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A Phenomenological Study on Single Parents' Experiences and Engagement as Their Child Attends Elementary School

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**A Phenomenological Study on Single Parents' Experiences and Engagement as Their Child Attends
Elementary School**

by

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M. A. Southwest Minnesota State University

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

For my parents, who taught me to value a love of learning and told me knowledge will set you free.

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ABSTRACT

The popularity of parental involvement in school systems has risen since the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) came into effect. However, there is a lack of research on how single parents navigate parental involvement and the struggles they face juggling jobs, multiple children, and stress with a lack of support. This research is guided by the following questions: What are the perceptions and beliefs of parental involvement for single parents with their child attending elementary school? How do single parents experience this first year? What support do single parents receive from the school system?

A phenomenological study using a construct of resiliency theoretical framework was conducted using single parents in Minnesota. Seven single parents were recruited to participate in a demographic survey and individual interviews. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. The findings of the study provide guidance to school systems and teachers on single parents' obstacles and lived experiences and provide the school system with ways to assist and support single-family households.

INTRODUCTION

Bringing a child to the very first day of school can be an exciting and scary new adventure for the child and parent. Typically, but not always, when a child from a family enters the school setting, there can be questions and uncertainties about school expectations and routines. Parental involvement is one area that parents will experience during these first few years but there are known barriers that prevent parents from being involved in their child's education. Some of those barriers include how parents view their roles in their child's education, lack of confidence or language barriers, parents' perception of invitations from the teacher or the school, single parents or large families, work situations, financial circumstances, and mental health status (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). As an educator of kindergarten students, the researcher of this study often saw the barriers called out by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) when interacting with parents navigating life with a child in school. Of note, she recognized the struggles that single parents faced as they began navigating school challenges. Single-parent families are comprised of a parent/caregiver and one or more dependent children without the presence and support of a spouse or adult partner sharing parenting responsibility (Kramer, 2021). To help bridge the gap, the researcher wanted to further explore the insights of single parents around their experiences, perceptions, and barriers to parental involvement. Single-parent households fall under the category of barriers to parental involvement. The following study was conducted to provide insight into single parents' experiences, perceptions, and barriers to parental involvement as their children attend elementary school.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), in 2020 there were 10,719,000 single-parent households in the United States and the Pew Research Center found in 2019 that 23%

of children under 18 lived with one parent and no other adult. The number of children living in a single-parent household in the United States is three times the number found in other countries (Pew Research Center, 2019). This number has grown rapidly with the rise in children being born outside of marriage, a trend that was less common decades ago. Recent estimates showed that in 2016 about 40% of births in the United States occurred outside of marriage, up from 28% of births occurring outside of marriage in 1990 (Child Trends, 2016).

Looking at the increase in children being raised by single parents, schools need to be aware of the effects on their students. Children raised in single-parent households face risk factors such as academic problems, experience external and internal disorders, and have lower self-esteem than their peers from dual-parent households (George & Levin, 2015; Turner et al., 2007). Psychological distress and lower educational attainment experienced through being raised in a single-parent household during adolescence transfers to poor outcomes in employment, income, and marital status in adulthood (Woessmann, 2015). Schools should be looking to support the single parent population by exploring what single parents need and how to best respond to these needs. Typical forms of support that have previously been implemented toward dual parent households might not meet the single parent's needs and support their involvement in their child's educational life.

Being physically present at school functions is seen by some school personnel as the primary way that parents show they are involved in their child's education. When, by removing a narrow mind frame around parental involvement, the idea that there are many ways for parents to be involved will become apparent (Mapp, 2003). Mapp (2003) described how detrimental having a limited view of involvement can be:

By not recognizing diverse forms of involvement that may take place beyond the school building and by not providing different outlets for family participation, schools may unwittingly restrict both the numbers of parents and the ways that parents can be involved in their children's schooling. (p. 59)

The mindset that attending events at school is how one expresses their desire to be engaged with their child's school leads to negative feelings regarding single parents who cannot attend. Then comes the assumption that the parent does not care about their child's education.

A research study done by Carroll (2017) stated single parents are subjected to derogatory stereotyping. Previous studies have cited that some mothers perceive themselves to solely have the responsibility of being the main caregiver and experience the demands of putting their child's needs first and if they do not or are unable to, this can cause maternal guilt and fear of social penalties, low self-efficacy, and higher stress levels (Henderson et al., 2010, 2015; Meeussen & Laar, 2018; Newman & Henderson, 2014).

Data are lacking on how to best serve and support single-parent families, the strategies implemented by schools to engage parental involvement are centered on typical nuclear family types. Jacques and Villegas (2018) recommended conducting a needs assessment to better understand the barriers and challenges the school community faces, but the authors went on to state previously documented challenges from literature. The challenges stated in the article, that impact single parents, are being unable to attend school meetings or events due to scheduling conflicts, time constraints that can involve childcare, commute time, or multiple jobs, and educators holding unrealistic expectations for family engagement (Willems & Gonzales-DeHass, 2013). The researcher of the present study

focused on single parents to better understand their experiences and barriers in the school setting as their child goes through elementary school.

Parental involvement has held an interest in the academic world as being advantageous for academic achievement for children (Castro et al., 2015; Epstein, 1991). Children who have parents involved in their education have higher levels of academic achievement than children whose parents are less involved (Topor et al., 2010). However, the academic benefits of parental involvement have been debated as of late. In an older study, Domina (2005) found that the benefits of parental involvement are only related to student success when socioeconomic status and a child's prior skills are linked together. A study by Harris and Robinson (2013) found that standard measures of parental involvement do not show significant statistical data related to increased math and reading skills. Gibbs et al. (2021), warned not to abandon parental involvement in its entirety and examine it as a holistic view across different types of family cultures and social classes. On the contrary, Gibbs et al. (2021) found that "the schools and teachers are highly influential in shaping parental efficacy" (p. 19). With this influence, administration and teachers can intentionally set up practices that welcome parental involvement in ways that provide effective outcomes for their students and schools (Gibbs et al., 2021).

