

A STUDY TO IDENTIFY FAMILY FACTORS  
THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN  
A GROUP OF CHILDREN FROM SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

by

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(ABSTRACT)

The number of children from single-parent families has risen significantly since the 1970s. The stress associated with single-parent status not only places the parent in a precarious state, but also has the tendency to adversely affect the child's academic performance.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship among stress, coping resources, and academic success in a group of children from single-parent families. The study also was designed to assess what family factors including race, gender, income level, education level, employment status, and family composition contribute to the academic success of the child.

Sixty-seven single-parent families and their oldest elementary school-age child participated in this study.

The families' stress level was measured by using the Family Inventory of Life Changes and Events (FILE), while the Family Crisis Orientation Personal Evaluation Scales (F-COPES) were used to measure the families internal and external coping resources. A child's Resource Questionnaire was used to measure the child's coping resources. Academic success was measured using Grade Point Average (GPA) and Criterion Referenced Tests (CRTs) scores.

The results indicated no significant relationship between stress and academic success as measured by GPAs when controlling for gender, race, and resources. However, the education level of the parent, child's gender, and the number of children in the family were family factors found to contribute to academic success when measured by GPAs.

When measured by the CRTs, several factors contributed to academic success. In language arts, higher numbers of children in the family were associated with lower language arts scores. In addition, girls tended to score higher than boys. In math, only the child's gender was found to contribute to academic success, with girls tending to score higher than boys. In science, higher numbers of children in the family were

linked with lower science CRT scores, while higher family coping resources were associated with higher science CRT scores. In social studies, single mothers were linked with higher CRT scores than single fathers. In addition, higher family stress was associated with lower social studies CRT scores, and white children tended to score higher than minorities.

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Joe Henry Moyé, who had a great appreciation for knowledge.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, a number of social changes have led to the emergence of non-traditional family structures, the most notable being the single-parent family (Thornton & Freedman, 1983). The single-parent family is one of the fastest growing non-traditional family structures in this nation. A U.S. Census Bureau (1989) report shows a surge in the number of children from single-parent families which reflects a trend that has been steadily rising since the 1970s. Presently, of about 63 million children in this country under the age of eighteen, more than 15 million live in single-parent homes (Rawling, 1989; Sweet, 1988). Equally alarming, is an estimate by the Bureau of Census (1989) and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (1980) that of the 15 million children living in single-parent homes, 5.2 million are elementary school-age. These figures are in sharp contrast with those of two decades ago which showed that only 13 percent of children under the age of eighteen lived in single-parent households compared with the current 27 percent (Rawling, 1989; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990).

Figures released by the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1990) indicate that eighty-seven percent of all single-parent families are headed by a female. Most of these

single-parent families are the result of the increasingly high rate of divorce and separation, and to the large number of unmarried mothers opting to keep their babies. The U.S. Bureau of Census (1989) reported that in 1988, 14 million, or 10.1 percent of all adults who had ever been married had divorced. If the current divorce rate continues, it is estimated that by the year 2000, one half of all children will spend at least part of their childhood years in a single-parent family (Hernandez, 1986; Hofferth, 1985; Shreeve, 1985).

Children from single-parent homes tend to have greater academic and disciplinary problems in school than children from two-parent homes (Shreeve, 1985; Hetherington, 1981). A 1980 study done by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), which addressed the school needs of elementary school children from single-parent families, revealed that 38 percent of the elementary students from one-parent families received grades of D or F. Only 23 percent of children from two-parent families received similar low grades. Conversely, 17 percent of children from single-parent families were rated high achievers, compared with 30 percent from two parent families (NAESP, 1980).

Though there is a preponderance of research documenting that children from single-parent families on a whole tend to have lower academic achievement than their two-parent

counterparts, and thus stand in jeopardy of being at greater risk of truancy and dropping out of school, (NAESP, 1980; Roddy, 1984), there continues to be a division of theory in terms of the true cause and effect regarding the impact of the single-parent family on school achievement (DiSibio, 1981; Roddy, 1984; Shreeve, 1985). One may question whether the single-parent status itself tends to lower achievement, or if the single-parent status is an associated factor.

Until recently, research on single-parent families focused on the father's absence as the principle variable affecting the social and emotional development of children in single-parent homes. However, after further examination of life circumstances of single-parent families, evidence suggests that the father's absence can have direct and indirect effects on children (Weinraub & Wolf, 1983). While direct effects of the father's absence include those relating to stimulation, social attention, and modeling, indirect effects are those resulting from the increased social, emotional and financial stresses on the mother. The latter currently are being studied as contributing factors to most of the differences observed in children of single-parent homes (Blechman, 1982; Hernog & Sudia, 1973; Shinn, 1978).

Sava (1989), NAESP Executive Director, states that "Children from so called non-traditional single-parent homes



have become one of the most significant minorities in our schools" (p. 1). Given the prevalence of the single-parent family structure, and the prevalence of academic and disciplinary problems linked with children from these families, it is evident that schools are challenged with the critical role of meeting these children's educational needs.

#### Background

According to the U.S. Bureau of Census (1989), Marital dissolution by divorce and births out of wedlock are the major causes of single-parent families in the U.S. Due to this major shift in family composition, researchers in the fields of marriage and family are shifting their focus to issues of coping and control (mediating variables) rather than focusing completely on dysfunctional outcomes (Sprey, 1985; Roy, 1983; Fuqua, 1983).

In light of the high rate of divorce and the escalation of single-parent families, Hogan, Buehler, & Robinson, (1983); and Norton & Glick, (1986) point out that it becomes imperative for researchers, educators, and policymakers to address the issue of how the single-parent family copes with the negative consequences of life stressors and facilitates adjustment of family members.

McCubbin and his associates are among the many researchers who have done extensive studies on family stress

and coping in a variety of normative and non-normative situations. Their research has been significant in moving researchers toward an understanding of adjustment and adaptation in the single-parent family system.

The earliest conceptual foundation for research in family stress report McCubbin and Patterson (1983a) is the Hill (1949, 1958) ABCX Family Crisis Model. In this model, the a represents (the event) - interacting with b (the family's crisis meeting resources) - interacting with c (the definition the family makes of the event) - produces x (the crisis). Building on Hill's classical research, McCubbin and Patterson (1982) identified a range of post-crisis variables and developed a prediction type model which they labeled the **Double ABCX Model**.

The **ABCX** models provide the conceptual foundation for this study and are based on the theory that changes or transitions in life are expected, predicted, and can be potential sources of stress. According to these models, the outcome from a stressful event is the result of the family's capabilities (i.e. personal resources, internal resources, and social support) and how the family defines the event. The **ABCX Model** focuses upon pre-crisis variables which have the capability of preventing a stressor from reaching crisis proportions. The **Double ABCX Model** (Figure 1) assesses

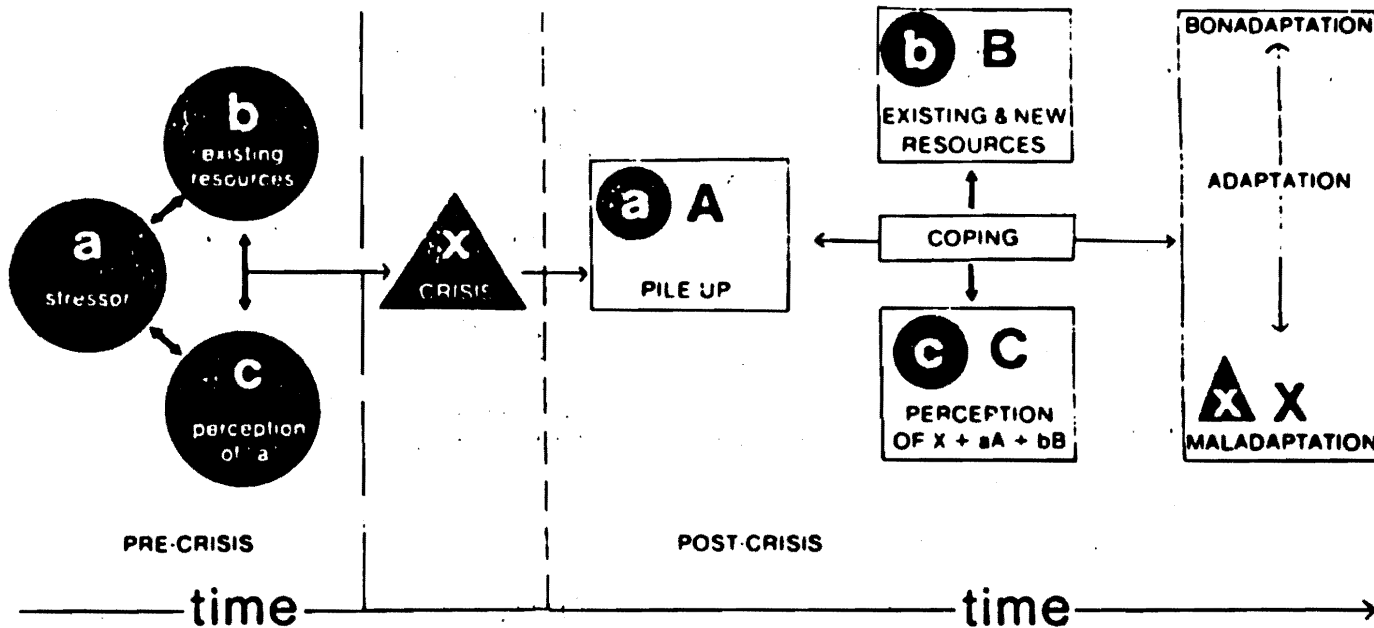


FIGURE 1. The double ABCX model

Note: From Stress and the Family: Coping with Normative Transitions (P. 12) by Hamilton I. McCubbin, Joan M. Patterson, and Charles R. Figley (Eds.), 1983, New York: Brunner/Mazel, Inc. Copyright 1983 by McCubbin & Figley.

post-crisis variables and focuses on family efforts, over time, to adapt once a crisis has occurred.

Two major factors are relevant in the **Double ABCX Model**: family demands and capabilities (resources). The demands emerge within three units related to the family which McCubbin and Patterson (1983b) have identified as: the individual, the family, and the community. Each unit is characterized by both demands and capabilities. The demand of one unit can be met through reciprocal relationships. The goal is to achieve a balance between individual family members and the family system, and between family and community, thus achieving family adaptation.

Families whose resources are inadequate or exhausted in meeting the demands of a stressor, move into the crisis phase.

As a result, these families lose equilibrium within the family system and become unable to cope with internal and external demands. Most single-parent families experience this imbalance due to the pile-up of changes and demands brought on by marital separation, divorce, or death of spouse (Hogan; Buchler; & Robinson, 1983).

While the stress models serve to explain the dynamics of stress, Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development model provides a conceptual framework for understanding how

stress experienced in one social context affects how one interacts in other social contexts. The ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) emerged from the theory that human development involves an interaction between the individual and the environments in which he/she engages. The environment is not limited to the immediate physical setting but also comprises larger contexts, such as the political and economic systems.

The ecological environment can be described as a group of concentric circles. Each environment is characterized by its interdependence and interconnectedness while having a definite influence on the others. The interaction between the environment and the individual is viewed two-directional, thus creating a reciprocal effect. For example, families or family members make demands of environments and environments in turn make demands of them.

Bronfenbrenner referred to these environments or social contexts as: microsystem (immediate physical setting); mesosystem (all microsystems that regularly involve an individual); exosystem (actions of major institutions on a local level); and macrosystem (institutions of culture). Each aspect of the environment moves from specific to more inclusive while having influences upon the others.

The school is considered a major institution which is a part of a larger environment that encompasses the home. The

two have an interdependent and interconnected relationship. Therefore, what goes on in the home will be felt in other environments or social contexts, such as the school. Children's behavior and performance in the school setting are to a great extent indicative of home conditions and circumstances.

The ecological model, in conjunction with the stress models, can provide a schemata for assessing what is happening in and to single-parent families, and how these interactions affect how family members function in other environments or social settings.

#### Statement of the Problem

This study concerns stressful life events in a group of single-parent families and how these families use of resources affects the level of academic success of their oldest elementary school-age child. Evidence has shown that the well-being of the parent in charge of the family is an important factor in creating a sense of well-being within the family (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1980; Richard & Pfeiffenberger, 1983). Therefore, the extent of a parent's emotional well-being following a stressful event is contingent upon the coping resources and upon the parent's and family's perception of the stressful event (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983a). As a result, the outcome of a stressful

event in the family may be reflected in the child's academic performance.

Due to the need for further understanding of the relationship among stress, coping resources, and academic success in single-parent families, the problem of this study was to examine the relationship among stress, coping resources, and academic success in a group of children from single-parent families.

#### Purpose of the Study

Given the prevalence of the single-parent family structure in this country, it becomes increasingly important to study the variables which may be associated with negative consequences (i.e. academic and disciplinary problems) for the children involved. A review of the literature indicates that further research is needed to understand what variables may serve to mediate the negative effects of single-parent status on the family structure (Roy & Fuqua, 1983; White & Mika, 1983). Thus, the purpose of this study was to determine what factors account for the academic success in a group of children from single-parent families. In addition to stress, academic success, and coping resources; such as family factors as (race, gender, income level, education level, employment status, and number of children in the family) were also considered.

### Research Questions

1. What are the family factors that contribute to children's academic success in single-parent families?
2. What is the relationship between stress and academic success when controlling for gender of the child?
3. What is the relationship between stress and academic success when controlling for race?
4. What is the relationship between stress and academic success when controlling for resources?

### Significance of the Study

Approximately 15 million children under the age of eighteen live in single-parent homes. Studies indicate that 30 percent to 40 percent of these children have lower academic achievement in school than their two-parent counterparts (NAESP, 1980; Shreeve, 1985).

In addition, there is evidence from the extant literature that further research in specific aspects of single-parent status, such as coping and family adaptation is needed (Herzog & Sudia, 1973; Roy & Fuqua, 1983; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983b). Further research in this area would serve to assist administrators, principals, teachers, counselors, and single-parent families in understanding how coping variables may serve to mediate the negative effects of single-parent status on academic performance.



