

Solitude: The Joys, Groans and Hopes of Solo Parent-Teachers

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Abstract – *This phenomenological study aimed to determine the motivations, difficulties, and aspirations of solo parent- teachers as revealed by their joys, groans, and hopes. Participants of the study were seven (7) solo parent-teachers who were individually interviewed. Quantitative content analysis was applied to the interview results to analyze the data. The unit of analysis used were words and phrases from the results of the interview. To gather the responses, the participants’ replies were recorded using a voice recorder and was later transferred and written in the interview form in verbatim. The frequency of occurrence of words were counted. The themes and sub-themes were determined by the researchers with the help of an expert. Findings of the study revealed that the sources of joys of solo parent-teachers are financial freedom; fulfilling one’s child needs; and day-off from work these motivators fall under the themes safety needs, esteem needs, and basic needs. Their groans are brought by poor financial/ resource management; stress and fatigue; and child discipline which are related with the themes on safety and security and esteem needs. On the other hand, solo parent-teachers hope for work- life balance; flexible schedule; and proper education for their child which are all associated with the themes safety and security needs and love and belongingness needs. The findings are useful in designing appropriate interventions, policies, programs, projects and activities that will help the solo parent- teachers to increase their productivity.*

Keywords – *solo parent-teachers, motivations, difficulties, aspirations*

INTRODUCTION

Life satisfaction is one of the factors that have significant impact on job satisfaction [1]. In the study of Cevik [2], it was found that teachers’ attitudes towards the teaching profession has a relationship with their life satisfaction. This is due to the view that people who are unsatisfied with their career will live unhappy lives or the individuals who are unhappy with their lives will cause them to be unsatisfied in their job [1]. This personal- professional life connection is affirmed by the study of Day, Kingtona, Stobartb, and Sammons [3] they revealed that teachers’ personal and professional lives, experiences, opinions, and job performance are connected with one another. This means that when a teacher is happy with his personal life it will have an impact to his professional life at the same time, if he is happy with his professional life it will have effect on his personal life.

With the plethora of literature and studies indicating the factors of career-life satisfaction, work and home conflicts exhibit the strongest effects. These work and home conflicts can be work-life conflict or alone. According to research, solo parents face life with more difficulty than those who have their partners

family- work conflict. The former takes place when career-related problems disturb family life while the latter happens when family-related problems interrupt the career life. Both conflicts produce unpleasant results to both family and work [1].

In the Philippines, one of the emerging problems that the family faces today is single parenthood. According to Barajas [4], many adults are experiencing single parenthood and that almost 50 percent of youngsters born today live with one parent only.

This was supported by a report released in 2012 by the Trade Union Congress of the Philippine. According to the report, there are almost 14 million single-parent Filipinos who are providing and supporting their families by themselves. These figures ballooned over the years as revealed in a more recent article by the Federation of Solo Parents. Their figures show that the number of solo- parents increased to 20 million in 2017 [5].

The increasing number of solo parents has raised awareness as more individuals need to face the responsibilities of parenthood living with them. Bianchias cited by Haudar, Guhao, and Rodriguez [6] mentioned that single parenthood is

hard because the sole responsibility of rearing the children rest on the single- parents.

Truly, solo parents are expected to double their efforts in their parental roles. They also need to perform dual tasks to compensate for the absence of their spouse. This situation poses an ordeal especially to those in the academe who are burdened with excessive workload. Teachers are indeed the most affected by this scenario. In the news article released by the Manila Bulletin, teachers' organizations are requesting the Department of Education (DepEd) to lessen their workload by limiting their "clerical tasks" which require additional responsibilities to teachers such as checking of students' work, computing of grades, monitoring of student progress, etc[7].

Having in mind the tremendous demands of teaching plus the responsibilities brought by solo parenthood, solo parent- teachers are indeed at a disadvantage. In a study conducted by Hazell [8]she found that one of the reasons why teachers leave their career is due to their assignment. Teachers found their workload to be "worse than expected", hence, they resign from the profession.

A similar idea was presented by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) thus it presented strategies to help the solo parents. According to the agency, "Solo parents are considered a vulnerable sector of society since raising children on your own is a herculean task, hence, the national and LGUs should provide them with the necessary assistance to help them cope with the challenges of solo parenthood"[9].

