

Academic Performance Of Learners Of Dysfunctional Families In Selected Primary Schools In Eswatini

Mkhumbulo Ndlovu

Eswatini Medical Christian University, Department of Psychology.

Abstract

A healthy family nurtures and socializes children, provides material and emotional support as well as harnessing the overall well-being of its members. Dysfunctional families fall far below meeting this basic expectation. There has been a general observation that the traditional nuclear family consisting of two heterosexual biological parents is gradually dwindling. This study explores the academic performance of learners in dysfunctional families in selected primary schools in Eswatini. The study employs a qualitative multiple case study design embedded in the interpretative paradigm data. Data was collected through interviews, from teachers to understand the learners from dysfunctional families. Data was analysed thematically using the themes that emerged from the participants' responses. The study findings reveal that learners from dysfunctional families are at increased risk for academic failure compared to learners from functional families. The study also identified several factors that contribute to the academic struggles of learners from dysfunctional families, including stress, anxiety, lack of support, and low self-esteem. The study concludes by recommending interventions aimed at improving family functioning and providing support to learners from dysfunctional families.

Keywords: *dysfunctional families, academic performance, self-esteem, coping mechanisms*

Date of Submission: 06-11-2023

Date of Acceptance: 16-11-2023

I. Introduction and background

Over the past decade, dysfunctional families have become more common than the “nuclear family” which consists of a mother, father, and children. More common, is the presence of a variety of dysfunctional families that are headed by mothers, fathers, and even grandparents who raise their grandchildren. Despite this dynamic becoming more popular, children who are raised apart from one or more biological parents experience disadvantages in more ways than one. The children are more likely to drop out of high school, less likely to attend college, and less likely to graduate from college than children who are raised by both of their biological parents (McLanahan & Schwartz, 2020). On the other hand, the nuclear family has advantages for the children that include better financial stability, the development of strong support systems for children, and consistency in raising children from established daily routines. Importantly, children must be provided with education despite the family structure they are coming from. Overland (2012) reports that education is a cornerstone of personal development and social progress, catalysing individual growth and collective advancement. In Eswatini, as in many other nations, primary education is the foundation upon which future academic and life achievements are built. However, the quality of this foundation can be significantly affected by the family environment in which a child grows. In Eswatini, as in many parts of the world, some learners face the immense challenge of coming from dysfunctional families, where they encounter obstacles such as domestic strife, financial instability, and a lack of emotional support. Dysfunctional family dynamics can exert a profound influence on the academic performance of these learners. Dysfunctional family structures encompass a wide range of issues, including but not limited to parental conflict, single-parent households, financial strain, substance abuse, and a lack of emotional or psychological support. Each of these factors has the potential to disrupt a child's educational journey, affecting their attendance, engagement, and academic achievements (Afifi, 2013).

Academics are one of the most important aspects of a student's life; with good grades, students can get into universities, which allow them to earn degrees to obtain jobs that they want. If the relationship between the student's parents is unstable and filled with conflict, this can alter the student's academic performance (Afifi, 2019; Brown, 2020; Overland, 2018). However, the relationship between family backgrounds in academic performance has received only limited attention both on theoretical and empirical grounds. One of the few works in the theoretical literature that takes into account family background is a paper by Ng'ang'a (2018) who compared a standard grading system to a competitive grading system in terms of the level of student effort each family was able to motivate and showed that the family systems' relative advantage depended crucially on the nature of the

family background distorting academic achievement. Ng'ang'a (2018) further showed that when leisure is a normal good and students are given monetary rewards by their parents unrelated to their academic performance they become less diligent. Brown (2020) however focused on the motivation that families provide to students in terms of monetary rewards. This therefore creates a gap in other ways that family background influences the performance of students. A dysfunctional family is a very important social issue that can affect a child's academic success. Children who are raised in a single-family home are at risk of not reaching their full potential. Students within our educational system encounter many challenges in their family lives that they bring with them into the classroom. Udansky and Wolf (2020) identified single parenting as a major problem on the rise. Single Parent is a common phenomenon in the community today but still represents a major life stress for the individuals involved, with potentially strong negative consequences for the mental and physical health of all members of the family. The effect of dysfunctional families on children's academic performance has been the subject of research attention for several decades and has long been viewed as the cause of a range of serious and enduring behavioral and emotional problems in children (Kelly & Emery, 2018).

