



## EFFECTS OF PARENTS DIVORCE ON STUDENT WELFARE IN RWANDA: A CASE OF GASABO DISTRICT

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### Abstract

This research examined the effects of parents' divorce on student's welfare in Rwanda, a case of Gasabo district. The researcher intends to achieve this by use of three specific objectives including describing the factors leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District, examining the type of life of children in terms of essential rights in education and assessing the impact of divorce on student welfare in Gasabo District. The research will be beneficial to the researcher, Gasabo District and Mount Kenya University. Some theories were used to support the study such as Theory of Marriage, Attachment theory and the transformative learning theory. The researcher used descriptive methods of study based on qualitative and quantitative approach in order to get better analysis of the study. The study population is 308 teaching staff and 15 management staff of three schools located in Gasabo District which are Remera Catholic, St Ignace and APAPEC Irebero. The sample was obtained using Yamane's formula and it gave 130 persons. The questionnaire and interview guide were used to collect data. Data was processed and analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics was used to summarize characteristics of participants in the univariate analysis by highlighting frequencies and percentages of different variables. The findings showed that divorce of parents was positively related with student welfare in Gasabo District ( $r=0.742$ ), this is because the R-value is less than 0.05. The R- squared of 0.550 implied that a unit change in divorce of parents predicts 0.550 changes in the student welfare. Therefore, the research objectives were reached. The findings will be used in designing education in upgrading the National policy of the family and the National Integrated Child Rights Policy.

**Key words:** Parent divorce, education performance, student welfare.

## 1. Introduction

Globally, the divorce rates around the world is 18 per 1,000 married persons (Forbes, 2022). For many and various reasons married people file for divorce such as infidelity by one spouse, unmet expectations, marital problems and other related issues as well as loss of sentiments. Most of the time young children are involved in and face in divorce processes; although due to their age, they may not fully understand what is happening in their families. The repercussions of divorce can be positive or negative; in most situations, divorce affect children in various ways and they are forced to learn how to deal with it at an early age while their maturity is very critical.

In Rwanda, the Government protects the family because it is considered as the natural foundation of the Rwandan society. Rwandan own family always has been considered as the core of life and the pillar of happiness. Rwanda acknowledges that, the child is conceived, born, educated in family and that it is where the interpersonal relationships is strengthened. The Rwandan legislation stipulates that marriage has to occur by free consent and spouses have the same rights and duties during marriage and divorce. Rwanda has ratified the Convention on the Consent to Marriage, the Minimum Age of Marriage and Registration of Marriages and the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women. The institution of marriage in Rwanda is ruled by law. The law on Matrimonial Regimes, Succession and Gifts gives equal rights to succession to all children either boy and girls. Those are among the guidelines leading the National Policy on Family Promotion (Government of Rwanda, 2005). Couples in common marriages are sensitized and encouraged to enter into a civil marriage fixed at 21 years and this plays an important role in protecting the right to succession for mainly women and children. Consequently, the percentage of married persons has declined. Among men, it has fallen from 59% in 1978 to 53% in 2012. The decline is slightly steeper among women, from 62% in 1978 to 50% in 2012. The divorced population is more numerous among women (2%) than among men (only 0.7%). This proportion in Rwanda is higher in the Eastern Province (3%), Kigali City (2.7%) and the Southern Province (2.3%) and less represented in the Northern (1.5%) and Western (1.8%) provinces (Government of Rwanda, 2005). The government of Rwanda has done a lot to control divorce therefore to ensure children enjoy their rights. The percentages of separated/divorced are relatively lower, except in the male population who did not state their educational level among whom 11% are divorced).

Although, the home or family environment has been recognized as having a lot of influence on the children welfare and academic performance of students (Ajila & Olutola, 2017), previous

studies have been concentrated in the area of socio-economic status of parents. Other aspects of parental environment such as the structure of the family have been grossly neglected. Yet, Merlo & Rowland (2019) stated that parent's constant disagreement affects children emotionally and this could lead to poor student welfare and poor academic performance in school.