Identifying the problems encountered, motivating factors and aspirations of solo parent teachers are useful inputs in designing appropriate interventions that would help them to better perform their jobs, and in increasing their productivity as teachers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research paper analyzed the joys, groans, and hopes of solo parent- teachers by looking at their motivation, the difficulties they are facing and their aspirations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research paper used phenomenology as its research design. Horton [10]in his study entitled *Phenomenological Study on the Motivating Factors Influencing Participation in Tennessee's Governor's Academy for School Leadership* suggested the use of phenomenological study because it focused on one

specific small group of people with comparable characteristics. As a method, phenomenology describes a certain phenomenon by allowing the researcher to explore insights, viewpoints, understandings, and emotional state of those individuals who experienced or lived the phenomenon. It uses different methods such as dialogues, discussions, observation, interviews, conversations, meetings, analysis of texts such as journals, diaries, etc [11].

The researchers used phenomenology in this study because they believe that it is an effective approach to get intelligible human perceptions, in this case about solo parenthood of teachers, by letting them to penetrate the respondents' views, outlooks, and actions in order to acquire cognizance about their motivation, difficulties, and aspirations.

The study used the interview method to document the responses and content analysis to analyze the answers. Content analysis is a technique that utilizes similar and valid inferences through interpretation and coding of texts, and textual[12].

Roles of the Researchers

The study aimed to identify the joys, groans and hopes of solo parent-teachers in Sariaya West District. As researchers, it is their task to identify those solo parent teachers in the district as they would be the participants of the study.

The researchers are also tasked to gather data through an interview. An interview guide was also prepared and utilized by the researchers. Moreover, they were tasked to analyze, code, develop themes and interpret these responses based on the answers of the participants.

Research Participants

The participants of the study were the solo parent-teachers from Sariaya West District. A total of seven (7) participants were included in the research. These seven (7) identified solo parent- teachers were chosen through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used based on a criterion related to the research [7]. For the purposes of this study, participants should be solo parent male or female teachers who fall under the description of the Solo Parent Welfare Act of 2000^[13] which describes solo parent to be those who were left alone by their spouse/partner due to several reasons such as demise, neglect or separation who have at least child under their care.

It can be noted that there were only seven (7) participants in this phenomenological study who were chosen through purposive sampling. According to the

Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching [12] samples in phenomenology is small, usually 10 or less participants only. Mason [14] also recommended to have small number of participants usually five (5) to 25 participants for qualitative research like phenomenology.

Data Collection

In data collection, the interview method served as the main data collection activity in which an interview guide was used as the main interview instrument. According to the University of Twente [15], interviews are used to collect data from a small group of subjects. It is used when the researcher seeks to comprehend the interviewee's perspective of a phenomenon [16]. One tool which the interviewer can use is the interview guide. This guide allows the interviewer to freely explore important topics in depth. It also allows flexibility in the manner, order, and language of questioning [17].

To ensure the validity of the interview guide, the researchers invited validators composed of one (1) male solo parent-teacher, one female solo parent-teacher, and one (1) legal officer. This is to ensure the proper construction and appropriateness of the interview guide and to check that its contents are within the bounds of pertinent laws.

The interview was held in the central school in Sariaya West District. They were individually interviewed in one of the classrooms in the school which is free from any distractions. Since the participants are solo parent-teachers it was more convenient to meet at the place of their work. According to Calderon and Gonzales [18] the important consideration in selecting the place for interview should be quietness and convenience and there must be no distractions.

Prior to the actual interview, the participants were ensured that ethical considerations were properly observed by applying the key principles of ethical issues that should be considered in any research study [7]. These principles are reverence for people, magnanimity, fairness, harmony, reverence for groups and privacy.

During the interview, the researchers ensured that they: clarified to the participants the aims of the interview; discussed the confidentiality terms; described the interview format and specified the duration of the interview [18].

To gather the responses, the participants' replies were recorded using a voice recorder. Afterwards, the data

from the interview recording was transferred and written in the interview form in verbatim. These responses were then analyzed using data analysis that fit the study.