The findings of this study can be used for assessing how stress in single-parent families can disrupt children's ability to participate in the learning process. Further, these findings can yield information about how the functioning of the single-parent family system is influenced by interactions with the larger community. Finally, these findings can assist principals, teachers and the community in their efforts in addressing the unique needs of single-parent families and their children.

#### Definition of Terms

1. Single-Parent Family--A family consisting of child or children living with "one" parent or guardian as a result of death, divorce, or separation. This also includes children living with mothers who have never been married (DiSibio, 1981).

2. Normative Events--Experiences which occur over the family life cycle: marriage, parenthood, adolescence, new job, etc. These experiences are expected and predictable.

3. Non-normative Events--Experiences that are sudden, unexpected, and sometimes life-threatening.

4. Coping Resources--Problem-solving attitudes and behaviors which families develop to respond to problems or difficulties (McCubbin, Olson, & Larsen, 1981).

5. Criterion Referenced Tests--A test designed by Prince William County Public Schools to measure students mastery of curricula objectives.

6. Academic Success--Is measured by the child's Grade Point Average (GPA) and the four Criterion Referenced Tests (CRTs) scores.

7. Stressor--Normative or non-normative life event that has the potential for causing stress.

8. Stress--A state which arises from actual or perceived demand-capability imbalance in the family (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983).

9. Pile-Up--Sum of normative and non-normative stressors and intra-family strains (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983a).

10. Oldest Elementary School Age Child--The oldest child in the single-parent family in any grade from first to fifth.

#### Delimitations

To make this study manageable, it was delimited as follows:

1. This study was delimited to first through fifth graders who live in a single-parent setting.

2. The stressful life events and coping resources assessed in this study were delimited to those defined by

the FILE (Family Inventory of Life Events and Changes) and F-Copes (Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales) assessment inventories (McCubbin and Thomson, 1987).

3. This study was delimited to seven elementary schools in Virginia's Prince William County Public Schools system.

#### Limitations

Any conclusions or implications made from this study are limited to the following:

1. This study did not exhaust all of the variables which may be significantly related to stress in single-parent families within the context of academic success. Thus, it is recognized that there may be other variables associated with the level of academic success in children living in single-parent homes.

2. This study included single-parent families and their oldest elementary school-age children in any of the grades from first through fifth, and its findings may not be applicable to other families.

3. The measurement of academic success was limited by the grading scale and the Criterion Reference Tests used in Prince William County's elementary schools.

### Organization of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I includes the introduction, a background discussion, assumptions, statement of the problem, purposes of the study, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, and an enumeration of delimitations and limitations. Chapter II reviews related research and literature. Chapter III gives a description of the subjects, the instrumentation, procedures, and analyses used for the investigation. Chapter IV gives results of the data analyses. Finally, Chapter V presents a summation of the findings along with conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature presented in this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section gives an overview of the changes that have taken place in the American family, while the second section examines an ecological perspective of the family and school. The third section reviews empirical research related to children's academic achievement in single-parent families, and the last two sections look at family stress and its relationship to academic success, and social supports.

#### The Changing American Family

In the 1980s, social and economic circumstances brought about high divorce rates; a decrease in the number of members in the average American home; an increase in the number of working mothers; growth in the single-parent family structures, and in the number of children living in these families (Cherlin, 1988; Bane & Weiss, 1980). These family trends have been compounded with psychological, social, and economic problems.

Among the many researchers and demographers who have described the dramatic changes occurring to the American family, including the increasing number of single-parent homes are: Bronfenbrenner (1976); Norton and Glick (1986);

Herzog and Sudia (1973); and Thornton and Freedman (1983). According to these researchers, changes in the American family patterns are the result of long term trends in urbanization, industrialization, economic growth, disruption of the Great Depression and World War II, as well as changed attitudes toward marriage, parenthood, divorce, and the roles of women.

Researchers, Saluter (1989), and Thornton and Freedman (1983) describe how attitudes toward marriage, remaining single, and marital patterns have changed distinctly since World War II. They also point out that during the first four decades of the 20th century, first time marriage rates were quite steady. However, after World War II, these researchers reported that there was a pervasive increase in marriage rates which helped to usher in the "Baby Boom".

Based upon the U.S. Bureau of Census Report (1989) and the work of researchers Thornton and Freedman (1983), the postwar marriage boom reshaped the pattern of first marriages in America. The median age at first marriage fell from 23 for white women born in the 1880s to just over 20 for those born in the late 1930s. Since the mid-1950s, the median age has moved upward gradually. Saluter (1989) reported in the Current Population Report that 25.9 years was the median age at first marriage for men in 1988 and was the same for men in 1900, while 23.6 years was the average

age for women in 1988 and 1900. Conversely, researchers Rodgers and Thornton (1982), reported that the postwar marriage boom was not distinct for blacks as for whites, especially marrying at younger ages. Even today, the U.S. Bureau of Census (1989) figures show that the average age of blacks marrying for the first time is higher than that of whites.

#### Divorce

It is reported that as long ago as the late 18th century, marital conflict and divorce have been recognized as a serious social concern (Thornton & Freedman, 1983). According to the Current Population Report (1989) and demographers Rodgers and Thornton (1982), the actual rate of divorce in the United States increased gradually from 1860 to the early 1960s. Then there were two decades of rapid increase. By 1985, it is reported that 23 percent of the ever-married population in the United States had experienced divorce at some point in their life (Saluter, 1989).

Norton and Glick (1976) pointed out in their research that many of the socioeconomic indicators (such as young age at marriage, low educational status, low occupational status, and low income), which have been traditionally linked to marital disruption, have been changing in directions that have lessened the impact on marital stability.

To account for the current surge of divorce in this country, demographic analysis by Norton and Glick (1976) and Thorton and Freedman (1983) suggest the following possible reasons:

- (1) People tend to be less tolerant of their marital problems, due to higher expectations.
- (2) Americans may be more accepting of divorce as a solution to an unhappy marriage.
- (3) Changes in laws and economic circumstances have made divorce feasible.
- (4) Increase in women's labor force and the decline in family size have made divorce easier for women.

Another characteristic reflecting recent changes in divorce is the presence of children among couples involved in divorce. Figures released by the Bureau of Census (1989) show that the number of children living with a divorced parent rose from 2.5 million in 1970 to 5.9 million (38 percent) in 1988. These children account for the largest proportion of children in a one-parent situation. Further, population figures indicate that white children who live with one parent are more likely to live with a divorced parent than Hispanic and Black children are respectively (Saluter, 1989).



### Growth of Single-Parent Families

According to researchers Norton and Glick (1986), from 1970 to 1988, the number of single-parent families rose from 3.8 million to 9.4 million. This proportion has more than doubled since 1970, and is growing at a much faster rate than the traditional family.

According to Norton and Glick (1986), the term "single-parent" family refers to three major types of families: a distinct family household, a related sub-family, or an unrelated sub-family. However some researchers (Thompson and Gongla, 1983) warn of the impossibility of knowing how many types of single-parent families actually exist and what proportion are in each category. Still, it has been estimated by the Bureau of Census (1989) that about 22 percent of single parents live either in a relative's home or in some unrelated person's household. Rawlings (1989) reports that another characteristic of single-parent families is that they are increasingly younger than two-parent families. The median age of persons maintaining a single-parent family in 1988 was 33.2 years compared with the median age of 37.4 years for two-parent families (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1989).

According to Ross and Sawhill (1975); and Norton and Glick (1986), the vast majority of single-parent families are maintained by the mother. Rawlings (1989) reports in

the Current Population Report that single mothers account for about 87 percent of all single parents. He further notes that the percentage of one-parent situations maintained by single fathers is higher among whites than blacks. Of the 1.2 million single-parent fathers estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau (1989), about 81 percent of them were reported to be white.

#### Labor Force Status

One of the most noticeable changes in the American family is the rapid increase of mothers entering the labor force (Norton & Glick, 1986; Thornton & Freedman, 1983). Historically, American women worked to provide for the family by maintaining the home and contributing to the family's growth and development (Thornton & Freedman, 1983). However, Thornton and Freedman (1983) contend that the industrialization period in the late and early 1900s shifted the primary focus of employment from the household to the marketplace. This labor shift changed family life, and presented new problems. Some of the problems that families face as a result of the labor shift are: child care, juggling of schedules for both home and job, and marital adjustments to the wife's new status (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Weiss, 1979; Thornton & Freedman, 1983).

Ross and Sawhill (1975) note in their book that in single-parent families, the problems are compounded by high poverty rate, low income and fewer employment opportunities. In addition, research has shown that while single parents may have completed high school, married parents are more likely to have completed both high school and college (Norton & Glick, 1986; Rawlings, 1989). Not having a college degree creates a disadvantage for the single parent when competing for and holding down good jobs.

Bane and Weiss (1980) note that single-parent families make less than their two parent counterparts, and women take a sizable reduction in family income following marital disruption. They further report that divorced and separated mothers experience around 40 percent to 50 percent drops in family income respectively.

As traditional families become less dominant as a result of social and economic circumstances, non-traditional, single-parent families with children under the age of 18 are increasing. Because of this dramatic increase in single-parent families, there is much concern over the potentially negative effects for their children and the disadvantaged position it holds in society when compared with the two parent family.

In addressing these concerns, Bronfenbrenner (1976) provides through an ecological perspective, a framework for

understanding how the family and school can work together in an effort to ensure children's school and life success.

### An Ecological Perspective of Family and School

The ecological model stresses the view that families and family members do not grow and develop alone or just within the boundaries of the family structure. Their growth and development is profoundly affected by various external settings.

There are four basic tenets which serve as focal points in the ecological model: (a) The ecological environment is a set of nested, interlocking systems --- microsystems, mesosystems, exosystem, macrosystem; (b) The interconnections of these systems are decisive to the family; (c) Systems in which family members are not directly involved can profoundly affect their development; and (d) Collectively, the various environmental settings constitute distinctively different subcultures and cultures (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner describes any settings in which a member of the family is physically present as a microsystem. The school, home, and community are examples of microsystems. The mesosystem represents the interdependence of two or more microsystems (i.e. home and school, or school and community).

Due to the interdependent and interconnected relationship, microsystems, influence each other. For example, the degree to which a child functions in school is reflected to some degree in the type of interactions the child experiences at home and vice versa.

Contrary to the microsystem, an exosystem affects family members even though they are active participants in the physical setting. The classroom, Board of Education, U.S. Congress, and the judicial system are examples of exosystems.

Finally, the macrosystem refers to the consistencies and common characteristics that exist between the lower systems (microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem) or beliefs that could exist at the subculture or culture level as a whole. Examples of this system are seen in the intrasocietal contrasts that exist in various socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious groups (e.g. rich/poor; black/white; Protestant/Catholic).

#### Home-School Partnership

The evidence strongly shows that partnerships between the home and school increase the likelihood of children meeting school success (Henderson, 1987; Comer, 1980; Rich, 1987; Becher, 1984). Educators and parents feel that the school and home can no longer be isolated from one another

(Kappan, 1991; Gallup Poll, 1986). Comer (1980) contends that a cooperative and collaborative relationship among parents, community, and school is necessary in decreasing the harmful psychological and behavioral effects brought on by social and economic circumstances. Comer further contends that high level teaching and learning cannot take place until these conditions are reduced through a collaborative working relationship between home and school.

A partnership relationship is important to all families, and especially to single-parent families. Clay (1981) suggests that single-parent families depend on schools as the main source of continuity in the life of their children. Such dependency becomes evident during the stressful period of separation and divorce. A partnership relationship between home and school also benefits the school. By being responsive to family needs through a home-school collaboration, schools gain community support necessary to carry out their mission, and thus become more effective (Gordon, 1978; Henderson, 1987; Clay, 1981; Rich, 1988).

In reviewing the research on the effects of parent involvement on student achievement, Gordon (1978) concluded that there were three models of parent involvement: (1) those that work to improve the parent-child relationship,

(2) those that try to integrate parents into the school program, and (3) those that attempt to build a strong relationship among school, family, and community.

Though there is much literature on the importance of home-school partnerships and parent involvement, the majority of research has focused on the "family process variables" (Henderson, 1987; Becher, 1984; Gordon, 1978). Family process variables are describes by Henderson (1987) as family characteristics relating:

- to education and income levels of the parents;
- to family behaviors that determine whether parents read to children and enforce rules about homework and television;
- to family patterns, such as marital and employment status, and social support networks
- and to characteristics relating to family attitudes which include expectations parents have for their children and the child's self-concept.

These variables represent a line of research that examines the home environment with its effects being measured in terms of school performance.

Much of this research is the result of the heightened interest in the 60s regarding the effect of home environment on cognitive development. Dave, 1963; Wolf, 1964; Coleman, 1966; Jencks, 1972; Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Clark, 1983; and

Bloom, 1986 are among the many researchers who have documented the crucial role of family and home on children's cognitive development and achievement. According to these researchers, it is what parents do in the home rather than their socioeconomic status (SES) that is more predictive of school success and learning development.

According to the literature review on parent involvement (Becher, 1984; Henderson, 1987), coupled with a series of studies to further understand the relationships between specific family process variables and parent behaviors, the following findings have been observed:

(1) Children who score high on measures of achievement, competence, and intelligence, had parents who held high expectations, aspirations, and exhibited a higher level of general interest than did parents of low scoring children (Epstein, 1987; Seginer, 1983; Gordon, 1979).

This finding is documented in Seginer's (1983) review of literature of parents' educational expectations and children's academic achievement. He found that the majority of empirical studies supported the contentions that high-achieving children tend to come from families (a) who have high expectations for them; (b) families who see standards; and (c) who make greater demands on their children at an earlier age. Seginer points out that these findings were consistent, despite variations in definitions of parents'



expectations, academic achievement, respondents' characteristics, and data collection methods.

(2) Children with higher scores had parents who had more interactions that were responsive to them (Bradley, Caldwell, & Elrado, 1977; Ladd, Lange, & Kienapple, 1981).

This position is documented in Bradley, Caldwell, and Elrado (1977) research that examined home environment, social status, and mental test performance. They found the home environment quality to be more strongly associated with I.Q. among whites than blacks, among girls than boys. It also was found that among the socioeconomic variables, the education level of the parents showed the strongest relationship to children's I.Q. and that families within each socioeconomic group differ widely in the kind and amount of stimulation they provide to children. The researchers explained that girls' I.Q. is more strongly associated with environment than boys because mothers tend to be more sensitive and effective when interacting with infant girls than boys.