Hamlin (2014) found a need in school systems to develop a better understanding of parental involvement and the impact it has on student success across different socioeconomic and cultural groups. Parental involvement such as communicating high expectations to children has shown to be more effective than other methods (Galindo et al. 2012; Hamlin 2014; Harris and Robinson, 2013). Choi et al. (2014) found similar results stating that when parents provide a positive attitude toward learning, responsibility, and persistence through

modeling, their children have higher academic success. Preschool parents discussing the school day with their children more frequently improved literacy scores compared to those parents who did not converse about their child's day (Dove et al., 2015). Through these studies, the key to the most beneficial types of parental involvement are still being debated but the amount of interest, importance, and expectations parents put on their child's education has shown to be beneficial to student success. The current study aimed to examine how single parents are engaging with their children and if or what impacts their ability to provide the parental involvement they desire.

The researcher has had many experiences with single parents during her 10 years as a kindergarten teacher. During that time, she has talked with countless parents who have expressed the pressure they face navigating societal norms of parenting. Through those personal connections, the researcher felt it important to not only find a way to better help single parents navigate the experience of a child attending elementary school, but she specifically saw an opportunity to support single parents, who face additional pressures from society. This research set out to explore the best ways to support this group of parents in the school setting, and how support systems like teachers and other parents can help.

Statement of the Problem

There is currently a lack of qualitative studies done on single parents and their lived experiences navigating involvement as their child attends elementary school. Without that research, a bigger problem of understanding how to help single parents get engaged with their child's education is at hand. From previous research, parents' involvement and their interest in a child's schooling create positive academic outcomes but single parents face many hurdles, such as poverty, working multiple jobs, limited support, and copious amounts

of stress that can become barriers to being as involved as they would like. There is a need to discover what challenges and life experiences impact a single parent's ability to be engaged in the schooling of their child in elementary school.

A particular study by Meier et al. (2016) focused on single mothers and how they are sadder, stressed, and more fatigued in comparison to partnered mothers. Campbell et al., (2016) conducted a study on the role mandatory work programs play in single parents' financial status and health. Both Campbell et al. (2016) and Meier et al. (2016) found that single parents experience strain in finances, depression, and fatigue that stems from working low wage jobs and navigating the inability to afford childcare. Single parent households with children are much more likely to live in poverty, the poverty rate of children in single parent households, from 2012, was triple that of children who lived with two parents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013b).

There is a connection to be made between single parents living in poverty and the adverse effects of achievement for those students living in poverty in the school setting. Since single-parent households are more likely to live in poverty, the academic success of children raised in single-parent households is a problem as a family's socioeconomic status correlates to achievement (George & Levin, 2015). Students from low socioeconomic homes have a disadvantage from their peers, as they lack an academic environment at home and students from high socioeconomic homes have a more stimulating home life that promotes cognitive development (Thompson, 2018).

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of single parents as they navigate their child attending the K-12 public school

system via elementary school, while also juggling work, parenting, and other obligations. The purpose of a phenomenological study is to gain a common meaning from several individuals experiencing the same phenomenon. Conducting this study and gaining the perceptions of single parents will help school staff become aware of the best ways to support single parents' involvement as they navigate the school system in a parental role. The researcher hoped to learn how school systems can support single parents in relation to parent involvement and supply additional resources they may need. There will be additional struggles to add to existing literature, including how the pandemic impacted single-parent households, but also showcasing positive outcomes, in hopes of overcoming the negative stigma faced by single parents. A study by West et al. (2016), stated:

Considering new and innovative methods for supporting single mother headed families continues to be an area in need of attention. Learning more from single mothers about how they experience different forms of support is an essential aspect of understanding how support can be best provided. (p. 390)

This study by West et al. also called for teachers, counselors, and administrators to be patient listeners and reach out to single parents. It is crucial to update the research on support for single parents with the pandemic.

Research Design

The goal of the study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of single parents during their child's attendance in elementary school. The researcher conducted this phenomenological study using a qualitative research paradigm. "A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept

or a phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). The participants in the study completed interviews reflecting on their lived experiences as single parents.

Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend interviews to collect data on individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon. Implementing interviews for this phenomenological study on single parents' perspectives successfully allowed for better understanding and “described the common meanings for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept of a phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.75). Creswell and Poth (2018), also stated during the process of a phenomenological study, the researcher reflects on essential themes. This will help to interpret the research and make meaning from the lived experiences of the participants.

“Phenomenology is not only description, however; it is also an interpretive process in which the researcher interprets the meaning of the lived experience” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2019, p.55). As the researcher conducted the interviews, reviewed, and discovered themes among the participants, it was crucial she kept her experiences and opinions in a separate space than the participants. Bloomberg and Volpe asserted that “bracketing personal experiences is difficult, if not impossible” (p. 55). The researcher made her very best effort to stay neutral and become aware of any biases she held. In phenomenological studies, this important step is called epoche. King and Horrocks (2019) recommended setting aside preconceptions about the phenomena and reviewing it with a fresh perspective.

Research Question(s)

The research questions were developed using the guiding theme of lived experiences of single parents as their child attends elementary school. There is an overarching research question followed by sub questions created to tease out additional information on parents

perceived involvement, resources utilized or not utilized, and how parents perceive their involvement. The following research questions guided this qualitative phenomenological study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions and experiences related to involvement in education for single-parent households who have a child entering the K-12 school system for the first time via elementary school?

Sub Question 1: How do single parents describe their level of involvement and the impact it has on their child's development?

Sub Question 2: How do single parents perceive the resources that are available to them?

Sub Question 3: How do single parents view the adequacy of their parental involvement?

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks are utilized throughout research studies to provide a general explanation at what the researcher will potentially find throughout the study, it also provides a lens to view participants and communities within a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The theoretical framework for a study is typically phase two in the process and comes before the researcher plans the design and approach to the research study.

This study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's theory and was used as the framework in which the research was conducted and analyzed. Uri Bronfenbrenner (1992), an esteemed developmental psychologist, affirmed that effective and successful childhood outcomes should be a result of not only early intervention and strengths-based programming such as timely wrap-around support services for children and families but also focus on preventive

social capital-building initiatives and involvement at the individual, parental, and community levels so that children are better academically prepared to achieve. Through Bronfenbrenner's (1992) educational platform, as understanding of the impact of poverty on child development, mental health, and parental roles, responsibilities, and the involvement parents show in their child's schools.