Single-parent families have on average lower income than two-parent families and are thus more constrained in ensuring adequate financial resources to meet their children's learning needs. In addition, since single parents must cope with the double responsibility of work and childrearing, it may be more challenging for them to provide and maintain a supportive learning environment for their children. These conditions are not conducive for effective learning. This is because when the single parent is overburdened by responsibilities and by their own emotional reaction to their situation, they often become irritable, impatient and insensitive to their children's needs which may affect children performance in school and handicap their welfare at school (Katz & Woodin, 2022).

There is immense of literature on family structure, single parenting and school welfare and performance, both globally and locally. For instance, globally, Uwaifo (2018) conducted a study on the Effects of Family Structure and Parenthood on the student welfare and Academic Performance of Nigerian University Students. However, since this study was conducted in Nigeria, a country which differs from Rwanda in terms of economic characteristics, culture and political environment, its findings cannot be generalized to Rwanda. In addition, the study was conducted among university students which is different from primary and secondary schools. In addition, Suleman (2018) conducted a study on the effects of parental divorce on student welfare and academic Performance of Students at Elementary Level in District Karak, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Pakistan. However, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the Rwandan case due to differences in cultural beliefs, environment, policies, economic factors and other factors. This study therefore sought to assess the effects of parents' divorce on student welfare in Rwanda using the case of Gasabo District.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Overview on parents' Divorce**

Divorce (also known as dissolution of marriage) is the process of terminating a marriage or marital union. Divorce usually entails the canceling or reorganizing of the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage, thus dissolving the bonds of matrimony between a married couple

under the rule of law of the particular country or state. It can be said to be a legal dissolution of a marriage by a court or other competent body. It is the legal process of ending a marriage (Arkes, 2016).

Divorce laws vary considerably around the world, but in most countries, divorce requires the sanction of a court or other authority in a legal process, which may involve issues of distribution of property, child custody, alimony (spousal support), child visitation / access, parenting time, child support, and division of debt. In most countries, monogamy is required by law, so divorce allows each former partner to marry another person.

Divorce is different from annulment, which declares the marriage null and void, with legal separation or de jure separation (a legal process by which a married couple may formalize a de facto separation while remaining legally married) or with de facto separation (a process where the spouses informally stop cohabiting). Reasons for divorce vary, from sexual incompatibility or lack of independence for one or both spouses to a personality clash or infidelity (Feeney & Monin, 2015).

The only countries that do not allow divorce are the Philippines and the Vatican City. In the Philippines, divorce for non-Muslim Filipinos is not legal unless one spouse is an undocumented immigrant and satisfies certain conditions. The Vatican City is a state ruled by the head of the Catholic Church, a religion that does not allow for divorce (Feeney & Monin, 2015).

## **2.2 Student Welfare**

Student welfare encompasses services that promote the physical, mental and social wellbeing of pupils and students (Betty & Ackerman, 2017). These students may be living with one parent or divided living arrangements are made with both parents. Developmental stages for children are the periods in a child's life and the experiences of physical, emotional, mental, and social phases the child goes through at that time (Betty & Ackerman, 2017). Younger children are at short-term risks due to confusion surrounding the divorce processes and the loss of the parent who is no longer living in the same home. Younger children are less reliable to make sense of all the changes that are occurring in their present lives (Furstenberg & Teitler, 2014). Elementary age children: Children ages 5 through 12 are expanding their world to include peers and school friends rather than just family members. They react to what is happening to the family by thinking about it and questioning the changes. They worry about almost everything and believe

in living by rules and that life is fair. Children in this age group feel deeply the loss of the family bonding when the divorce or separation happens.