(3) Children with higher scores had parents who had perceived themselves as teachers and incorporated teaching modes and strategies (Epstein, 1987; Gordon, 1978; Guinagh & Gordon, 1976).

Guinagh and Gordon's (1976) longitudinal study of school performance as a function of early stimulation

provided mothers early childhood program training in how to use teaching materials at home. Children of mothers who participated in the program made significant advances on reading and math tests when they entered school, and noted that their level of performance was maintained through third grade.

(4) Children with higher scores had parents who used more advanced levels and styles of thought and language interactions with them. These parents also provided more explanations and reasons for performance and correcting behavior (Gordon, 1978; Olmsted & Jester, 1972).

In a study to examine the relationship between maternal teaching behavior and socioeconomic background, Olmsted and Jester (1972) found significant differences in ways mothers of middle- and low- socioeconomic levels teach their children. The study consisted of two groups of mothers. In one group, the mothers had middle socioeconomic status (SES) while the second group had mothers with low SES. The mothers were trained to teach a task that involved sorting blocks into four groupings. The mothers were then asked to teach their children how to sort the blocks, and to verbalize the reasons for each grouping. The results showed that the middle SES mothers provided more detailed introduction than did lower SES mothers, middle SES mothers gave more exposure to the different groupings, and middle

SES mothers gave more corrective feedback with explanations and fewer closed ended questions. Finally, the middle SES mothers and children showed more variety in their verbal behavior than did the low SES mothers and children.

(5) Children with higher scores had parents who acted as stronger models of learning and achievement for their children (Seginer, 1983; Rich, 1987; Broxie, 1987).

Rich (1987) is a strong proponent of this type of parent involvement. She experimented with home-learning lessons that parents could use with their children to reinforce math and reading. After exposing an experimental group to the home-learning lessons, Rich compared them with a control group. Scores on reading and math tests were used as indicators of effectiveness of home-learning activities. The findings showed that the experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group. According to Rich, these activities provide opportunities for parents to teach basic motivation skills and attitudes to children as they engage in daily learning activities.

(6) Finally, children with higher scores came from homes where there was considerably more reinforcement of school behavior than children who did not (Atkinson & Forehand, 1979; Barth, 1979).

Atkinson and Forehand (1979) reviewed research on the use of home-based reinforcement programs designed to modify

academic and disruptive classroom behaviors. Academic behaviors include listening to presentations by the teacher, listening and participating in class discussions, asking and answering questions, completing classwork neatly and correctly, and achieving (grades) appropriate to potential. Some of the behavioral techniques used were: praise, notes to parents, tangible rewards, and sanctions used by parents as consequences. In all the studies reviewed, the authors concluded that home-based reinforcement was effective in changing classroom behavior. The findings were consistent, despite the wide range of grades, regular and special classrooms, and academic and disruptive behaviors.

As evidenced in the literature and research findings, parent involvement efforts, whether at home or in the school-community setting, have a positive influence on all members of the home-school partnership.

#### Academic Achievement of Children in Single Parent-Families

There are several factors associated with single-parent families that have been found to have adverse effects on school achievement:

Poverty--is a leading cause of anxiety, poor health, absenteeism, and lower quality of life in general. Many single-parent families headed by females are below the poverty line (Bane & Weiss, 1980).

Emotional Stress--Most single parents and their children experience stress brought on by financial, emotional, and social issues (McLanahan, Wedemeyer, & Adelberg, 1981). This stress can retard and adversely affect the child's academic performance. Kelly and Wallerstein (1979) have identified such emotional signs as sadness, lack of concentration, restlessness, and depression.

Discrimination--against or stereotyping of single-parent families also affects school performance. Clay (1980) reports in a study of 1,200 single parents polled that one-third had experienced negative comments about one-parent families, and that teachers low expectations often produced poor student performance.

Parental Involvement--or lack of involvement, to a large degree, determines how successful a child is in school. It has been documented that single-parent involvement tends to be less than that of two-parent families (Clay, 1981; Schlesinger, 1985; Jones, 1989). Working hours, stress, lack of resources, and experience are some of the reasons cited for limiting the single parent's involvement in the child's academic achievement.

Hence, children experiencing divorce related problems also are likely to experience adjustment problems at home and school (Kurdek & Berg, 1983). The stress felt within the family often affects the child's academic performance.

In 1979, the National Association of Elementary School Principals along with the Institute for Development of Education Activities concluded that children from divorced homes were at risk and needed extra help at school (Lazarus, 1980). As a result, the two associations combined efforts and conducted a study of 18,000 students from fourteen states (Brown, 1980; Lazarus, 1980; Zakariya, 1982). This study examined grade point averages, attendance, suspensions, truancy and referrals for discipline problems. The findings showed that a substantially larger number of high achievers came from two-parent families than from one-parent families, and that a large number of children from one-parent families were low achievers. The findings also revealed that children from single-parent families comprise 40 percent of the number of dropouts. A follow-up was done where 24 interviews were held with parents to assess the children's progress. The results continued to show, on average, two parent children achieved significantly higher than one-parent children.

Though the National Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals initiated its study in 1979, there were earlier studies that examined the school success of students from one-parent homes. Shinn's (1978) review of 54 studies begins with the research of Sutherland (1930). Sutherland found when comparing Scottish children in two-

parent homes with those where the father was absent due to war deaths, children in two-parent families scored higher I.Q. tests. In another early study, Risen (1939) studying junior high school students with one or no parent found that these students tend to be sent to the school counselor more and had less chance of being a leader. The absence of one or both parents seemed to have had a negative effect on academic performance. Similar to Sutherland's (1930) findings, in a large study of a racially integrated junior high school, Stetler (1959) found that students living with both parents had higher I.Q.s than students living with one parent.

There has been much attention given to how (Colletta, 1979; Herzog & Sudia, 1973; Lazarus, 1980) the SES is a moderating variable in explaining differences in student tests scores in one- and two-parent families.

In a large study of 400 fifth graders, Smidchen and Thompson (1978) compared family SES and achievement in one and two-parent homes. In examining the areas of reading and math comprehension, the difference between the two family structures was not as great for the above median income level as for the below median income level. The researchers further explained that the family of one - and two-parent families . . . seems to have a greater impact on students in lower ranges of socioeconomic scales. At the higher income,

and educational level, the family is more apt to have the time, resources and experience to direct toward student achievement levels. (p.21)

Though some studies have suggested that socioeconomic status variables intervene to account for the negative impact of divorce on children, Guidubaldi (1984) and his colleagues had different results. Their study showed that divorce accounts for a number of negative academic effects independent of socioeconomic measures.

According to Shinn (1978), income differences alone have not accounted for all of the effects in a number of studies surveyed. She further contends that the proportion of variance in effects of father absence that can be attributed to income loss or the interaction between income and other contributing factors remains to be determined.

The difference in the effects of father absence on boys and girls also has been an area of much interest. Guidubaldi, Cleminshaw, and Perry (1984) report that one of the most powerfully demonstrated findings of their research found girls in divorced families better adjusted academically than boys. Girls showed superior performance on grades in reading, math, and on the Wide Range Achievement Test. Girls were found also to be less likely to have repeated a school grade. A correlation analysis of marital status and criteria were performed separately for



boys and girls. The findings showed the boys from intact families scored better in reading and math than boys from divorced families, and that not as many from intact families repeated school grades as from divorced families. The only difference between the two girl groups was on independent learning.

Some researchers, Santrock (1972), Sciarra and Jantz (1974), and Chapman (1977), contend that father absence diminishes both mathematical and verbal performance, specifically in boys. In a study of white, low SES boys and girls to determine the relation of father absence to cognitive development, Santrock (1972) found that on measures of achievement, father-absent boys consistently performed more poorly than father-absent girls or father-present boys. Sciarra and Jantz (1974) in a study on the effects of father-absence on black children from low income families found that male and female father-absent fourth graders achieved lower reading scores on I.Q. tests than did their father-present counterparts. Chapman (1977) found no significant relationship between father-absent girls and their verbal SAT scores.

Another body of research had made some effort to examine the effect of social supports in mediating the negative effects of single-parent status on children's academic performance. Literature related to social supports

and children's adaptation to divorce and separation makes clear the value of using social supports as an intervening variable in promoting sound mental health, and in mediating the negative effects of divorce (Richardson & Pfeiffenberger, 1983; Roy & Fuqua, 1983; McCarthy, 1986).

Roy and Fuqua (1983) tested the hypothesis that single-parent families with high-achieving children would have significantly greater social supports than single-parent families of low-achieving children. The high- and low-groups were determined by comparing the responses from parents of children receiving grades of A through F. The researchers findings showed that the total support score of the high-achieving group was significantly higher than the low-achieving group.

Continuing to focus on the use of social supports as a mediating variable, McCarthy (1986) tested the hypothesis that high-strength families used a broader range of resources than low-strength families. The study examined the relationship of single-parent strengths, self-esteem, coping strategies, social supports, and their effect on the academic achievement of early adolescent. The results showed that high-strength families and mothers scored highest in self-esteem, coping strategies and social supports, and had adolescents whose academic grades were stable or gained. A comparison of mothers separated or

divorced under two years with those separated or divorced over two years showed mean scores that were statistically different at .05 for total coping and external coping, but not statistically different for self-esteem, internal coping, and social supports. The researcher noted that strong families in this study used three major social supports: own children, friends, and parents.

Although the majority of studies examining the relationship between single-parent family status and cognitive functioning have shown father absence to be significantly related to low-student achievement, the evidence is not unequivocal. In single-parent families, there are many factors interacting that may negatively affect student achievement. Among those factors are the number of siblings, structure of the child's environment, the amount of nurturing the child receives, socioeconomic level of family, circumstances surrounding the separation of parents, age, gender, and race of child (Roddy, 1984; DiSibio, 1981; Brown, 1980).

So far, the research primarily has examined the differences between the academic success of children from two-parent families and that of children from one-parent families. However, very little research has examined the mediating variables that may account for why some children from single-parent families experience academic success,

while other children in similar situations do not. Consequently, the research on academic achievement of single-parent children seems to be moving in the direction of examining the variables that differentiate academically successful, single-parent children from their less successful single-parent counterparts.

#### Stress As A Barrier To Academic Success

Stress is defined by McCubbin and Patterson (1983b) as "a state which arises from an actual or perceived demand-capability imbalance in the family's functioning and which is characterized by a multidimensional demand for adjustment or adaptive behavior" (p.9). The authors contend that stress is not stereotypic, but that it varies according to the characteristics of the family, the nature of the situation, and the psychological and physical well-being of family members.

Stressful life events can weaken the family system and subsequently have a negative effect on children's school progress. To further understand how stress in the family may affect the academic success of children, the **ABCX** and **Double ABCX** models provide a schemata for viewing stress in families (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983a). In the **ABCX Model**, the a represents the event or stressor, interacting with b,

family resources, interacting with c, the family's perception of the stressor, which produces x, the crisis.

According to McCubbin and Patterson (1983a), a crisis is the result of the family's inability to restore stability and the continuous pressure to make changes in the family structure and patterns of interaction. Hence, stress may never reach crisis proportions if the family is capable of using existing resources and defining the stressor so as to resist systematic change, while maintaining family stability. If the family is unable to prevent a stressor from reaching crisis proportions, the stressor moves to the crisis phase (x) which moves into the **Double ABCX Model**.

The **Double ABCX Model** assesses post-crisis variables and focuses upon family efforts, over time, to adapt. In this model, aA refers to the "pile-up factor", which represents demands or changes that may emerge from (1) individual family members, (2) the family system, and/or (3) the community.

There are at least five types of stressors that contribute to a pile-up in the family system in a crisis situation (McCubbin and Patterson, 1983b):

- (1) The initial stressor and its hardships
- (2) Normative transitions
- (3) Prior strains

- (4) The consequences of family efforts to cope (i.e. role changes may meet disapproval from family members)
- (5) Both intra-family and social ambiguity (i.e. uncertain of family structure and boundary)

While aA of the **Double ABCX Model** refers to the pile-up factor, the bB represents the family's adaptive resources which include characteristics of individual family members, the family unit, and the community. Resources that are a part of the family's repertoire are referred to as "existing resources" and are represented by b of the bB factor. Those new resources that the individual family and the community strengthen or developed in response to the additional demands of the crisis are referred to as "expanded resources" and are represented by the B of the bB factor.

The cC factor is the meaning the family gives to the total crisis situation. The family's definition of the event includes the present stressor and added stressors, existing and expanded resources, and speculations of what needs to be done to bring the family back into balance.

The family demands and capabilities are two major elements relevant in the **Double ABCX Model**. These two elements emerge through three units related to the family in its effort to achieve family adaptation: (1) individual family members; (2) the family system; and (3) the

community. According to McCubbin and Patterson (1983b), family adaptation is achieved when the demand of one unit can be met by the capabilities of another unit, thus achieving a balance at two points of interaction. Hence, family adaptation is the pivotal concept of the **Double ABCX Model**, which focuses on family efforts to adapt, over time, after a crisis has occurred.

The behaviors that families use to adapt after a crisis has occurred are called "coping responses" (Hann, 1977). These behaviors do not necessarily remove the conflict or return the family to its previous state, but assist the family in recovering from the effects of a crisis and in achieving a better fit between the environment and family demands.

Melson (1983) points out that factors such as status, income, and occupation are not always good predictors of family coping patterns under stress. The author contends that families who are competent at meeting crises: (1) have nonmaterialistic value orientation; (2) view emotional problems as family concerns; (3) share decision-making among family members; and (4) have cohesive and open communication within and outside the family.

Stressors can be categorized into groups - - those associated with normative transitions and those associated with non-normative transitions (McCubbin & Patterson,

1983a). Normative transitions are role changes such as marriage, parenthood, adolescence, and retirement, which are expected to occur in most families at a given point in time. Because of its high rate in this country, divorce is regarded by some researchers as a normative transition (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983a). Non-normative transitions are those that are unexpected and unpredictable, such as chronic illness, catastrophes, and sudden death.