Using Bronfenbrenner's theory as a guide, the researcher was able to justify using a qualitative, phenomenological study to understand how single parenthood impacts a parent's role and involvement in their child's learning. By conducting one-on-one interviews, the researcher gathered lived experiences of single parents, that highlighted support services that Bronfenbrenner's theory declared provided successful childhood outcomes.

It is through this framework that the researcher is expected to see how lack of support from outside help, the school, and community can be detrimental to a child's academic success. The interviews the researcher conducted provided insight on what supports benefit single parents, where they are lacking school support, and how this impacted their desire or ability to be involved with their child's schooling.

This study was also guided by the resilience framework. Greene (2002) described resiliency as being linked to life's stressors and their ability to cope with said stress. This framework aligns well with the researcher's goal in focusing, not on the adverse effects of being a single parent but recognizing how they have overcome and thrived through life's stress. Masten (2014) joined the resilience framework by adding that resilience emerges from being exposed to adaptive systems for human development, including: having a healthy brain, experiencing close relationships with caring and competent adults, having committed families, supportive schools and communities, and a belief in oneself. Employing the

resilience theory in research studies allows frameworks for interventions and guiding policies to better support children (Masten, 2014). “In essence, resilience researchers agree that resilience is concerned with individual variations in response to risk” (Ledesma, 2014, p. 2).

Key Terms

Parental burnout: a state of intense exhaustion related to one’s parental role, in which one becomes emotionally detached from one’s children and doubtful of one’s capacity to be a good parent. (Roskam et al., 2017).

Resilience: the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Single parent: (For the purposes of this study) Single-parent families are comprised of a parent/caregiver and one or more dependent children without the presence and support of a spouse or adult partner who is sharing the responsibility of parenting (Kramer, 2019).

Assumptions

It was the assumption of the researcher that the participants freely completed the Qualtrics survey truthfully, in order to become a participant in the study. Through the interview process, the researcher assumed the participants were truthful in their description of their lived experiences. The researcher viewed the data through a constructivist paradigm, which views reality as having multiple views and experiences. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated it is the job of qualitative researchers to report the multiple realities told to them. The researcher will assume all statements made by the participants are true and valid, in order to report the varied realities experienced by single parents.

Limitations

The greatest limitation to this research was the sample of participants. The sample size was a limitation as the midwestern school was in a small, rural area. Since the qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews, the willingness of participants to engage in interviews beyond the initial survey, was limited. This contributed to the limitation of sample size. The lack of diversity of the sample prohibits the study from representing single parents across the United States.

The researcher chose to conduct the study on single parents in general, as focusing on single mothers or single fathers would have been too limiting on the sample size. Therefore, an overall view of single parents was used in this study.

The time constraint is another limitation to this study as it needed to be completed on a specific timeline for the completion for an Educational Doctoral degree. Conducting and coding interviews was a time-consuming task, that prohibited the researcher from holding more than seven interviews. The honesty of the participants was a limitation that coincides with qualitative research as the participants had control over whether the data collected is either truthful or not.

Summary

The rise of single parents in our society has brought about a need to question what our school systems are doing to support and encourage single parents. As single parents embark on a new journey, the school system can be both an added stress and filled with joy. As the world has shifted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this research study sought to better understand the impact the school setting had on single parents.

This study desired to shine light on the single parent's journey through school life, how the pandemic affected them, and how school systems can better support them. Through interviews, the participants were able to share their lived experiences, and share their successes and hardships throughout these first years. The study accomplished what it set out to do and provided recommendations for future studies and supplied ideas for changes that can be implemented in the school setting.

The current chapter briefly outlined the purpose of the study, the research design, the theoretical framework used and the research questions that guided the study. The researcher also listed the assumptions, limitations, and defined terms used within the study. Chapter two will provide a summary of the literature in relation to single parents and the school system. Chapter three will provide the methodological procedures for the research study and chapter four will provide the research findings. The closing chapter will conclude with interpretations and recommendations for future research.

Literature Review

The section below will introduce literature that addresses single-parent households, parental stress, parental involvement, and barriers to parental involvement. The literature review aims to lay the foundation for the research in this work, helping schools realize the importance of developing strategies that support single-parent households instead of exclusively gearing toward dual-family households.

Methods of Searching

To begin gathering literature for the study on parental involvement in single family homes, library databases and scholarly search engines were used. The online library at Minnesota State University Moorhead provided ample materials that covered findings regarding parental involvement. The materials were found using Education Research Complete, Academic Search Complete, and ERIC databases. While searching for literature on *parental involvement*, including the words *early childhood* and *kindergarten* allowed the studies involving middle school and high school aged children to be excluded from the desired literature. The key words *single parent households*, *barriers*, and *parental involvement* also yielded results specific to the current study's needs.

Most of the research found on single parenting was collected from mothers. This might be related to a finding by the Census Bureau that identified 80% of all single-family households are run by single mothers (Census Bureau, 2020). Another possible reason for this is that only 34% of divorced couples have shared custody, according to national data collected from 2010-2014 (Meyer et al, 2022). Many of the studies surrounding single fathers centered on their lack of involvement and their difficulties in co-parenting. There is a lack of studies on how single fathers navigate raising children compared to single mothers' studies

on raising children. The following section will detail three major themes found in existing research on single-parent households: parental stress, guilt, and pressure.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement in schools has been a prevalent topic within the field of educational research studies. “The importance of involving parents in improving educational achievement cannot be overstated as parents are the most pervasive socializing influence on academic competence and school functioning” (Singh, et al., 1995). It is crucial to discover perceptions and beliefs single parents have on the topic of involvement in order to implement best practice strategies to encourage involvement. This research explored further into discovering beliefs and experiences on involvement by examining single-parent households' perceptions of parental involvement and the barriers they face when their child was in elementary school. The focus in the study moved from single mothers to single parents, therefore allowing a more inclusive look at single parents.

Parental Involvement has been defined by multiple researchers as being two-part, both home-based involvement and school-based involvement (Choi et al., 2015; Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011; Pomerantz et al., 2007). Ice & Hoover-Dempsey (2011) defined home-based parental involvement as representing “parents’ practices related to school that often take place outside of school” (p. 155). A third dimension to parental involvement, which will be discussed in a later section, is school-family cooperation-based involvement. This involvement is related to families’ level of communication with teachers and how to maintain it successfully.