For the young teenagers, they are in that stage of going through rapid physical, social and emotional growth in all corners of their lives. They are often confused and feel insecure mostly. At some times, they may act like a little child by being needy, very demanding, or clinging to their parents. Other times they reject their parents and attach to their friends for support and understanding. This stage seems the stormiest for the parent and child where their relationships are complex. Older teenagers are trying on different roles and in the process of establishing/identifying their identities. This age group may become preoccupied with the survival of relationships and mourn the loss of the family of their childhood. They feel embarrassed and resentful toward parents who are perceived as giving their own needs priority (Ackerman, 2017).

### **2.3 Effects of parents' divorce on student welfare**

Research has shown that children are greatly affected by the disunion of their parents' marriage. In most cases these effects are displayed in academic strain, difficulty in regulating mood and emotions, and a tendency to find outlets in harmful substances or activities such as drugs, alcohol, and violence (Feeney & Monin, 2015).

Frequently, children who have experienced a parental divorce have lower academic achievement than children from non-divorced families. A review of family and school factors related to adolescents' academic performance noted that a child from a divorced family is two times more likely to drop out of high school than a child from a non-divorced family. These children from divorced families may also be less likely to attend college, resulting in the end of their academic career (Anderson, 2014).

Often academic problems are associated with children from single-parent families. Studies have shown that this may be directly related to the economic effect of divorce. A divorce may result in the parent and children moving to an area with a higher poverty rate and a poor education system, because of the financial difficulties of a single parent.

Children of divorced parents also on average achieve lower levels of socioeconomic status, income, and wealth accumulation than children of parents who remain married. These outcomes are associated with lower educational achievement. Young men or women between the ages of 7

and 16 who had experienced the divorce of their parents were more likely than youths who had not experienced the divorce of their parents to leave home because of friction, to cohabit before marriage, and to parent a child before marriage. Divorce often leads to worsened academic achievement in children ages 7–12, the most heightened negative effect being reading test scores. These negative effects tend to persist, and even escalate after the divorce or separation occurs (Eyo, 2018).

### **3. Research design and methodology**

The researcher in this study used descriptive case study research design with the mixed approach, meaning qualitative and quantitative approaches as the method to collect the information from participants. That is, a quantitative approach was used to collect the information from respondents by use of questionnaires and the qualitative approach used interview guide for key informants.

### **4. Population, sampling, sampling technique and data collection**

The target population is estimated at 192 teaching staff of three schools located in Gasabo District which are Remera Catholic, St Ignace and APAPEC Irebero (Gasabo District, 2022). In this study, the sample size was calculated using the Yamane's Formula. The calculation gave 130 persons. The study participants were chosen using a systematic sampling procedure by the researcher. The entire population was divided into a sample of 130 members of the teaching staff to determine the range of sampling numbers, and the start number was chosen from the first range ( $192/130=1.5\approx 2$ ). The excel sheet of a current list of all the teaching staff of three schools located in Gasabo District which are Remera Catholic, St Ignace and APAPEC Irebero was obtained from their respective schools with a total number of 192 persons and the name of a teacher coming after 2 other teachers were included in the sample and were chosen with equal chance.

Also, since the schools are three in number (Remera Catholic, St Ignace and APAPEC Irebero), the researcher used stratified sampling from where participants were sampled proportionally from each school. This study collected primary data which refers to the data the researcher collects from the participants themselves at the field. In particular, the study used structured questionnaire for the purposes of quantitative data collection. The structured questionnaire was characterized by close-ended questions.

The structured questionnaires were developed based on the research objectives of the study. The structured questionnaire therefore has six sections with the first section having the demographic characteristics of the respondent, four sections having information on independent variables, and

a final section on the dependent variable. A five-point Likert based measurement scale was used for the study. The study used a Drop-Off and Pick-Up later method of data collection. In this method, the questionnaire was dropped to the respondents and picked at a later pre-agreed date to give the respondents time to fill the questionnaire. The Drop-Off Pick-Up method was associated with a high response rate.

Collected data was organised, edited and cleaned to remove any inconsistencies, repetitions or errors that would complicate analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics included percentages, frequencies, mean and standard deviation. Inferentially correlations and multiple regression analysis were applied to get the change in dependent variable caused by the effect of independent variables.

