

The Developmental Impact of Self-Efficacy on Single-Mother Families

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Abstract: Based on the United States Census Bureau, the number of single-parent families with children under the age of 18 has grown rapidly from 1.5 million in 1950 to 10.5 million in 2021 in the United States, which is a staggering rate of growth. Children raised by single parents usually do not behave as lively as children from normal families in school. They are more introverted, and in severe cases, they may even be depressed and have less interaction with their classmates. But if single parents pay enough attention to their children and always care about their children's education and psychological development and are willing to put in efforts to regulate the child's mentality, despite the lack of a parental role, the occurrence of depression in this kind of children will be greatly reduced.

Keywords: Developmental impact; Self-Efficacy; Single-Mother families

1. Introduction

Based on earlier studies, it is known that financial stress is one of the most pressing issues that single-parent families need to face, and it is one of the most important factors that the external parties are concerned about (Kotwal & Prabhakar, 2009, Aerts et al., 2022). Communities and governments usually give some welfare opportunities to single-parent families for humanitarian reasons (Kotwal & Prabhakar, 2009). But this, to some extent, also affects the self-confidence of the parents. In severe cases, they may even feel bad about their inability to take care of their children, and the welfare opportunities will indirectly add to their frustration (Brody, Flor, & Gibson, 1999). Furthermore, recent studies have shown that reasons such as particular family structures (single parenting) and the inability to provide adequate financial support, while having a serious impact on a child's development, are not the most essential ones (Cohen et al., 2015, Taylor & Conger, 2017). In contrast, the existence of a positive life atmosphere in a single-parent family can have a more serious impact on both the child's academic development and his or her personal cognitive development (Gratz, 2015).

2. Conceptualization of self-efficacy

2.1 The nature and concept of self-efficacy

Self-efficacy was first proposed by Bandura (1977) as one of the main concepts of social learning theory (retitled social cognitive theory in 1986). Self-efficacy can be understood as a judgment of one's own abilities, specifically whether one can accomplish something to achieve a desired outcome. Self-efficacy has a strong influence on people's thinking, attitudes, and behavioral actions (Zulkosky, 2009). People with high self-efficacy are more internally stable and can control their thoughts more accurately. They are more likely to believe they can improve themselves through their own efforts (Neill, 2006). Having some experience with particular things, for example, if you do chores every day, you will be familiar with how to do them. Persistence in activities that need to be completed and increasing familiarity with daily activities can be conducive to a high sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1978).

Conversely, if a person is unfamiliar with the environment they are in and the steps that should be taken, this is when the sense of personal efficacy decreases. According to Bandura (1989), people's questioning of their abilities deepens their stress and creates a greater likelihood of depression.^[1]

There are four main factors that influence self-efficacy: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological cues (Bandura, 1977). These factors will help people to determine what level of self-efficacy they have and where they can start if they want to increase or improve their self-efficacy. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that self-efficacy is not a

dynamic trait and is generally guided by the situation where the individual is and what they aspire to accomplish at the moment (Lenz & Shortridge-Baggett, 2002).

2.2 Understanding self-efficacy in home-school community partnerships

The interconnections between self-efficacy, family, and peer experiences at school are essential during a child's formative years (Bandura et al, 2001). Bradley and Corwyn (2001) put forward their idea that self-efficacy can be understood as a kind of blending agent, a response that children develop as they adapt to different environments. People who have a great feeling of self-efficacy are more sensitive to the situation and are more likely to get the information they want from it, for instance, they are more likely to get encouragement from interactions with teachers (Vieno et al., 2007).

Self-efficacy can help people adapt to different environments. On the contrary, people will also have different self-efficacy when situated in different scenarios (school, community, family), and these influences from family, community, and school are all interrelated (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Bandura, 1997; Magnusson, 1995). Therefore, it is very important to make balanced use of these factors. When getting along with some important people, such as family members and teachers, it is necessary to motivate and control self-efficacy (Vieno et al., 2007).

3. Self-efficacy in single-parent families

3.1 The impact of self-efficacy on single mothers

In fact, a mother's self-efficacy and work situation do not have a direct impact on her children, but rather a subtle one. If a mother's self-efficacy is low, she will feel that there is no hope for her future, including the development of her children. Conversely, if a mother has high self-efficacy, they will be more active in their lives and more willing to spend time and energy to participate in their children's development (Jackson & Scheines, 2005).