A relatively new barrier to parental involvement, since 2019, was the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic changed how many lived their day-to-day lives and

the impact on schools has not been fully measured or realized. Bonal and Gonzalez (2020) found that despite schools' best efforts to provide learning activities during the lockdown, significant inequalities emerged depending on family characteristics and school characteristics. Socialization through early childhood was a particular concern for vulnerable children. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were limited in the review of the literature, in relation to single parents, but are beneficial to discover in order to implement better systems for single-income families. The closing of schools and daycares due to the pandemic placed many households in difficult circumstances. It put them in difficult circumstances as families were left without childcare options during this time. Even without a global pandemic, the researcher was unable to find information on support for single parents in the school system. There are other obligations for single parents like multiple jobs that make it difficult to attend school functions like conferences, volunteering, sporting events, or classroom parental involvement activities (Baker et al., 2016; Finders & Lewis, 1994; Wong 2019).

Defining Involvement

There are three different dimensions of parental involvement. According to Fantuzzo et al. (2000), the three distinct types as school-based involvement, school-family cooperation-based involvement, and home-based involvement. While school-based involvement refers to the involvement of families in school and in-class activities, school-family cooperation-based involvement is related to families' levels of communication with teachers and how to maintain it successfully. Home-based involvement refers to the fact that families provide a suitable studying environment for their children at home and help them with their homework.

Joyce Epstein (1991) detailed her framework for parental involvement. The technical name of her framework is *Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership and Sample Practices*. Epstein described this framework as a partnership or collaboration between home and school. Ideally families and educators would work together for the children, defacing the one-way opportunity that is dictated by a school. According to Epstein (1991) there are six types of involvement, and they include:

1. Parenting: Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.
2. Communicating: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and their children's progress.
3. Volunteering: Recruit and organize parent help and support.
4. Learning at Home: Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.
5. Decision Making: Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.
6. Collaborating with the Community: Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and students learning and development.

Epstein's framework provided two additional tables detailing challenges each type could encounter, redefinitions of terms like volunteer and community, and lists expected outcomes in each of the six categories.

A meta-analysis study is a quantitative study with an epidemiological design that uses previous research data to procure conclusions based on that specific topic. This is a different type of research conducted by the researcher for the present study, in that previous data is not

analyzed (Lau et al., 1997). The meta-analysis study conducted by Castro et al., (2015) reviewed 308 previously conducted studies and pulled out seven factors of parental involvement that closely mimicked Epstein's six frameworks. The seven factors were various parent participation, communicating about school, homework help, parental expectations, reading habits, attending school functions, and parenting style (Castro et al., 2015).

The researchers synthesized the data and concluded that:

The strongest associations between type of parental involvement and academic achievement were found when parents have high academic expectations for their children, develop and maintain communication with them about school activities and schoolwork, and promote the development of reading habits. (Castro et al., 2015, p. 41)

Comparing Epstein and Castro et al., shows a clear picture that parents can participate in a multitude of ways to be involved. The community factor mentioned highlights the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child", hinting that children need a whole community to raise them in a safe and loving way so they can develop and flourish. If single parents experience challenges the community or school can rise to the occasion and provide the assistance or guidance they need.

In the 20-year difference between the two articles on parental involvement, some themes have stayed the same. Both types of parental involvement include parenting expectations at home related to learning, communication between school to home and home to school, and learning at home through reading and homework help. However, Castro (2015) did not include volunteering, community collaboration, or decision making as a top seven-factor in parental involvement. Castro also included parental attendance at school

events and parental attitude or parenting styles at home as important factors in parental involvement that Epstein did not. Literature seems to continue to promote parenting at home, open communication, and at-home learning practices.

Benefits to Parental Involvement

While schools are attempting to make the connection between home and school through involving parents in school-based activities, research is suggesting that is not the most effective way to harness parental involvement (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Parents involvement in school-based activities has important social and community functions but has shown limited or no benefit to student success (Altschul, 2011; DePlanty et al., 2007; Harris & Goodall, 2008). According to Dove et al. (2015), there are no significant findings relating to how often a parent volunteers at their child's school or how often parents stayed connected with their child's teacher. "Schools must advance beyond a belief that any parent involvement activity will produce important results" (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005, p. 204).

However, a study conducted by Tarraga-Garcia et al., (2017), stated that apart from two of the factors considered, home-family involvement was not significantly related to academic achievement. The two factors that showed a significant correlation were access to informal education resources and parents' employment. Family involvement, regarding the access of children to informal education resources, is significantly related to better academic achievement. Students with both parents working perform best, and those with none working, worst (Tarraga-Garcia et al., 2017).

Instead of school-based involvement, the most positive impact on student success has come from activities that parents engage in with their children at home (Altschul, 2011; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). The literature differed on the effect

parent involvement has on academic success. Parents who reported doing home learning activities with their children reported an improved percentage of students who were proficient in mathematics from one year to the next (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Ogg and Anthony (2020) found that home-based involvement had a substantial effect on academic success in science, more so than in reading and math. Children who have not entered the school system (before elementary school) have shown a positive correlation between early literacy activities at home and reading literacy and parental education. When a child is from a family with low socio-economic status, they experience later exposure to literacy activities than children from a high socio-economic family (Hemmerechts et al., 2016). Additionally, parents who frequently discussed their child's school day had a child who scored higher on literacy assessments (Dove et al., 2015). The study found a correlation between behavior and parental involvement, higher levels of home-based involvement showed lower levels of classroom behaviors (Fantuzzo et al., 2000).

Parent involvement can have an indirect effect on students learning too. Choi et al. (2015) found that "Parental involvement fosters personal attributes in children, such as positive attitudes toward learning, a sense of responsibility, persistence through modeling, and reinforcement, and these attributes are directly linked to students' academic achievement" (p. 154). Hall (2020) conducted a study on parent feedback on student work that also supported this claim. In the study, parents used Class Dojo (a parent/teacher/student communication app) to provide feedback on their child's writing. Surveys were collected from both students and parents, which showed that students felt their writing was valued when parents read their writing and provided feedback weekly.

