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Level of Depression, Stress, Coping Strategies, and Academic Performance of Single-Parent Household High School Students in Nakuru West, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the psychological effects of single parenthood on high school students' academic performance in Nakuru West, Nakuru County, Kenya, focusing on their coping mechanisms for emotional difficulties. Guided by Social Learning and Ecological Systems Theories, the study employed a descriptive research design with a mixed-methods approach. The target population included 3,803 students from selected secondary schools, with a sample of 101 students completing questionnaires (including the DASS-21 tool) and 26 participating in interviews. Data were analysed using SPSS, with descriptive statistics presented via means and standard deviations, and inferential statistics using t-tests, ANOVA, and regression analysis. Results were displayed in tables, pie charts, and bar graphs. Findings revealed that depression and stress significantly predicted academic performance ($\beta = -.514$, $t = -5.957$, $p < 0.05$), while coping strategies were not a significant predictor ($\beta = .072$, $t = 0.719$, $p = 0.474$). The study recommends training students in effective coping mechanisms, such as emotion-focused strategies, to mitigate psychological challenges. This research contributes to developing educational and psychological support policies to enhance academic achievement for students from single-parent families.

Key words: Academic performance, coping strategies, depression and stress, single parenthood.



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INTRODUCTION

The rising prevalence of single-parent households in Nakuru West, Nakuru County, Kenya, presents significant psychological and academic challenges for high school students, yet these issues remain understudied. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2022), approximately 35 per cent of families in Nakuru West are led by single parents, predominantly women, driven by global demographic, cultural, and economic shifts. These changes have made single parenthood a common family dynamic in regions like the United States, the United Kingdom, and African countries such as Kenya.

Single-parent families often face financial strain, limited parental involvement, and emotional stress, which can profoundly impact children's psychological well-being and academic performance. Adolescents from such households frequently experience elevated levels of stress and depression, which impair their focus, motivation, and cognitive function, ultimately affecting academic success (Salami & Alawode, 2020; Lebni, 2020). Despite Kenya's efforts to promote universal secondary education, high dropout rates persist, with psychological factors playing a substantial role.

UNESCO projects that nearly 35 per cent of Kenyan secondary students may not complete upper secondary education by 2030 (Teachers Arena, 2022). The lack of localised research on how stress, depression, and coping strategies influence academic performance in Nakuru West creates a gap in evidence-based interventions. Key terms in this study include academic performance, referring to students' measurable educational outcomes; coping strategies, defined as adaptive or maladaptive methods to manage stress and depression; and single parenthood, denoting households led by one parent. This study aims to examine the extent of stress and depression, the coping strategies employed, and their combined effects on the academic achievement of high school students from single-parent households in Nakuru West.

To guide this investigation, the study addresses two objectives: first, to identify the coping strategies used by high school students from single-parent households to manage depression and stress; and second, to evaluate the impact of depression and stress levels on their academic performance. Corresponding research questions explore the specific coping strategies employed

and the levels of depression and stress among these students. The study tests two hypotheses: first, that the level of depression and stress has no significant impact on academic performance; and second, that coping strategies have no significant effect on academic performance.

The research is grounded in Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which posits that behaviour is shaped by interactions across multiple environmental layers, including family and societal factors (Shelton, 2018). Additionally, Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests that adolescents may emulate their parents' coping mechanisms, which may influence their academic outcomes (Kolodziej, 2015). This introduction establishes the foundation for a comprehensive analysis of the methodology, findings, and recommendations, providing insights into how psychological factors and coping strategies influence academic performance and inform policies to support the mental well-being and educational success of these students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research indicates a significant correlation between single parenthood and adverse psychological outcomes among adolescents. Salami and Alawode (2020) found that adolescents from single-parent households are more prone to depressive symptoms, often stemming from limited emotional support and financial instability. This emotional strain can hinder cognitive processes critical for academic success. For instance, McLanahan (1994) observed that depression impairs memory and focus, directly undermining academic achievement. These findings underscore the need to explore how such psychological challenges affect students in specific contexts like Nakuru West, where single-parent households are prevalent.

Building on the impact of depression, stress emerges as another critical factor affecting adolescents in single-parent families. Kabat-Zinn (2023) links chronic stress to cognitive impairment, noting its detrimental effects on academic performance. Similarly, Banerjee (2022) associates elevated cortisol levels with reduced working memory and problem-solving abilities, further limiting students' academic potential. In the Kenyan context, Ng'eno and Mwoma (2018) highlight that students from single-parent homes in Kenya face unique stressors, such as caregiving responsibilities and economic hardship, which divert their attention from academic engagement.

