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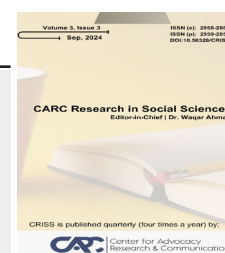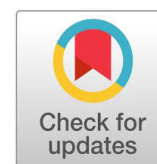
Impact of Broken Families on Students Behaviour: A Case of Public Sector Universities of Azad Jammu and Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study investigated the impact of broken families on the behaviour of students at public sector universities of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K). The study also compared the factors affecting the behaviour of broken family university students at AJ&K. A snowball sampling technique was employed to collect data from 200 undergraduate students from broken families, using a questionnaire that assessed five key domains: emotional behaviour, mental health, social problems, aggressive behaviour, and competitiveness. The study observed ethical considerations, such as obtaining informed consent and ensuring participant confidentiality. The results of this study provided valuable information about the behavioural changes students experienced following family breakups. Students from separated families exhibited more behavioural problems compared to those from divorced families. Similarly, students belonging to separated families and those not living with either parent experienced a greater impact on their behaviour than the students belonging to broken families due to death, separation, or divorce. The findings suggested psychological measures to address the behavioural issues of these students. This implies that universities should implement counselling services and encourage active participation in recreational and curricular activities to promote constructive behaviour among students from broken families.

INTRODUCTION

Family is the most crucial component of the social system. Marriage is the cornerstone of a fundamental social unit; however, discord between spouses can result in familial disintegration (Zeybek & Kasap, 2020). According to Ihedioha (2020), the family is an environment that establishes the psychological, moral, and spiritual foundation essential for the child's overall development.

In the context of this study, a broken family is no longer structurally intact due to factors such as divorce, separation, or the death of a parent. It can have a serious effect on children's behaviour. The family plays a critical role in shaping an individual's personality, beliefs, and skill development. Parental separation has been associated with reduced intellectual growth and a decline in academic performance (Mayowa, 2021). Given that parental separation may have various negative consequences on children, including stress, perceived guilt, obligation, and moderate resources. It also harms the child's motivation and learning behaviour in the classroom (Williams-Owens, 2017; Jacobsen et al., 2022).

Broken homes are a global concern, affecting both industrialized and developing countries. Despite its widespread impact, it persists across various regions. Children's academic performance is notably impaired when they experience parental neglect, physical abuse, sexual harm, or psychological trauma, such as being beaten

or emotionally tortured (Batool, 2017). While infants and young children may experience relatively few negative developmental consequences, the social, emotional, and educational outcomes of older children and teenagers can be significantly compromised. In single-parenting situations, children are at greater risk and tend to perform poorly across various developmental domains (Babalis et al.,2018). Most teenagers raised by a single parent are financially disadvantaged. Parents cannot spend money on consumer goods to raise their children's social status. It gives way to children's juvenile behaviour (Tubei et al., 2021).

The family structure where an individual is raised shapes various aspects of human development, including upbringing, family background, behaviour, attitudes, values, self-esteem, and self-reliance (Ang, 2006). Psychological conditions within the home often stem from broken families (Omoruyi, 2014). These unusual living arrangements are likely to have an adverse effect on a student's academic performance and overall achievement. This undoubtedly causes emotional, behavioural, and educational issues (Mustapha & Odediran, 2019). Youth from broken families tend to perform worse academically, have less positive attitudes, experience lower social well-being, and struggle more with peer interactions than those whose parents have maintained long-term marriages (Anyamene et al., 2022). Teenagers appear as powerless victims of their parents' inability to build happy and stable households. Parents often lack the financial means to provide their children with high-end items that could enhance their peer status. Additionally, consistent disciplinary practices significantly predict juvenile behavioural disorders (Magpantay, 2014; Berja & Cruz, 2008).

Socialization is an ongoing process that persists throughout an individual's life. For children to develop the necessary social adjustment skills and maintain positive relationships within the family and the broader community, they require a safe, healthy, and nurturing home environment (Magpantay, 2014). The family provides social and occupational training about beliefs, customs, practices, ethical values, etiquette., and social standards. Parental love, affection, and psychological bonds are important for a child's socialization and personality development. They learn respect, sympathy, courage, punctuality, and truthfulness in the home environment. While they are deprived of adequate emotional and physical support in the fragmented family structure (Jabaruddin et al., 2016).