The ethical consideration was considered thorough seeking of the authorization for research from the university. The consent statement also advised the respondents on the purpose of the data collection, and guarantee the respondents on their confidentiality. The researcher explained to the respondents the benefit of research to respondents. The researcher assured the respondents that the study was strictly academic. Ultimately, the researcher was honest in reporting the research findings. Participation was voluntarily and the researcher tried her best to minimize the harm and risks by using her judgement. The researcher will keep confidential all the records from the participants including their signed consent forms separate from the questionnaires as the law permits.

## 5. Conceptual framework

### Independent Variable

#### Factors leading to divorce

- Infidelity
- Misuse of the property
- Poverty
- Loss of sexual desire
- Irresponsibility
- Infertility
- Loveless marriage
- Domestic violence

#### Type of life of children in terms of essential rights in education

- School fees
- School materials
- Health
- Nutrition
- Shelter
- Live with his/her parents

### Dependent Variables

#### Impact of divorce on student welfare

- Lack of school materials
- Poor performance
- School drops out
- Malnutrition
- Lack of shelter
- Teenage pregnancies
- Absence of parent's education
- Disturbed social relations

#### Intervening variables

- National policy of the family
- National Integrated Child Rights Policy

In the above conceptual framework, independent variables are constituted by the factors leading to divorce which include Infidelity, Misuse of the property, Poverty, Loss of sexual desire, Irresponsibility, Infertility, Loveless marriage and Domestic violence. In addition, the framework shows the type of life of children in terms of essential rights in education as another independent variable. It includes School fees, School materials, Health, Nutrition, Shelter and the fact of living with his/her parents. On the contrary, the dependent variable is the impact of divorce on student welfare which include Lack of school materials, Poor performance, School dropout, Malnutrition, Lack of shelter, teenage pregnancies and the absence of parent's education. The framework also shows the intervening factors which include the National policy of the family and the National Integrated Child Rights Policy.



## 6. Data analysis and results

### 6.1 Factors leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District

The results showed that most of the respondents strongly agreed that infertility is among the factors leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District (Mean=4.05; SD=1.113). They agreed that the misuse of the family property constitutes a factor leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District (Mean=3.40; SD=1.502). They stay neutral poverty being a factor leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District (Mean=2.78; SD=1.485). they agreed that loss of sexual desire constitutes a factor leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District (Mean=3.62; SD=1.526).

The respondents agreed that irresponsibility constitutes a factor leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District (Mean=3.20; SD=1.422). They agreed that infertility constitutes a factor leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District (Mean=3.00; SD=1.545). They agreed that loveless marriage constitutes a factor leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District (Mean=3.46; SD=1.458). They agreed that domestic violence constitutes a factor leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District (Mean=3.72; SD=1.259).

This implies that Infidelity, Misuse of the property, Loss of sexual desire, Irresponsibility, Infertility, Loveless marriage and Domestic violence are among the factor leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District.

**Table 1. Respondents' opinion on the factors leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District**

What are the factors leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District?	N	Mini mum	Maxim um	Mean	Std. Deviatio n
Infidelity	130	1	5	4.05	1.113
Misuse of the property	130	1	5	3.40	1.502
Poverty	130	1	5	2.78	1.485
Loss of sexual desire	130	1	5	3.62	1.526
Irresponsibility	130	1	5	3.20	1.422
Infertility	130	1	5	3.00	1.545
Loveless marriage	130	1	5	3.46	1.458
Domestic violence	130	2	5	3.72	1.259
<b>Mean</b>				3.40	1.413

Source: Primary data, 2023

Note: Strongly Disagree= [1-2[=**Very Low Mean**; Disagree= [2-2.5[=**Low mean**; Neutral= [2.5-3[=**Moderated mean**; Agree= [3-4[=**High mean**; Strongly Agree = [4-5] = **Very High mean**