Analysis of Data

This research used the quantitative content analysis in analyzing the interview data. Quantitative content analysis is a research method in which structures of textual, visual, or auditory materials are thoroughly categorized and documented so that they can be examined [19]. In this research, it is the auditory material which is the interview response that was analyzed using quantitative content analysis. In content analysis, occurrence of words, phrases, subjects or concepts in a set of historical or contemporary texts [21] is quantified. Conducting quantitative content analysis involves designing the content analysis, defining units, sampling, recording and coding, and narrating [21].

In this study, quantitative content analysis was employed to analyze the joys, groans and hopes of solo parent-teachers. The unit of analysis used were words and phrases taken from the results of the interview. The frequency of occurrence of words were counted. This is to identify the patterns and array of themes (recording and coding) that emerged based on the responses of the participants. The themes and sub-themes were determined by the researchers through a consensus of opinions. They also consulted experts to determine the reliability of the coding keys. The interview data were then grouped and interpreted.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers believe that the participants were hesitant to share personal information due to personal reasons and might have withhold some data which might affect the research accuracy. To remedy this, several precautions were applied to clear their reluctances and establish trust. The researchers guaranteed that the conduct of the study was according to the ethical principles as described by Mack, Woodson, Macqueen, Guest, and Namey [22] namely: reverence for people, magnanimity, fairness, harmony, reverence for groups and privacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the joys of the solo parent- teachers as revealed by their motivation. The table also shows that the common motivation of the solo parent- teachers includes financial freedom; fulfilling one's child needs

and wishes; and day-off from work and paper works. These motivators fall under the themes: safety needs, esteem needs, and basic needs.

Table 1. Joys of Solo Parent-teachers

Motivation	f	Sub- theme	Theme
Financial Freedom	7	Financial matters	Safety and security
Fulfilling one's child needs and wishes	7	Parental duties	Esteem
Day-off from work and paper works	7	Rest	Basic
'Me time/ vacation'	6	Recreation	Safety and security
Material incentives	5	Financial matters	Safety and security
Acceptance and appreciation	4	Acceptance	Belongingness

According to Maslow, basic needs include food, water, warmth, and rest; esteem needs are those about reputation and sense of accomplishment; while safety needs has something to do with emotional and financial security, orderliness, freedom from fear, social constancy, property, health and wellbeing. Maslow also emphasized that people are motivated to realize these needs.

The results of the present study agree with the theory of Maslow. The findings also affirm that financial freedom, fulfilling one's child needs and wishes day-off from work and paper works are indeed motivators of teachers.

Meanwhile, Maslow also differentiated the needs as deficiency and being needs. Being needs are those needed for growth while deficiency are those arising due to scarcity and are explained to motivate people when they are unmet [23].

In a study conducted by Alam and Farid [24] entitled *Factors Affecting Teachers Motivation*, he found that only 24 percent of teachers agreed that they had reasonable salary, whereas 30 percent of teachers agreed that they received their salary on time. They also found that only 10 percent of teachers feel that the needs of life were available to them, while 90 percent of the teachers think that their economic status needs to be improved.

This illustrates financial scarcity of teachers, and according to Maslow, when there is scarcity people are motivated to do more in order for them to achieve their needs.

On the other hand, solo parent- teachers are also expected to support, rear, and guide their children.

Their first role is to take care of their child's needs and to provide them with proper food, fresh air, good lighting, enough sleep, recreation, and time [25]. This is all part of the social utility of parenthood. Social utility is defined as those benefits of a product or service that satisfy interpersonal needs. In a study it was found that teachers expressed higher levels of individual-focused motivation and social utility value as career motivators.[26]They are motivated to perform their roles as parents such as fulfilling their child's needs and wishes. This can be associated with Maslow's esteem needs or the need for respect and reputation which can be achieved when one meets the expectations of the society [24].

Meanwhile, according to the International Institute for Educational Planning (2019), teacher motivation and attrition are influenced by the teaching conditions. The article also emphasized that teachers' workload affects the motivation of teachers. This was confirmed in the study of Chughati, and Perveen [27] they found that public school teachers are more versatile and pleased with their working hours and working situations as compared to private school teachers. This is due to the fact that the work assignment of public school teachers is relatively low than their private school counterpart.