It may be important to highlight that a dysfunctional family is a family unit in which the relationships, communication, and interactions among its members are marked by consistent and significant patterns of discord, instability, and dysfunction (Brown, 2020). These patterns often lead to emotional, psychological, and sometimes physical distress for family members, impacting their well-being and overall quality of life. Dysfunctional families may exhibit a range of harmful characteristics, such as chronic conflict, poor communication, abuse (emotional, physical, or substance-related), neglect, a lack of support, and unhealthy or dysfunctional roles assigned to family members. Dysfunctional family dynamics can hinder the development of its members, affecting their emotional and psychological growth, and relationships, and often leading to various challenges in different aspects of life. The concept of a dysfunctional family is relative, as what may be considered dysfunctional in one cultural or societal context may not be the same in another. Understanding the dynamics at play and the extent of the impact is essential for designing effective interventions and support mechanisms that can mitigate the challenges these students face. This study seeks to explore the academic performance of learners in dysfunctional families within selected primary schools in Eswatini. By investigating the challenges these students encounter, the study aims to identify areas where targeted interventions and support can help bridge the gap in their educational achievements, ultimately contributing to more equitable educational outcomes for all learners in Eswatini. In light of the foregoing, the following objectives were pursued:

- To identify living conditions experienced by learners in dysfunctional families.
- To explore ways in which dysfunctional family living conditions shape the behaviour of learners.
- To determine how learners from dysfunctional families perform in their academic work.
- To recommend strategies that can be adopted to support learners from dysfunctional families.

II. Problem Statement

Effective learning and a conducive family environment contribute to positive learning outcomes for students. Dysfunctional family dynamics, which can manifest in various forms, create an environment that may not be conducive to effective learning and personal development for learners. McLanahan and Schwartz (2020) note that external factors such as family dysfunction can profoundly impact a child's ability to succeed academically. These factors may include unstable home environments, limited emotional and psychological support, financial hardship, and exposure to domestic strife and substance abuse. It is important to understand these factors in line with the dysfunctional family and how they contribute to the academic performance of learners.

III. Significance of the Study

This study addresses a critical issue affecting learners in Eswatini, focusing on those facing dysfunctional family environments. Dysfunctional family environments can take a toll on the mental and emotional well-being of learners (Afifi, 2019). The study's insights may lead to better mental health support within schools, helping students cope with the stressors they face at home and fostering a more conducive learning atmosphere. Importantly, academic success is closely tied to future socio-economic prospects and by improving the educational outcomes of learners from dysfunctional families, this study indirectly contributes to breaking the cycle of poverty and social disparities, thus benefiting the broader Eswatini society. The findings from this study may inform educational policymakers on intervention programs and support mechanisms that may be put in place to assist learners in dysfunctional families, thereby enhancing their chances of academic success in Eswatini. The research may further prompt community and family discussions on the importance of support structures for learners. It can encourage communities and families to take a more active role in nurturing the educational development of their children. This study adds to the body of knowledge on the influence of family dynamics on academic performance, especially in the context of Eswatini providing a reference point for future research on similar topics in the region and beyond. This study's significance is far-reaching as it encompasses educational, social, and economic

dimensions. It aims to address a pressing issue; dysfunctional family and learner performance while contributing to the betterment of the educational experiences of learners. By understanding the challenges faced by learners in dysfunctional families and implementing appropriate support measures, the study plays a critical role in building a more accommodating education system in the country.

IV. Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Wegscheider's (1981) family role identification theory. The theory proposes that there are four core roles of children from dysfunctional family systems: (a) the hero, (b) the lost child, (c) the mascot, and (d) the scapegoat (Brown, 2021).

According to Wegscheider (1981), the 'hero' child is a role played by a child who rises against the family situation and assumes a position of responsibility which ordinarily should have been carried out by the parent. Such individuals attempt to appease other family members for external validation and act in ways that look good and exemplary. The hero tends to base much of their sense of self on their abilities to achieve. As a result, they can develop internalized guilt, shame-based cognition, and an intense fear of failing, in addition to lacking personal boundaries with other family members, especially their parents (Brown, 2021).