These localised stressors emphasise the importance of examining how stress manifests among high school students in Nakuru West and its specific impact on their academic outcomes.

To mitigate the effects of stress and depression, coping strategies play a pivotal role. Villosillo-Balbuena (2022) classifies coping strategies into emotion-focused, such as seeking emotional support or engaging in distracting activities, and problem-focused, which involve direct problem-solving. The effectiveness of these strategies depends on contextual factors and access to support

systems, which may vary significantly in resource-constrained settings like Nakuru West. While global research provides valuable insights, few studies have explored these dynamics in the specific socioeconomic and cultural landscape of Nakuru West. This gap highlights the need for localised research to understand how depression, stress, and coping strategies interact to influence academic performance, paving the way for tailored interventions to support students from single-parent households in this region.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

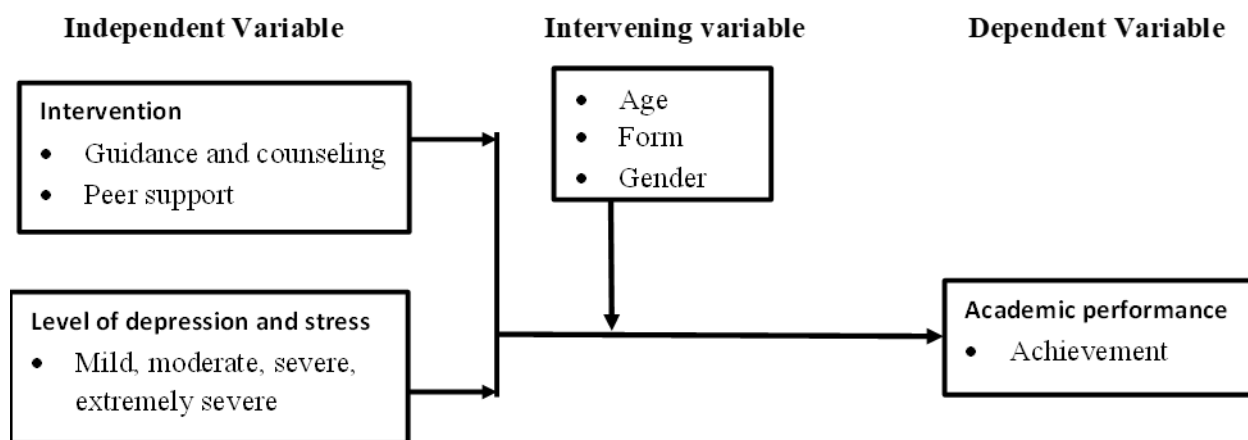


Figure 1. Conceptual framework on the relationship between intervention, depression, stress, and academic performance.

METHODOLOGY

This research utilised a descriptive cross-sectional survey approach that incorporated both qualitative and quantitative techniques to evaluate the psychological and academic impacts of single parenthood on high school students in Nakuru West, Nakuru County, Kenya. Data were collected from 110 students across four secondary schools, selected through proportionate stratified random sampling to ensure representation. Additionally, 32 students from both single- and two-parent households participated in semi-structured interviews.

Data collection instruments included structured questionnaires, divided into sections on stress, depressive symptoms, coping strategies, and perceived academic performance, incorporating the 21-item Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) to assess negative emotional states. Interview guides provided qualitative insights into students' experiences. To ensure validity and reliability, questionnaires and interview schedules were piloted with 30 students in a Nakuru East secondary

school, with reliability assessed using Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency.

Quantitative data were examined using SPSS software, employing descriptive statistics (averages and standard deviations) alongside inferential statistics (t-tests, ANOVA, and regression analysis) to examine relationships between psychological variables and academic performance. Qualitative data from interviews were thematically analysed to add depth and context to the findings. This mixed-methods approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of how depression, stress, and coping strategies influence academic outcomes among students from single-parent households

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 1 below, out of the 110 students targeted in the study, 101 participated, and their questionnaires were deemed suitable for further study. This translated to a response rate of 92 per cent. For the

key informant interviews, the target was 32 students, out of which 26 participated, translating to 81%.

