

Lived Experiences, Challenges Encountered, And Coping Mechanisms of Grade 7 Students from Single-Parent Families: Basis for Counseling Program

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Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of Grade 7 students from single-parent families at Usab High School in the City of Masbate during School Year 2025–2026 and served as the basis for a proposed counseling program. Guided by a systems approach involving input, process, output, and feedback, the study employed a qualitative phenomenological design. Fifteen students who had lived in single-parent households for at least one year were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through expert-reviewed, semi-structured face-to-face interviews, audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, validated through member checking, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that the students assumed household responsibilities at an early age, developed resilience and independence, experienced emotional struggles related to parental absence, valued family support, and faced financial and social difficulties. Their major challenges included bullying and social exclusion, loneliness and emotional distress, limited financial resources, reduced parental participation in school activities, and difficulty balancing household and academic responsibilities. They coped through emotional release and self-soothing activities, faith and prayer, support from family members and significant others, emotional maturity, perseverance, and commitment to education. The study concluded that these learners experience significant emotional, social, financial, and academic difficulties but demonstrate resilience through personal strengths and available support systems. It recommends strengthening inclusive classroom practices, guidance and counseling services, anti-bullying initiatives, parental involvement, peer support, and the proposed counseling intervention program. The study supports SDG 4 on Quality Education and SDG 3 on Good Health and Well-Being by promoting inclusive education and psychosocial support for vulnerable learners. Its sustainability impact lies in strengthening educational, social, and institutional support systems that promote student well-being and continued participation in education.

Keywords: Academic Resilience, Coping Mechanisms, Lived Experiences, School Counseling, Single-Parent Families, Social Support, Student Well-Being

1. Introduction

Education is central to learners' personal, social, and professional development, yet students' academic participation and performance are shaped by conditions within their families, schools, and communities. Learners from single-parent families may experience financial limitations, reduced parental supervision, increased household responsibilities, emotional distress, and social difficulties. Nevertheless, they may also develop resilience, independence, perseverance, and adaptive coping mechanisms through parental care, extended-family assistance, teacher support, peer relationships, school programs, community involvement, and personal faith. This study explores the lived experiences, challenges encountered, and coping mechanisms of Grade 7 students from single-parent families at Usab High School in the City of Masbate. It seeks to understand how family circumstances affect their emotional well-being, social relationships, school participation, and academic resiliency. The study also intends to provide a basis for a counseling program that can help these learners manage family-related difficulties and school responsibilities.

Global educational inequalities continue to affect children's access to meaningful learning opportunities. Approximately 53% of children in low- and middle-income countries experience learning poverty or the inability to read and understand a simple text by age 10 (World Bank, 2022). In the Philippines, more than 75% of students were identified as low performers in mathematics, science, reading, and creative thinking based on the Programme for International Student Assessment 2022 results (EDCOM 2, 2024). These conditions reinforce the importance of Sustainable Development Goal 4, which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). Students from single-parent families constitute a particularly vulnerable group because family transitions may create financial instability, limited parental supervision, emotional distress, and additional caregiving or household responsibilities (Harripersaud, 2025). Nearly 8% of households worldwide are headed by single parents, approximately 84% of whom are mothers who frequently experience economic hardship and increased caregiving burdens (UN Women,

2020). Such conditions may limit children's access to educational resources and affect their motivation, concentration, attendance, and engagement. Despite these difficulties, many learners demonstrate academic resiliency, which enables them to adapt, recover, and continue pursuing educational goals in difficult circumstances (Pamisa & Cabigas, 2025). Filipino high school students from broken families have demonstrated resilience through peer relationships and adaptive coping mechanisms (Doctor et al., 2025). Emotional intelligence and optimism also contribute to resilience and academic adjustment (Morales, 2024), while teacher empathy and school belongingness strengthen academic resilience among learners experiencing family marginalization (Gonzalez, 2023). Family communication and social support are likewise important. Consistent parental communication can provide stability and promote academic persistence even in single-parent households (Lopez, 2024). Students who perceive support from teachers and guardians also tend to develop stronger adaptive coping strategies (Wang, 2025). Academic resilience is therefore not merely an individual trait but a capacity strengthened through supportive interactions among learners, families, schools, peers, and communities.