The 'lost' child, is often referred to as the "unseen child" or the "passive child." This child can go unnoticed in the family due to acute withdrawal from social interactions (Brown, 2021). As a result, this child harbours a deep sense of loneliness and quietness. They are often ignored and feel deeply left out. Consequently, the lost child often develops the behavioural pattern of a loner, repressing their emotions and thus seek comfort in animals, material possessions, or even crafts. The lost child has concluded that interpersonal relationships are scary and unpredictable; however, focusing attention on non-humans or objects feels like a safe way to foster a sense of connection and relationship.

The 'mascot' child typically expresses the repressed emotions of other members of the family, assuming the role of the clown or comedian in the family system (Brown, 2021). The mascot child tries to find a way to ward off family tensions in a positive way. The mascot utilizes comic relief to navigate away from family issues and to conceal their true feelings of inadequacy, emotional distress, and underlying fear (Brown, 2021). As a result of their continuous denial of personal needs and emotions, the mascot child can develop into a passively compliant adult, reliant on others to lead them and make choices on their behalf. This mascot role can lead to immature behaviours, attention seeking, and difficulties in establishing autonomy and self-confidence.

Finally, the 'scapegoat' child is a role often played by the child who opposes familial values and opinions and acts directly against the accepted norms of the family in a defiant way (Al Abaidi, 2017). They are often referred to as the "black sheep" because of their tendency to behave in unique ways; often contradictory to family norms. Usually, the scapegoat serves as a "release valve": they become the central bearer of stress within the dysfunctional family system and are forced to become the scapegoat for all that is wrong with the wider family system. Parents within the dysfunctional family system will often avoid a sense of accountability for their own maladaptive behaviours or thoughts by focusing on the perceived flaws of the scapegoat child. Internally, the scapegoat child harbours feelings of shame and inadequacy due to the pervasive rejection and criticism they absorb from the family system and beyond.

V. Literature review

The optimal conditions for healthy development arise in those families which create a high degree of mutuality between parents and between parents and children (Stiver, 1990). A dysfunctional family on the one hand is one largely characterized by conflict, waywardness, instability and neglect of parental responsibilities (Brown, 2021). In short, Black (1981) identified three "family laws" which govern dysfunctional family systems: (a) do not talk, (b) do not trust, and (c) do not feel. Generally, it has been observed that children brought up under such family systems tend to develop coping mechanisms in order to protect themselves from the fear, hurt and guilt. In most cases these coping mechanisms are maladaptive and exert a strain on their development. A dysfunctional family system encompasses a broad range of family structures and no two cases are identical. These entail: single parent families (due to divorce, death of one parent or bearing children out of wedlock); one or both parents exert a strong authoritarian control over the children; one or both parents have compulsive behaviour(s), for example, an addiction to substances, sex, gambling, or overwork; domestic violence is present within the home between the parents, or toward siblings, including emotional abuse and physical abuse; and one or both parents exploit the children and treat them as possessions not worth of love (Al Ubaidi, 2017 & Brown, 2021).

Living conditions experienced by learners in dysfunctional families

Children brought up under dysfunctional family systems experience deprivation in a number of ways. According to Fotoh (2021), children living under such a family structure hardly receive the necessary attention they require, suffer deprivation, and denial of some rights and opportunities. They are more vulnerable to anti-social behaviours and abuse. Maposa, Zirima and Mushauri (2020) also opines that children from dysfunctional

families become the casualties of the conflict and violence that transpires between the parents. Further, it is argued that regardless of age, children from dysfunctional families deeply resent the strains and difficulties which arise in long-held family celebrations, traditions, daily rituals, and special times, and rate these changes as major losses (Pett, Long & Gander, 1992 cited in Maposa, Zirima & Mushauri, 2020). Children growing up in dysfunctional families are exposed to a dysfunctional hierarchy culminating from parents' failure to exercise their leadership responsibility in a family (Kilpatrick & Holland, 2006). Such a scenario is a result of substance abuse, mental illness, youthfulness, marital discord, work-related fatigue, and lack of parenting skills.

Children of neglectful parents are denied the structure and nurturance that they require in order to feel safe and competent (Kilpatrick & Holland, 2006). Parental guidance is a critical aspect for proper upbringing of children. Without it, children are likely to fumble through trial and error; experiencing frequent and repeated failures that ultimately contribute to a negative self-image associated with incompetence (Gallop, 2002).