Table 1: Response Rate

Respondents	Research Instrument	Targeted	Achieved	Percentage Achieved
Students	Questionnaires	110	101	92
Interview Schedule	KIIs	32	26	81
Average				86.5

Note: Response rate. Source (Author).

Interview participants were seven each from Moi Secondary and Nakuru West Secondary schools, and six each from Crater View Secondary and Uhuru Secondary. According to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), research employing empirical data, especially those with relatively homogeneous study populations and carefully stated aims, attained saturation within a limited range of interviews (9–17). The overall average response of 86.5 per cent was considered adequate to respond to the concerns of this study. In general, a response rate of 70 per cent and above is considered excellent in surveys (Sataloff & Vontela, 2021).

Validity and Reliability Tests

A panel of experts reviewed the research proposal to ensure content authenticity and validity. They examined

the research tool, ensuring it aligned with the study's goals and captured key construct elements. A subject-matter expert assessed face validity, identifying inconsistencies in the format and language. The instrument was then modified based on their feedback to improve clarity, coherence, and relevance. This process laid the groundwork for reliable data collection.

The study conducted reliability statistics on the quantitative data based on specific variables, including personnel reforms, technological reforms, training reforms, and strategies for effective performance. The results were presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics for Quantitative data

Item	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Level of Depression and Stress	0.738	6
Coping Strategies	0.811	6
Academic Performance	0.821	6
Overall reliability	0.790	

Note: Reliability statistics for Quantitative data. Source (Author).

Table 2 showed that all the variables had a Cronbach's Alpha greater than 0.7. Coping strategies had a Cronbach's Alpha of $r=0.811$. The level of depression and stress had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.738, while the dependent variable, academic performance, had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.821. The statistics were sufficient to infer consistency, according to Barbera et al. (2020).

Respondents Demographic Information

The form-level distribution shows that the majority of students are in Form 3 (55.4%), with the remaining 44.6% in Form 4, indicating a fair distribution of students from single-parent families in Nakuru West Sub-County. The ages of the students in the study range from 15 to 19

years. The majority of the students are 17 years old (44.6% of the sample), followed by 18 years (32.7%) The smallest group consists of 15-year-olds, representing just 1 per cent of the total sample. Overall, the distribution is concentrated in the 16-18 age range, comprising 96.1 per cent of the participants, with only a small percentage of 15-year-olds and 19-year-olds. Thus, the students are predominantly 17 and 18 years old. The results agree with those of Khatete (2018) and Erlass Prokeatif Indonesia (2020), who found that the majority of the Form 3 and 4 students in Kenya are 17 and 18 years old.

Results on the Gender Distribution show that there is a higher number of female students (58%) compared to



male students (42.6%). This distribution indicates that | the sample is somewhat skewed toward females.

Table 3: Respondents' Demographic Information

Gender	F	%	F	F	%	Age	F	%	Period lived in the area.	F	%
Male	43	42.6	Form 3	56	55.4	15 years	1	1	6 months to 2 years	5	5
Female	58	57.4	Form 4	45	44.6	16 years	19	18.8	Over 2 years	96	95
Total	101	100	Total	101	100	17 years	45	44.6	Total	101	100
						18 years	33	32.7			
						19 years	3	3			
						Total	101	100			

The findings on the period lived in Nakuru West show that a vast majority of the students (95%) have lived in Nakuru West for more than 2 years, indicating that most students are long-term residents of the area. Only 5 per cent of students have lived in the area for a period of 6 months to 2 years. Nzina et al. (2024) found that students' involvement was significantly impacted negatively by the distance between their homes and schools. Since the

majority of the students have lived within the area for more than two years, they are thus competent to provide information regarding the objectives of the study.

**Descriptive Analysis
Effect of Level of Depression and Stress on the Academic Performance of High School Students from Single-Parent Households**

Table 4: DASS-21 Analysis: Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scores

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	25%	50% (Median)	75%	Maximum
Depression	1.29	1.07	0	0	1	2	3
Anxiety	1.00	1.13	0	0	1	2	3
Stress	1.21	1.13	0	0	1	2	3
Overall mean	1.17	1.11					

Depression Analysis involved evaluation of DASS Items 3, 5, 10, 13, 16, 17, and 21 from the DASS 21 questionnaire. The results show that depression had a Mean Score of 1.29, suggesting mild depressive symptoms on average. Further results show that 25 per cent of participants have a score of 0, indicating that they experience no depressive symptoms. The Median score of 1 suggests that most participants experience mild depression. Some participants reached the maximum score (3), indicating severe depression in certain cases.