The literature consistently identifies academic, emotional, financial, and social challenges among learners from single-parent families. According to Bannawi et al. (2023), limited academic guidance, reduced monitoring, and emotional strain can weaken junior high school students' academic performance. Yang and Rai (2023) found that anxiety, loneliness, and emotional insecurity reduce concentration and classroom participation. Bago (2022) emphasized the effects of insufficient supervision, economic hardship, and household responsibilities, while Hiko et al. (2023) associated single parenting with weakened academic support and inconsistent discipline. Usman et al. (2025) similarly identified reduced parental involvement, inadequate learning resources, and emotional instability as barriers to achievement. Students from broken or disrupted homes may experience difficulty concentrating, reduced motivation, and emotional distress, as observed by Mabuza (2025). Haq and Khan (2024) explained that unstable home environments can interrupt learning routines and psychological readiness. Nkwuo et al. (2023) associated divorce with emotional imbalance and decreased interest in school, while Nseabasi and Eronwu (2024) linked divorce and separation with lower motivation, self-discipline, and academic engagement. Family involvement can either mitigate or intensify these difficulties. Gu et al. (2024) found that parental monitoring, academic assistance, and communication with teachers influence academic performance. Lasisi et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of parental assistance and encouragement in mathematics, while Awino et al. (2022) identified gender and socioeconomic status as factors affecting academic adjustment. Gitonga (2024) associated inadequate financial resources and limited parental attention with lower achievement. Bola et al. (2023) noted that learners may struggle to balance academic responsibilities with personal and emotional concerns, and Akintayo et al. (2026) found that family separation and divorce may reduce learning motivation, educational interest, and academic aspirations. Psychological and developmental concerns are also prominent. Li (2025) found that stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem interfere with academic participation and study habits. Sahib and Aldoori (2025) highlighted identity formation difficulties and emotional instability among adolescents, while Sivakumar and Choudhary (2024) associated inadequate emotional support with behavioral problems and reduced academic interest. Ali et al. (2024) found that supportive and responsive parenting strengthens children's coping strategies. Aprihatin et al. (2025) further identified social support, self-motivation, and adaptation to changing family arrangements as coping mechanisms among students whose parents had divorced.

Philippine literature shows that students from single-parent families often assume greater responsibilities and experience emotional distress, academic pressure, financial limitations, restricted parental time, and resource difficulties that affect their school and social engagement (Day et al., 2024; Juane and Alonsozana, 2024; Villarama et al., 2024; Dote and Garcia, 2025; Lanozo et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, resilience is strengthened through faith, family support, parental coping, teacher assistance, peer and community involvement, and intergenerational encouragement (Juane and Alonsozana, 2025; Duco et al., 2025; Mateo et al., 2025; Catedral et al., 2025; Perez et al., 2025). Although financial instability and limited educational resources can reduce parental monitoring and contribute to academic struggles (Dela Peña et al., 2024; Caballero and Reblando, 2023), teacher and peer support, mentoring, extracurricular activities, and guidance programs can improve confidence and reduce stress (Miranda and Lopez, 2024; Villareal et al., 2025; Del Mundo and Ramos, 2024). Community involvement, parental emotional availability, positive parental modeling, and spiritual values also promote coping, perseverance, and academic resilience (Ortega and Manalastas, 2023; Espino and Javillonar, 2025; Gutierrez and Dizon, 2024; Reyes et al., 2025). Foreign studies similarly associate single parenting with limited supervision, inadequate parental guidance, financial hardship, emotional instability, and lower academic achievement (Fotoh, 2021; Effiong and Essien, 2022; Tunde et al., 2024; Mtweve, 2023; Agha et al., 2026; Perera, 2021). However, mindfulness, coping flexibility, teacher empathy, extracurricular participation, and institutional assistance can lessen these effects and strengthen engagement and resilience (Kowalski and Lee, 2022; KP et al., 2025; Martinez and Gudiño, 2023; Rodriguez and Tomasello, 2020). Effective parental communication, expectations, self-discipline, school-community partnerships, educational policies, and home-school collaboration further support academic and behavioral adjustment (Oliveira and Santos, 2023; Khatri and Dutta, 2024; Griffin and Mathews, 2025; Vasquez and Hwang, 2025; Kim and Lee, 2021; Huang and Zhou, 2021; Dai et al., 2025). Maternal support, school connectedness, mother-child relationships, and teacher and peer support likewise serve as protective factors, consistent with the view that resilience develops through interactions among family, school, and community environments (Smith and Landon, 2020; Mampane, 2021; Ellis et al., 2020; Mesman et al., 2021; Lin, 2024). Philippine studies also identify teacher mentorship, digital peer support, student organizations,

financial literacy, expressive arts, parental and extended-family involvement, faith-based coping, emotional intelligence training, and school counseling as useful supports (De Castro and Ilagan, 2025; Maniego and Pascual, 2024; Rosario and Beltran, 2023; Tolentino and Guevarra, 2025; Lazaro and Domingo, 2024; Bartolome and Nolasco, 2023; Macaraeg and Bautista, 2023; Navarro and Enriquez, 2025; Reyes and Alvarado, 2025; Cruz and Dela Peña, 2024). Positive classroom climates, adaptive learning strategies, peer mentorship, extracurricular participation, faith-based involvement, time-management training, narrative therapy, constructive feedback, and community mentorship further promote self-efficacy, emotional stability, perseverance, and personal growth (Villanueva and Ortiz, 2023; Labrador and Ramos, 2024; Del Rosario and Medina, 2025; Jimenez and Bautista, 2023; Lopez and Aguilar, 2024; Perez and Domingo, 2025; Aquino and Mendoza, 2025; Abad and Soriano, 2024; Yap and Cruzado, 2024).