Children from dysfunctional families suffer physical, psychological and sexual abuse. Abuse of parental power takes place when parents use punishment as a means to express their own anger and resentment rather than as an instrument for appropriately directing their children's behaviour (Paylo, 2005). Children experiencing abuse tend to grow up with internal anger which may be maladaptively displaced in violent ways to weaker targets in the course of life. According to Brown (2021) children from dysfunctional families experience trauma from home and internal conflict arises when the child realises that the person who is meant to protect and care for them is actually the one causing harm to them.

Dysfunctional families in shaping the behavior of learners

Dysfunctional families can significantly shape the behavior of learners in various ways, as the family environment plays a crucial role in a child's development and socialization (Bineeva, 2018). Astoyants, (2015) observes that dysfunctional families often lack emotional support and may be marked by constant conflict or neglect. Children growing up in such environments may develop emotional and psychological issues, including low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and feelings of insecurity. These emotional challenges can impact their behavior, leading to withdrawal, aggression, or other coping mechanisms.

Udansky and Wolf (2020) argue that children learn by observing and imitating the behavior of family members, particularly parents. In dysfunctional families, if children witness negative behaviors, such as substance abuse, aggression, or poor communication, they may adopt these behaviors as their own. Additionally, dysfunctional families may exhibit unhealthy conflict resolution patterns, such as avoiding issues or resorting to aggression. Learners from such families may struggle with resolving conflicts effectively, which can lead to problems in peer relationships and school. The emotional turmoil and instability in dysfunctional families can hinder a child's ability to concentrate and engage in school. Learners from dysfunctional families may struggle academically, leading to behavior issues related to academic performance, such as truancy or disinterest in schoolwork. McLanahan and Schwartz (2020) add that learners may develop maladaptive coping mechanisms to deal with the challenges they face in a dysfunctional family. These mechanisms might include substance abuse, self-harm, or risky behaviors, which can manifest as behavior problems in school. Sharing the same sentiments Davljatova, (2014) argues that dysfunctional families often lack healthy communication and socialization patterns. Learners from such families may struggle with social skills, leading to issues with peer relationships, bullying, or social isolation. Moreover, dysfunctional family environments can lead to attachment issues, including difficulty forming healthy and secure attachments with peers, teachers, or caregivers. This can affect behavior both at home and in school (Astoyants, (2015).

Learners from dysfunctional families and academic performance

Learners belonging to dysfunctional families can exhibit a wide range of performance outcomes in their academic work, extracurricular activities, and other aspects of their lives. The impact of a dysfunctional family on a learner's performance can vary significantly depending on the specific circumstances and the learner's coping mechanisms.

Underperformance in academics and coping mechanisms

Afifi, (2019) argue that many learners from dysfunctional families may struggle with academic performance due to the emotional and psychological stress they experience at home. This can result in lower grades, missed assignments, and a lack of engagement in schoolwork. Amato, Patterson and Beattie (2015) remarks that learners may display inconsistent academic performance, with periods of high achievement followed by significant drops in grades. The unpredictable nature of family dysfunction can disrupt their focus and motivation. Some learners may develop coping mechanisms to deal with the stress and challenges they face at home. These mechanisms can be either positive or negative. Positive coping mechanisms, such as seeking support from teachers or engaging in extracurricular activities, can help maintain academic performance. Negative coping mechanisms, like substance abuse or risky behaviors, can harm academic performance.

Extracurricular activities and motivation

Participation in extracurricular activities can vary with learners. Some learners may actively engage in sports, clubs, or arts, using these activities as a way to escape their family environment. Others may avoid extracurricular activities due to a lack of time, motivation, or resources. The level of motivation and self-efficacy can differ among learners. Some may lack motivation and self-belief, leading to a decline in academic performance. Others may exhibit a strong desire to excel academically as a means of transcending their family circumstances. Such is true for the hero child as articulated in Wegscheider's (1981) family role identification theory.

Resilience and overachievement

Some learners from dysfunctional families exhibit remarkable resilience and overachievement Astoyants, (2015). These may use their challenging circumstances as a source of motivation to excel academically and participate in numerous activities to prove themselves. It is important to recognize that each learner is unique, and the impact of family dysfunction can vary widely. Teachers, school counselors, and support staff play a crucial role in identifying learners who may need extra support and providing the necessary resources and interventions to help them succeed academically and personally.