Comparatively, the results of the current study may imply that the solo parent- teachers are overloaded with work that is why they are motivated by day off from work and paper works. It can also be inferred that because of their work overload, solo parent- teachers are deprived of rest (basic needs) and as Maslow put it, deprivation motivates people when their needs are unmet.

Table 2. Groans of the Solo Parent-teachers

Difficulties	f	Sub- theme	Theme
Financial/ Resource Management	7	Financial matters	Safety and Security
Stress and fatigue	7	Health issues	Safety and Security
Child discipline	7	Parental duties	Esteem
Time management	6	Sense of accomplishment	Esteem
Childcare	6	Parental duties	Esteem
Filling the void	4	Emotional exhaustion	Belongingness
Social isolation	3	Feelings of alienation	Belongingness
Decision making	2	Critical thinking	Self-actualization

Table 2 presents the groans of the solo parent-teachers as shown by the difficulties they encounter. The table also displays that their difficulties are caused by financial/ resource management; stress and fatigue; and child discipline. These difficulties are related with safety and security and esteem needs.

According to Maslow, satisfying deficiency needs such as basic, security, social and esteem needs is essential to avoid unpleasant emotions or consequences [28]. He added that people do not feel anything if these needs are met but they become apprehensive or distressed if they are not [29]. This implies that once deficiency needs are unsatisfied, it causes people to feel unpleasant feelings such as anxiety.

Maslow emphasized that the moment an individual's physiological needs are met, the needs for security and safety become prominent. This is because people want order, certainty and control in their lives [23]. Some of these security and safety needs comprise: financial security, health and wellness, safety against accidents and injury [29].

Sadly, most of the teachers including the solo parent teachers face financial difficulties. Data from DepEd exposed that teachers from all the regions of the country have a total of P178 billion worth of loans from private lending institutions [30]. In a study, it was found that overspending is a problem that was most encountered by the teachers. Overspending is a learned behavior caused by emotional issues, family upbringing, or even lifestyle inflation [31]. The situation illustrates that teachers are not able to manage and control their finances well. Since safety and security needs are deficiency needs, failure to control and manage these causes unpleasant feelings to individuals.

Solo parent-teachers also said that stress and fatigue, which commonly results to burnout, gives them difficulty. Burnout is emotional, biological, and psychological tiredness caused by extreme and continued stress. It occurs when an individual feels too much emotional drain, and unable to meet constant demands. As the stress lingers, an individual begins to lose the interest and motivation to take on a certain role [32].

In the study of Wiley [33] it was found that teacher stress is brought by the expectations on the individual teacher. These expectations are usually related with their workloads which they describe to be heavy. In the Philippines, several groups have repeatedly asked DepEd to review the workload after teachers reported that extra tasks pushed them "beyond capacity." The

excessive paperwork, took time away from teachers in caring for their families, themselves, and teaching itself [34]. They even allot more time just to finish all the works assigned to them. In a study it was found that the longer the hours teachers are working, the more stress occasions are reported [35]. The higher the stress of a person, the more he develops unpleasant feelings.

Certainly, being a solo parent- teacher requires hardwork that sometimes causes anxiety and depression. As parents, they cannot escape the social expectations ascribed to parenthood. Social expectation is an assumed social norm for people and organizations of the society about what people should do [36]. For solo parent- teachers, they are expected to perform duties like child rearing that involves the enormous responsibility to nurture the children, to provide for their needs and to plan and establish their future [7]. In another study, it was also revealed that majority of the single mothers have difficulty in maintaining discipline among the children due to the absence of male figures in the family [37]. As parents, it is part of the social expectation that they rear their young to be good citizens and to discipline them when necessary. It is this social expectation that gives them most of the difficulty because they find it hard to discipline their child. Too much expectation may result to expectation disorders such as anxiety, phobias, panic disorder and generalized anxiety disorder [38].

Table 3 shows the hopes of the solo parent- teachers as revealed by their aspirations. The table also shows that the solo parent- teachers aspire for work- life balance; flexible schedule; and proper education for one's child which are all associated with safety and security needs and love and belongingness.