Globally, single-parent households are vulnerable to economic and caregiving pressures that may affect children's educational experiences. International studies demonstrate that family disruption can influence academic performance, emotional security, motivation, and social participation. However, they also show that learners can develop resilience when they receive consistent support from parents, teachers, peers, schools, and communities. Nationally, the Philippine government recognizes the welfare and educational rights of children from nontraditional family structures. The Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000 (Republic Act No. 8972), as amended by Republic Act No. 11861, provides educational assistance, social protection, and other forms of support to solo parents and their children. The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (RA No. 10533) likewise requires the provision of quality education responsive to learners' diverse needs and circumstances. Locally, the study is situated at Usab High School, a public secondary school along the Masbate–Milagros Road in Barangay Usab, City of Masbate. Established in June 2007, the school developed from temporary learning spaces into a public institution serving more than 700 students. It has 36 teaching personnel, five non-teaching personnel, 13 regular classrooms, and a two-story ICT and Science laboratory building. It also offers the General Academic Strand, Humanities and Social Sciences Strand, and Technical-Vocational-Livelihood tracks. The school serves learners from Barangay Usab and neighboring communities and experiences contextual concerns such as increasing enrollment, limited classroom spaces, and occasional flooding due to its low-lying location. The manuscript identifies 40 students from single-parent families across Grades 7 to 12, including 15 Grade 7 students. This population makes the school an appropriate setting for examining how family, school, personal, and community factors shape the experiences and coping mechanisms of learners from single-parent households.

The study is guided by a systems-oriented conceptual framework composed of input, process, output, and feedback. The input consists of the learners' lived experiences, challenges encountered, and coping mechanisms. The process involves qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews, participant validation, thematic analysis, and interpretation. The intended output is a counseling program that can help Grade 7 students develop positive strategies for managing family-related difficulties and school responsibilities. Feedback from the findings may support the continuing improvement of school policies, counseling services, learner-support programs, and future research. The framework recognizes that learners' responses to adversity are influenced by interacting personal and environmental factors. A single-parent family refers to a household in which a child lives with only one parent because of separation, parental death, or other circumstances (Link, S. 2024). Emotional regulation involves managing emotional states and responses to difficult situations (Psychology Today, n.d.). Goal orientation concerns the desire and capacity to improve and accomplish objectives (Cambridge University Press, n.d.), while perseverance refers to sustained effort despite difficulty or delay (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Self-efficacy concerns a person's belief in the capacity to accomplish tasks, regulate behavior, and remain motivated (Cherry, 2020). Social support encompasses helping behaviors provided by others (et al., 2025), while motivation involves internal and external forces that influence actions and behavior (Souders, 2019). Coping strategies are the thoughts and behaviors used to manage stressful internal and external demands (Stephenson et al., 2020). Parental involvement refers to parents' participation in their children's schooling (Bartolome et al., 2017). Teacher support includes academic assistance and encouragement that promote achievement, socio-emotional development, and well-being (OECD, 2025). Peer relationships are social connections among individuals of similar age, status, or developmental level (Reed, 2025). The school environment comprises the institutional atmosphere, resources, teacher quality, socioeconomic conditions, and relationships that influence academic performance and student well-being (ScienceDirect, n.d.). Together, these constructs explain how students' resilience develops through the interaction of personal strengths and external support systems.

Existing studies have extensively examined the effects of single parenting on academic performance and emotional adjustment. Research has also demonstrated the importance of parental and social support, coping strategies, and school environments in developing resilience, as shown by Kim and Lee (2021), Lin (2024), and Kowalski and Lee (2022). However, limited attention has been given to the specific lived experiences of junior high school learners from single-parent families in rural or smaller-community school settings. Much of the existing research focuses on academic outcomes, psychological variables, urban populations, or students from broader age groups. Consequently, less is known about how Grade 7 learners in a rural Philippine public school interpret their family situations, manage household and academic responsibilities, experience emotional and social difficulties, and identify sources of strength in their daily lives. There is

also limited context-specific evidence concerning how parental guidance, extended-family assistance, teacher encouragement, peer relationships, community involvement, faith, and personal motivation interact in supporting students from single-parent families at Usab High School. Understanding these factors is necessary because interventions developed for urban schools or other populations may not fully reflect the resources, challenges, and relationships present in the local setting. The study addresses these gaps by examining the lived experiences, challenges encountered, and coping mechanisms of 15 Grade 7 students from single-parent families. Rather than focusing exclusively on academic deficiencies, it recognizes both vulnerability and resilience. The findings are intended to inform a counseling program responsive to the emotional, social, familial, and educational circumstances of the participants.

The study primarily aligns with SDG 4 – Quality Education, which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). Students from single-parent families may face disadvantages arising from financial constraints, emotional difficulties, limited parental participation, household responsibilities, and restricted access to educational resources. Examining their experiences can help schools design support mechanisms that reduce barriers to participation, strengthen academic engagement, and provide more equitable learning opportunities. The study also has a supporting connection to SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-Being because it examines emotional distress, loneliness, stress, coping mechanisms, social support, and the potential development of a counseling program. Addressing these concerns can contribute to learners' psychosocial well-being and their ability to participate meaningfully in school. Its emphasis on family, school, community, and institutional support also reflects the collaborative principle of SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals. Effective assistance for vulnerable learners requires coordination among parents, guardians, teachers, guidance personnel, school administrators, division officials, and community stakeholders.