Niia et al. (2015) found a negative correlation to increased parent involvement, in which parents being involved caused negative interactions between parent and child. This study was done in Sweden and the students were between the ages of 13-15. The correlations were only negative when the students had unwelcomed academic issues. “Parental involvement has negative correlations with academic achievement, which is likely due to increased communication between school and parents when students fail to meet their academic goals” (Niia et al., 2015, p. 304).

Barriers to Parental Involvement

The main struggles addressed in the literature reviewed were families in poverty, working mothers, and ethical issues with non-white families not feeling viewed as valued participants in their children's learning. The review will examine the barriers further.

Camacho-Thompson et al. (2016) examined parental involvement in school, involvement at home, parental depression, somatic symptoms, and family relationships as factors contributing to how successful a child was in school. Stressful events, social and economic factors are aligned with lower parent involvement, but those different stresses are related to different areas of involvement (Camacho-Thompson et al., 2016; Harris & Goodall, 2008). For example, “financial strain was negatively associated with school involvement, but major family life events were linked with lower levels of home academic involvement” (Camacho-Thompson et al., 2016, p. 1070). Being involved becomes exponentially harder for families when they are in stressful situations.

Similarly, Holmes et al. (2018) looked at how mothers' work-family balance affected their involvement. They included full-time and part-time work plus poverty level, number of children, marital status, and education. “When a mother has fewer children and she works

part-time, she may expect her part-time workload and fewer children to facilitate her work-family balance. When she experiences conflict instead, her violated expectations may add to her stress” (Holmes et al., 2018, p. 1895).

A study by Latunde et al. (2016) stated “Black families often feel their efforts to engage with their children’s education are largely ignored by schools and in literature” (p. 72). This study looked at engagement strategies of Black parents by defining parental involvement. This study is significant because it examines how Black families instruct their children, which can differ from non-Black families. The discussion shared the following, “This study’s findings revealed that Black parents/guardians engaged in their children’s education in two major ways: by (a) helping with learning at home and (b) exposing their children to educational activities outside the school” (Latunde et al., 2016, p. 76).

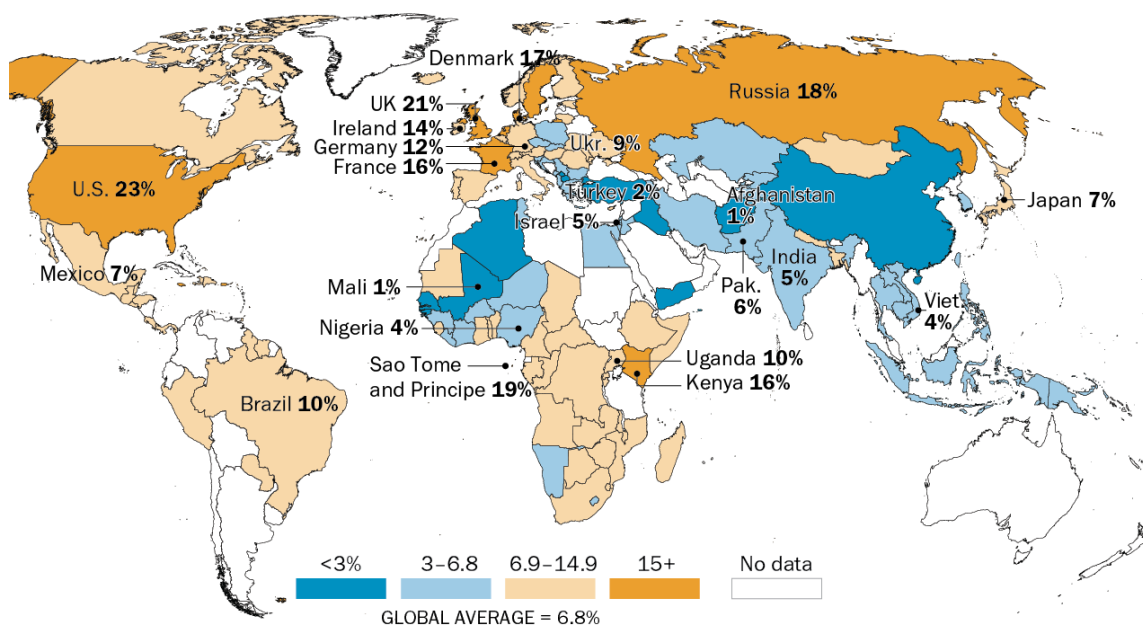
A study done by Shah (2009), shared the struggle that Latino families have with feeling welcome in schools without Latinx representatives. Their research showed greater parent attendance and involvement in schools when the Latinx population was present in the staff. “This study points to a need for additional research that attempts to disentangle the role Latino representation plays in schools. As noted above, Latino school board members may have numerous effects on school policies and on parental attitudes and behaviors” (Shah, 2009, p. 227).

The research stated above showcases a cultural barrier to parental involvement of our Black and Latinx populations. Schools report challenges in implementing responsive family engagement strategies that are inclusive to diverse populations (De Luige & Martelli, 2015). *Strategies For Equitable Family Engagement*, Jacques & Villegas (2018), recommended strategic planning over time, offering staff professional learning on cultural responsiveness,

gather human resource strategies that will attract diverse educators, ensure communications are accessible to all families, and welcome families in appropriate and culturally competent ways.

Single Parent Households

The number of children in the United States, that has been living with a single parent has been rising for the past decade. In 2021, the United States has the world's highest rate of children living with single parents (Kramer, 2021). Figure 1 shows almost a quarter of children from the United States lived in a single-parent home in the 2010-2018 census and data survey (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Figure 1**Percentage of children under the age of 18 in single-parent households****Almost a quarter of U.S. children live in single-parent homes, more than in any other country***% of children under age 18 in single-parent households*

Note. Image obtained from the Pew Research Center as an analysis of the 2010-2018 census and survey data. The map shows data of single-parent households that include one adult and at least one child under 18.