The Median score of 1 indicates that most participants experience mild anxiety. DASS 20 had the highest mean (1.51), indicating that the students have frequent anxious thoughts. Twenty-five per cent of participants reported no anxiety symptoms.

Anxiety Analysis involved the DASS items 2, 4, 7, 9, 15, 19, and 20. The results show that anxiety had a Mean Score of 1.00, which suggests mild anxiety on average.

Stress Analysis constituted the DASS items 1, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14, and 18. The findings show that stress had a Mean Score of 1.21, which suggests mild stress on average. DASS 14 had the highest mean (1.57), indicating that the students have frequent stress-related issues. Fifty per cent of participants scored one or lower, meaning most report mild stress symptoms. Also, 25 per cent of participants reported no stress symptoms.

Effect of Coping Strategies on the Academic Performance of High School Students from Single-Parent Households.

Table 5: Descriptive Results of Coping Strategies Variable

Coping strategies	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M	Std. Dev
I practice relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, to manage my stress.	37(36.6%)	22(21.8%)	17(16.8%)	11(10.9%)	14(13.9%)	3.56	1.431
I make a plan to address the problems I face rather than avoiding them.	29(28.7%)	31(30.7%)	12(11.9%)	12(11.9%)	17(16.8%)	3.43	1.445
I create a schedule to manage my time effectively when I have a lot of tasks to complete.	27(26.7%)	36(35.6%)	22(21.8%)	7(6.9%)	9(8.9%)	3.64	1.205
I talk to friends or family members when I am feeling stressed or overwhelmed.	24(23.8%)	27(26.7%)	14(13.9%)	15(14.9%)	21(20.8%)	3.18	1.479
I do things like work out or listen to music that help me de-stress and feel better.	47(46.5%)	30(29.7%)	12(11.9%)	5(5.0%)	7(9%)	4.04	1.191
I reach out to school counsellors or support services when I am struggling academically or emotionally.	19(18.8%)	16(15.8%)	17(16.8%)	20(19.8%)	29(28.7%)	2.76	1.491
Overall Mean						3.44	1.374

The frequencies and basic statistical measures (mean and standard deviation) are provided for each statement regarding the coping strategies variable as follows;

I practice relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, to manage my stress.

The findings for this statement were SA (Strongly Agree): 37 responses (36.6%), A (Agree): 22 responses (21.8%), N (Neutral): 17 responses (16.8%), D (Disagree): 11 responses (10.9%), SD (Strongly Disagree): 14 responses (13.9%). The mean was 3.56 with a std. Dev. of 1.431.

I make a plan to address the problems I face rather than avoiding them.

The results for this statement indicated that there were 29 responses (28.7%) for SA (Strongly Agree), 31 responses (30.7%) for A (Agree), 12 responses (11.9%) for N (Neutral), 12 responses (11.9%) for D (Disagree), and 17 responses (16.8%) for SD (Strongly Disagree). The mean was 3.43 with a std. Dev. of 1.445 meaning the respondents agreed with the statement, although with a high degree of variability.

I create a schedule to manage my time effectively when I have a lot of tasks to complete.

The findings were SA (Strongly Agree), 27 responses (26.7%), A (Agree), 36 responses (35.6%), indicating that more than half the students create a schedule to manage their time effectively when they have a lot of tasks. Other responses were N (Neutral), 22 responses (21.8%), D (Disagree), seven responses (6.9%), and SD

(Strongly Disagree), nine responses (8.9%). The mean was 3.64 with a std. Dev. of 1.205 meaning the respondents highly agreed with the statement, although with low variability.

I talk to friends or family members when I am feeling stressed or overwhelmed.

The findings for the statement were SA (Strongly Agree) 24 responses (23.8%), A (Agree) 27 responses (26.7%), indicating that about half of the students talk to friends or family members when they feel stressed or overwhelmed. Further, other findings were N (Neutral) 14 responses (13.9%), D (Disagree) 15 responses (14.9%), SD (Strongly Disagree) 21 responses (20.8%). The mean was 3.18 with a std. Dev. of 1.479, meaning the respondents moderately agreed with the statement, although with high variability.

I do things like work out or listen to music that help me de-stress and feel better.