The study contributes to educational sustainability by identifying conditions that may help vulnerable learners remain engaged, motivated, and capable of completing their education. Understanding their experiences can support inclusive instructional practices, responsive school policies, and continuing learner-support services. It contributes to public health and psychosocial sustainability by addressing emotional distress, loneliness, anxiety, social exclusion, and coping. A counseling program grounded in learners' actual experiences can help schools provide preventive and developmental support rather than responding only after serious difficulties emerge. The research also supports socioeconomic sustainability because financial hardship, transportation limitations, insufficient school resources, and household responsibilities may restrict learners' participation. Recognizing these barriers can help institutions and stakeholders design assistance that reduces educational disadvantage. Its contribution to community sustainability lies in its recognition that students' resilience is strengthened through relationships among families, extended relatives, teachers, peers, faith communities, and barangay-based support systems. The study treats educational success as a shared responsibility rather than an outcome produced by learners alone. Finally, the study advances institutional and policy sustainability by generating context-based evidence that may guide school counseling, teacher interventions, parental-engagement strategies, anti-bullying measures, referral systems, and learner-welfare programs. Its multidisciplinary perspective connects education, psychology, family studies, social work, counseling, community development, and educational governance.

The study specifically seeks to determine the lived experiences of Grade 7 students from single-parent families, the challenges they encounter as members of single-parent households, the coping mechanisms they employ, and the counseling program that may be proposed from the findings. It recognizes that participants' experiences, difficulties, and coping responses may vary according to their family circumstances and available support systems. The inquiry is limited to 15 Grade 7 students from single-parent families enrolled at Usab High School during School Year 2025–2026. It focuses on their descriptions of family life, school experiences, emotional concerns, social relationships, household responsibilities, academic difficulties, and coping practices. It does not include students from two-parent families, learners from other grade levels, or students from other schools. The findings may help learners strengthen emotional regulation, motivation, goal orientation, perseverance, and coping. Parents and guardians may gain a clearer understanding of how communication and involvement influence academic resilience. Teachers and school heads may use the findings to create supportive classroom environments and appropriate school interventions. The Schools Division Office of the City of Masbate and other stakeholders may use the results in designing policies and programs for learner well-being. The study may also serve as a contextual reference for future research on family dynamics, counseling, school support systems, and academic resilience.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study used a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to explore and describe the lived experiences of Grade 7 students from single-parent families at Usab High School. According to Sandelowski (2000), qualitative research provides a comprehensive account of events using the everyday language of the individuals experiencing them without necessarily developing complex theories. Similarly, Lambert and Lambert (2012) explained

that qualitative research directly describes participants' experiences using information obtained from interviews, observations, or documents. Codes and meanings are derived from the collected data, making the approach appropriate for obtaining detailed descriptions of the participants' family situations, challenges, and coping mechanisms.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Usab High School, a public secondary school located along the Masbate–Milagros Road in Barangay Usab, City of Masbate, Province of Masbate. The school operates under the Department of Education Masbate City Division in Region V–Bicol Region and has School ID 321802. Established in June 2007, the school initially served approximately 100 Grade 7 students in temporary classrooms at Usab Elementary School. It later transferred to its current one-hectare site donated by the Usab Barangay Council. At the time of the study, the school served more than 700 learners with 36 teaching personnel, five non-teaching personnel, 13 regular classrooms, and a two-story laboratory building for Information and Communication Technology and Science. Usab High School offers junior high school and senior high school programs, including the General Academic Strand, Humanities and Social Sciences Strand, and Technical-Vocational-Livelihood tracks. The school was selected because 40 students from Grades 7 to 12 came from single-parent families, including 15 Grade 7 learners who constituted the participants of the study. Its diverse population, school programs, and community involvement provided an appropriate setting for examining the academic, emotional, familial, and social experiences of learners from single-parent households.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The participants consisted of 15 Grade 7 students from single-parent families who were enrolled at Usab High School during School Year 2025–2026. To protect their identities, the participants were assigned neutral codes from P1 for Participant 1 to P15 for Participant 15. These codes were used throughout the collection, transcription, analysis, and presentation of the data.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who had direct experience of the phenomenon being investigated. Creswell and Poth (2016) explained that purposive sampling involves selecting individuals who are knowledgeable about or have experience with the central issue, allowing researchers to obtain a deeper understanding of their perspectives and lived experiences. Similarly, Patton (2014) emphasized that purposive sampling focuses on information-rich cases capable of providing meaningful insights into the phenomenon under investigation. Participants were required to be currently enrolled as Grade 7 students at Usab High School during School Year 2025–2026. They must also have been living in a single-parent household for at least one year because of parental separation or the death of one parent. Fifteen students who met these criteria were included in the study.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide containing open-ended questions about the participants' lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms. Its flexible structure enabled the researcher to follow predetermined questions while asking follow-up or probing questions to clarify and deepen the participants' responses. According to George, T. (2023), semi-structured interviews combine predetermined questions with sufficient flexibility to explore participants' experiences while maintaining consistency in data collection. Similarly, DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) explains that semi-structured interviews are organized around open-ended questions that guide the discussion while allowing additional questions to emerge during the interview. The interview guide was reviewed by experts to determine the clarity, appropriateness, and alignment of the questions with the study objectives. Necessary revisions were incorporated based on their comments and recommendations before the instrument was administered.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection began after the research proposal had been finalized and approved by the Thesis Adviser and the Officer-in-Charge of the institution's Research, Development, and Extension. A formal communication letter was then submitted to the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent of the Department of Education Masbate City Division through the recommendation of the Senior Education Program Specialist for Planning and Research. After obtaining the necessary permission, the researcher coordinated with the identified Grade 7 students and their concerned guardians. The purpose and procedures of the study were explained before informed consent was obtained. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, their responses would remain confidential, their identities would not be disclosed, and they could withdraw from the study at any time. Face-to-face interviews were conducted using the semi-structured interview guide. The questions focused on the participants' daily and family experiences, the academic and social difficulties they encountered, and the strategies and support systems they used to manage stress and family-related concerns. Interviews were scheduled during the participants' free time to avoid disrupting their classes. Each session lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes and was conducted in a quiet and comfortable setting. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The recordings and transcripts were securely stored and properly labeled using participant codes. The researcher also observed non-verbal cues, including facial expressions, tone of voice,