Another aspect of stress is "clustering". The clustering of normative and non-normative life events may occur concomitantly. For example, a family may be going through the transition of divorce when unemployment is thrust upon them. McCubbin and his associates (1983b) see "clustering" as one explanation why some families may lack the energy to recover from a crisis.

Single-parent families are confronted with many stressors due to changes and demands. With major role changes, decreased income, unaffordable child care, and lack of social support, these families are not likely to be involved in their children's education at home or school (Moles, 1982). In a study to examine the relationship among stress, resources, race, family structure, and parent involvement, in a group of headstart parents, Jones (1989) hypothesized that family stress and insufficient resources would have a negative effect on home-school relations.



Fifty-three Headstart parents were asked to respond to two inventories that measured stressful life events and the availability of resources. In addition, parental involvement data was obtained from Headstart records. The results did show that parents with high stress levels had low resources and were minimally or not involved at all in school activities. Parents with low family stress and high resources were associated with high parent involvement. Race and family structure had no effect on parent involvement. However, the results showed that two-parent families had lower stress levels than one parent families.

In a slightly different study, Massey (1987) examined the home environment of single-parent families to see if it differed markedly from that of two-parent families. The home environment was measured on three variables related to achievement: parental aspirations, independence training, and adult-child interactions. Differences in attendance, stress, position in family, size of family, and family mobility also were examined. The sample included 33 white fifth grade boys who were paired. Each pair contained one child from a single-parent family and one from a two-parent family. Twelve pairs matched according to socioeconomic status and intelligence.

The findings showed no significant differences between single-parent and two-parent environments on the three

variables. In addition, there were no significant differences between the children living in the two types of family structures in terms of achievement, attendance, and psychological stress. However, significant differences were found in family size and in qualitative aspects of adult-child interaction, and life change units generating stress.

Massey suggests that the results of this study should be interpreted cautiously. She points out that the sample may not be representative of the larger population, since the procedures used for obtaining participants involved a process of self-selection.

In contrast to Massey's (1987) findings, Eiduson's (1983) longitudinal study of traditional and alternative living conditions showed significant relationships between measures of stress which included life changes, and child outcome measures. High levels of stress (e.g. multiple moves, family breakup, etc.) were associated with lower child IQ scores in all family living conditions. The study further revealed that in single-parent homes, children's cognitive functioning was not negatively affected by parental psychological problems. In two-parent homes, children's cognitive functioning was most disrupted by events such as moves, divorces and separations. Children living in all types of family situations, but especially

single-parent children were negatively affected by life event changes (e.g. moves, changes in household membership).

The findings of Kurdek and Blisk (1983) are not unlike those of Eiduson (1983). After assessing 25 divorced mothers and their children, Kurdek and Blisk found negative effects of environmental change on the children's self-esteem. In addition, the mother's post-separation stress was associated with the child's emotional, behavioral, and academic problems.

As found by the research and previously cited literature, stress as a result of life changes can have a negative impact on children's psychological, social, and academic competence in all families. However, the propensity for stress tends to be greater in single-parent families as a result of limited resources.

#### Stress and Social Supports

How single-parent families meet the challenges and opportunities of their unique situation depends not only on personal coping resources, but also on the social supports available. Richardson and Pfeiffenberger (1983), in their work with families in transition (e.g. divorced, re-married, or separated), say that social supports can provide nurturance and reinforcement to single-parent families in

their efforts to cope with stressful life events. They also found that social supports provide the mechanisms for reducing the level of stress, thus enabling the parent to deal more effectively with the child/children.

Social supports may be formal or informal. Formal support systems as described by Richardson and Pfeiffenberger (1983) include such professional help services as therapy, crisis intervention, and counseling. Informal social supports are described as those that exist outside the established professional services. PTAs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Parents Without Partners, friends, and relatives are examples of informal social supports.

Unger and Powell (1980) have identified three types of services--instrumental, emotional, and referral and information--that social supports provide for families under stress. The authors define instrumental support as the sharing of material goods and services. Emotional support is defined as conveying a sense of belonging and acceptance. Finally, referral and information is defined as the ability to influence interactions with formal helping systems and to identify other sources of aid.

Cohen and Wills (1985) concluded, after reviewing research on stress and social supports, that support instruments that measured esteem and informational support consistently showed evidence of a buffering process. They

also found evidence that a single confidant may be sufficient for buffering stress rather than involvement with a large range of social networks. However, the authors point out that future research is needed to test the effectiveness of specific support resources to specific stressors.

The use of social supports can be seen in McCarthy's (1986) study. McCarthy sought to discover whether self-esteem, coping strategies, and social supports used by single-parent mothers affected the academic stability of their adolescents. Of fifty-eight single-parent mothers, 91.2 percent were at the highest socioeconomic status levels, as measured on the Hollingshead Four Factor Index Scale.

The McCarthy's study showed that the strong single-parent mothers used a broad range of resources, including high self-esteem, positive coping patterns, and social support, which was the least used of all resources. However, this strong mother group received support from their own children, friends and family. When the mothers were grouped according to the number of years divorced or separated (under and over two years), total coping and external coping scores were significantly different at the .05 level, but were not significantly different for self-esteem, internal coping, and social support. Despite the

differences found among the mothers when grouped into time frames, their children retained stability on the Metropolitan Achievement Test scores in both time periods. It was further noted that when high-strength mothers used a large number of coping and social supports, and had high self-esteem, each child in the family showed stability or gained in academic achievement.

Wolf's (1987) study which focused on stress, social supports and single parents, examined the nature of parental behaviors and child development in one- and two-parent households. The sample consisted of 19 pairs of single mothers and their preschool children, and a comparison group of married mothers and their children.

The findings showed no differences between single and married mothers in the handling of their daughters. Nor were there any differences in intellectual functioning and readiness to learn in the two family types. Boys in single-parent homes were less compliant with their mothers than were boys from two-parent homes.

Single mothers were reported to have received fewer social supports for their parenting role and personal well-being. It was found that single mothers facing stressful life events were less effective in their overall parenting. In addition, children in single-parent homes experiencing stress were less ready to learn, more aggressive, tended to

be moody, and were at higher risk for developing emotional and learning problems.

As noted earlier, stress associated with divorce and single parenthood is not only felt by the parent, but also by other family members (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983a). As Kelly and Wallerstein (1979; 1980) report, children in these families often experience sadness, lack of concentration, and depression, which can impact on academic performance and behavior.

The literature shows that children can benefit from support systems as well as adults when experiencing stressful life events (Richardson & Pfeiffenberger, 1983; Constable & Walberg, 1988). According to Constable and Walberg (1988), the combination of family, formal, and informal supports allows each person to cope with life's complexities.

Sandler, Wolchik, and Braver (1983), have identified three areas where research has been able to determine the influence of social supports on children's adaption to divorce:

1. Quality of the relationship with the custodial and noncustodial parents
2. Degree of contact with noncustodial caregivers
3. The amount of social support

In a study that focused on social supports of children in divorce families, Wolchik and colleagues examined direct stress and stress-buffering effects from various family and nonfamily members on the adjustment of 104 children of divorce. Fifty-nine percent of the children in the study were girls, 93 percent were Caucasian, two percent were Black, four percent were Hispanic, and one percent of other race. The average age for the children was 11.5 years.

The procedure involved separate interviews with the parent and child. In addition, measures of divorce events, social support, and adjustment were administered verbally to the children.

The results showed how the relations between support and adjustment among children of divorce are complex and tend to depend on both level of stress and source of support. The results also showed that the lower the level of social support from adults, the stronger the positive relation between stress and adjustment problems. Further, it was found that children with the lowest level of stress and high support from nonfamily adults were more poorly adjusted than children with the same level of stress and low support from family adults. Finally, support from other children (peers) did not facilitate adjustment after divorce.

It was concluded that support from family and nonfamily adults is significantly related to emotional and school



adjustment. However, support from peers, especially adolescents, was found to be negatively related to school and emotional adjustment.

In a similar study, Cauce, Felner and Primavera (1982), examined the structure of social support and its relationship to adjustment for high-stress, lower socioeconomic adolescents. Students permanent records, indices of self-concept and perceived social support were the sources of data collection.

The results showed that family accounts for the largest percentage of variance on the support scale, followed by formal and informal supports. Both black and white males rated formal (i.e. teachers, principals, counselors) as being more helpful than did the females. More informal sources (i.e. friends, other adults) were rated by females as being more helpful. It was also found that higher levels of informal support (e.g. from friends) were associated with poorer academic adjustment and better peer self-concept.

The researchers concluded that students who identify more with informal support, such as peers, may be subject to greater pressure to conform, and thus tend not to perform as well in school. However, contrary to this belief, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) have found a significant link between high academic achievement and good peer relationships among boys and girls of all ages.

There is also evidence and research that supports the findings that negative effects associated with divorce are lessened when high quality relationships are maintained with both parents (Richardson & Pfeiffenberger, 1983; Wolchik, Sandler, & Braver, 1986).

In a study to determine whether the availability of support systems lessened the impact of divorce on family stress and child adjustment, Guidubaldi and Cleminshaw (1983) examined the relationship of several support systems. Included among the support systems examined were the extended family, noncustodial parent, church, work and community groups. Additionally, the study addressed the impact of social supports on children's academic achievement and social competence.

The results revealed specific support systems that were highly related to reducing adverse effects of divorce. The quality of the child's relationship with noncustodial parent was an important factor. A positive noncustodial relationship with the child was highly correlated with both higher IQ scores, and WRAT reading/spelling subtests. The most powerful relationship between social support and adjustment was with regard to grandparents. Children who had contact with grandparents had higher scores on WRAT reading and math subtests. They also were more likely to be

in a regular class and less likely to receive remedial reading or to have repeated a grade.

Slightly different from the above study, Wolchik, Sandler, & Braver (1986) examined the type of support that children who reside with their mothers received from fathers. The sample included 110 children who had recently experienced divorce. An interview with the children provided an assessment of social support and interparental conflict they had experienced in the aftermath of the divorce. Five categories of supportive transactions were measured: recreation, advice, goods and services, emotional support, and positive feedback.

The findings showed that many fathers played a minor role in their children's support networks. One-sixth of the children indicated that fathers did not provide any support in a three-month period. Forty-three percent had not received advice from their fathers and 56 percent said their fathers had not provided any emotional support. While the number of support functions provided by fathers was positively related to self-esteem, the quality of time spent with fathers was negatively associated with depression and hostility, and positively related to self-esteem.

It was concluded that it is the quality rather than quantity of interactions that counts, and diminishing the acrimony between divorcing couples, and enhancing the

father-child relationship might prove to be important components of intervention programs.

The literature confirms that the child's relationship with the noncustodial parent is important during the aftermath of divorce. In addition, it is noted that friends, siblings, classmates, teachers, grandparents, neighbors, and membership in various organizations serve as sources of support for children (Derdeyn, 1977; Hess & Camara, 1979; Kurdek, 1981).

Schools can play a significant role in providing social support to single-parent families and their children. First, schools must become sensitive to the ways stress affects family members after divorce, separation, and death. Second, schools must understand that stress in the family, whether single-parent or two-parent, can affect children's ability to participate in the academic process. Third, coupled with awareness and willingness, schools can provide a supportive setting in being responsive to the needs of single-parent families and their children.

#### Chapter Summary

The number of elementary children from single-parent families has been on the increase since the 1970s. The literature suggests that there tends to be higher incidences of disciplinary problems in these families than in two-

parent families. Meeting the needs of these children, places schools in a crucial position.

As evidenced through the the empirical research that has been done on children of divorce, the emotional stress associated with this transition, not only places the parent in a precarious state, but it also has the tendency to adversely affect the child's academic performance.

Home-school partnerships have had a positive effect in helping all children experience academic success. These partnerships also have served to provide social support to single-parent families and their children through a home-school collaboration. The task at hand for parents and educators is to begin identifying those factors that will contribute to the academic success of children from single-parent families and to work collaboratively in achieving a positive outcome.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### The Setting

Prince William County is a suburban community with a rural heritage located southwest of the District of Columbia and north of Richmond, Virginia. According to the Prince William County Office of Planning, the county encompasses 355 square miles and has an estimated population of 226,400.

Prince William County (PWC) is the third largest school division in the state of Virginia, preceded by Fairfax and Virginia Beach respectively. School enrollment is reported at about 42,000 with 38 elementary schools, 10 middle schools, six high schools, and four special education schools (PWC Community Relations Office, 1990).

Prince William County Public Schools system is the second-largest employer in the county, with IBM Corp. being first. The median family income is reported at \$53,000 for 1990 (PWC Office of Planning, 1991).

#### Population and Subjects

Seven elementary schools in Prince William County Public Schools system with moderate to high enrollments of students from single-parent families were identified. From these schools 651 possible single-parent families were selected from registration printouts. Information

pertaining to this study was sent to these families. If the families were indeed single-parent families, they were instructed to complete the four questionnaires with their oldest elementary child in mind in grades first through fifth. Families who were not single-parent families were instructed to disregard the information and return all forms in th self-addressed envelope (Appendix B).

A request was made to the Supervisor of Research for permission to conduct this study involving the seven elementary schools.

#### Instrumentation

The Family Inventory of Life Events and Changes (FILE) (McCubbin, Patterson & Wilson, 1980) and the Family Coping Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales (F-COPES) (McCubbin, Larson, & Olson, 1981) were used to assess the stress and resource levels of parents in this study. In addition, a modified version of the questionnaire from a study done by Roy and Fuqua (1983) out of the University of North Dakota was used to assess the child's coping resources. Academic success was measured using the child's Grade Point Average (GPA) and Criterion Referenced Tests (CRTs) scores. To obtain demographic information on the family, parents completed a questionnaire developed by the researcher. Specifically, the FILE was used to record the expected

(normative) and unexpected (non-normative) life events and changes experienced by the family unit, and the F-COPES was used to assess the families internal and external support resources.

The FILE index consists of 71 items categorized into nine scales: Intra-family strains, marital strains, pregnancy or birth strains, finance and business strains, work-family transitions and strains, illness and family care strains, losses, transitions "in and out", and family legal strains.

Intra-family Strains. This scale is two dimensional-- conflict and parenting strains and consists of 17 items. Twelve of the items are related to conflict between family members and five of them are related to difficulties associated with the parenting role.