Possible strategies for supporting learners from dysfunctional families

A number of strategies are available for creating optimum conditions for learners from dysfunctional families to thrive at school and in life.

- 1) Parental involvement: Schools should encourage parents from dysfunctional families to involve themselves in their children's academic work (Maposa, Zirima & Mushauri, 2020). The office of the head teacher can be used to arrange for regular meetings between teachers and parents.
- 2) Guidance and counselling: Schools should have a strong guidance and counselling unit to help all the children with family problems and also create a link between the home and the school (Fotoh, 2021). Through effective counselling, learners get an opportunity to find closure in the issues affecting them in a safe environment. Ultimately, this service will assist deal with mental health issues affecting learners from dysfunctional families.
- 3) Individualised education programmes: schools should put in place individualised support programmes to assist children emerging from single parent homes to perform at par with their colleagues staying with both parents (Maposa, Zirima & Mushauri, 2020)
- 4) Parental education: Using various platforms, media and stakeholders, parents can receive information and training on good parental practices, child rearing challenges, parental responsibilities and tips on how to constructively interact with children (Minullina, 2018). Parents can also be advised on what they can do to stay together and provide all necessary school needs for their children and get more involved in their school activities (Fotoh, 2021).
- 5) Child protection: under severe cases of neglect and child abuse, the government through the Social Welfare and child protection department can investigate, assess and determine whether the child can remain safely in the home or be placed in the custody of the state (Zastraw & Kirst-Ashman, 2013). Children suffering from physical and sexual abuse may also be referred for medical treatment.
- 6) Family support mechanisms: dysfunctional require specialised support in order to reform and become functional. This entails strategies such as family therapy, support groups, couples counselling and individual counselling (Zastraw & Kirst-Ashman, 2013).

VI. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research utilises words or visual images rather than numbers as the unit of analysis (Belle, 2016). It also uses thick-descriptions, holistic perspectives, small scale studies, to understand the meanings people have constructed with regard to their own experiences and world. Qualitative studies are thus evaluated for trustworthiness using a systematic approach that determines how well credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are satisfied during the preparation, data collection, organization, analysis, presentation, and interpretation of findings, as was the case in this study (Schlebusch, Makola & Ndlovu, 2022). The multiple case study design was used for the study. According to Fleming and Zegwaard (2018) multiple cases are used in situations where the researcher seeks to explore similarities and differences between cases. Data collected from different schools across the country was compared in order to draw similarities and differences between teachers' views on the impact of dysfunctional families on learners' academic achievement.

The study population consisted of 8 life skills orientation teachers from 8 schools across the country. Two schools were conveniently sampled from each of the four regions in Eswatini. Convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling that allows the researcher to select members of the target population that meet

certain practical criteria, based on easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, and/or the willingness to participate in the study (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Purposive sampling was used to identify and select participants for the study. Maree et al. (2016) posit that qualitative research, in general, makes use of purposive sampling, which is based entirely on the judgement of the researcher, in that, a sample is composed of elements that contain the most characteristic, representative or typical attributes of the population. Life skills orientation teachers are responsible for counselling learners various facing life challenges hence they were considered most appropriate information bearers in this regard. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data which were analysed and presented through thematic content analysis.

VII. Findings and discussion

Findings of qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews from Life Skills Orientation teachers are presented and analysed thematically. Themes are generated from the main research objectives that guided the study. In living up to the ethical consideration of anonymity, schools and participants were given codes for identification. The 8 schools are coded SA; SB; SC up to SH whilst participants are coded PA; PB; PC up to PH; where Participant A (PA) is Life Skills Orientation teacher at School A and so on.

Participants' general understanding of dysfunctional families.

It was considered appropriate to initially explore participants' understanding of what a dysfunctional family is. This was critical in establishing a common line of discussion at the beginning of the conversations with participants. In defining a dysfunctional family, participants viewed it as a family that is not functioning properly as a result of the absence of one parent due to death, divorce or separation. PB remarked: *"It is a family with one parent or no parent at all...or the one who is there is as good as absent."* Another perspective was highlighted by PE who defined it as: *"A family that is not operating the way it is supposed to, usually as a result of conflict, violence, addiction and irresponsible life style by one or both parents."*