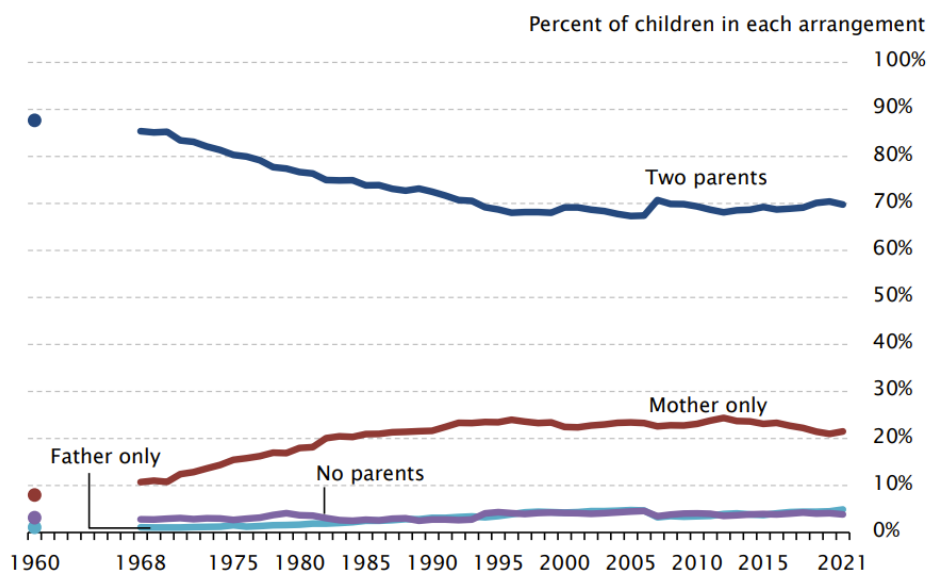
Single-parent families are comprised of a parent/caregiver and one or more dependent children without the presence and support of a spouse or adult partner sharing parenting responsibility (Kramer, 2021). Kramer (2021) consulted the U.S. Census Bureau, which had defined single-parent households as households that also have grandparents, other relatives, or cohabiting partners present.

According to the Census Bureau, in their Decennial Census from 1968 to 2021, the number of two-parent households declined from 85% in 1968 to 70% in 2021. While the

number of mother-only households rose from 10% in 1968 to over 20% in 2021, the number of father-only households has remained slightly similar since 1968, with a 5% increase in single-father households (see figure 2). From the data, it is observable that there is a rise in single-parent households and a decline in dual-parent households. This is another reason why additional research is needed to help meet the needs of single-parent households and help them navigate challenges when starting school and meet the unique needs that are not present in dual-parent households.

Parental Stress

Of the almost 11 billion single parents in the United States, 31% lived below the poverty line, 29% were jobless for the entire year of 2020, and 28.7% were food insecure (Census Bureau, 2020). The cause of parental stress can come from many different areas including financial trouble, lack of social support, and relationship problems. Stressors adversely affect the general well-being and health of parents (Bornstein et al., 2008).

Figure 2**Living Arrangements of Children: 1968 to Present**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1960, and Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 1968 to 2021.

The single-parent population is currently experiencing poverty and joblessness, that causes extreme stress in their daily lives. Stress levels in parents can impact future levels of engagement with their children. When parents experience prominent levels of stress during their child's toddler years, this may diminish the resources that parents have to engage with their child daily, and in turn diminish future resources for involvement in schooling at home (Blake Berryhill, 2016). Single mothers are more vulnerable to internalizing problems and creating ineffective parenting behaviors with their children (Blake Berryhill, 2016; Taylor et al., 2010).

Single Parent Barriers

While all parents may feel the pull of stress in their daily lives, single parents may be tackling more than a two-parent household. Additional stressors felt by single parents may include:

- Visitation and custody problems
- The effects of continuing conflict between the parents
- Less opportunity for parents and children to spend time together
- Effects of the breakup on children's school performance and peer relations
- Disruptions of extended family relationships
- Problems caused by the parents' dating and entering new relationships (American Psychology Association, 2019, para. 4).

Additionally, Whisenhunt et al. (2019), found the following challenges that increase stress in single parents: desire for co-parenting, finding balance among multiple roles, managing childcare and supporting child development, negative effects on self, and navigating blended families.

Stack and Meredith (2018) concluded that the high level of stress, psychological distress, and anxiety single parents reported feeling is caused by being solely responsible for everything, including financial concerns. The distress reported in this study was so severe that it included sleepless nights and thoughts of suicide. Single parents have higher levels of mental health problems, which from the researcher's understanding, it could result partly from the stress of trying to balance the needs of employment, home responsibilities, child-rearing, and interactions with the child's school with limited time, personal, and social support.

Parental Burnout

A more recently coined term for parental stress has been parental burnout. The term burnout came from Freudenberger (1974) to describe the utter exhaustion of mental care professionals at the workplace. It was suggested by Freudenberger that those who are most prone to develop burnout are the dedicated and committed who feel pressure to take on too much from within the workplace. The experience of burnout can be felt because of a loss of idealism, energy, and purpose, and over commitment (Rogers & Dodson, 1988; Sturgess & Poulsen, 1983). While the term originated in the medical field, the term has been used in professions that are seen as helpers, for example: social workers, teachers, and other similar professions (Iacovides et al., 2002). Translating this feeling of burnout to parenthood can easily be imagined.

Meeusen and Van Laar (2018) argued parental burnout is caused by attempting to be the perfect mother. The pressure to be perfect increases maternal guilt, lowers mother's self-efficacy beliefs, and increases their stress level (Henderson et al., 2015; Meeusen & Van Laar, 2018). Henderson et al., 2018, suggested “that even for women who do not conform to the standards of intensive mothering, the pressure to be the perfect mother and associated guilt for not meeting such high standards are alive and well” (p. 524). Parental burnout may not only be prompted by individual or family-level risk factors but also by norms set from intensive mothering at a societal level (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018).

Barriers of Single Mothers

Intensive mothering is an ideology understood as a maternal ideal that is described as “child centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive” (Hays, 1996, p.54; Sullivan, 1997). A study done on a MOPS (Moms of Preschoolers) group examined how women who accept and strive for the ideology of

intensive mothering cope with the unattainable standards. The qualitative, sociological study conducted interviews with participants of the MOPS group and found that MOPS “silenced their troubles instead of translating them into larger social issues surrounding the dominant discourse of motherhood” (Newman & Henderson, 2014, p. 487). Intensive mothering is rooted in the media and mothers themselves, the pressure mothers put upon themselves to be perfect can cause guilt, lower self-efficacy, and higher levels of stress and anxiety (Henderson et al., 2015; Newman & Henderson, 2014).