Marital Strains. The four items on this scale measure stressors in the marital relationship resulting from sexual or separation issues.

Pregnancy or Birth Strains. These four items are related either to problems arising from pregnancy or to problems resulting from family expansion.

Finance and Business Strains. This scale is two dimensional; Family Finance - has nine items to assess sources of increased strain on family's money supply, while Family Business has three items relating to problems associated with personal investments.



Work-Family Transitions and Strains. This scale is two dimensional--work and family transitions and work strains. This scale consists of 10 items: four are related to changing jobs and six are related to changes occurring at work, to moves made by the family, and to one of its members.

Illness and Family "Care" Strains. This scale has three dimensions--illness onset and child care, chronic illness strains, and dependency strains. It consists of eight items. Four items reflect needs arising from injury or illness of a family member or of a friend and needs resulting from problems with child care. Two items are related to the onset or continued difficulties with chronic illness. The last two items provide information about family members who may require care or help.

Losses. These six items reflect losses due to the death of a family member or friend and due to broken relationships.

Transitions "In and Out". This scale consists of five items which focus on family members moving in or out of the home or beginning a major project outside the family.

Legal Strains. The five items on this scale are related to family members who are law offenders.

The F-COPES Scale is comprised of 30 items falling within five scales: reframing, social supports, spiritual support, community support, and passive appraisal. Among

these five scales, two are described as having internal family coping patterns, and three are described as having external family coping patterns. Internal coping patterns are behaviors that a family uses internally to handle problems between its members. Reframing and passive appraisal are internal coping patterns (McCubbin, Olson & Larsen, 1981). Reframing relates to how the family perceives the stressful experiences, or whether the family views change positively, negatively, or neutrally. Passive appraisal relates to avoidance type behaviors that families might employ due to lack of confidence.

External coping patterns are the use of extrafamilial support systems. They include the following scales: social support, community support, and spiritual support. Families may engage in acquiring social support from (relatives, friends, neighbors), community support (schools, scout troops, and parent organizations), or spiritual support (religious organizations).

As previously stated, the questionnaire that was used to assess the child's coping resources and to measure the level of academic success is from a study done by Roy and Fuqua (1983) out of the University of North Dakota. Their study examined the relationship between social support systems used by single-parent families and the academic performance of their children. The research instrument used

consisted of two categories: questions relating to the parent, and questions relating to the child. A modified version of the latter was used in this study.

The items on the questionnaire were derived from a review of literature on single-parent support systems and coping strategies. Items 11 through 13 of the questionnaire were included to obtain demographic information on the child in the study.

In addition to the data provided by the stress, resource, and academic success measures, the following demographic data were obtained from the parents: race, gender, and age of parent; marital status and how long; educational level; employment status; income level; number of children and other adults in the family; and age, gender, and current grade of the child in the study.

#### Procedure

Six hundred and fifty-one families with children in grades first through fifth from seven elementary schools were selected to maximize the probability of obtaining a usable volunteer-sample. To these parents, the researcher sent four questionnaires along with a letter (Appendix B) explaining the study and requesting their participation. Parents were asked to return all information in a self-addressed envelope to the researcher.

Data collection was confined to three areas--assessment of the family stress level, assessment of the family's resource level, and assessment of the child's academic success. While a resource and academic questionnaire were used to measure coping resources and academic success of the child, the Family Inventory of Life Events and Changes (FILE), and the Family Crisis Orientation Personal Evaluation Scales (F-COPES) were used to measure the family stress and resource levels.

#### Analyses

The raw data were obtained from demographic responses, resource and academic questionnaires on the child, F-COPES, and FILE inventories. Number Cruncher Statistical System (NCSS) was used to analyze these data. The four research questions were analyzed using Descriptive Statistics, Analysis of Variance, Regression Analysis, and the Chi Square Test of Association. The questions and statistical measures were related to the following:

Research Question 1: What are the family factors that contribute to children's academic success in single-parent families?

(regression analysis)

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between stress and academic success when controlling for gender of the child?

(analysis of variance, chi square)

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between stress and academic success when controlling for race?

(analysis of variance, chi square)

Research Question 4: What is the relationship between stress and academic success when controlling for resources?

(analysis of variance, chi square)

#### Chapter Summary

Sixty-seven single-parent families and their oldest elementary school-aged child participated in this study. The families stress level was measured by using the Family Inventory of Life Changes and Events (FILE), while the Family Crisis Orientation Personal Evaluation Scales (F-COPES) was used to measure the families internal and external coping resources. A Resource Questionnaire was used to measure the child's coping resources. Academic success was measured using Grade Point Average (GPA) and Criterion Referenced Tests (CRTs) scores. The data were analyzed to answer the four research questions. Results are presented in Chapter IV, followed by conclusions and recommendations in Chapter V.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This study examined the relationships of stress, coping resources, and academic success. For demographic purposes, race, gender, income, education level, employment status, age, and family composition also were considered. The sample consisted of 67 single-parent families and each family's oldest elementary school-age child who attended Prince William County public schools during the 1990-91 school year.

The families' stress level was measured by using the Family Inventory of Life Changes and Events (FILE) (McCubbin, Patterson & Wilson, 1980), while the Family Crisis Orientation Personal Evaluation Scales (F-COPES) (McCubbin, Larson, & Olson, 1981) was used to measure the families' internal and external coping resources. The child's coping resources were measured by using a child's Resource Questionnaire. Academic success was measured by using the child's grade point average (GPA) and Criterion Referenced Tests (CRT) scores. And parents completed a questionnaire developed by the researcher to provide information on the family.

The first two sections of this chapter contain information on the response rate and a description of the subjects. The other sections contain the results of the analyses used to answer the research questions.

### Response Rate

The volunteer-sample consisted of 67 single-parent families and each family's oldest elementary school-aged child. This volunteer sample was selected from 651 families. The children in the study attended elementary schools in Prince William County with moderate-to-high enrollments from single-parent homes. Out of 651 surveys distributed, 180 were returned for a response rate of 27.6 percent (Table 1). Of the 180 returned, 99 parents declined to participate. An additional 14 parents indicated they were not single. Thus, the usable response rate for this study was 10.3 percent.

### Description of the Sample

This study consisted of 58 female and nine male single parents. According to the U.S. Census Bureau Report (1989), the average household income in the United States was 36,520. Over 50 percent of the families in this study earned incomes below this amount. As shown in Table 2, 66 percent of the volunteer-sample was white, 22 percent black, 4 percent Hispanic, and 7 percent of other race. With regards to marital status, the largest percentage of parents was divorced or separated. Mean age was 35.2 years with the majority having completed high school.

Of the children, 36 were girls and 31 were boys, with a mean age of 9.3 years. The largest percentage of the

**Table 1.**  
**Response Rate of Subjects**

<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Total Distributed	651	---
Total Returned	180	27.6
Respondents Stated (no) for Participation	99	15.2
Respondents Indicated Not Single	14	2.2
<b>Total Participated</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>10.3</b>



**Table 2.**  
**Demographic Characteristics of Subjects**  
**(Parents)**

	Number	Percentages
Number of Parents	67	100
Female Parents	58	87
Male Parents	9	13
<u>Racial Composition</u>		
Caucasian	44	66
African American	15	22
Hispanic	3	4
Other	5	7
<u>Age of Parents</u>		
20-28	6	9
29-32	17	26
33-39	29	44
40-54	14	21
Mean Age = 35.2 years.		

Table 2 (Continued).

Demographic Characteristics of Subjects  
(Parents)

	Number	Percentages
<u>Marital Status</u>		
Single/Never Married	10	15
Separated	18	27
Divorced	36	54
Widowed	3	4
<u>Length of Time in Present Status</u> (separated, divorced, widowed)		
Less than a Year	7	12
1-2 Yrs.	14	25
3-5 Yrs.	18	32
6-8 Yrs.	11	19
9-10 Yrs.	7	12
<u>Number of Children In the Family</u>		
1	17	25
2	29	43
3	17	25
4-7	4	6
<u>Education Level</u>		
High School Not Completed	9	13
GED	7	10
High School	34	51
Bachelor's Degree	13	19
Graduate Degree	4	6

**Table 2 (Continued).**  
**Demographic Characteristics of Subjects**  
**(Parents)**

	Number	Percentages
<u>Employment Status</u>		
Not Employed	8	12
Employed Part-Time	4	6
Employed Full-Time	52	81
<u>Income</u>		
Under \$10,000	12	18
\$10,000 - \$24,999	21	32
\$25,000 - \$50,000	29	44
Above \$50,000	4	6
<u>Other Adults in the Home</u>		
0	46	69
1	11	16
2-3	10	15

children was in fifth grade, (Table 3) followed by fourth and third.

Research Question 1: What are the family factors that contribute to children's academic success in single-parent families?

Several multiple regression analysis were performed using these independent variables: parent's gender and education, marital status, family income, child's gender, race, number of children in the family, number of children and adults living in the home, family resources as measured by the F-COPES Inventory, family stress as measured by the FILE Inventory and the child's coping resources as measured by the child's Resource Questionnaire. For dependent variables, academic success was measured by Grade Point Average (GPA) and Criterion Referenced Tests (CRT) scores in language arts, math, science, and social studies (Tables 4-8).

The gender of the child, parent's education level and the number of children in the family are factors found to contribute to the child's academic success as measured by the GPA (Table 4). Twenty-eight percent of the variability in academic success as measured by GPA can be accounted for by these same factors. Of the three, the parent's education level had the highest correlation (.33) with GPA. Specifically, the higher the parent's education level the

**Table 3.**  
**Demographic Characteristics of Subjects**  
**(Children)**

	Number	Percentages
<u>Number of Children</u>	67	100
Girls	36	54
Boys	31	46
<u>Age of Children</u>		
6-7	12	18
8-9	21	31
10-11	32	48
12	2	3
Mean Age = 9.3 yrs.		
<u>Grade</u>		
First	8	12
Second	5	7
Third	13	19
Fourth	18	27
Fifth	23	34

**Table 4.**  
**Regression Results Using GPA as Dependent**  
**Variable (measure of academic success)**

Independent Variable	Parameter Estimate	T-Value (b = 0)	p-Value
Intercept	1.31	2.72	.009
Parent's Education	.31	3.18	.003
H.S. (not completed) (1)			
GED (2)			
High School (3)			
B.A. (4)			
Grad. Degree (5)			
Number of Children in Family	-.16	-1.86	.069
Gender of Child (1 = Boy, 2 = Girl)	.52	2.73	.009
<b>R<sup>2</sup> = 0.28</b>			

higher the child's GPA. Girls tended to have higher GPAs than boys and the child's GPA tended to be lower as the number of children in the family increased.

Academic success as measured by language arts CRT scores were affected by factors including the number of children living in the home. The higher the number of children in the family, the lower the language arts scores (Table 5). Girls tended to score higher than boys. Interestingly, higher language arts scores tended to be associated with larger numbers of children in the home.

Only the gender of the child contributed to academic success when measured by math CRT scores (Table 6), with girls' scores generally higher than boys'.

Factors weighing heaviest with regard to science CRT scores included the parent's marital status, number of children in the family and the family coping resources (Table 7). Higher numbers of children in the family are associated with lower science CRT scores and higher family coping resources are associated with higher science CRT scores. The variable marital status coded as "1" indicates single, "2" indicates separated, "3" indicates divorced, and "4" indicates widowed and, on average, 3.6 percent times the above code values to the science CRT scores. In general, children of widowed and divorced parents score high on

**Table 5.**  
**Regression Results Using Language Arts CRT Scores**  
**As Dependent Variable (measure of academic success)**

Independent Variable	Parameter Estimate	T-Value (b = 0)	p-Value
Intercept	0.88	21.32	<.001
Number of Children in Family	-.07	-3.04	.004
Number of Children Living at Home	.04	1.90	.063
Gender of Child (1 = Boy, 2 = Girl)	.05	2.19	.033
<b>R<sup>2</sup> = 0.25</b>			



Table 6.

Regression Results Using Math CRT Scores  
As Dependent Variable (measure of academic success)

Independent Variable	Parameter Estimate	T-Value (b = 0)	p-Value
Intercept	0.75	15.38	<.001
Gender of Child (1 = Boy, 2 = Girl)	.09	2.71	.009
<b>R<sup>2</sup> = 0.12</b>			

**Table 7.**  
**Regression Results Using Science CRT Scores**  
**As Dependent Variable (measure of academic success)**

Independent Variable	Parameter Estimate	T-Value (b = 0)	P-Value
Intercept	0.60	6.98	<.001
Marital Status	.04	2.18	.039
Number of Children in Family	-.03	-3.54	.002
Family Coping Resources	.003	3.45	.002

**R<sup>2</sup> = 0.62**

science than children of parents who are single or who have been separated.

Academic success as measured by social studies CRT scores is affected by factors such as parent's gender, family stress level and race (Table 8). Children of single mothers tended to have higher social studies CRT scores than children of single fathers. Children of white parents tended to score higher on the social studies CRT than children of non-white parents. In addition, higher family stress is associated with lower social studies CRT scores.

To reinforce the above findings, a correlation analysis of dependent and independent variables was performed. The results are shown in Table 9. The variables that were significantly correlated with GPA were the parent's education (.33), the number of children in the family (-.23) and the gender of the child (.28). Variables that were highly correlated with language arts CRTs were the gender of the child (.19) and the number of children living in the home (.19). Gender of the child (.28) was the only variable correlated with math CRTs. Variables highly correlated with science CRTs were parent's marital status (.41), number of children in the family (.55) and the family coping resources (.58). The social studies CRTs were highly correlated with the parent's gender (.33), level of family stress (.40) and

Table 8.

Regression Results Using Social Studies CRT Scores  
As Dependent Variable (measure of academic success)

Independent Variable	Parameter Estimate	T-Value (b = 0)	p-Value
Intercept	0.76	5.88	<.001
Gender of Parent (1 = Male, 2 = Female)	.18	2.71	.013
Family Stress	-.0002	-2.69	.013
Race (1 = White, 2 = Non-White)	-.12	-2.22	.037

$R^2 = 0.42$

Table 9.

