

A Study of the Subjective Feeling of Single-Parent, Primary School Students about their Changes in Family Structure, and their Needs of Counseling

Abstract

This study was carried out with subjects as the divorced families and the parents there in of students in primary 4, 5 and 6 of a secondary school in Macau. A qualitative research method was adopted, in which survey questionnaires were used in the in-depth interviews of the parents and their off-springs in five divorced families. This study was concluded in four counselling sessions focusing on those five primary students' negative emotion of anger triggered by the divorces of their parents.

The major findings of this study are as follows.

1. The break-up of the family composition structure from the divorce.

In the course of restructuring, a single-parent family encountered adaptation problems which mainly included financial difficulty, physical and emotional adjustments as well as the children's education. These problems intensified especially in the early stage after the divorce. In particular, the divorced mothers usually faced problems when they had to be financially independent, adapting to physical and emotional changes, as well as teaching the children. On the other hand, the divorced fathers found it most difficult to handle work and family at the same time.

2. The negative emotion of the single parents.

In the control of their emotions, the single parents negatively suppressed their own emotions since they believed that a divorce was not something to be proud of. They refused to talk to others and in the worse scenario, they let off their negative feelings in their children. This in turn caused deeper suppression which could hardly be dissolved.

3. The negative emotion of the single-parent children.

In the control of the children's emotions, the divorce of the parents brought about, in these children, the feelings of loneliness, lack of security, creation of negative thoughts, experience of anger and agony, as well as loss of temper. In the worse scenario, the angry emotion was let off in their divorced parents and the people around them. If the angry response towards the divorce and the negative emotions of the children were not allowed to be let off and expressed in an appropriate way, those negative emotions would be create a barrier in the course of their upbringing.

4. The negative emotion of primary students in divorced families – the need of counselling on their anger

The intensity of the children's response towards their parents' divorce depended on the response in the parents. The less they were exposed to the conflicts between the parents and their hostility and emotional suppression, the better they were to cope with their parents' divorce. It is not easy to remove the anger for the divorce in the young children. Therefore, it is understandable that the children experienced psychological agony and helplessness in face of a sudden change in their family front.

Teacher and parents should show more care and affection to the single-parent children and offer necessary assistance.

Based on the above findings, four sessions of “Emotional Counselling for Children and Youngsters” were undertaken in this study, with the focus on their emotion of anger. After these sessions, the five students undergoing the counselling obtained a more positive understanding and awareness of their angry emotion and its cause. This emotion was also dissolved in varying degrees and a positive knowledge was also given.

In accordance to these conclusions, the researcher put forwards the following suggestions:

Research work on the topic of the divorced family should take into consideration both the parents and the children. Both of them should also undergo counselling so that their negative emotions can be effectively transformed into positive ones.

1. Single parents must let the children know about the facts in a correct way. The couple should explain to their children about the divorce in a positive manner and let them know that the parents’ divorce is not the fault of the children. In this way, the children will not blame themselves. In the course of a divorce, the parents should calmly control their own emotions and get through the agony together with their children.
2. When facing the divorce of their parents, single-parent children need help from outside so that they will not develop the feeling of self-blame and pressure. These children should open their heart and seek the assistance of social workers and counsellors. In this way, they are given a chance to express their feelings and their grief and anger can be properly channelled.
3. School should set up a database on single-parent families and observe the emotional changes in single-parent children in time to provide proper care and guidance. Counselling should be incorporated to provide proper and timely assistance, so that the children’s emotions are suitably dissolved and their psychological circumstances adjusted. Relevant counselling sessions should be operated, especially focusing on the feeling of loss and angry self-blame.