Further by triangulation, the researcher used interviews to have additional information on the factors leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District. The respondents were asked a question to obtain insight on the level of divorce observed among the parents having their children in schools of Gasabo District. The results revealed that there are few cases of student whose parents have divorced in different schools of Gasabo District. One of the parent interviewed on this matter told the researcher that:

*“There are not many cases of divorce among parents who have pupils studying here in our district. Nevertheless, there are some families who have decided to break off their union, and some of them have children who are still at school”.*

Another divorced parent told the researcher that divorce cases do exist, even if they are not numerous, he said: *“I know at least five families who have divorced and have children studying with mine. They know each other because they have been through the same problems”.* Therefore, the first question of the study: What are the factors leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District? has been answered and the first objective of the study was achieved.

## **6.2 Type of life of children in terms of essential rights in education**

The results showed that most of the respondents strongly agreed that obtaining school fees is an essential right of children in terms of education(Mean=4.89; SD=0.311). They strongly agreed that obtaining school materials is an essential rightof children in terms of education(Mean=4.84; SD=0.369). They strongly agreed that a good health is an essential right of children in terms of education(Mean=4.78; SD=0.413). They strongly agreed that a good nutrition is an essential right of children in terms of education(Mean=4.68; SD=0.466). They strongly agreed that having a shelter is an essential right of children in terms of education(Mean=4.58; SD=0.594). finally, they strongly agreed that living with his/her parents is an essential right of children in terms of education(Mean=4.47; SD=0.828).

This implies that School fees, School materials, Health, Nutrition, Shelter and living with his/her parents are elements of essential rights of children in terms of education.

### **Table 2. Respondents’ opinion on the type of life of children in terms of essential rights in education**

<b>What is the type of life of children in terms of essential rights in education?</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mini mum</b>	<b>Maxim um</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviatio n</b>
School fees	130	4	5	4.89	.311
School materials	130	4	5	4.84	.369
Health	130	4	5	4.78	.413
Nutrition	130	4	5	4.68	.466
Shelter	130	3	5	4.58	.594
Live with his/her parents	130	2	5	4.47	.828
<b>Mean</b>				3.53	0.372

Source: Primary data, 2023

Note: Strongly Disagree= [1-2[=**Very Low Mean**; Disagree= [2-2.5[=**Low mean**; Neutral= [2.5-3[=**Moderated mean**; Agree= [3-4[=**High mean**; Strongly Agree = [4-5] = **Very High mean**

Further by triangulation, the researcher used interviews to have additional information on the type of life of children in terms of essential rights in education. The respondents were asked a question to obtain insight on the type of life of children in terms of essential rights in education. The results revealed that the students have right to get school materials, health services, an adequate nutrition, shelter and to live with their parents. One of the divorced parents interviewed on this matter told the researcher that:

### **6.3. Impact of divorce on student welfare in Gasabo District**

The results showed that most of the respondents strongly agreed that lackof school fees and materials is an element of the impact of divorce on student welfare in Gasabo District (Mean=4.52; SD=0.600). They strongly agreed that divorce of parents results in poor performance of students in Gasabo District (Mean=4.15; SD=0.944). They strongly agreed that divorce of parents results in school drop out of students in Gasabo District (Mean=4.62; SD=0.486).They agreed that lackof shelter is an element of the impact of divorce on student welfare in Gasabo District (Mean=3.68; SD=0.990).

The respondents stay neutral on malnutrition of students in Gasabo District being a consequence of divorce of their parents (Mean=2.64; SD=0.940). The respondents agreed that teenage pregnancies among students in Gasabo District could be a result of divorce of their parents (Mean=3.03; SD=1.339). The respondents also strongly agreed that divorce results in absence of parents' education of students in Gasabo District (Mean=4.52; SD=0.501). Finally, the

respondents agreed that divorce results in disturbed social relations of students in Gasabo District (Mean=4.52; SD=0.501).