Correlation Coefficients of Dependent Versus Independent Regression Variables

		Dependent Variables				
		GPA	LANGUAGE %	MATH %	SCIENCE %	SOCIAL STUDIES %
Independent Variables	Gender	0.09708 (n = 59) p = 0.4645	-0.04900 (n = 57) p = 0.7174	-0.02768 (n = 57) p = 0.8380	0.19487 (n = 28) p = 0.3204	0.33169 (n = 26) p = 0.0979
	Parent Age	0.16619 (n = 58) p = 0.2125	0.14697 (n = 56) p = 0.2797	0.09078 (n = 56) p = 0.5058	-0.01187 (n = 28) p = 0.9522	-0.14429 (n = 26) p = 0.4819
	Education	0.33192 (n = 59) p = 0.0102	0.19508 (n = 57) p = 0.1459	0.05006 (n = 57) p = 0.7115	0.22762 (n = 28) p = 0.2441	0.15619 (n = 26) p = 0.4461
	Marital	-0.03972 (n = 59) p = 0.7652	0.06967 (n = 57) p = 0.6066	-0.06128 (n = 57) p = 0.6507	0.41705 (n = 28) p = 0.0273	0.14570 (n = 26) p = 0.4776
	Children	-0.23098 (n = 59) p = 0.0784	-0.33226 (n = 57) p = 0.0116	-0.10309 (n = 57) p = 0.4454	-0.55177 (n = 28) p = 0.0023	-0.36221 (n = 26) p = 0.0690
	Live With You	-0.13382 (n = 59) p = 0.3123	-0.19514 (n = 57) p = 0.1458	-0.03077 (n = 57) p = 0.8202	-0.44200 (n = 28) p = 0.0185	-0.16735 (n = 26) p = 0.4139
	Adults	-0.06159 (n = 59) p = 0.6431	-0.14639 (n = 57) p = 0.2772	-0.13445 (n = 57) p = 0.3187	0.36597 (n = 28) p = 0.0555	0.28812 (n = 26) p = 0.1535

Table 9 (Continued).

Correlation Coefficients of Dependent Versus Independent Regression Variables

		Dependent Variables				
		GPA	LANGUAGE %	MATH %	SCIENCE %	SOCIAL STUDIES %
Independent Variables	Income	0.11766 (n = 58) p = 0.3790	0.11025 (n = 56) p = 0.4186	-0.10792 (n = 56) p = 0.4285	-0.15341 (n = 28) p = 0.4358	0.01328 (n = 26) p = 0.9486
	Boy/Girl	0.28374 (n = 58) p = 0.0309	0.19302 (n = 56) p = 0.1541	0.28623 (n = 56) p = 0.0325	0.19022 (n = 28) p = 0.3323	0.19339 (n = 26) p = 0.3438
	FILE Total	-0.10537 (n = 59) p = 0.4270	-0.16280 (n = 57) p = 0.2263	0.01207 (n = 57) p = 0.9290	-0.21273 (n = 28) p = 0.2771	-0.40565 (n = 26) p = 0.0398
	FCOP Total	0.13175 (n = 59) p = 0.3199	0.18394 (n = 57) p = 0.1708	0.04394 (n = 57) p = 0.7455	0.58304 (n = 28) p = 0.0011	0.35808 (n = 26) p = 0.0725
	Race	-0.09346 (n = 59) p = 0.4814	-0.15926 (n = 57) p = 0.2367	-0.11685 (n = 57) p = 0.3867	0.15861 (n = 28) p = 0.4202	-0.25162 (n = 26) p = 0.2150
	Child's coping	0.21202 (n = 59) p = 0.1069	0.23763 (n = 57) p = 0.0751	0.10564 (n = 57) p = 0.4342	0.01355 (n = 28) p = 0.9454	0.17615 (n = 26) p = 0.3894

race (.25). All of the previously mentioned variables were also identified in the regression analyses in tables 4-8.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between stress and academic success when controlling for gender of the child?

Two Analyses of Variances (ANOVAs) were performed using level of stress (low, medium, high) as measured by FILE Inventory as the independent variable and GPA as the dependent variable. The results are shown in Table 10.

There was no significant difference in GPA for the three levels of stress when controlling for gender of the child. However, a trend appears to exist for high stress levels of girls and boys producing lower GPAs than their low-stress counterparts. While, this trend may not be statistically significant, it may warrant further study.

To support the above findings, two Chi-Square Test of Association Analyses were performed to support the findings. Results of these analysis are shown in Table 11, giving support to evidence resulting from the analysis of variances that there is no direct relationship between academic success and level of stress when controlling for gender of the child.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between stress and academic success when controlling for race?

Table 10.

Results of Analyses of Variances to Determine the Relationship Between Stress and Academic Success when Controlling for Gender

Level of Stress	n	GPA	Test Statistic	df	p-value
Low	4 Boys	2.66	F = 0.16	2, 25	.86
Medium	20 Boys	2.44			
High	4 Boys	2.34			
Low	8 Girls	2.83	F = 0.16	2, 27	.85
Medium	19 Girls	2.96			
High	3 Girls	2.75			



Table 11.

Results of Chi-Square Analyses to Determine Relationship  
Between Stress (low, medium, high) and Academic Success  
(GPA  $\geq$  2.0 = Success) When Controlling for Gender

n	Chi-Square Statistic	df	p-value
31 Boys	0.10	2	.95
34 Girls	0.61	2	.74

Two Analysis of Variances (ANOVAs) were performed using level of stress (low, medium, high) as measured by the FILE Inventory as the independent variable and GPA as the dependent variable (Table 12). The levels of stress were derived by using one standard deviation above the mean for high, one standard deviation below the mean for low, and one standard deviation within the mean for medium.

There was no significant difference in GPA for the three levels of stress when controlling for race of the child. No discernible trend between GPA and level of stress appears to exist when controlling for race. To support these findings two Chi-Square Test of Association Analyses were performed. The results of these analyses are shown in Table 13.

In review, there is no relationship between academic success and level of stress when controlling for the race of the child.

Research Question 4: What is the relationship between academic success and stress when controlling for resources?

Two analysis of variances (ANOVAs) were performed using level of stress (low, medium, high) as measured by the FILE Inventory as the independent variable and GPA as the dependent variable.

No significant differences were found in GPA for the three levels of stress when controlling for resources (Table 14).

Table 12.

Results of Analyses of Variances to Determine the Relationship Between Stress and Academic Success when Controlling for Race

Level of Stress	n	GPA	Test Statistic	df	p-value
Low	7 White Students	2.53	F = 0.56	2, 35	.58
Medium	24 White Students	2.86			
High	7 White Students	2.63			
Low	5 Non-White Students	3.11	F = 1.36	2, 18	.28
Medium	15 Non-White Students	2.43			
High	1 Non-White Student	2.63			

Table 13.

Results of Chi-Square Analyses to Determine Relationship  
Between Stress (low, medium, high) and Academic Success  
(GPA  $\geq$  2.0 = Success) When Controlling for Race

n	Chi-Square Statistic	df	p-value
43 White Students	1.50	2	.47
23 Non-White Students	2.12	2	.35

Table 14.

Results of Analyses of Variances to Determine the Relationship Between Stress and Academic Success when Controlling for Coping Resources

Level of Stress	n	GPA	Test Statistic	df	p-value	
Low	2	Low-Coping Resources	2.69	F = 0.45	2, 8	.65
Medium	5	Low-Coping Resources	2.22			
High	4	Low-Coping Resources	2.75			
Low	10	Medium-Coping Resources	2.79	F = 0.20	2, 33	.82
Medium	22	Medium-Coping Resources	2.81			
High	4	Medium-Coping Resources	2.50			

No analysis performed for high-coping resources students because an empty cell was encountered. There were no students with high-coping resources and low family stress.

No discernible trend between GPA and level of stress appears to exist when controlling for resources. Again, the findings were supported by two Chi-Square Test of Association Analyses.

Table 15 supports the evidence resulting from the analysis of variances that there is no relationship between academic success and level of stress when controlling for resources.

The analyses for the above research questions also were performed using CRT scores in language arts, math, science and social studies as a measure of academic success. However, no significant results were found.

#### Relationship Between Coping Resources and Academic Success

To examine the relationship between coping resources and academic success, a series of analysis of variances were performed using level of resources (low, medium, high) as the independent variable and GPA as the dependent variable. This series of ANOVAs was structured to parallel the analyses conducted to answer research questions 2, 3 and 4. That is, the relationship between level of resources and academic success was examined while controlling for gender of the child, race of child and family stress as measured by the FILE Inventory. Results of these analyses are shown in Table 16.

Table 15.

**Results of Chi-Square Analyses to Determine Relationship Between Stress (low, medium, high) and Academic Success (GPA  $\geq 2.0$  = Success) When Controlling for Coping Resources**

<b>n</b>	<b>Chi-Square Statistic</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p-value</b>
13 Low-Coping Family Students	4.55	2	.10
39 Medium-Coping Family Students	0.67	2	.72
14 High-Coping Family Students	0.08	1	.77

Table 16.

Results of Analyses of Variances to Determine the Relationship Between Coping Resources and Academic Success

Level of Resources	n	GPA	F	df	p-value
Low	6 Boys	2.25	1.25	2, 25	.30
Medium	14 Boys	2.33			
High	8 Boys	2.83			
Low	4 Girls	2.65	1.64	2, 27	.21
Medium	22 Girls	3.05			
High	4 Girls	2.40			
Low	6 White Students	2.69	0.34	2, 35	.71
Medium	22 White Students	2.85			
High	10 White Students	2.60			
Low	5 Non-White Students	2.27	0.84	2, 18	.45
Medium	14 Non-White Students	2.64			
High	2 Non-White Students	3.12			
Low	2 Low Stress	2.69	.02	1, 10	.89
Medium	10 Low Stress	2.79			
High	---	----			
Low	5 Medium Stress	2.22	1.02	2, 36	.37
Medium	22 Medium Stress	2.81			
High	12 Medium Stress	2.69			



Table 16. (Continued).

Results of Analyses of Variances to Determine the Relationship Between  
Coping Resources and Academic Success

Level of Resources	n	GPA	F	df	p-value
Low	4 High Stress	2.75	0.34	1, 6	.58
Medium	4 High Stress	2.50	----		
High	----	----			

The higher the coping resources are, generally, the higher the GPAs. This trend held true for boys, but was the opposite for girls. Non-white students with high resources tend to have high GPAs. It should be noted that no statistically significant relationship between level of resources and GPA was found when controlling for gender of the child, race of child, and family stress.

In summary, the results of this study indicate that there was no significant relationship between stress and academic success as measured by GPA when controlling for the child's gender, race and resources. However, the education level of the parent, gender of the child and the number of children in the family were family factors found to contribute to the child's academic success when measured by GPA. Among these family factors, the parents' education level had the highest correlation (.33) with GPA.

When measured by CRTs, several factors contribute to the child's academic success. In language arts, higher numbers of children in the family were associated with low language arts scores. In addition, girls tend to score higher than boys. In math, only the gender of the child contributes to academic success. Specifically, girls tend to score higher than boys. In science, larger numbers of children in the family are associated with lower science CRT scores, while higher family coping resources are associated

with higher science CRT scores. In social studies, single mothers are associated more with higher CRT scores than single fathers. In addition, higher family stress is associated with lower social studies CRT scores. And children of white parents tend to score higher than children of non-white parents.

Chapter V presents conclusions based on these findings along with recommendations and suggestions for further study.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examines the relationship among stress, coping resources, and academic success in single-parent families and their oldest elementary school-age child. To determine what family factors contribute to the children's academic success, factors such as race, gender, income level, parent's marital status, education level, employment status, and family composition also were considered.

Using the data drawn from the Family Inventory of Life Changes and Events (FILE), the Family Crisis Orientation Personal Evaluation Scales (F-COPES), Grade Point Averages, Criterion Referenced Tests (CRT) scores, Resource Questionnaire on the child, and the Demographic Questionnaire, the following findings were drawn:

#### For Research Question 1

What are the family factors that contribute to children's academic success in single-parent families?

- Higher education levels in parents are associated with higher GPAs for children.
- Girls tend to have higher GPAs than boys.
- The child's GPA decreases with larger numbers of children in the family.
- The more children in the family, the lower the language arts CRT scores.

- Larger numbers of children in the home are associated with higher language arts scores.
- Girls tend to score higher than boys in language arts and math.
- Higher numbers of children in the family are associated with lower science CRT scores.
- Higher family coping resources are associated with higher science CRT scores.
- Children of widowed and divorced parents score high on science than children of parents who are single or separated.
- Single mothers are associated with higher CRT scores in social studies than single fathers.
- Higher family stress is associated with lower social studies CRT scores.
- White children tended to score higher than non-white children on social studies CRT scores.

#### For Research Questions 2, 3 and 4

- There was no significant relationship between stress and academic success as measured by GPAs when controlling for child's gender, race and resources.

#### Conclusions

Several of the findings are consistent with earlier research. The position that girls' academic performance tends to be better than boys in father-absent families is

supported by Guidubaldi, Cleminshaw, and Perry (1984). Their research found girls in divorced families were better adjusted academically than boys. Girls showed superior performance on grades in reading, math, and on the Wide Range Achievement Test. Girls also were found less likely to have repeated a school grade. In addition, a correlation analysis of parents' marital status and criteria were performed separately for boys and girls. The findings showed that in traditional, two-parent family, boys scored better in reading and math than boys from divorced families.

Further supporting these findings, Bradley, Caldwell, and Elrado (1977) examined the home environment, social status, and mental-test performance of children from different socioeconomic groups. They found the home environment more strongly associated among the whites than blacks, and among girls than boys. It also was concluded that among the socioeconomic variables, the education level of the parents showed the strongest relationship with children's I.Q. These researchers content that girls' I.Q.s are more strongly associated with home environment than with boys because mothers tend to be more sensitive and effective when interacting with infant girls than boys. It is further noted that families within each socioeconomic group differ in the kind and amount of stimulation they provide to children.

The finding that higher family stress is associated with lower social studies CRT scores is consistent with the research of Eiduson (1983). Eiduson's longitudinal study of traditional and alternative living conditions showed significant relationships between stress (e.g., multiple moves, family breakup, etc.) were associated with lower I.Q. scores for children in all family living conditions.

