

As sociology coursework – effects of a fatherless childhood

[Family](#), [Father](#)



I chose this area of study because I noticed that compared with personal knowledge, the New Right Ideology appears to exaggerate how fatherless upbringings affect children. Amongst my peers there are people raised in lone parent and nuclear families, and members of both groups experience similar amounts of problems and share similar social values, unlike Rebecca O'Neill's conclusion that children from lone parent families are more likely to have underage sex due to a lack of parental control.

(100 words)

Contexts and Concepts

In 1993, Olson and Haynes conducted a study of American lone parent families. The results led to them identifying seven strengths of these families, six were relevant to my research. The first was that lone parents accepted the responsibilities of their roles and problems were always solved. The second was prioritisation of the parental role, meaning parents did not have to split attention. The third strength was discipline, proving children did not go without discipline and they knew how to behave in society.

The fourth was opencommunication, meaning children would feel able to talk to parents, preventing long term emotional problems. Parental self nurturance was the fifth strength. The final relevant strength was the rituals and traditions which meant the children's lives had structure and they did not miss out on things that nuclear families are thought to have more of, such as family holidays.

Olson and Hayes proved the lone parent family to be beneficial to both parents and children, showing no deprivation of a second role model in the home to instil things such as social values and discipline. This is very relevant to what I aim to prove.

In September 2002, Rebecca O'Neill conducted the study, " Experiments in Living: The Fatherless Family", concerning lone-mother parenting, as a result of birth outside marriage, divorce or changes in marriage or cohabitation. She researched the effects of a fatherless upbringing on the children of fatherless families and adults who had been raised in fatherless families. When studying the effects on children, O'Neill found they were likely to suffer emotional problems. She found that young teenagers were likely to take illegal substances, commit crimes and have sex before marriage, activities linked to socialisation and discipline in the home. O'Neill's study of adults raised by lone mothers showed them to be less likely to gain qualifications and become employed, meaning they were more likely to be unemployed and depend on the state for benefits, therefore continuing the dependency culture and socialising children to think it is okay to depend on the state. O'Neill's results also showed adults from lone-parent families were less likely to marry and more likely to commit crimes.

The conclusions of this study are very supportive of the New Right ideology, in that the best environment for a child to be raised in is the traditional nuclear family including mother and father, I seek to prove this wrong.

(400 words)

Main Research Method

My interviews will be unstructured, as it would be the most relevant way of gaining qualitative results, which are useful for finding out the opinions and emotions of interviewees, leading to a conclusion about personal social values. Using unstructured interviews would be significant because each person would have individual values, ones which they may not be able to fully express with structured interviews. Unstructured interviews would also mean the interviewees could talk about things that are relevant which I had not thought about prior to the interviews.

The interviews will still have slight structure, in that I will be taking an active approach in engaging the interviewees in conversation about points I would like to cover for my research. I feel that an active approach would be useful as an interviewee engaged in conversation would probably be more likely to talk about their opinions and create a sense of friendship and trust. These may be needed to allow the interviewee to feel comfortable about topics such as sex, intoxicant use and criminal activity, things which they may otherwise consider as taboo. These topics are relevant to the social values outlined by O'Neill, but if they are not probed about, they could easily go unmentioned. I will operationalise concepts by explaining their definitions, which will avoid responses being affected by lack of understanding.

My sample will be of 140 students at my school, 20 from each year group, half of whom will be from lone parent families and half of whom will be from nuclear families. Doing a split sample will allow me to show the similarities

between the groups in terms of social values, emotional stability and educational attainment. The sample will be of pupils at my school, as finding interviewees will be easier and it would be cost efficient, with less travelling needed, also leading to a saving of time.

My sample will be voluntary, perhaps through advertisement. I would ask for voluntary interviewees who would openly talk about family matters. This sampling method would be suitable for my research because the interviews will be about some family matters, illegal activities and emotional subjects. These things can be hard for some people to talk about, so asking people to volunteer would be better than producing a random sample of which some people would feel uneasy talking about the covered issues.

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Potential Problems

As with any study, potential problems can be found in using unstructured interviews. Ethical issues can cause problems such as privacy being invaded. Some interviewees may reveal information they did not intend to reveal at first, due to the informal nature of the interviews. Another problem is the moral dilemma I will be faced with if an interviewee reveals information that indicates they are at risk of harm or that they are committing serious crimes. Would it be right for me to breach confidentiality and get local authorities involved? I will also need to find ways of ensuring my interviewees come to no emotional harm as a result of the interviews.

Validity may be difficult to ensure. Due to my method's informal nature, I may find myself making comments or asking questions that are biased, influencing interviewee responses. Also affecting validity is the interviewee. Some may have bad memories, and report things differently to what they are, others may conform to social desirability and make statements which are untrue, just to have themselves perceived in a certain way. This may also affect how reliable responses are when coming to a conclusion.

The research method will be free in terms of money, but not time.

Realistically, for me to get the maximum information out of interviewees, I would need to spend at least an hour with each. But, that would take at least a month if all were to be done in school hours. Therefore, I will only probably get half an hour with each interviewee.

My method also has the disadvantage that general conversing in unstructured interviews could lead to the discussion of irrelevant topics. My sample could cause a problem of the small group I use not being representative of youths of other ages or social backgrounds.