According to Jackson and Scheines (2005), there is a significant positive correlation between employment opportunities and self-efficacy. If a single mother is able to have a job, then her depressive state of mind will be reduced, which has a very strong effect on generating a positive atmosphere in single-parent families.^[2]

3.2 The impact of self-efficacy on children

Emotions are very contagious between families, and if the mother has a high sense of self-efficacy, this will also contribute to the child's self-confidence and promote his or her self-efficacy. Conversely, if the mother is chronically depressed, the family atmosphere will be more negative (Wolford, 2019). Self-efficacy also affects a child's motivation to learn to some extent. If children have stronger self-efficacy, they will be more willing to tackle problems encountered in their studies and will be able to concentrate better in the classroom. Conversely, if the sense of self-efficacy is weak, they will be reluctant to put much effort into their studies (Bandura, 1993), especially for younger children, such as elementary school students, who have just started a new journey of learning. If they are able to seize the opportunity to develop self-efficacy proactively, they will not only be able to improve their learning efficiency, but also will not be deterred from facing difficulties in their subsequent life development (Arslan, 2012).

4. Self-efficacy enhancement strategies

4.1 Self-efficacy enhancement strategies from the school's perspective

Compared to single fathers, single mothers will focus more on their children's academic training in school and the direction of their future values (Pandya, 2023). It is worth noting that children from single-parent families suffer more challenges at school, such as teasing and bullying, which can cause frustration for the child (Hodges et al., 2018). Moreover, children from single-mother families are more likely to be academically maladjusted and may have difficulty keeping up with their studies and enjoying school life (Lee & Joo, 2022). Adolescence is very important and influential as a stage of rapid developmental change in children. For single-mother families, the involvement of schools becomes even more important. School activities can help children from single-mother families improve their sense of well-being, security, and self-efficacy, as well as indirectly improve their academic performance (Garrett et al., 2019; Jayawardene et al., 2017).

There are two main ways that schools can increase self-efficacy for single mothers. One is to provide child study and care services, with teachers providing targeted homework help. This enables single mothers to focus on their work and better allocate their time. The primary concern is that this measure can alleviate the point of conflict between work and children's schooling issues, to achieve a better work-life balance (Van den Eynde et al., 2019).

The second method is for schools to set up organizations for single mothers to work together, and to set up related social groups to help each other (Stuart, 2010). School administrators also join them to solve their doubts at any time, which can make single

mothers feel the warmth from the school. Single mothers will have a sense of belonging, which will also help enhance their sense of self-efficacy (Dinter, 2000).

4.2 Self-efficacy enhancement strategies from the community's perspective

Based on Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) related understanding of ecological systems theory, school-community collaboration can be understood as a "mesosystem". The self-efficacy of single mothers can be enhanced in the mesosystem of self-efficacy. Specific guidance staff should be assigned to each single-mother family to conduct regular interviews and exchanges. Single mothers may suffer from social pressures, interpersonal relationships, and other problems, and community workers can communicate with them to discuss solutions to these problems. It is clear from the Lipman and Boyle (2005) study that proper and active community involvement can directly reduce insecurity in single-parent families. This is evidenced by the improvement in the mood of single mothers and their self-esteem.^[3]

The community can also conduct seminars for single mothers during their free time to teach them some job skills and provide some job opportunities. According to a research by Jackson and Scheines (2005), there is a significant positive correlation between employment opportunities and self-efficacy. If a single mother is able to have a job, then her depressive state of mind will be reduced, which has a very strong effect on generating a positive atmosphere in single-parent families.

5. Conclusion

According to de la Fuente (2019), the emotional changes and self-efficacy produced by single mothers are different in environments of school, community, and home. Schools should maintain good communication with each parent and be more inclusive of single-mother families (Kuruoğlu and Woodward, 2021). The community also needs to play its unique role in giving more practical help to single-mother families, such as job advice, thus increasing the self-efficacy of single mothers and promoting positive development of the whole family. Mutual encouragement within the family also contributes to self-efficacy. If single-mother families intend to develop well, self-efficacy enhancement is essential, and it requires the cooperation of the family, the school, and the community to achieve the goal.

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