In her study that examined the relationship among stress, resources, race, family structure, and parent involvement, Jones (1989) concluded that parents with fewer coping resources generally had higher stress levels. It also was concluded that high stress levels were associated with low parent involvement, while high coping resources were associated with high parent involvement.

The findings for research questions two, three and four indicate no significant relationship between stress and academic success as measured by GPA when controlling for child's gender, race, and resources. The following are factors that may have contributed to these results:

1. The mean stress level (390) for the volunteer-sample group was 22 percent lower than the norm (500) reported by McCubbin, Patterson, and Wilson (1980). A low-stress group is characterized by McCubbin and colleagues (1980) as one that appears to be unburdened by life events

and strains. This group also may face an unusually low number of demands and life may appear uneventful.

2. In addition to the low stress level, the coping mean for this sample group was 100, which is about 10 percent higher than the norm (91) reported by McCubbin, Olson, and Larsen (1980). Thus, it could be concluded that this group handled low-stress effectively through high use of coping resources, which fell within the five scales as measured by the F-COPES inventory. The five scales included reframing--which relates to how the family perceives stressful events; passive appraisal--which conveys avoidance-type behaviors; social support--which engages the support of relatives, friends and neighbors; community support--which engages the support from school and parent/children organizations; and spiritual support--which seeks the help of religious organizations.

It should be noted that reframing (80.3%) had the highest percentage of use followed by spiritual support (70.3%), community support (67.1%), social support (63.8%) and passive appraisal (59.9%) respectively. Reframing was also the most often used coping resource in McCarthy's (1986) study. She speculated that the apparent use of reframing tends to minimize problematic situations and ward off potential problems.



Conversely, had this sample group been one of high stress and lacked in the use of coping resources, the results probably would have been different.

3. The modest volunteer-sample of 67 respondents may have contributed to the results failing to be statistically significant. For example, when determining the relationship between stress and academic success when controlling for race in Table 12, the analysis for non-white students consists of only 21 students. Though the means or GPA (3.11, 2.43, 2.63) appear to vary, the highest of the three means is being calculated for only five students. Subsequently, the p-value of (.28) is higher than (.05) level of significance, indicating that there is no relationship between stress and non-white students.

4. The majority of the parents in this study had been either divorced, separated, or widowed for three or more years. Any conflict or disruption within the family may have dissipated with time to the point where adjustment and adaptation had occurred.

5. The respondents in this study were self-selected. These people are deciding for themselves as to whether they want to participate. As a result, the chance of targeting those who ought to participate, which may be the troubled group (high stress), is decreased. In addition, the self-

selections process may be related to the group's low-stress level and high-coping results.

### Implications

The most dramatic change to the American family over the past three decades has been the increase of single-parent families. Most of these single-parent families are the result of divorce, separation, and of unwed mothers. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (1989), 24 percent of all children under the age of eighteen, or one of every four children, live in a single-parent home.

To inform administrators and teachers of the changes taking place in the school community and to identify the clients that they service, a demographic profile of the families represented in the school system should be initiated. Such a profile would serve to provide data regarding the number of single-parent families in the school system, and assist in reducing the stigmatization attached to single-parent families by school personnel and the community.

Secondly, based on the review of literature, school personnel could benefit from in-service training, which focuses on the changing American family. In addition, these in-services may include sessions that teach administrators and teachers how to recognize symptoms of stress in children

resulting from family disruptions; provide discussion groups for children and/or parents, and provide resource information for single-parent families. All the above would serve to be effective intervention approaches for the school and community.

Thirdly, research has repeatedly shown how partnerships between home and school are important to students' success (Kappan, 1991). However, due to the demographic, social, and economic changes, parent involvement is being redefined. According to Davies (1991), the new definitions reflect three common themes:

- Providing Success for All Children  
All children can learn and can achieve school success.
- Serving the Whole Child  
Social, emotional, physical, and academic growth and development must be addressed by schools, families, and other agencies that affect the child.
- Sharing Responsibility  
The social, emotional, physical, and academic development of the child is shared among the school, family, community, and other agencies/institutions.

The demands brought on by social and economic changes have left many parents with less access to help and advise than parents of earlier generations (Kagan, Powell, Weissbourd, & Zigler, 1987). School administrators and teachers need to be aware of the economic and time restrictions placed on parents, especially single parents. However, as Davies (1991) suggests, schools could reach out more to the homes and neighborhoods of that constituency by providing information and materials. Parents' and schools' needs also could be met effectively by providing flexibility in parent conferences, committee meetings and other programs.

Fourthly, as single-parent families become more of the norm, problems that may have been associated with single-parent status in the past, may not be as prevalent as the literature portrays.

The literature did not address that segment of the population that is considered the "strong single-parent family". Although research in this area is in its early stages, it is needed to further understand the characteristics of such families. This study found no significant relationship between stress and academic success when controlling for gender, race, and resources. Further, the single-parent families in this study had lower stress levels and higher use of coping resources than the norm. As

a result, it could be speculated that the effective use of coping resources in handling the low stress allowed the children in this study to experience academic success. Therefore, an implication for researchers in studying single-parent families is to focus on the mediating variable, "family strengths", which would help in understanding how stressful events of marital disruption sometimes does and does not precipitate distress in the family or child.

Fifthly, as noted, the boys did not perform as well as girls in language arts and math. Research studies have shown that boys have more difficulty adjusting to divorce than girls (Bradley, et al., 1971; Guidubaldi, Cleminshaw, & Perry, 1984). As mentioned, stress associated with divorce and single parenthood is not only felt by the parent, but also by other family members.

As Kelly and Wallerstein (1979; 1980) note, children in these families often experience sadness, lack of concentration, and depression, which can impact on academic performance.

Children can benefit from support systems as well as adults when experiencing stressful life events (Richardson & Pfeiffenberger, 1983). Sandler, Wolchik, and Braver (1983) report that the quality of the relationship with custodial and noncustodial parents; degree of contact with

noncustodial parent; the amount of social supports are factors of social support that can influence children's adaption to divorce.

Schools can play a significant role in providing social support to children of single-parent families. Schools could target men's organizations to serve as mentors for boys of fatherless homes. They also could seek to hire more male teachers. In addition, the support of friends, siblings, classmates, teachers, grandparents, neighbors and various community organizations can further assist schools in providing a supportive setting in addressing the needs of single-parent families and their children.

#### Recommendations for Further Study

1. The findings from this study are based on a modest sample size. It is recommended that this study be replicated with a larger volunteer-sample and targeting those families that have been divorced, separated and widowed for less than two years. This period has been shown to be the most stressful for families.

2. Since the school offers a safe and stable environment for children of divorced and separated parents, schools and families could benefit from knowing what influences school factors (e.g., teacher attitudes and

behaviors, school climate, counseling programs, etc.) have on the adjustment of children from single-parent families.

3. Research on families with children in elementary school show that most families want to learn more about how to help their children. Specifically, single-parent families ask for additional social and emotional support in parenting. More research is needed to determine how social and emotional supports influence single parents' behaviors in parenting.

4. To better understand the value of social supports for individual coping efforts in young children, more research is needed to determine what types of support (formal/informal) lead to adaptation and adjustment. This information would be quite useful when designing prevention programs for children under stress.

In conclusions, this study was undertaken to examine the relationship among stress, coping resources, and academic success in a group of children from single-parent families. Further, it identifies family factors that contribute to children's academic success. The findings show no significant relationship between stress and academic success as measured by GPAs when controlling for gender, race, and resources. However, the education level of the parent, child's gender, and the number of children in the

family were factors found to contribute to academic success when measured by GPAs.

When measured by CRT scores, several factors contributed to academic success. In language arts, the more children in family were linked with lower language arts scores. In addition, girls tended to score higher than boys in both language arts and math. In science, larger numbers of children in the family was associated with lower science CRT scores, while higher family coping resources are associated with higher science CRT scores. In social studies, single mothers are associated with higher CRT scores than single fathers. Further, higher family stress is associated with lower social studies CRT scores, and white children tended to score higher than non-white children.

The findings support the stress and ecological of human development models and serve to reinforce the need for further investigation of variables that may serve to mediate the negative effects of single-parent family status.



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**Appendix A**  
**Permission Letters**



VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION — NORTHERN VIRGINIA GRADUATE CENTER

November 9, 1990

**TO:** Dr. Gabrielle Van Lingen  
Supervisor of Research  
Prince William County Public Schools

**FROM:** Carolyn S. Moye' *CSM*  
Assistant Principal, Minnieville Elementary  
Prince William County Public Schools

**SUBJECT:** Permission for Research Study

I am currently a doctoral candidate majoring in Education Administration at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia. I am also employed by Prince William County Public School system as an Assistant Principal. As part of the degree requirements for the Doctor of Education degree, I am requesting permission to conduct a research study involving single-parent families and their oldest elementary school-age children who are enrolled in the Prince William County Public Schools.

This study is designed to identify family factors that contribute to the level of academic success of children from single-parent families. It will examine such variables as stress, coping resources, academic success, gender, and income.

The findings from this study may be used to help school officials in assessing and interpreting how stress in single-parent families can disrupt children's ability to participate in the learning process. Further, these findings will yield information about how the functioning of the single-parent family system is influenced by interactions with the larger community which includes the school. Finally, these findings will serve to sensitize principals and teachers to the unique needs of single-parent families and their children.

In order to successfully conduct this study, I will need your assistance in the following areas:

- (1) Your permission to have the Data Processing Center assist me generating a list of single-parent families with elementary school-age children.
- (2) Your permission to send four questionnaires along with an introductory letter to these parents.

- (3) Your permission to secure report card grades and CRT results from the school that the children in the study attend, once the parents have given permission.

Enclosed are the following items:

- (a) Proposal for Study (Chapter I)
- (b) Instrumentation (Four Questionnaires)
- (c) Introductory Letter to Parents
- (d) Letter to Teacher of School Requesting students' Grades and CRT Results

My timeline is as follows:

1. Approval for Research Study by third week in November
2. Information from Data Center by second week in December
3. Questionnaires to be mailed to single-parent families second week in January

Thank you for your cooperation in this endeavor.

**Prince William County  
Public Schools**

**M E M O R A N D U M**

December 20, 1990

**TO:** William Cox

**FROM:** Gabriele van Lingen

**RE:** Request to conduct research on single parent families by Carolyn Moyer'

Carolyn Moyer', assistant principal at Minnieville Elementary School, has requested to conduct research on children in single parent families. Carolyn is a graduate student in Education Administration at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Her advisor is Dr. Houston Conley.

Carolyn's research involves the completion of coded questionnaires by approximately 200 parents and the provision of information of grades and CRT results of their children by teachers (see attached instruments). Signed parent permission for the latter information will be obtained.

I have reviewed this research according to Regulation 612-1 and recommend approval. Carolyn will need some assistance from the school division in identifying schools with a high proportion of single parent families, obtaining approval from the principals for contacting these families, and in obtaining address labels from data processing in order to mail out the request to participate and the questionnaires. Some additional time will be requested from some teachers at these schools in order to complete the one-page academic information for selected children. The potential benefits of Carolyn's study in identifying variables related to the academic success of children in single parent families within the Prince William County Public School System outweigh the costs in time and assistance she would need in her data gathering effort.

**Prince William County  
Public Schools**

P.O. Box 389  
Manassas, Virginia 22110  
(703) 791-7200

January 4, 1991

**TO:** Ms. Carolyn Moye  
**FROM:** William N. Cox  
**SUBJECT:** Research Request

Your request to conduct a research project regarding family factors that contribute to the level of academic success of children from single parent families has been reviewed by Dr. van Lingen, the area associate superintendents, and me. I have some concerns related to the requirements of teacher and staff time, and the potentially sensitive nature of the inquiries to parents. Additionally, the Data Processing Department has indicated they do not have data on which families are single-parent. They would be able to generate a list of students at the elementary level for whom only one parent is listed in the data, however.

Overall, the project does appear to have merit and the results may be of value to the school system. For that reason, permission is granted to proceed with the understanding that participation of individual schools and staff is voluntary on their part.

By copy of this letter, I will authorize you to (1) secure from data the list of parents which they can provide; (2) send questionnaires to these parents, and (3) assuming the schools have agreed to participate and parents have given permission, you may secure from them report card grades and CRT results for children in the study.

WNC:lar

cc: Dr. Gabriele van Lingen  
Ms. Faye Patterson  
Dr. Hugh Burkett




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**SCHOOL OF FAMILY RESOURCES AND CONSUMER SCIENCES**

University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1300 Linden Drive, Madison, WI 53706 608-262-4847

**OFFICE OF THE DEAN**

February 22, 1990

**Carolyn S. Moyer**  
 2601 Park Center Drive, Apt. C-609  
 Alexandria, Virginia 22302

Dear Ms. Moyer:

I am pleased to give you my permission to use the **F-COPES: Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales**, and the **FILE: Family Inventories of Life Events and Changes** instruments. We have a policy to charge \$5.00 (one time charge only) *per instrument* to individuals who seek permission. We apologize for this necessity. We also ask that you please fill out the enclosed abstract form and return it to this office.

I am also pleased to send you the **Manual Family Assessment Inventories for Research and Practice (FAIRP)**, and a copy of the **FAIRP Corrections** pamphlet. This Manual should be cited when using the instruments. The publication was printed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1987 and edited by Hamilton I. McCubbin and Anne I. Thompson. It is not advisable to use the **Family Inventories** manual by David Olson to score the instruments due to errors in it's scoring section.

A sample copy of each instrument is enclosed. Additional copies can be obtained at this address for 10 cents each. When large quantities are requested, the cost of postage is also added to the order.

If I could be of any further assistance to you, please let me know.

Sincerely,

**Hamilton I. McCubbin**  
 Dean

HIM/kme

Enclosures



Appendix B  
Letter to Parents

\* THIS INFORMATION IS INTENDED FOR SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES ONLY.  
IF YOU ARE NOT A SINGLE PARENT, PLEASE RETURN FORMS IN THE  
SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE.

Dear Parent:

I am a graduate student in education administration at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg Virginia. I am also an Assistant Principal with Prince William County Public Schools. I am in the process of completing the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree. To fulfill this requirement, I am conducting a research study involving single-parent families and their oldest elementary school-age children enrolled in Prince William County Public Schools. The purpose of this study is to determine what family factors contribute to the level of academic success of children from single-parent families.