and pauses, to provide additional context to the responses. A reflective journal was maintained to document these observations, emerging insights, and possible researcher biases. After transcription, the data and the researcher's initial interpretations were returned to the participants for content validation or member checking. This procedure allowed the participants to verify whether the transcripts and interpretations accurately represented their experiences.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis. The audio-recorded interviews were first transcribed verbatim, after which the researcher repeatedly read the transcripts to become familiar with the participants' accounts. Significant statements and meaningful segments related to the research questions were identified and assigned initial codes. Similar codes were then grouped into potential themes representing common patterns across the participants' experiences. These themes were reviewed and refined to ensure that they accurately reflected both the coded extracts and the complete dataset. The final themes were defined and named according to their central meanings and relationships with the objectives of the study. Related themes were organized into broader categories, and recurring patterns, similarities, differences, and relationships were examined. The resulting themes were used to construct a coherent narrative describing the shared and individual experiences of Grade 7 students from single-parent families. Member checking was used to strengthen the credibility and accuracy of the interpretations.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical standards in the development of the interview guide, recruitment of participants, collection of information, analysis of responses, and reporting of findings. The interview questions were formulated to avoid offensive, discriminatory, or inappropriate language. The study complied with Republic Act No. 10173, or the Data Privacy Act of 2012, and CHED Memorandum Order No. 15, series of 2019. Personal information was treated as confidential and used only for academic purposes. Participants' names and identifying information were not disclosed, and anonymous codes were used in the transcripts and research report. The collected data were securely stored and protected against unauthorized access, loss, or disclosure in accordance with the principles of transparency, legitimate purpose, and proportionality. Honesty, integrity, and transparency were also maintained throughout the research process. The data were collected, analyzed, interpreted, and reported without fabrication, falsification, or misrepresentation.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Lived Experiences of Grade 7 Students from Single-Parent Families

The participants' lived experiences were represented by five themes: early assumption of household responsibilities, resilience and independence amid family challenges, emotional struggles and longing for parental presence, appreciation of family support and parental love, and financial limitations and social difficulties.

3.1.1 Assumption of Household Responsibilities at an Early Age

The participants reported performing household responsibilities in addition to attending school. Their regular duties included washing dishes, cooking, doing laundry, cleaning the house, fetching water, and caring for younger children. These experiences showed that they assumed significant family responsibilities while managing their academic requirements. The findings indicate that students from single-parent families frequently perform dual roles as learners and household helpers. Their family circumstances require them to contribute to household management at an early age, which may develop responsibility and maturity but may also reduce the time and energy available for schoolwork. This finding is supported by Day et al. (2024), who revealed that students living in single-parent households experience significant adjustments in their daily lives, including increased responsibilities at home and emotional challenges that influence their academic engagement and social relationships in school. Similarly, Bago (2022) reported that increased household responsibilities placed on students limit their study time and academic focus. Bola et al. (2023) further found that students from single-parent families often face challenges in balancing academic responsibilities with personal and emotional concerns stemming from family situations.

3.1.2 Development of Resilience and Independence Amid Family Challenges

Despite their family circumstances, several participants reported that they continued attending school, adjusted to their situation, learned to help themselves, and persisted even when they had limited allowances or other resources. Their experiences reflected adaptability, self-reliance, and an increasing capacity to manage difficulties at home and in school. These responses demonstrate that exposure to family challenges can contribute to the development of resilience and independence. Rather than allowing their circumstances to prevent their participation in school, the participants learned to adapt and continue fulfilling their responsibilities. This finding is supported by Juane and Alonsozana (2025) found that high school students from separated families rely on coping mechanisms such as faith, family support, and personal resilience to overcome academic and emotional difficulties. Kowalski and Lee (2022) also found that mindfulness and coping flexibility play important roles in strengthening academic resilience among adolescents from single-parent families, enabling them to manage stress and maintain academic engagement.

