.08%)	120(32.4%)	105(28.4%)	370
I hardly get time to study at home because of my long hours of work at home	71(19.2%)	89(24.05%)	113(30.5%)	97(26.2%)	370
My parent always supports me financially to make sure I meet up with my school requirements	95(25.6%)	102(27.5%)	93(25.1%)	80(21.6%)	370
My parent has a reliable source of income	73(19.7%)	78(21.08%)	109(29.4%)	110(29.7%)	370
I always have food to eat before and after school	76(20.5%)	87(23.5%)	99(26.7%)	108(29.2%)	370
<b>Total</b>	<b>454(20.4%)</b>	<b>505(22.7%)</b>	<b>659(29.6%)</b>	<b>602(27.1%)</b>	<b>2220</b>

Information on table one above shows that 19.4% and 19.1% of the respondents respectively strongly agreed and agreed that their parents always pay their fees on time while 33.7% and 27.5% of the respondents respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed this view. This illustrates that majority (61.2%) of the respondents hold that their parents do not always pay their fees on time. 18.1% and 21.08% of the respondents respectively strongly agreed and agreed that their parents provide most of their school needs (textbooks, school bag and shoes) while 32.4% and 28.4% of the respondents respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed this opinion. This indicates that most (60.8%) of the respondents opined that their parents do not provide most of their school needs (textbooks, school bag and shoes). 19.2% and 24.05% of the respondents respectively strongly agreed and agreed that they hardly get time to study at home because of their long hours of work at home while 30.5% and 26.2% of the respondents respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed this assertion. This shows that majority (56.7%) of the respondents affirmed that they always have time to study at home. 25.6% and 27.5% of the respondents respectively strongly agreed and agreed that their parents always support them financially to make sure they meet up with their school requirements while 25.1% and 21.6% of the respondents respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed this view. This shows that more than half (53.1%) of the respondents affirmed that their parents always support them financially to make sure they meet up with their school requirements. 19.7% and 21.08% of the respondents respectively strongly agreed and agreed that their parents have a reliable source of income while 29.4% and 29.7% of the respondents respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed this opinion. This indicates that most (59.1%) of the respondents opined that their parents do not have a reliable source of income. 20.5% and 23.5% of the respondents respectively strongly agreed and agreed that they always have food to eat before and after school while 26.7% and 29.2% of the respondents respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed this opinion. This shows that most (55.9%) of the respondents are of the opinion that they do not always have food to eat before and after school.

Based on the above analysis, it is clear that the income status of single parents influences the academic performance of their children. These could be seen as most single parents do not have a reliable source of income, do not always pay their children's fees on time, do not provide most of

their school needs (textbooks, school bag and shoes) and do not regularly provide food for their children before and after school. All these will negatively affect the academic performance of their children.

These findings are in agreement with Kadushinn (1967) who argued that low income limits both educational attainment and academic performance of children. This is more visible in single parent homes where just one of the parents is in charge of providing the economic, social and emotional needs of children. The stress of having to find the basic necessity of life such as food, shelter and clothing for the family by a single parent consequently places them at risk of becoming detached from their children, and compromises their ability to succeed in their academics.

**Table 2: Educational attainment of single parents and the academic performance of their children**

Items	Responses				
	SA	A	D	SD	N
My parent is educated	87(23.5%)	92(24.8%)	100(27.02%)	91(24.5%)	370
My parent always check my books at home	67(18.1%)	69(18.6%)	122(32.9%)	112(30.3%)	370
My parent always create time to do assignments with me at home	58(15.6%)	77(20.8%)	123(33.2%)	112(30.3)	370
My parent has employed somebody to assist me with bookwork at home	73(19.7%)	67(18.1%)	126(34.05%)	104(28.1%)	370
My parent always attend PTA meetings in my school	78(21.08%)	89(24.05%)	109(29.4%)	94(25.4%)	370
My parent always pay for my extra classes	78(21.08%)	83(22.4%)	98(26.5%)	111(30%)	370
My parent always create time to discuss with me about my school	80(21.6%)	73(19.7%)	121(32.7%)	96(25.9%)	370
Total	521(20.1%)	550(21.2%)	799(30.8%)	720(27.7%)	2590