Your participation will require you to answer four questionnaires. It will also be necessary for me to secure from your child's teacher recent grades and Criterion Referenced Tests (CRT) results to be combined with your answers from the questionnaires. Once this has been done, all names and any other identifications will be removed from all forms. In this way, no one will be able to connect your answers with your name and your identification is kept anonymous.

The results from this study will be shared with you and most importantly will be used in assisting principals, teachers, and the community in their efforts to address the unique needs of single-parent families and their children.

In order to use this information, I need your signed permission. Please read the consent form on the reverse side of this letter. Check and sign in the appropriate places.

I thank you in advance for your assistance in this endeavor. Please return the attached questionnaires and the completed form on the reverse side of this letter in the enclosed stamped self-addressed envelope on or before \_\_\_\_\_ . If you have any questions, please call me locally at (703) 670-6106.

Sincerely,

Carolyn S. Moyer

PLEASE TURN OVER

\*\*\*\*\*

Please check your response below indicating your willingness to participate in the Research Study and your permission to allow me to secure your child's grades and CRT results.

YES, I WILL PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY AND YOU HAVE MY PERMISSION  
(Your oldest child in elementary school)

NO, PERMISSION IS DENIED.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's Name and School

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's Signature

**Appendix C**  
**Instruments**



**FAMILY STRESS COPING AND HEALTH PROJECT**  
 888 Linden Drive  
 University of Wisconsin-Madison  
 Madison, WI 53706

Family Health Program  
 FORM C  
 1983  
 © H. McCubbin

HD	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
GID	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FID	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# FILE

## Family Inventory of Life Events and Changes

Hamilton I. McCubbin      Joan M. Patterson      Lance R. Wilson

### PURPOSE

Over their life cycle, all families experience many changes as a result of normal growth and development of members and due to external circumstances. The following list of family life changes can happen in a family at any time. Because family members are connected to each other in some way, a life change for any one member affects all the other persons in the family to some degree.

"FAMILY" means a group of two or more persons living together who are related by blood, marriage or adoption. This includes persons who live with you and to whom you have a long term commitment.

### DIRECTIONS

#### "DID THE CHANGE HAPPEN IN YOUR FAMILY?"

Please read each family life change and decide whether it happened to any member of your family—including you.

- **DURING THE LAST YEAR**

First, decide if it happened any time during the last 12 months and check YES or NO.

During Last 12 Months	
Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

FAMILY LIFE CHANGES	DID THE CHANGE HAPPEN IN YOUR FAMILY?		Score	FAMILY LIFE CHANGES	DID THE CHANGE HAPPEN IN YOUR FAMILY?		Score
	During Last 12 Months	Yes			No	During Last 12 Months	
<b>I. INTRA-FAMILY STRAINS</b>				12. Increased difficulty in managing infant(s) (0-1 yr.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	35
1. Increase of husband/father's time away from family	46	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	13. Increase in the amount of "outside activities" which the child(ren) are involved in	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	25
2. Increase of wife/mother's time away from family	51	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	14. Increased disagreement about a member's friends or activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	35
3. A member appears to have emotional problems	58	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15. Increase in the number of problems or issues which don't get resolved	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	45
4. A member appears to depend on alcohol or drugs	66	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	16. Increase in the number of tasks or chores which don't get done	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	35
5. Increase in conflict between husband and wife	53	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	17. Increased conflict with in-laws or relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	40
6. Increase in arguments between parent(s) and child(ren)	45	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>II. MARITAL STRAINS</b>			
7. Increase in conflict among children in the family	48	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	18. Spouse/parent was separated or divorced	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	79
8. Increased difficulty in managing teenage child(ren)	55	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	19. Spouse/parent has an "affair"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	68
9. Increased difficulty in managing school age child(ren) (6-12 yrs.)	39	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	20. Increased difficulty in resolving issues with a "former" or separated spouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	47
10. Increased difficulty in managing preschool age child(ren) (2½-5 yrs.)	36	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	21. Increased difficulty with sexual relationship between husband and wife	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	58
11. Increased difficulty in managing toddler(s) (1-2½ yrs.)	36	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Subtotal 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Please turn over and complete

Subtotal 2

FAMILY LIFE CHANGES	DID THE CHANGE HAPPEN IN YOUR FAMILY?			FAMILY LIFE CHANGES	DID THE CHANGE HAPPEN IN YOUR FAMILY?		
	During Last 12 Months	Yes	No		Score	During Last 12 Months	Yes
<b>III. PREGNANCY AND CHILDBEARING STRAINS</b>				<b>VI. ILLNESS AND FAMILY "CARE" STRAINS</b>			
22. Spouse had unwanted or difficult pregnancy	45	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	48. Parent/spouse became seriously ill or injured	44	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. An unmarried member became pregnant	65	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	49. Child became seriously ill or injured	35	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. A member had an abortion	50	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	50. Close relative or friend of the family became seriously ill	44	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. A member gave birth to or adopted a child	50	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	51. A member became physically disabled or chronically ill	75	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>IV. FINANCE AND BUSINESS STRAINS</b>				<b>VII. LOSSES</b>			
26. Took out a loan or refinanced a loan to cover increased expenses	29	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	52. Increased difficulty in managing a chronically ill or disabled member	50	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Went on welfare	55	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	53. Member or close relative was committed to an institution or nursing home	44	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. Change in conditions (economic, political, weather) which hurts the family business	41	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	54. Increased responsibility to provide direct care or financial help to husband's and/or wife's parents	47	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. Change in Agriculture Market, Stock Market, or Land Values which hurts family investments and/or income	43	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	55. Experienced difficulty in arranging for satisfactory child care	40	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. A member started a new business	50	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>VIII. TRANSITIONS "IN AND OUT"</b>			
31. Purchased or built a home	41	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	56. A parent/spouse died	90	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. A member purchased a car or other major item	19	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	57. A child member died	99	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33. Increasing financial debts due to over-use of credit cards	31	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	58. Death of husband's or wife's parent or close relative	48	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34. Increased strain on family "money" for medical/dental expenses	23	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	59. Close friend of the family died	47	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35. Increased strain on family "money" for food, clothing, energy, home care	21	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	60. Married son or daughter was separated or divorced	50	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
36. Increased strain on family "money" for children's education	22	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	61. A member "broke up" a relationship with a close friend	35	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
37. Delay in receiving child support or alimony payments	41	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>IX. FAMILY LEGAL VIOLATIONS</b>			
<b>V. WORK-FAMILY TRANSITIONS AND STRAINS</b>				62. A member was married	42	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
38. A member changed to a new job/career	40	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	63. Young adult member left home	43	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
39. A member lost or quit a job	55	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	64. A young adult member began college (or post high school training)	20	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
40. A member retired from work	48	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	65. A member moved back home or a new person moved into the household	42	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
41. A member started or returned to work	41	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	66. A parent/spouse started school (or training program) after being away from school for a long time	30	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
42. A member stopped working for extended period (e.g. laid off, leave of absence, strike)	51	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>X. FAMILY LEGAL VIOLATIONS</b>			
43. Decrease in satisfaction with job/career	45	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	67. A member went to jail or juvenile detention	60	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
44. A member had increased difficulty with people at work	32	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	68. A member was picked up by police or arrested	57	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
45. A member was promoted at work or given more responsibilities	40	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	69. Physical or sexual abuse or violence in the home	75	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
46. Family moved to a new home/apartment	43	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	70. A member ran away from home	61	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
47. A child/adolescent member changed to a new school	24	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	71. A member dropped out of school or was suspended from school	30	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Subtotal 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Subtotal 4 \_\_\_\_\_  
Grand Total \_\_\_\_\_  
(1+2+3+4)

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 Madison, WI 53706



Family Health Program  
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 1981  
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# F-COPES

## FAMILY CRISIS ORIENTED PERSONAL SCALES

Hamilton L. McCubbin

David H. Olson

Andrea S. Larsen

### PURPOSE

The Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales is designed to record affective problem-solving attitudes and behavior which families develop to respond to problems or difficulties.

### DIRECTIONS

First, read the list of "Response Choices" one at a time.

Second, decide how well each statement describes your attitudes and behavior in response to problems or difficulties. If the statement describes your response very well, then circle the number 5 indicating that you STRONGLY AGREE; if the statement does not describe your response at all, then circle the number 1 indicating that you STRONGLY DISAGREE; if the statement describes your response to some degree, then select a number 2, 3, or 4 to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement about your response.

WHEN WE FACE PROBLEMS OR DIFFICULTIES IN OUR FAMILY, WE RESPOND BY:	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
1 Sharing our difficulties with relatives	1	2	3	4	5
2 Seeking encouragement and support from friends	1	2	3	4	5
3 Knowing we have the power to solve major problems	1	2	3	4	5
4 Seeking information and advice from persons in other families who have faced the same or similar problems	1	2	3	4	5
5 Seeking advice from relatives (grandparents, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
6 Seeking assistance from community agencies and programs designed to help families in our situation	1	2	3	4	5
7 Knowing that we have the strength within our own family to solve our problems	1	2	3	4	5
8 Receiving gifts and favors from neighbors (e.g. food, taking in mail, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
9 Seeking information and advice from the family doctor	1	2	3	4	5
10 Asking neighbors for favors and assistance	1	2	3	4	5

WHEN WE FACE PROBLEMS OR DIFFICULTIES IN OUR FAMILY, WE RESPOND BY:	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
11 Facing the problems "head-on" and trying to get solution right away	1	2	3	4	5
12 Watching television	1	2	3	4	5
13 Showing that we are strong	1	2	3	4	5
14 Attending church services	1	2	3	4	5
15 Accepting stressful events as a fact of life	1	2	3	4	5
16 Sharing concerns with close friends	1	2	3	4	5
17 Knowing luck plays a big part in how well we are able to solve family problems	1	2	3	4	5
18 Exercising with friends to stay fit and reduce tension	1	2	3	4	5
19 Accepting that difficulties occur unexpectedly	1	2	3	4	5
20 Doing things with relatives (get-togethers, dinners, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
21 Seeking professional counseling and help for family difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
22 Believing we can handle our own problems	1	2	3	4	5
23 Participating in church activities	1	2	3	4	5
24 Defining the family problem in a more positive way so that we do not become too discouraged	1	2	3	4	5
25 Asking relatives how they feel about problems we face	1	2	3	4	5
26 Feeling that no matter what we do to prepare, we will have difficulty handling problems	1	2	3	4	5
27 Seeking advice from a minister	1	2	3	4	5
28 Believing if we wait long enough, the problem will go away	1	2	3	4	5
29 Sharing problems with neighbors	1	2	3	4	5
30 Having faith in God	1	2	3	4	5



## SINGLE-PARENT HOUSEHOLD QUESTIONNAIRE

Please respond with a short answer or with the number which is shown in the parenthesis next to the answer.

1. What is your gender? (Place an "X" on the appropriate line.)

Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is the highest level of schooling you have completed?

H.S. not completed (1) \_\_\_\_\_  
 GED (2) \_\_\_\_\_  
 High School (3) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bachelor's Degree (4) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Graduate Degree (5) \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your present marital status? \_\_\_\_\_

Single, never married (1)  
 Separated (2)  
 Divorced (3)  
 Widowed (4)

5. How long have you been in this status? \_\_\_\_\_

(in months)

6. How many children do you have under the age of eighteen? \_\_\_\_\_

7. How many children live with you? \_\_\_\_\_

8. How many adults besides yourself live in your household? \_\_\_\_\_

9. What is your employment status? \_\_\_\_\_

Not employed (1)  
 Employed part-time (2)  
 Employed full-time (3)

10. Which best describes your annual gross income? \_\_\_\_\_

Under \$10,000 (1)  
 \$10,000 - \$24,999 (2)  
 \$25,000 - \$50,000 (3)  
 Above - \$50,000 (4)

11. What is your race? \_\_\_\_\_

Caucasian (1)  
 African American (2)  
 Hispanic (3)

## QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE CHILD

Read the following questions with your oldest elementary school-age child in mind. Please check YES or NO for each question.

1. Is your child active in Scouts or any other children's organizations (including church organizations)? YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_
2. Is your child active in any sports? YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_
3. Does your child regularly attend church services and/or Sunday School? YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_
4. Does your child have contact with his/her other parent? YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_
5. Does your child have a friend from the Big Brother or Big Sister Program? YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_
6. Has your child received individual or group counseling regarding divorce or death of a parent? YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_
7. Does your child regularly spend time with an adult male or female (friend, relative, etc.)? YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_
8. Does your child have regular contact (by phone, letter, or in person) with any of your relatives? YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_
9. Does your child have regular contact with any of his/her other parent's relatives? YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_
10. Does your child have any good friends that he/she plays with regularly? YES\_\_\_ NO\_\_\_

## PLEASE FILL IN THE FOLLOWING BLANKS.

11. How old is your child? \_\_\_\_\_ years old
12. What grade is your child in this school year? \_\_\_\_\_ grade
13. Is your child a boy or girl? (Circle One)

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

Dear Teacher,

I have been granted permission by the parent of \_\_\_\_\_ and the Central Administration to secure the following information on the above named student. This information will be used in a research study.

(a) How many grades listed below did this student receive on his/her report card for the most recent grading period?

A's \_\_\_\_\_ E's \_\_\_\_\_  
 B's \_\_\_\_\_ S's \_\_\_\_\_  
 C's \_\_\_\_\_ U's \_\_\_\_\_  
 D's \_\_\_\_\_  
 F's \_\_\_\_\_

(b) What were the most recent CRT results for this student? Please include the grade and year of the test.

CRT Information: GRADE \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR \_\_\_\_\_

	<u>Raw Score</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Mastery</u>
L.A.	/	_____	/
MATH	/	_____	/
SCIENCE	/	_____	/
S. STUDIES	/	_____	/

(c) If for some reason this student does not have any CRT results, please check the appropriate blank.

\_\_\_ Transferred  
 \_\_\_ Exempted  
 \_\_\_ Other

PLEASE TURN OVER

Thank you for your assistance. Please return this form by

\_\_\_\_\_ to:

**Carolyn S. Moyer**  
**Minnieville Elementary School**

**The vita has been removed from  
the scanned document**