**Table 3. Respondents’ opinion on the impact of divorce on student welfare in Gasabo District**

What is the impact of divorce on student welfare in Gasabo District?	N	Mini mum	Maxim um	Mean	Std. Deviatio n
Lack of school fees and materials	130	3	5	4.52	.600
Poor performance	130	2	5	4.15	.944
School drop out	130	4	5	4.62	.486
Malnutrition	130	1	5	2.64	.940
Lack of shelter	130	2	5	3.68	.990
Teenage pregnancies	130	1	5	3.08	1.339
Absence of parent’s education	130	4	5	4.52	.501
Disturbed social relations	130	1	5	3.58	1.238
<b>Mean</b>				3.84	0.879

Source: Primary data, 2023

Note: Strongly Disagree= [1-2]=**Very Low Mean**; Disagree= [2-2.5]=**Low mean**; Neutral= [2.5-3]=**Moderated mean**; Agree= [3-4]=**High mean**; Strongly Agree = [4-5] = **Very High mean**

In addition, the results from Table 3 indicate that divorce of parents was positively related with student welfare in Gasabo District ( $r=0.742$ ), this is because the R-value is less than 0.05. In addition, this meant that the relationship between divorce and student welfare in Gasabo District was strong. The results further indicates that divorce of parents significantly influences student welfare in Gasabo District ( $\beta =7.172$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The R- squared of 0.550 implied that a unit change in divorce of parents predicts 0.550 changes in the student welfare. The F-value of 11.024 and the corresponding p-value ( $p = 0.001$ ) which is less than 0.05 implied that divorce of parents affects the student welfare in Gasabo District.

**Table 4. Correlation between parent divorce and student welfare in Gasabo District**

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	.200a	.040	.033	3.28317	

a. Predictors: (Constant), Divorce of parents								
<b>ANOVA<sup>b</sup></b>								
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.		
1	Regression	57.652	1	57.652	5.348	.022a		
	Residual	1379.740	128	10.779				
	Total	1437.392	129					
a. Predictors: (Constant), Divorce of parents								
b. Dependent Variable: student welfare in Gasabo District								
<b>Coefficients<sup>a</sup></b>								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.		
		B	Std. Error	Beta				
1	(Constant)	26.516	1.871		14.170	.000		
	Divorce of parents	.157	.068	.200	2.313	.022		
a. Dependent Variable: student welfare								

### 7. Limitations and future research

In summary, this study has some strengths and limitations; its findings reflect the opinion of the teachers of the students whose parents have divorced in the questionnaire and the opinion of the divorced parents in interviews. Since our key data were collected from different informers, this may have given us more force and credibility to the findings. However, some participants might have feared to give real information related to the impact their divorced has had to their children

in terms of education performance. Indeed, some of them might not have been able to tell the researcher that their children have got unwanted pregnancies because it would be seen as irresponsible behavior for their part.

However, the findings of the study are based on self-report. Self-report has been documented or linked to social desirability bias. Nevertheless, the obtained information covers the essential situation of the effect of parents' divorce on student welfare in Gasabo District and the suggestions framed could constitute a better solution to the said situation.

Following the study findings and limitations, suggestions on further research were identified. The researcher stayed with no explanation on the discrepancy found between different programs initiated to accompany vulnerable children and the decrease of school performance of children from divorced families. Therefore, a study on those discrepancies would fill the existing gap on that matter.

### **8. Managerial implications**

The findings will be used in designing education in upgrading the National policy of the family and the National Integrated Child Rights Policy.

### **9. Conclusion**

The study's general objective was to assess the effects of parents' divorce on student welfare in Rwanda using the case of Gasabo District. To achieve this, the study followed the following specific objectives: To describe the factors leading to divorce of parents of student studying in Gasabo District; To examine the type of life of children in terms of essential rights in education; To assess the impact of divorce on student welfare in Gasabo District. In sum, it was found that the divorce of parents significantly influences student welfare in Gasabo District. Therefore, all the asked questions were answered and the objectives were achieved.

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