The findings for the statement were SA (Strongly Agree) 47 responses (46.5%), A (Agree) 30 responses (29.7%), showing that three-quarters of the students do things like work out or listen to music as a means of de-stressing and thus feel better. Other results were N (Neutral) 12 responses (11.9%), D (Disagree) 5 responses (5.0%), and SD (Strongly Disagree) 7 responses (6.9%). The mean was 4.04 with a std. Dev. of 1.191 meaning that overall the respondents highly agreed with the statement, with a low level of variability.

I reach out to school counsellors or support services when I am struggling academically or emotionally.

The findings for the statement were SA (Strongly Agree) 19 responses (18.8%), A (Agree) 16 responses (15.8%), showing that a third of the students reach out to school counsellors or support services whenever they are struggling academically or emotionally. The other findings were N (Neutral) 17 responses (16.8%), D (Disagree) 20 responses (19.8%), and SD (Strongly Disagree) 29 responses (28.7%). The mean was 2.76 with a std. Dev. of 1.491, meaning the respondents slightly agreed with the statement, with a high level of variability.

The overall mean for the coping strategies variable was 3.44 with a std. Dev. of 1.374, meaning the respondents agreed with the statements on coping strategies with a moderate degree of variability.

Academic Performance of High School Students from Single-Parent Households

Results regarding the academic performance variable were as follows;

I find it difficult to concentrate on my schoolwork due to stress related to my family situation.

Findings for this statement indicate that responses were Strongly Agree (SA) 33 students (32.7%), Agree (A) 22 students (21.8%), indicating that over half of the respondents find it difficult to concentrate on their schoolwork due to stress related to my family situation. Other results were Neutral (N) 3 students (12.9%), Disagree (D) 11 students (10.9%), and Strongly Disagree (SD) 22 students (21.8%). The mean was 3.33 with a std. Dev. of 1.556, meaning the respondents agreed with the statement with a high level of variability. This finding concurs with that of Cherry (2010) and Meng and Zhang (2023), who discovered that adolescents experiencing depression might have difficulty focusing, completing their schoolwork, and performing well on examinations, which in turn lowers their academic performance.

My academic performance has been negatively affected by feelings of depression.

For this statement, the results were Strongly Agree (SA) 30 students (29.7%), Agree (A) 24 students (23.8%), indicating that over half of the students felt that their academic performance had been negatively affected by feelings of depression. Other results were Neutral (N) students (11.9%), Disagree (D) 19 students (18.8%), and Strongly Disagree (SD) 16 students (15.8%), showing that a third did not feel their academic performance had been negatively affected by feelings of depression. The mean was 3.33 with a std. Dev. of 1.491, meaning the respondents agreed with the statement with a high level of variability.

I feel that my grades have suffered because of a lack of support at home.

For this statement, the results were Strongly Agree (SA) - 24 students (23.8%), Agree (A) - 20 students (19.8%), indicating that slightly less than half of the students felt that their grades had suffered because of a lack of support at home. Further results were Neutral (N) 19 students (18.8%), Disagree (D) 18 students (17.8%), and Strongly Disagree (SD) 20 students (19.8%). The mean was 3.10 with a std. Dev. of 1.459, meaning the respondents slightly agreed with the statement, with a high level of variability.

Table 6: Descriptive Results of Academic Performance Variable

Academic performance	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M	Std. Dev
I find it difficult to concentrate on my schoolwork due to stress related to my family situation.	33(32.7%)	22(21.8%)	13(12.9%)	11(10.9%)	22(21.8%)	3.33	1.556
My academic performance has been negatively affected by feelings of depression.	30(29.7%)	24(23.8%)	12(11.9%)	19(18.8%)	16(15.8%)	3.33	1.470
I feel that my grades have suffered because of a lack of support at home.	24(23.8%)	20(19.8%)	19(18.8%)	18(17.8%)	20(19.8%)	3.10	1.459
I struggle with managing my school assignments and deadlines because of family-related stress.	19(18.8%)	32(31.7%)	11(10.9%)	13(12.9%)	26(25.7%)	3.05	1.499
My single-parent household has made it harder for me to stay motivated in my studies.	20(19.8%)	19(18.8%)	18(17.81%)	14(13.9%)	30(29.7%)	2.85	1.519
I often feel overwhelmed by the demands of school and my family responsibilities.	25(24.8%)	35(34.7%)	10(9.9%)	11(10.9%)	20(19.8%)	3.34	1.465
Overall Mean						3.17	1.495

Source: Research Data (2024)

I struggle with managing my school assignments and deadlines because of family-related stress.