A child's education suffers significantly due to a lack of parental attention, as teachers often note that children from broken families exhibit anger, violence, anxiety, fear, and hyperactivity, leading to disruptive behaviour and poor academic performance (Omoruyi, 2014). Consequently, they face more stressful conditions than those with permanently married parents. It leads to physical, emotional, social, and psychological issues, as children's decisions and behaviours often reflect their underlying attitudes. These outcomes can be either positive or negative, but they are typically a direct result of their experiences (Tubei et al., 2021).

Mental health problems encompass a broader range of psychological issues, including emotional problems, but also extend to cognitive, behavioural, and social functioning (Granlund et al., 2021). Mental health problems may involve conditions such as depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder (Karp, 2017), which affect not only emotional regulation but also thinking patterns, behaviour, and overall mental well-being. These issues may stem from biological factors, such as brain chemistry or genetics, and environmental triggers (Kupferberg et al., 2023). Emotional Problems in adolescents depict difficulties in managing or regulating emotions. These problems manifest as intense feelings of sadness, anger, fear, or anxiety that interfere with daily functioning. Emotional problems often result from situational stressors, trauma, or interpersonal conflicts and may lead to behaviours like mood swings, excessive worry, or emotional outbursts. Examples include prolonged grief or difficulty coping with stress (Paulus et al., 2021; Brundin et al., 2022).

The impact of a broken family directly influences a student's behaviour, as many households are characterized by imperfections stemming from spouse incompatibility, the natural death of a parent, or a parent's decision to travel abroad for work, along with various familial issues. Such circumstances often lead to divorce, separating children from one or both parents (Johnston et al., 2009). Children facing these issues usually experience significant turmoil, particularly regarding their social adjustment (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Families are broken due to divorce, death, poverty, violence and other reasons. The number of broken families progresses in society. Families are not permanently broken at the early stages of a child's life. Families may be broken at any stage of life, even if the children are grown up. This study is crucial as it aims to illuminate the effects of parental separation on children's behaviour, particularly as they transition into university life. Understanding how these early experiences shape students' behaviours in a higher education context is vital, especially given the significant developmental changes that occur during this period.

However, despite the increasing prevalence of broken families, there is a notable scarcity of research focusing on university students, particularly in AJ&K. Most existing studies have concentrated on younger children or adolescents, leaving a gap in understanding how the consequences of parental separation manifest during the crucial years of higher education. By addressing this gap, the study contributes to the academic literature and provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals. Understanding the behavioural implications of parental separation can guide universities in developing targeted support programs and resources for affected students, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and supportive academic environment. The current study found out how and in which way it affects the behaviour of broken family university students.

The study addresses the following research question:

- How do broken families impact students' behaviour at the university level in AJ&K?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive research design, which is well-suited for systematically describing the characteristics of a population or phenomenon (Creswell

& Creswell, 2017). As noted by Fraenkel etal. (2012), quantitative researchers emphasize the objective separation of facts from emotions, aiming to measure variables to minimize bias and subjectivity. This approach allows researchers to collect data that can be quantified and analyzed statistically, providing insights into patterns and relationships within the study population (Mahat et al.,2024).

Population & Sample

The study population comprised male and female students from BS programs at four public-sector universities in AJ&K during the Fall 2020 semester. The sample population consisted of undergraduate students at the BS level from the University of AJ&K, Muzaffarabad, Mirpur University of Science and Technology (MUST), Women's University Bagh (WUB), and the University of Poonch, Rawalakot.

The snowball sampling technique was employed to select the students that invited study participants to assist researchers in identifying additional subjects. Initially, the first researcher collaborated with class proctors and teachers to identify and select students from broken families at the university level at AJ&K. Through this approach, 50 students from each of the four public-sector universities were chosen, resulting in a total of 200 participants, which included 81 students from families affected by death, 80 from divorce, 32 from separation, and 7 from other circumstances.

Research Instrument

A questionnaire was used to collect data from four public-sector universities in AJ&K. According to Hox and Boeije (2005), the questionnaire collects data on a population's characteristics, actions or attitudes. After reviewing the literature, a questionnaire was developed comprising five factors, including a) emotional problems, b) mental health problems, c) social problems, d) aggression, and e) competitive behaviour. The questionnaire was based on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2, and strongly Disagree = 1).