3.1.3 Emotional Struggles and Longing for Parental Presence

The participants experienced sadness, worry, loneliness, and emotional pain because of parental separation, absence, or death. Some frequently thought about their family circumstances, while others expressed difficulty adjusting when the remaining parent was often away for work. The absence of one or both parents created a continuing sense of loss and longing for parental presence. The findings show that family disruption affects the participants' emotional security and may interfere with their concentration, motivation, and social participation. Their accounts indicate that parental absence is not only a structural family condition but also an emotional experience that influences their daily lives. This finding is supported by Yang and Rai (2023), who identified that family-related psychological problems such as anxiety, loneliness, and emotional insecurity negatively influence students' school performance by reducing concentration, classroom participation, and engagement in learning. Similarly, Villarama et al. (2024) revealed that parental separation has profound psychological effects on students, including feelings of abandonment, anxiety, and emotional instability, which negatively affect academic focus and behavior. Li (2025) further found that students from single-parent families experience stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem that interfere with academic engagement and participation in school activities.

3.1.4 Appreciation of Family Support and Parental Love

Although the participants belonged to single-parent families, many expressed happiness and gratitude for the care provided by their remaining parent, grandparents, siblings, and other relatives. They valued the affection, guidance, and protection they continued to receive and regarded these relationships as sources of comfort and security. The findings indicate that family completeness is not the sole basis of emotional stability. Consistent love and support from a remaining parent or extended-family member can help students accept their circumstances and maintain a positive outlook. This finding is supported by Espino and Javillonar (2025), who revealed that the emotional availability of single parents significantly affects adolescents' academic performance, with higher emotional support leading to better academic outcomes. Similarly, Catedral et al. (2025) found that single parents demonstrate resilience and adaptive coping strategies that positively influence their children's development and ability to handle academic challenges. Oliveira and Santos (2023) also found that effective parental communication patterns significantly promote academic resilience among adolescents from single-parent families.

3.1.5 Experiences of Financial Limitations and Social Difficulties

Some participants reported having limited daily allowances and insufficient resources for school needs. Others experienced bullying, social discomfort, or difficulty during school activities requiring parental attendance. These conditions affected their participation, confidence, and sense of belonging in the school environment. The findings demonstrate that students from single-parent families may experience interconnected economic and social disadvantages. Financial limitations restrict access to school resources, while parental absence and social stigma may intensify feelings of exclusion. This finding is supported by Dela Peña et al. (2024), who revealed that adolescents from single-parent families face socioeconomic barriers such as financial instability and limited access to educational resources, which contribute to their academic struggles. Correspondingly, Caballero and Reblando (2023) found that economic strain among single mothers affects their ability to consistently monitor and support their children's academic activities. Fotoh (2021) also revealed that financial difficulties and emotional stress contribute to lower academic achievement among learners from single-parent families.

3.2 Challenges Encountered by Grade 7 Students from Single-Parent Families

Five themes described the participants' challenges: bullying, discrimination, and social exclusion; emotional distress and loneliness; financial difficulties affecting academic participation; limited parental involvement in school activities; and difficulty balancing household and academic responsibilities.

3.2.1 Experiences of Bullying, Discrimination, and Social Exclusion

Several participants experienced teasing, bullying, insensitive remarks, unequal treatment, or exclusion because of their family circumstances, economic condition, or personal characteristics. Some became uncomfortable or remained silent when conversations concerned parents and complete families. These experiences reduced their confidence and affected their interactions with classmates. The findings indicate that the difficulties associated with single-parent households extend into the school environment. Bullying and exclusion can reinforce existing feelings of insecurity and make students reluctant to participate socially and academically. This finding is supported by Villarama et al. (2024), who revealed that parental separation has profound psychological effects on students, including feelings of abandonment, anxiety, and emotional instability, which negatively affect academic focus and behavior. Similarly, Li (2025) found that students from single-parent families experience psychological issues such as stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem that interfere with academic engagement and participation in school activities. Yang and Rai (2023) also identified that family-related psychological problems such as loneliness and emotional insecurity negatively influence students' classroom participation and overall engagement in learning.

3.2.2 Emotional Distress and Feelings of Loneliness

The participants reported sadness, crying, worry, loneliness, and difficulty concentrating because of parental absence, separation, or death. Some coped by crying or sleeping, while others continued to struggle with memories of their absent or deceased parent. Their emotional burdens affected their well-being and ability to focus in school. The findings show that family-related concerns can become persistent emotional stressors. Feelings of loss and loneliness may weaken academic concentration, motivation, and school adjustment when adequate emotional support is unavailable. This finding is supported by Mabuza (2025), who found that students from broken homes face emotional distress and decreased motivation, which hinder their academic progress and overall performance. Similarly, Nkwuo et al. (2023) revealed that divorce has a detrimental effect on students' academic performance because it often leads to emotional imbalance, lack of focus, and decreased interest in school activities. Li (2025) further found that students from single-parent families experience stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem that interfere with their academic engagement and consistent study habits.