Findings for this statement indicate that responses were Strongly Agree (SA) - 19 students (18.8%), Agree (A) - 32 students (31.7%), Neutral (N) - 11 students (10.9%), Disagree (D) - 13 students (12.9%), and Strongly Disagree (SD) - 26 students (25.7%). The mean was 3.05 with a std. Dev. of 1.499, meaning the respondents slightly agreed with the statement, with a high level of variability.

My single-parent household has made it harder for me to stay motivated in my studies.

Regarding this statement, the results were Strongly Agree (SA) - 20 students (19.8%), Agree (A) - 19 students (18.8%), Neutral (N) - 18 students (17.8%), Disagree (D) - 14 students (13.9%), and Strongly Disagree (SD) - 30 students (29.7%). The mean was 2.85 with a std. Dev. of 1.519, meaning the respondents slightly agreed with the statement, with a high level of variability.

I often feel overwhelmed by the demands of school and my family responsibilities.

Findings for this statement indicate that responses were Strongly Agree (SA) - 25 students (24.8%), Agree (A) - 35 students (34.7%), Neutral (N) - 10 students (9.9%), Disagree (D) - 11 students (10.9%), and Strongly Disagree (SD) - 20 students (19.8%). The mean was 3.34

with a std. Dev. of 1.465, meaning the respondents moderately agreed with the statement, with a high level of variability.

The overall mean for academic performance was 3.17 with a std. Dev. of 1.495, meaning the respondents moderately agreed with the statements, with a high level of variability. Thus, the students from single-parent

households in Nakuru West Sub-County generally experience challenges in their academics. This is further corroborated by interviews with the respective class teachers from the four schools that participated in the study. According to the class teachers, students from single-parent households face challenges and tend to perform poorly compared to their peers from two-parent households.

Table 7: Correlation Results

		Level of Depression and Stress	Coping Strategies
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	-.514	.072
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.474
	N	101	101

The relationship between Level of Depression and Stress and Academic Performance has a Pearson Correlation of -0.514 (p= 0.000). Thus, there is a stronger negative correlation between stress and academic performance compared to that between depression and academic performance. The relationship is statistically significant (p < 0.05), indicating that increased stress is associated with lower academic performance.

The connection between Coping Strategies and Academic Achievement has a Pearson Correlation of

0.072 (p 0.474). The correlation is weak and lacks statistical significance (p = 0.474 > 0.05). It indicates that the coping strategies do not demonstrate a meaningful connection with academic performance within this dataset. According to Li and Li (2024), adolescents who actively sought social support and participated in constructive activities, like extracurricular programs, reported better emotional outcomes and improved academic performance.

Bivariate Regression Results

Table 8: Coefficients from the Bivariate Regression Analysis

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	4.017	.218		18.424	.000
Level of Depression and Stress	-.960	.161	-.514	-5.957	.000
R = .514, R ² = .264, F = 35.486, p= 0.000					
(Constant)	3.161	.466		6.780	.000
Coping Strategies	.095	.132	.072	.719	.474
R = .072, R ² = .005, F = .516, p= 0.474					
a. Dependent Variable: Academic Performance					

The model coefficients indicate that levels of depression and stress are significant predictors of the academic performance of students from single-parent families in Nakuru West Sub-County ($\beta = -.514$, p < 0.05). The t value = -5.957 is also significant.

DASS-21 analysis indicated that depression had a Mean Score of 1.29, suggesting mild depressive symptoms on average. Further results show that 25 per cent of

participants have a score of 0, indicating no depressive symptoms. The Median score of 1 suggests that most participants experience mild depression. Some participants reached the maximum score (3), indicating severe depression in certain cases. Anxiety had a Mean Score of 1.00, which suggests mild anxiety on average. The Median score of 1 indicates that most participants experience mild anxiety. DASS 20 had the highest mean (1.51), indicating that the students have frequent anxious

thoughts. Twenty-five per cent of participants reported no anxiety symptoms. Stress had a Mean Score of 1.21, which suggests mild stress on average. DASS 14 had the highest mean (1.57), indicating that the students have frequent stress-related issues. Fifty per cent of participants scored one or lower, meaning most report mild stress symptoms. Also, 25 per cent of participants reported no stress symptoms.