The experts reviewed the questionnaire, and their feedback and suggestions were incorporated. A sample of fifteen students from the University of AJ&K, Muzaffarabad,

was selected for the pilot testing. A pilot study evaluated the claims and ensured their alignment with the research objectives. It identified challenging items and potential gaps in the instrument. Cronbach's Alpha was employed to measure the internal consistency and reliability of the instrument, confirming its robustness. The composite reliability of five factors was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha test, which yielded a high value of 0.97. The reliability of the scale across sub-groups was as follows: Emotional Problems (6 items) with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.97, Mental Health Problems (9 items) at 0.96, Social Problems (7 items) at 0.98, Aggressive Behavior (9 items) at 0.97, and Competitive Behavior (5 items) at 0.96.

Data Collection and Analysis

The first researcher collected data from four universities of the AJ&K. Ethical approval was obtained before data collection from the university's ethical committee. Different university departments were visited and enquired the students if someone from one of their family members belonged to a broken family. The purpose of the study was explained, and confidentiality was ensured. The data was collected from 200 students belonged to broken families from the four universities of AJ&K.

SPSS version 24 was used for data analysis, and descriptive and inferential statistics were employed. ANOVA helped determine the group differences, and the post-hoc test further identified which specific groups had statistically significant differences from one another (Field,2018).

Ethical Considerations

Following Bryman (2016), several ethical considerations were addressed during the study. Informed consent is crucial, ensuring that participants are fully aware of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained to protect participants' privacy, especially given the topic's sensitive nature. Participation was voluntary and free from coercion or pressure. Finally, a debriefing process followed the study to ensure participants were informed and not negatively impacted.

FINDINGS

The main findings of the study are presented in tabular form as follows:

Table 1

ANOVA: Differences among University Students from Broken Families

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Group	30318.56	3	10106.21	11.75	0.00[*]
Within Group	154726.86	180	859.59		
Total	185045.32	182			
[*]*p<0.05*					

Table 1 depicts a significant difference(F=11.75) in the students' behavioural change regarding broken families from different family types. Further differences have been found through post-hoc analysis.

Table 2
Post-Hoc: Differences among University Students from Broken Family

Structure of broken families	Categories	Mean Difference	p
Death	Separated	-27.73	0.00*
	Divorced	2.26	0.96
	Other	-39.70	0.00*
Separation	Divorced	30.00	0.00*
	Other	-11.96	0.76
Divorce	Other	-41.96	0.00*
P<0.05; Other (those who're not living with either parent)			

Table 2 reveals a significant difference among students from families with deceased parents, those who are separated, and those from other family structures (i.e., not living with either parent). The data depicts a statistically significant difference between students from separated families and those from divorced families. Similarly, a significant difference is observed between students from divorced families and those belonging to other family types (i.e., not living with either parent). However, the analysis shows no significant difference among students from families with deceased parents, separated families, divorced families, and those from other family types.

Table 3
ANOVA: Differences in Emotional Problems in University Students from Broken Families

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Group	726.85	3	242.28	13.33	0.00*
Within Group	3562.10	196	18.17		
Total	4288.95	199			
P<0.05					

Table 3 indicates a significant difference (F=13.33) in the students' behavioural change regarding their emotional issues due to the types of broken families. Further differences have been found through post-hoc analysis.

Table 4
Post-Hoc: Differences in Emotional Problems of University Students from Broken Families

Structure of broken families	Categories	Mean Difference	p
Death	Separated	-5.00	0.00*
	Divorced	-2.30	0.00*
	Other	-5.91	0.00*
Separation	Divorced	2.70	0.01*
	Other	-.90	0.95
Divorce	Other	-3.61	0.14
P<0.05; Other (those who're not living with either parent)			

Table 4 indicates a significant statistical difference among university students from families with deceased parents and those from separated, divorced, and other family structures (i.e., not living with either parent). The findings further demonstrate a significant statistical difference between university students from separated families and divorced families. However, no significant differences among students from separated, divorced, and other family types have been found.