Table 2 above depicts that 23.5% and 24.8% of the respondents respectively strongly agreed and agreed that their parent are educated while 27.02% and 24.5% of the respondents respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed this view. This shows that more than half (51.42%) of the respondents said their parent are not educated. 18.1% and 18.6 of the respondents respectively strongly agreed and agreed that their parents always check their books at home while 32.9% and 30.3% of the respondents respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed this opinion. This indicates that most (63.2%) of the respondents opined that their parents do not always check their books at home. 15.6% and 20.8% of the respondents respectively strongly agreed and agreed that their parents always create time to do assignments with them at home while 33.2% and 30.3% of the respondents respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed this assertion. This illustrates that majority (63.5%) of the respondents hold the view that their parents do not always create time to



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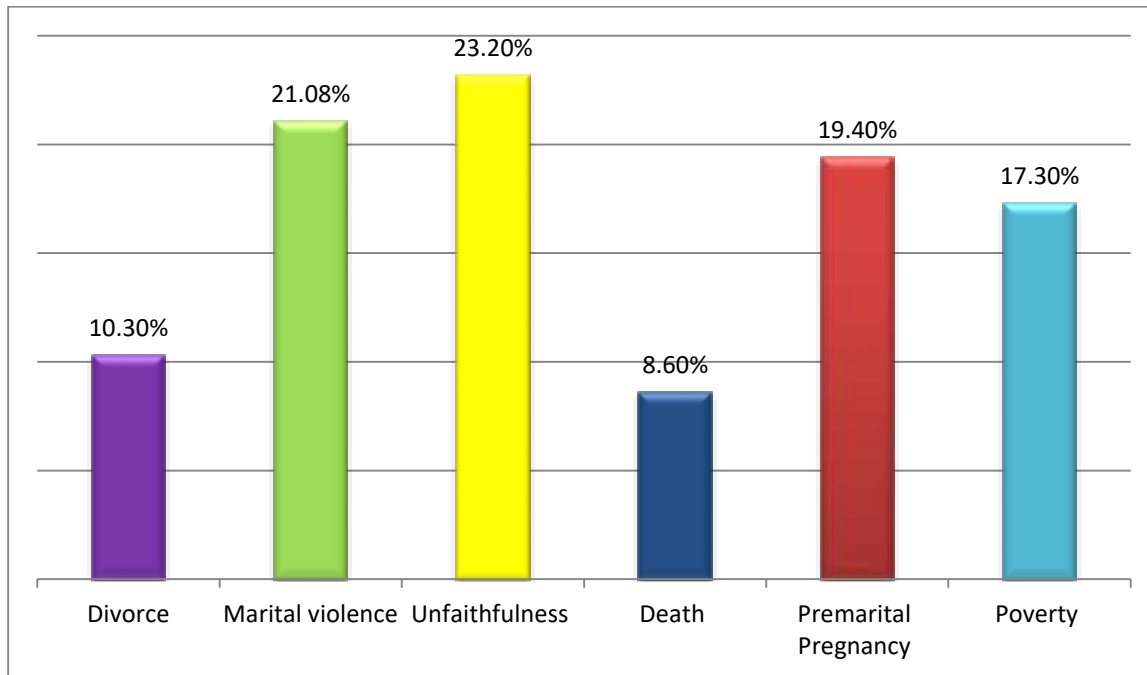
do assignments with them at home. 19.7% and 18.1% of the respondents respectively strongly agreed and agreed that their parents have employed somebody to assist them with bookwork at home while 34.05% and 28.1% of the respondents respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed this opinion. This indicates that most (62.15%) of the respondents said their parents have not employed somebody to assist them with bookwork at home. 21.08% and 24.05% of the respondents respectively strongly agreed and agreed that their parents always attend PTA meetings in school while 29.4% and 25.4% of the respondents respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed this view. This shows that most (54.8%) of the respondents are of the opinion that their parents do not always attend PTA meetings in school. 21.08% and 22.4% of the respondents respectively strongly agreed and agreed that their parents always pay for their extra classes while 26.5% and 30% of the respondents respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed this assertion. This means that majority (56.5%) of the respondents said their parents do not always pay for their extra classes. 21.6% and 19.7% of the respondents respectively strongly agreed and agreed that their parents always create time to discuss with them about school while 32.7% and 25.9% of the respondents respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed this opinion. This shows that most (58.6%) of the respondents hold the view that their parents do not always create time to discuss with them about school.