Responses given by participants demonstrate an adequate understanding of dysfunctional families. These views are synonymous with Brown (2021) who argues that a dysfunctional family is one largely characterized by conflict, waywardness, instability and neglect of parental responsibilities (Brown, 2021). Also, literature has it on record that dysfunctional families have the following characteristics: single parent families (due to divorce, death of one parent or bearing children out of wedlock); one or both parents exert a strong authoritarian control over the children; one or both parents have compulsive behaviour(s), for example, an addiction to substances, sex, gambling, or overwork; domestic violence is present within the home between the parents, or toward siblings, including emotional abuse and physical abuse; and one or both parents exploit the children and treat them as possessions not worth of love (Al Ubaidi, 2017 & Brown, 2021). It was imperative therefore to venture into conversations with participants against an understanding that a dysfunctional family is broad based in character encompassing single parent families, child-headed families, negligent families, addictive parents and conflict-dominated families.

Living conditions experienced by learners from dysfunctional families.

The study established that learners of dysfunctional families undergo a myriad of unpleasant experiences that impact negatively on their development and wellbeing. Participants mentioned that learners from dysfunctional families experience conditions of poverty, lack of emotional and psychological care from parents, as well as vulnerability to all forms of abuse. PC indicated that: *"Children from such families are deprived of emotional and psychological care from parents."* In addition, PF remarked: *"Such children are prone to exposure to Gender Based violence and are also victims of sexual abuse from people close to their single parent."*

These views are consistent with Fotoh (2021) who emphasised that children living under a dysfunctional family structure hardly receive the necessary attention they require, suffer deprivation, and denial of some rights and opportunities. They are more vulnerable to anti-social behaviours and abuse. Maposa, Zirima and Mushauri (2020) also opine that children from dysfunctional families become the casualties of the conflict and violence that transpires between the parents. Effectively, children growing under such conditions cannot attain optimal development as genetically endowed in them. Learning cannot effectively take place when learners are traumatized by harsh living conditions at home. Dysfunctional families therefore present counterproductive conditions for learner development.

Dysfunctional families in shaping the behavior of learners

The findings revealed that there are many ways in which dysfunctional families can shape the behavior of learners. One way is through modeling. Children learn by watching the adults in their lives. If the adults in a child's life are constantly arguing, fighting, or abusing each other, the child is more likely to learn these behaviors and exhibit them in their own life. PD had this to say:

“A child who is constantly exposed to conflict and violence in the home may be aggressive and disruptive in school as teachers we see this in our learners and when you make a follow-up as a teacher you discover that the child’s home is modeling such behavior.”

Another way in which dysfunctional families can shape the behavior of learners is through attachment. Attachment is the emotional bond that a child forms with their caregivers. Children who form secure attachments with their caregivers are more likely to be confident, resilient, and well-adjusted. On the other hand, children who form insecure or disorganized attachments with their caregivers are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems. These mental health problems can in turn impact the child's behavior in school. PC had this to say:

“A child who is neglected or abused by their caregivers may be more likely to withdraw from social interactions and have difficulty trusting others”.

These findings were consistent with McLanahan and Schwartz (2020) who remarked that dysfunctional families can also shape the behavior of learners by creating a stressful environment. Children who live in stressful environments are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems. Stress can also make it difficult for children to concentrate and learn.

Learners from dysfunctional families and academic performance

The findings revealed that the family is a strong indicator of how well children will perform academically. This study found that the perceptions of the participants support the relevant literature on dysfunctional family and academic performance; learners from dysfunctional families underperform in their studies. The utterances by PE and PB are informative in this regard:

“Families are crucial in the academic performance of learners. I must confess that almost all learners from dysfunctional families underperform in their studies and the underperformance is coupled with so much undesirable behavior”

“Learners from dysfunctional families have difficulty with concentration and focus due to the stress and anxiety they experience at home.”

The findings on the relationship between the dysfunctional family and the academic achievement of students, were consistent to the fact that the family is a basic component that leads to academic success. A proper family structure and academic success are interrelated activities that have a profound effect on children’s lives (Owusu, 2020). PD stated:

“I believe that family has a great influence on students’ academic achievements. The more they are loved and accepted by their families, the more they learn and more knowledge they acquire which leads to success.” Additionally, PA remarked: *“Growing up in a dysfunctional family increases the risk of becoming a single parent as well as the risk of academic failure.”*

However, it was interesting to note that none of the findings indicated resilience and overachievement as a result of the dysfunctional family as indicated by the literature. There was a consensus from participants that learners from dysfunctional families underperform.