Table 5
ANOVA: Differences in Mental Health Problems among University Students from Broken Families

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Group	1715.70	3	571.90	15.33	0.00*
Within Group	7308.64	196	37.28		
Total	9024.35	199			
P<0.05					

Table 5 depicts a significant difference (F=15.33) in the student's behavioural changes regarding their mental health problems due to different family structures. Further differences have been found through post-hoc analysis.

Table 6

Post-Hoc: Differences in Mental Health Problems among University Students from Broken Families

Structure of broken families	Categories	Mean Difference	p
Death	Separated	-6.16896	0.00*
	Divorced	-1.05646	0.06
	Other	-12.48148	0.00*
Separation	Divorced	5.11250	0.00*
	Other	-6.31250	0.06
Divorce	Other	-11.42500	0.00*
*P<0.05; Other (those who're not not living with either parent)			

Table 6 shows a significant difference among students belonging to families with deceased parents, those who are separated, and those from other family structures (i.e., not living with either parent). The analysis further reveals a significant difference between students from separated and divorced families. Additionally, a significant difference has been found between students from divorced families and those belonging to other family types (i.e., not living with any parent). However, the findings indicate no significant difference among students from families with deceased parents, separated families, divorced families, and those from other family types.

Table 7

ANOVA: Differences in Social Problems among University Students from Broken Families

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Group	823.44	3	274.48	8.62	0.00*
Within Group	5948.07	187	31.80		
Total	6771.51	190			
*P<0.05					

Table 7 indicates a significant difference (F=8.62) in the student's behavioural change regarding their social problems due to different family structures. Post-hoc test further clarifies the difference.

Table 8

Post Hoc: Differences in Social Problems among University Students from Broken Families

Structure of broken families	Categories	Mean Difference	p
Death	Separated	-4.04	0.00*
	Divorced	.013	1.00
	Other	-8.29	0.00*
Separation	Divorced	4.05	0.00*
	Other	-4.25	0.27
Divorce	Other	-8.30986	0.01*
*P<0.05; Other(those who're not living with either parent)			

Table 8 depicts a significant difference among students belonging to families with deceased parents, those who are separated, and those from other family structures (i.e., not living with either parent). The analysis further reveals a significant difference between students from separated families and those from divorced families. Additionally, a significant difference is observed between students from divorced families and those belonging to other family types (i.e., not living with either parent). However, the findings indicate no significant difference among students from families with deceased parents, separated families, divorced families, and those from other family types.

Table 9

ANOVA: Differences in Aggression among University Students from Broken Families

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Group	653.19	3	217.73	4.92	0.00*
Within Group	8359.46	189	44.23		
Total	9012.65	192			
*P<0.05					

Table 9 shows a significant difference (F=4.92) in the students' aggression due to the type of broken family. Post-hoc further reveals the difference.

Table 10

Post Hoc: Differences in Aggression among University Students from Broken Families

Structure of broken families	Family of students	Mean Difference	p
Death	Separated	-2.82	0.19
	Divorced	1.69	0.30
	Other	-5.19	0.19
Separation	Divorced	4.51	0.00*
	Other	-2.37	0.82
Divorce	Other	-6.89	0.04*
P<0.05; Other (those who're not living with either parent)			

Table 10 demonstrates a significant difference in aggression levels between students from separated families and those from divorced families. Moreover, a significant difference is depicted between students from divorced and other family types (i.e., not living with either parent). However, no significant difference is depicted among students from families whose parents died, separated, or divorced and those from other family types (i.e., not living with either parent). Additionally, students from separated families exhibit similar aggression levels to those belonging to other family types.

Table 11

ANOVA: Difference in Competition among University Students from Broken Families

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Group	180.60	3	60.20	60.20	0.07
Within Group	5074.71	194	26.15		
Total	5255.31	197			
P<0.05					

Table 11 depicts no significant difference (F=60.20) in the students' behavioural change in competition due to the types of broken families.

Discussion

The current study investigated the impact of broken families on the behaviour change of university students. The findings show that students who belonged to separated, divorced, and other (not living with either parent) family types had more emotional problems than those whose parent/s had died in broken families. Further, students with separated parents experienced more emotional issues than those living in divorced families. These findings are consistent with Amato's study (2005), which found that students from broken families experience a lack of emotional stability. The results are also consistent with the findings of Abuzar's study (2023), which discovered that emotional fragility is a possessive behavior in which any perceived distance causes nervous and occasionally manic responses. This emotional attachment within broken homes demonstrates the enormous effect of parental remoteness on children's psychological well-being and behavioural habits. Students often exhibit signs of sadness or depression, which can persist for years following the separation of their parents. The findings are congruent with those of Karp (2017), where students' self-esteem has been influenced due to broken homes.