Maternal Pressure & Guilt

There are five types of guilt mothers can experience: guilt from aggression, guilt from exit, guilt from absence, guilt from preferential treatment, and guilt from motherhood myths (Rotkirch & Janhuner, 2009). Fathers have mostly been excluded from guilt research, “Fathers in every known society have provided less childcare than mothers. (Rotkirch & Janhuner, 2009, p. 92). It is not to discredit their experiences or internal thoughts but there is a lack of previous research gathered on father's guilt.

Some studies have found that the perception of perfection that mothers experiences can be harmful to them. “Internalization of high standards for ideal motherhood and the perception that one does not meet these standards is detrimental to mothers of young children” (Liss et al., 2013, p. 1117). The most powerful source of pressure and observance is interpersonal, meaning from other mothers (Henderson et al., 2010). This is contrary to a belief that mothers feel more pressure from media and celebrity parents (Henderson et al., 2010; Henderson et al., 2015).

In the workforce, employed mothers are more fatigued than non-employed mothers, while single mothers experience elevated levels of fatigue, sadness, and stress. Interestingly,

non-employed single mothers were found to fare worse than employed single mothers (Meier et al., 2016). Borelli et al., 2017, reported that work-family conflict elicits more guilt among mothers than fathers in a study done with toddler-aged children.

Barriers of Single Fathers

There has been limited research on the experiences of single fathers raising children and their involvement in their child's education. A possible factor in the lack of research could be that in 2015, 80% of single-parent households were run by mothers, leaving only 20% of single-parent households run by fathers (U.S. Census Bureau & Grall, 2016). Another possible hypothesis for this lack of research could be the number of fathers incarcerated. A study conducted by Maruschak et al., (2016) found that 47% of inmates in state prisons and 57% of inmates at federal prisons were parents. The number of fathers in prison during the survey in 2016 was 626,800 compared to mothers at 57,000. The number of fathers incarcerated increased by 48% from 1991 to 2016. However, the number of mothers incarcerated increased by 96% from 1991 to 2016. Seemingly, in 1991 there were very few mothers incarcerated compared to 2016 but the number of fathers in prison is still exponentially higher in 2016.

However, single fathers experience barriers to being involved in general with their children. Navigating the family court system, and child support without outside help can be difficult and cause fathers to stop seeking involvement with their children (Caines et al., 2019). Often there is no support or services in place for fathers at "family" social services, legal offices, or agencies, as they are leaned toward helping single mothers and nonmarried, single fathers have little knowledge about the legal system (Caines et al., 2019). Co-parenting struggles have also impacted a father's ability to be involved as maintaining low-conflict

relationships has made long-term involvement in their children's lives more likely to take place (Arditti et al., 2019; Caines et al., 2019; Randles, 2020). A study done by Coles (2015) found single fathers' involvement with children and household duties increased as they took on a single-parent role. There are reported differences in gender roles that single parents take on, for example, single mothers engage in more private talks with children and housework while single fathers engage in more play with their children and provide provisions (Coles, 2015). More research is needed on the role single fathers take with parental involvement with their school-aged children.

Parental Role

The following section will review literature on the parents' role in parental involvement, including their perspective, benefits to involvement, and how parental warmth can benefit student success.

Parental Perspective

It was difficult to find research on parents' perspective of their involvement in school and with teachers. A study done by Snell (2018) conducted interviews with immigrant families to see their perspective on parent involvement. The parents cited home-based activities such as going to the park, attending community events, doing things as a family, and teaching children respect as the top of their priorities. Though the school reports limited attendance at school events such as conferences and math nights, many parents reported visiting the school twice a day to walk their children to school. Some parents sat with their children outside or during breakfast before the day begins, sitting on benches or under trees and watching the children play on the school playground (Snell, 2018). The parents also shared concerns they had with the school which included bullying, language barriers,

employment and economical status, and dietary issues. When speaking of the teachers, the parents expressed how the teachers “loved” and “cared” for their children (Snell, 2018).

Parents requested to be invited inside the children’s classroom to see what they are doing.

Snell (2018) ended with saying:

Parent interviews revealed that parents are highly invested in their children’s education and see themselves as collaborating with school staff to educate their children. Although sometimes teachers did not perceive parents as fully involved academically, this perceived lack of engagement may have resulted from parents’ respect for teachers as professionals and not understanding how they were expected to participate in academic activities. (p. 130)

Schools located in smaller districts can foster better parent-school collaborations (Feuerstein, 2000; Rodriguez & Elbaum, 2014). Their ability to foster better relationships comes from their ability to highlight a safer and more welcoming environment. Rodrigues and Elbaum (2014) deduced that a smaller teacher-student ratio is the cause of better relationship building between families and school. The teacher had more time to reach out and encourage parents than teachers with larger ratios. Rodriguez and Elbaum (2014) concluded that:

Parents of students in schools with lower student–teacher ratios were more likely to indicate that the school encouraged them to play an active role in their child’s education. They were also more likely to indicate that the school solicited their opinions and offered choices concerning available services for their child. These are essential elements of successful school–parent collaborations. (p. 76)

One of the benefits highlighted in Rodrigues and Elbaum’s study was that smaller school districts appeared to have the ability for staff to promote parental involvement, gather

parental opinions, and offer choices in services. The ability to appear more welcoming and create better relationships between school and home could be related to additional time teachers have since their class sizes are smaller.

Parental Behaviors

Ogg and Anthony (2020) looked at how parental warmth affected student achievement. Parental warmth, for the purpose of the study, was defined as the warmth between parent and child, which involved showing affection and a feeling of closeness felt to the child. It can also be defined as a theme in positive parenting. “A warm and supportive relationship may motivate students by communicating that academic tasks are enjoyable” (Ogg & Anthony, 2020, p. 97). When children find academic tasks more enjoyable, they are more engaged in lessons, motivated to complete work, and respectful of all issues in learning and school. If parents are supportive at home, then tasks done in school may be seen as agreeable. Fallesen and Gahler (2019) found that single parents spend less time on developmental activities with their children and that they are more restricted on time as household duties are not divided. Since single-parent households are more restricted by time, it is possible they could struggle to showcase parental warmth to their children therefore not allowing a strong positive relationship between positive school interactions and home.