The model coefficient also indicates that coping strategies are not a significant predictor of the academic performance of students from single-parent families in Nakuru West Sub-County ($\beta = 0.072$, $p > 0.05$). The t value = .719 is also not significant. According to Bandura's theory, repeated exposure to these behaviours strengthens their use, even if they are not the most effective strategies for improving academic performance. The least commonly used strategy seems to be reaching out to school counsellors or support services.

The participants appear to use a variety of coping mechanisms, with a tendency towards positive strategies (such as relaxation techniques and planning) and fewer indicating a reliance on seeking external help. According to Zade-Mohammadi and Aslani (2021), seeking social support is one of the emotion-focused coping strategies. The results also agree with those of Zammuner (2019), who found that students from single-parent households commonly employed problem-focused strategies like seeking help from teachers or peers, as well as emotion-focused strategies such as participating in hobbies and relaxation techniques.

The R-squared value of 0.005 reveals that approximately 0.5 per cent of the variability in academic performance can be explained by coping strategies that the students adopt. This is further supported by the ANOVA results

($F(3,92) = 0.516$, $p > 0.01$), which confirm that coping strategies are not significant for academic performance. The regression coefficient of 0.072 ($t = .719$, $p = 0.474$) indicates a negligible impact of coping strategies on academic performance. The results agree with those of Zammuner (2019), who found that effective coping strategies were associated with better adjustment and academic outcomes. As such, the students from single-parent households commonly employed problem-focused strategies like seeking help from teachers or peers, as well as emotion-focused strategies such as engaging in hobbies and relaxation techniques.

Results of Interview Schedule

The survey revealed that guidance and counselling are the most frequently mentioned solutions for students from single-parent families. These include providing basic needs support, helping with school fees, and visiting homes for security. The most significant factors were showing love, listening to and appreciating students, and assisting with school activities. School-specific trends indicated that Moi Secondary emphasised these needs, while Nakuru West Secondary focused on spiritual commitment and home visits.

Uhuru Secondary stressed the need for financial assistance and emotional support. To improve students' well-being, schools should strengthen counselling programs, expand mental health support, provide financial support, and promote teacher-student mentorship, home visits, and parental engagement (Zade-Mohammadi & Aslani, 2021). Additionally, parental involvement strategies should be developed to engage single-parent homes more in students' education. Peer support systems should be encouraged to reduce emotional struggles.

Table 9: Ways in which high school students from single-parent households can be helped

Response	Moi Sec	Nakuru West Sec	Crater View Sec	Uhuru Sec	Total	Percent (%)	Chi (χ^2)	Sig.
Yes, they may be helped with needs	2	2		1	5	0.192	12.462	.000
Yes, by committing themselves to God Almighty	1	3		2	6	0.231	7.538	.006
Yes	3				3	0.115	15.385	.000
Yes, through guidance and counselling	5	3	4	3	15	0.577	.615	.433
Yes, by giving them support with basic needs	7	2	3	1	13	0.500	.000	1.000
By showing them love	1		1	1	3	0.115	15.385	.000
By visiting their homes and helping them, plus providing them with enough security	2	2	1	2	7	0.269	9.846	.002
Yes, through helping them with school fees	4			4	8	0.308	3.846	.050
Through the provision of bursaries	3	1		3	7	0.269	9.846	.002
Through providing them with guidance and counselling	1		3		4	0.154	12.462	.000
They need to be listened to and appreciated	1		2	1	4	0.154	12.462	.000
Assisting them by paying for any school activities	2	1		1	4	0.154	12.462	.000

Source: Research Data (2024)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: This study confirms that students from single-parent households in Nakuru West face substantial psychological challenges that negatively impact their academic performance. Depression and stress are particularly detrimental, and current coping strategies appear insufficient in mitigating their effects. There is an urgent need for focused mental health interventions in schools. Qualitative interviews revealed that students commonly relied on peer support, sports, and distraction as coping mechanisms. However, many expressed a lack of access to professional psychological support.

Recommendations: There should be integrated mental health services that offer combined counselling for both depression and stress, supported by increased access to trained professionals. Periodic mental health screenings and awareness campaigns are essential for reducing stigma and encouraging students to seek help. Single parents need resources to support their children's mental well-being effectively. The study also recommends teaching effective coping strategies, establishing peer support networks, creating resilience-building programs, and encouraging participation in extracurricular activities to help students manage stress and improve their mental health.



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