Table 3. Hopes of Solo Parent- teachers

Aspirations	f	Sub-theme	Theme
Work-Life Balance	6	Relationships	Love and belongingness
Flexible Schedule	4	Well-being	Safety and security
Proper education for one's child	4	Education	Safety and security
Salary increase	3	Financial matters	Safety and Security
Work Promotion	2	Sense of accomplishment	Esteem

Social needs are the needs for love, affection, belonging as well as for relationships with others (family, friends, companionship). These needs are

satisfied through pleasing and satisfying relationship with other people.

Relatedly, solo parent-teachers in this study aspire to meet the belongingness needs through work-life-balance. According to Fatima and Sahibzada [39] work life balance is positively associated with job resources, colleague support and partner support. Their definition of work-life balance is in a way relational as it involves other people particularly their partners and colleagues. Gray, Garcia, Crosier, and Fisher [40] strengthened this findings as their study reveal that single parents may be more inclined toward starting a new romance or sensual relationship as compared to partnered parents of other young children.

A similar finding was shown by Haudar, Guhao, and Rodriguez [6] they found in their interview that male solo parent- teachers still plan to remarry. This is due to the notion that being solo parent can be lonely at times. According to Brazelton and Sparrow [41] single parenthood is both rewarding and lonely job. There is frequently no grownup to share daily experiences with as well as the delights and dismay of raising children. Relatively, single mothers are reported to feel loneliness, helplessness, hopelessness, and lack of identity and confidence. Some find the responsibility of childcare hard to handle and to start a routine for her children [37].

It was mentioned that safety and security needs include shelter, job security, health and safe environments which have something to do with keeping people safe from harm. A person who does not feel safe in an environment will seek to find safety before he attempts to meet any higher level needs [42]. This might explain why most of man's decisions and actions are centered on maintaining or improving his conditions to keep himself safe from harm. [43]

The concept of safety and security is manifested by the solo parent- teachers through their aspirations of educating their child. In a study, it was revealed that the solo parent- teachers desire their children to finish studies [7]. Similarly, Jacob [44] in his study found that majority of parents have high anticipations for their children's educational attainment and wanted them to graduate from college. This is due to the parents' perception that the knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired through formal education strongly influence both employment and earnings [45] of their children.

On the other hand, the solo parent- teachers also aspire for a flexible working schedule. This schedule allows employees to work hours that differ from the

normal set-up. This flexible arrangement gives employees constancy in their schedule as well as opportunities to balance other commitments [46]. Also, flexible working hours facilitate work-life balance. Reduced stress and improved employee wellbeing are results of the work-life balance [47] which is correspondingly one of the aspirations of the respondents.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The results of the study showed that the joys of the solo parent- teachers are financial freedom; fulfilling one's child needs and wishes; and day-off from work and paper works. These are motivators that fall under the themes: safety needs, esteem needs, and basic needs. It can be inferred that the respondents feel happy and motivated when these needs are met. Hence, they strive more to ensure that these needs are achieved and maintained.

To further motivate the solo-parent teachers, the Department of Education (DepEd) and other stakeholders should think of programs that will enhance and reinforce these motivators. Doing such will increase their drive and will affect their performance and productivity.

On the other hand, the groans of the solo parent- teachers are financial/ resource management; stress and fatigue; and child discipline. These difficulties fall under the themes: safety and security and esteem needs. It can be said that solo parent- teachers find difficulties in personal, financial, and social management. They find it challenging to manage their own stress, money, and social expectations.

Hence, DepEd, with the help of its stakeholders should institutionalize programs that strengthen teachers' financial literacy, stress management, and parenting roles. Having these programs will help the teachers to become more self- sufficient while tending to their personal and parental roles. The programs will also help them to be more efficient and effective teachers.

Lastly, the aspirations of the solo parent- teachers are work- life balance; flexible schedule; and proper education for one's child which are all associated with safety and security needs and love and belongingness. It can be inferred that solo parents- teachers hope for a partner to provide emotional support and companionship as well as help in raising the children.

It is because of the above reason that the Department of Education should issue policies and

launch programs that will support solo parent- teachers to develop both professionally and personally.

The results and findings of the study is limited to identifying the joys, groans and hopes of solo parent-teachers in Sariaya West District. The study aimed to provide inputs to policy that will help the solo parent-teachers improve and increase their productivity.

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