Students from separated and other broken homes (those who do not live with either parent) have more serious mental health issues than children from broken families caused by death. These results are consistent with those of Behere et al. (2017), who found that children from broken families require particular attention for their emotional, physical and psychological development.

Students from separated, divorced, and other broken families (those who do not live with either parent) have more social issues than those from broken families caused by death. Students with separated parents have more social challenges than students from divorced homes. These findings coincide with those of Sullivan et al. (2024) and Enenta et al. (2024), who determined in their investigations that a child's parental situation influences his social behaviour and personal development. They believe a child's home is the foundation for their social, moral, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development. Parents, both fathers and mothers, play a crucial role by providing socialization, care, protection, and essential social and emotional support to their children. According to Kelly & Emery (2003), children from broken families show withdrawal from social and personal activities that could have made them dull. However, Abuzar's (2023) qualitative study contradicts this fact and states that participants have developed good communication skills (speaking and listening), which helped them effectively articulate their thoughts and convey their points. The differences might be explained by cultural contexts and the varying situation of the families.

Moreover, students from other broken types (those who do not live with either parent) exhibit more aggression than those from divorced families. Students with separated parents exhibit more aggressive behaviour problems than students from divorced homes. This observation is consistent with the findings of (2014), who discovered that youngsters from broken homes had more aggressive behavior than those from intact families. She also found that, unlike guys from average households, pupils from broken families become more aggressive as they age. The study's findings show that students from separated and other broken homes (those who do not live with either parent) had stronger consequences than students from

broken families caused by death, separation, or divorce.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that separation has a more significant impact than divorce in generating emotional problems among students. However, separation, divorce, and other situations where students do not live with either parent produce similar emotional challenges. In terms of social problems, divorce and being without any parents are more severe than death. At the same time, separation is more impactful than divorce, with divorce and non-parental living arrangements having similar social effects. Regarding aggression, living without any parent is more severe than divorce, and separation is more impactful than divorce, with death and non-parental arrangements showing similar effects. Separation also leads to more severe impatient behaviour issues compared to divorce, and separation and non-parental living situations produce comparable aggressive behaviours. In terms of extremism, separation and living without any parent have a more pronounced impact than death or divorce, with separation being more severe than divorce but similar in impact to non-parental arrangements. Finally, overall behavioural problems are more severe among students from separated families or those not living with any parent, with separation having a greater impact than divorce. In contrast, separation and non-parental situations show similar effects in exacerbating behaviour issues.

University students from broken families often experience a range of emotional problems, including feelings of loneliness, isolation, depression, and hopelessness. To help address these issues, it is recommended that such students be encouraged to engage in various university social events following consultation with the student counseling center. Participation in co-curricular activities can help build their self-assurance and resilience, equipping them to manage these emotional challenges better. Additionally, students from broken families may exhibit significant mental health difficulties, responding negatively and anxiously to unexpected situations, struggling to follow university rules, and displaying difficulty concentrating on their studies.

To address these concerns, universities should provide mental health support through multiple channels, such as audio calls, online chatting, and face to face sessions. Workshops, symposiums, and open lectures focused on anxiety management should be organized to provide students with practical tools for coping with anxiety-related issues. Social problems were also prevalent among male and female students from broken families. To mitigate these issues, universities should organize workshops and seminars through their guidance and counseling services to educate students on the symptoms and associated challenges of social problems.

Moreover, BS-level students from broken families often need more confidence, struggle with completing tasks, and face difficulties in social interactions. Teachers should create a friendly and supportive environment to foster confidence, coordinate assignment delivery and deadlines, and collaborate with the university's counseling services to arrange seminars and workshops on managing aggression. Lastly, students from broken families tend to exhibit no significant change in competitive behaviour.

Overall, universities should encourage participation in healthy activities by organizing creative games and events facilitated by the guidance and counseling committees to refresh students' minds and teach the value of positive competition.

Conflict of Interests

The authors has declared that no competing interests exist.

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