3.2.3 Financial Difficulties Affecting Academic Participation

Some participants experienced difficulty paying for transportation, food, projects, and other school requirements. A participant reported missing classes because transportation money was unavailable, while others struggled to complete projects because of insufficient funds. These financial constraints limited regular attendance and full participation in academic activities. The findings suggest that financial instability directly affects access to education and the completion of school requirements. Economic hardship may also increase emotional pressure because students must manage academic expectations despite limited resources. This finding is supported by Dela Peña et al. (2024), who revealed that adolescents from single-parent families face socioeconomic barriers such as financial instability and limited access to educational resources, which contribute to their academic struggles. Correspondingly, Caballero and Reblando (2023) found that economic strain among single mothers affects their ability to consistently monitor and support their children's academic activities. Fotoh (2021) also revealed that financial difficulties and emotional stress contribute to lower academic achievement among learners from single-parent families.

3.2.4 Challenges in Parental Involvement and School-Related Activities

The participants experienced sadness, embarrassment, and inconvenience when a parent or guardian could not attend school meetings, events, or activities. Some had difficulty receiving information about their grades or school concerns because no adult was available to represent them. The absence of parental participation also made some students feel isolated during school events. The findings emphasize that limited parental availability affects both students' emotional experiences and communication between the home and school. Activities that assume the presence of two parents or an available guardian may unintentionally intensify feelings of exclusion among learners from single-parent households. This finding is supported by Gu et al. (2024), who found that parental involvement such as monitoring schoolwork, providing academic support, and maintaining communication with teachers serves as a key mediating factor that can either lessen or intensify the effects of single parenting on student achievement. Similarly, Huang and Zhou (2021) revealed that consistent parental involvement positively influences adolescent adjustment in non-intact families, improving both academic and behavioral outcomes. Bartolome and Nolasco (2023) also found that parental involvement positively influences academic confidence among solo-parented children, as active engagement in school-related activities strengthens students' belief in their academic abilities.

3.2.5 Struggles in Balancing Household and Academic Responsibilities

Some participants found it difficult to complete schoolwork because they regularly performed household chores. The simultaneous demands of domestic work and academic requirements created pressure, particularly when numerous tasks had to be completed at home and in school. The findings show that additional household responsibilities consume time and energy that could otherwise be devoted to studying, resting, or participating in school activities. Young learners may therefore experience physical and emotional exhaustion while attempting to meet both family and academic expectations. This finding is supported by Day et al. (2024), who revealed that students living in single-parent households experience increased responsibilities at home and emotional challenges that influence their academic engagement and social relationships in school. Similarly, Bago (2022) reported that increased household responsibilities placed on students limit their study time and academic focus. Bola et al. (2023) further found that students from single-parent families face challenges in balancing academic responsibilities with personal and emotional concerns stemming from family situations.

3.3 Coping Mechanisms of Grade 7 Students from Single-Parent Families

3.3.1 Emotional Release and Self-Soothing Strategies

The participants managed sadness and stress by crying, sleeping, resting, listening to music, walking, talking to themselves, or spending time alone. These activities allowed them to release difficult emotions and temporarily reduce the pressure associated with family and school problems. The findings indicate that students initially rely on accessible personal strategies to regulate their emotions. Although these practices may not resolve the causes of their difficulties, they provide temporary comfort and help them regain emotional balance. This finding is supported by Aprihatin et al. (2025), who

revealed that students with divorced parents develop coping mechanisms such as seeking social support, engaging in self-motivation strategies, and adapting to new family dynamics, which positively influence their learning motivation. Similarly, Ali et al. (2024) found that parenting styles in single-parent households are closely linked to children's coping strategies, highlighting that supportive and responsive parenting can help students manage stress effectively, while less supportive approaches may worsen academic and emotional difficulties. Kowalski and Lee (2022) also found that mindfulness and coping flexibility play important roles in strengthening academic resilience among adolescents from single-parent families, enabling them to manage stress and maintain academic engagement.

3.3.2 Reliance on Faith and Prayer for Emotional Strength

Several participants reported praying, seeking guidance from God, and relying on faith when confronted with emotional difficulties. Spiritual practices provided reassurance, hope, and strength when they felt unable to manage their problems alone. The findings demonstrate that faith functions as an important emotional resource among the participants. Prayer provides a sense of comfort and purpose that helps them endure family-related adversity and remain hopeful. This finding is supported by Juane and Alonsozana (2025), who revealed that high school students from separated families rely on coping mechanisms such as faith, family support, and personal resilience to overcome academic and emotional difficulties. Similarly, Reyes et al. (2025) reported that spiritual factors such as faith, discipline, and hope play an important role in strengthening the academic resilience of adolescents in single-parent families, helping them overcome challenges and remain motivated in their studies. Navarro and Enriquez (2025) also found that faith-based coping and moral education serve as important resilience factors among Filipino adolescents from disrupted families, helping them maintain positive attitudes toward education.