Possible strategies for supporting learners of dysfunctional families

Participants suggested a number of strategies that can be adopted to provide support to learners of dysfunctional families. Notably, participants proposed counselling and psychological service provision, tightening the enforcement of child protection laws and social work support mechanisms to learners. PG suggested that: *“The government must ensure that child protection laws are seriously enforced.....people continue to abuse children despite the presence of laws that forbid such practices.”* In terms of psychological support services, PH stated that: *“The Ministry of Health needs to deploy psychological counsellor to every local community to address and handle matters of abuse and neglect of children.”* Similar sentiments were echoed by PD who reiterated that: *“At school level, the school needs to engage psychologists and social workers to provide support services to the children.”*

In support of the above views, literature sources proposed that schools should have a strong guidance and counselling unit to help all the children with family problems and also create a link between the home and the school (Fotoh, 2021). Similarly, Zastrow and Kirsty-Ashman (2013) argued that under severe cases of neglect and child abuse, the government through the Social Welfare and child protection department can investigate, assess and determine whether the child can remain safely in the home or be placed in the custody of the state (Zastraw & Kirst-Ashman, 2013).

VIII. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study the following conclusions are drawn;

- Dysfunctional family may affect academic achievement.
- Learners from dysfunctional families may have lower academic achievement than learners from functional families.
- Dysfunctional families are more likely to model negative behavior and undesirable habits in learners.
- Counselling and psychological services are required for supporting learners and parents of dysfunctional families

IX. Recommendations

Based on the conclusion the following recommendations are made;

- There is a need to strengthen programs in schools that support learners from dysfunctional families.
- Schools should collaborate with community members and implement some interventions of supporting learners from dysfunctional families.
- Law enforcement institutions should do more to ensure that child protection laws are enforced.
- Parents should receive lessons on tips to effective parenting and harmonious living
- Rehabilitation programmes are required for parents with addictive habits and tendencies

References

- [1]. Afifi, D. (2019). Psychological Trauma Of Children Of Dysfunctional Families. *Future Academy*. 2018;45 (1):65-74.
- [2]. Al Ubaidi, J (2017) Cost Of Growing Up In Dysfunctional Family. *Journal Of Family Medicine And Disease Prevention*. Vol 3 (3) PP 1-6.
- [3]. Amato, P. R., Patterson, S., & Beattie, B. (2015). Single-Parent Households And Children's Educational Achievement: A State-Level Analysis. *Social Science Research*, 53, 191. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sres.2015.05.012>
- [4]. Astoyants, M.S. (2015) *Troubled Family: Problems And Ways To Overcome Them*. "Pegasus" Publishing House.
- [5]. Belle, L.J. (2016) *The Role Of Principals In Maintaining Effective Discipline Among Learners In Selected Mauritanian State Secondary Schools: An Education Management Model*. (Phd Thesis) Pretoria: University Of South Africa
- [6]. Bineeva, N.K. (2020). *Specificity Of Socialization In The Troubled Family Type*. Rostov-On-Don: "Pegasus" Publishing House.
- [7]. Brown, G.O (2021) *Healing Complex Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Clinician's Guide*. Cham: Springer Nature
- [8]. Brown, L. (2020). *Marriage And Child Well-Being: Research And Policy Perspectives*. *Journal Of Marriage And Family*. 2010;72:1059–1077
- [9]. Children: A Preliminary Study. *Indian Journal Of Psychological Medicine*, 39(4), 457.
- [10]. Davlyatova, S.V. (2015). *Social And Psychological Support In Dealing With Troubled Family*.
- [11]. *Russian Family: Problems And Development Prospects (The Experience Of The Rostov Region)*: Monograph. Novosibirsk: Publishing House Center Of Scientific Cooperation
- [12]. Development.
- [13]. Etikan, I. Musa, S.A And Alkassim, R.S (2016) Comparison Of Convenience Sampling And Purposive Sampling. *American Journal Of Theoretical And Applied Statistics*, 5(1):1-4.
- [14]. Fleming, J. And Zegwaard, K.E (2018) Methodologies, Methods And Ethical Considerations For Conducting Research In Work-Integrated Learning. *International Journal Of Work –Integrated Learning*, 19 (3):205- 213