The above analysis implies that the educational attainment of single parents influence the academic performance of students. This analysis shows that more than half of single parents in Kumba III Municipality are uneducated; do not always check their children's books at home; do not always create time to do assignments with their children at home; do not always attend PTA meetings in school and do not always create time to discuss with them about school.

These findings are in accordance with Uwaifo (2008) who found that differences in academic performance exist in terms of those from single parents and those from two parent families. Fadeiye (1985) found that in two parent homes, both parents have roles to play in the child's education. The father is to give the necessary tools for the educational advancement, while the mother is to supplement the father's efforts in this regard. Where the father is absent and the mother is not privileged enough to cater for all the basic needs as well as supervised the academic performance of the children, they will have poor academic performance. Pittman (1993) found out that single parent family, Black or White and regardless of how adaptive a person may be, is associated with numerous problems including poor academic performance.

**Table 3: Causes of single parenting in Kumba III Municipality**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Divorce	38	10.3
Marital violence	78	21.08
Unfaithfulness	86	23.2
Death	32	8.6
Premarital pregnancy	72	19.4
Poverty	64	17.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100</b>

**Figure 1: Causes of single parenting in Kumba III Municipality**

Findings on table 2 and figure 1 above demonstrates that 23.2% of the respondents depicts that single parenting is caused by unfaithfulness, 21.08% of them said it is caused by marital violence, 19.4% of the respondents said it is caused by premarital pregnancy, 17.3% of the respondents said single parenting is caused by poverty while 10.3% of the respondents said it is caused by divorce and 8.6% of them said it is caused by death of spouse.

There is agreement across diverse studies that single parenting is associated with divorce, premarital cohabitation and pregnancy, early marriages, economic hardship, high levels of

residential mobility, death of spouse and growing up in a disrupted or divorced family (Wadsworth, 1979; McLanahom and Bumpass, 1988; McGue and Lykken, 1992; Amato, 1994; Tulisalo, 1999).

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The family serves the function of guidance and socializing of its members and it is the first agent of socialization in the life of a child. This social roles includes, teaching the child socially accepted behaviour, norms, values, dressing, acquisition and use of language, eating habits, control of aggression, development of sex roles, morality etc. Ideally the family should be a strong bio-psycho-social unit i.e. a biological, psychological and social unit. From this point of view the family has a key role to play to enhance the academic success of children. Apart from the materials and economic resources provided to the child by the family for his intellectual development it is also a responsibility of the family to socialize and develop the child's personality gradually. Thus, it is paramount for parents to stay together for the proper upbringing of their children.

The findings of this study reveal that single parents influences the academic performance of their children as most single parents do not have a reliable source of income, do not always pay their children's fees on time, do not provide most of their school needs (textbooks, school bag and shoes) and do not regularly provide food for their children before and after school. All these negatively affect the academic performance of their children. Also, it was revealed that the educational attainment of single parents influences the academic performance of students as more than half of single parents in Kumba III Municipality were uneducated; do not always check their children's books at home; do not always create time to do assignments with their children at home; do not always attend PTA meetings in school and do not always create time to discuss with them about school. Findings also show that, single parenting is caused by unfaithfulness, marital violence, premarital pregnancy, poverty, divorce and death of spouse.

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations were made:

- The Ministry of Family and social welfare should organize seminars to teach couples the importance and the requirements of the family to the education of their children. Parents should be advised to stay together and provide all necessary school needs for their children and get more involved in their school activities.
- Schools at all levels should have a strong guidance and counseling unit to help all the children with family problems and also create a link between the home and the school.
- The Ministry of Secondary Education and Vocational Training in collaboration with Universities and Religious organizations should work together and develop training programs on love, marriage and care for parents in order to educate the society on the importance of love and family care for healthy families, communities and society in general.
- Parents should consider the future of their children as the first priority, stay together and providing psycho-social and economic support to enhance the academic performance of their children.

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