3.3.3 Seeking Support from Family Members and Significant Others

The participants sought help from parents, grandparents, siblings, relatives, friends, neighbors, and other trusted individuals. These individuals provided emotional encouragement, advice, financial assistance, companionship, and practical support during difficult situations. The findings show that supportive relationships reduce feelings of isolation and strengthen the participants' ability to manage personal and academic difficulties. Assistance from family members, peers, and other significant people supplements the support that may be unavailable because of parental absence. This finding is supported by Mateo et al. (2025), who revealed that peer and community involvement act as moderating factors that reduce academic distress among students from separated families by providing emotional and social support. Similarly, Duco et al. (2025) found that teacher support plays a crucial role in enhancing the motivation and resilience of students from broken families, helping them stay engaged in their studies despite personal challenges. Miranda and Lopez (2024) also reported that peer and teacher support significantly predict academic confidence among high school students from single-parent households.

3.3.4 Development of Resilience and Emotional Maturity

Several participants believed that their experiences had made them stronger, less emotionally reactive, and more capable of confronting problems independently. They reported becoming more mature, self-confident, and prepared to handle difficulties as they adjusted to their family circumstances. The findings indicate that repeated exposure to responsibilities and adversity contributed to personal growth and adaptability. The participants did not simply endure their family situations but gradually developed emotional strength and independence. This finding is supported by Day et al. (2024), who revealed that students living in single-parent households experience significant adjustments in their daily lives, including increased responsibilities at home and emotional challenges that influence their academic engagement and social relationships in school. Similarly, Gutierrez and Dizon (2024) found that parental modeling fosters resilience among children of single parents, influencing their positive attitudes toward education and perseverance in school. Kowalski and Lee (2022) also found that mindfulness and coping flexibility strengthen academic resilience among adolescents from single-parent families by helping them manage stress and remain academically engaged.

3.3.5 Perseverance and Determination Toward Education and Life Goals

The participants remained committed to studying despite lacking allowances, experiencing financial hardship, or confronting emotional and social difficulties. They regarded education, hard work, discipline, and future aspirations as reasons to continue. Some drew inspiration from their parents, while others ignored negative comments and focused on completing their education. The findings demonstrate that educational aspirations serve as an important coping mechanism. The participants viewed education as a means of improving their future circumstances and eventually assisting their families. This finding is supported by Reyes et al. (2025), who reported that spiritual factors such as faith, discipline, and hope strengthen the academic resilience of adolescents in single-parent families, helping them remain motivated in their studies. Similarly, Perez et al. (2025) found that daughters raised by single mothers exhibit strong educational motivation driven by intergenerational resilience and parental encouragement. Khatri and Dutta (2024) also revealed that parental expectations and self-discipline are key factors influencing academic success among adolescents in single-parent households.

3.4 Synthesis of the Findings

The findings collectively show that the participants' experiences involved both vulnerability and resilience. Their family circumstances exposed them to emotional distress, financial limitations, social exclusion, limited parental involvement, and competing household and school responsibilities. At the same time, these experiences encouraged the development of responsibility, independence, emotional maturity, perseverance, and appreciation for available family support. The three major areas were closely connected. The challenges arising from single-parent family life shaped the students' daily experiences, while their coping mechanisms helped them manage these conditions and remain engaged in education. Emotional release, spirituality, supportive relationships, personal resilience, and educational determination functioned as complementary resources. The results therefore indicate the importance of coordinated family, school, peer, and community support in addressing the emotional, social, and academic needs of Grade 7 students from single-parent families.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

Grade 7 students from single-parent families experience early household responsibilities, financial limitations, emotional distress from parental absence, bullying and social exclusion, limited parental participation in school activities, and difficulty balancing academic and domestic obligations. Despite these challenges, they develop responsibility, independence, resilience, emotional maturity, and appreciation for the support of their remaining parent and extended family. They manage their difficulties through emotional release and self-soothing activities, faith and prayer, assistance from family members and significant others, personal resilience, and perseverance toward completing their education and achieving a better future.

Teachers should maintain a supportive and inclusive learning environment, monitor students' emotional well-being, encourage participation, and provide activities that promote socio-emotional learning and resilience. School administrators should strengthen guidance and counseling services, anti-bullying initiatives, mental health awareness activities, and other student-support programs, while counselors should conduct regular counseling sessions, peer-support activities, and coping-skills training. Single parents and guardians should maintain communication, provide emotional support, and remain involved in their children's education despite financial and time constraints. The proposed counseling intervention program should be implemented to address the students' emotional, social, academic, and psychological concerns and help them manage family-related difficulties and school responsibilities. Future studies may include larger populations, compare learners from different family structures, and examine the relationship between coping mechanisms and academic performance.

The study was limited to the lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of 15 Grade 7 students from single-parent families enrolled at Usab High School during School Year 2025–2026. It excluded students from two-parent families, learners from other grade levels, and students from other schools. As a qualitative phenomenological inquiry, it focused on participants' descriptions and did not use quantitative measurements or statistical analysis; therefore, the findings are specific to the participants and context of the study.

Compliance with ethical standards

The study complied with institutional ethical standards, Republic Act No. 10173, and CHED Memorandum Order No. 15, series of 2019, with the necessary institutional and school-division approvals secured before data collection. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from the participants and their guardians, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were protected through participant codes and secure data storage. The researcher declares no conflict of interest, assumes responsibility for the originality and accuracy of the work, properly acknowledges all contributions, and observes applicable copyright and authorship requirements.

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