A study conducted with college students ages 18 to 24 examined parental warmth and conscientiousness, stating a positive correlation, possibly having the “potential to positively predict beneficial personality traits in children” (Kaufling & Keim, 2020). Kaufling and Keim (2020) described the need to explore additional benefits of parental warmth in younger ages. Henninger and Gross (2016) found evidence that suggested financial characteristics and employment predicated differences in parental warmth. In a later study, Henninger and Gross

(2019), called for future research into parenting behaviors in single-family households versus double-parent households. However, Chung et al., 2019, did not come to similar conclusions, stating that family income and education were predictors of parental warmth. This study claimed happiness in marriage was a predictor of parental warmth.

Teachers' Perspective

There are limited studies found by the researcher on teachers' perspective on parent involvement, one study done by Ferrara (2017) stated "Teachers often indicate they are underprepared to work with parents, especially families from differing cultures" (p. 147). Ferrara's study involved surveying college students enrolled in a teacher preparation program at a college, she gave them a survey prior to a 3-credit course on family involvement and after the course was completed. The focus of her study was to see if teachers' perception of various aspects of parent involvement changed by the end of the course. The survey centered around questions from the PTA's National Standards and are framed around six specific types of involvement considered beneficial to a child's academic success: "welcoming all families into the school community, communicating effectively, supporting student success, speaking up for every child, sharing power, and collaborating with the community" (Ferrara, 2017, p. 151). The results showed a change in the teacher's perspective in some areas but not all areas.

Teacher attitudes toward parental involvement are favorable in most aspects, teachers report feeling empowered by having good parent involvement (Dor, 2012). Another area that presented itself within the literature surrounded the idea of parent and teacher relationships was having open discussions. According to Dor (2012) teachers can be uncomfortable discussing curriculum issues or other issues they feel are in their professional practice.

Teachers also reported difficulties with engaging parents, including difficulty in collaboration, miscommunications, disrespect, failure to schedule home visits, and overprotective parents (Dor, 2012; Meyer et al., 2011). Parental involvement has a comfort level attached to it from a parent and teacher side. A study done by Stormont et al., (2013) examined the perceptions of parent contact and comfort. Overall, the study found that there was a lack of comfort involved with parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds, children with behavior issues, academic skill deficits, and limited social skills, regardless of the amount of contact had between the teachers and parents. Teachers reported more comfort with parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds even when they did not have copious amounts of contact.

Research Question(s)

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions and experiences related to involvement in education for single-parent households who have a child entering the K-12 school system for the first time via elementary school?

Sub Question 1: How do single parents describe their level of involvement and the impact it has on their child's development?

Sub Question 2: How do single parents perceive the resources that are available to them?

Sub Question 3: How do single parents view the adequacy of their parental involvement?

Conclusions

Research studies continue to indicate that children who receive parental involvement at home and have parents that support them academically experience more favorable outcomes over parents who are not actively involved or supportive. Using Joyce Epstein's six types of parental involvement as steppingstones to successful parental involvement can lead to greater success for children at school. It is also evident through research that single parent households encounter barriers that prohibit them from being as involved in their child's education at school and at home. The literature review examined current research on single-parent families, including barriers and struggles these households face in general and as it relates to parental involvement. The review provided a synopsis of existing literature on parental involvement in the early years of elementary school and what is defined as parental involvement. It is the researcher's intention to provide a whole picture to the study of single parents, not only in aspects of parental involvement but to showcase daily life. Finally, this review provided rationale on the chosen methodology and framework used in the study.

The researcher conducted the study to discover what experiences and barriers single parents had and what resources single parents utilized throughout the school year. The results from the study may provide elementary schools with more insight and highlight the needs of single parents in their building as they begin the journey in education. In Chapter 3, the methodology of the study will be discussed, including the research design, procedure, and instruments used.

Methods

This chapter reviewed the research methodology used for the phenomenological qualitative study focused on single parents and how they navigate their lives and parental involvement in the school system. The research will include their personal narratives on their

daily lives and how they perceive school support, relationships, and what barriers impact their ability to be involved in their child's schooling. The conclusion of this study attempted to highlight the struggles and celebrations of single parents in these early school years and how they can best be supported by school staff. A qualitative approach was chosen to allow for understanding of the parents' narratives and to allow them to share their experience as single parents being involved in their child's education. The research approach, design, participants, procedures, data collection, and ethical considerations will be discussed more thoroughly in this chapter.

Purpose of the Study

As the number of single-parent households continues to rise in the United States, the need to discover what single parents' experience in their involvement in schools has become all important. As described previously (see pp. 26-36), single parents experience barriers, like depression, lack of support, and financial strain, that make it difficult for them to be involved. Discovering the impact their daily lives have on their ability to be as involved as they would like, may guide schools on various resources of support.

It was the researcher's intention to specifically add to existing research by focusing on single parents who are experiencing educational involvement as their child attends elementary school. Exploring the idea of the effects of parental involvement through quantitative methods has been done many times over, however, research is lacking lived experiences of parents attempting to be engaged in their children's lives with the hardship of being a single parent. This study was conducted to address the need to discover experiences and barriers single parents' encounter.

The researcher of the current study strove to contribute to the current literature pertaining to the importance of parental involvement, especially in the case of children being raised by single parents, but additionally providing in-depth insight to elementary schools on how to best support single parents who are entering the school system. Providing the right resources and information could help alleviate the unknowns and uncertainties these parents may feel.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the researcher's study on single parents whose child is attending a K-12 setting via elementary school.

RQ1: What are the perceptions and experiences related to involvement in education for single-parent households who have a child entering the K-12 school system for the first time via elementary school?

Sub Question 1: How do single parents describe their level of involvement and the impact it has on their child's development?

Sub Question 2: How do single parents perceive the resources that are available to them?

Sub Question 3: How do single parents view the adequacy of their parental involvement?

The research questions above attempted to explore and understand the perceptions and experiences of single parents as they raise a child in elementary school. A qualitative research methodology was chosen to implement a study of in-depth questioning and to help provide insight for school districts. A qualitative research design is used "...because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 45). It was crucial

to use a qualitative methodology to provide individuals with an avenue to share their stories and allow the participant to feel in charge of their voices over the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The aim of this research was to shed light on the experiences of single parents of elementary aged students.

Research Design

This research study used a phenomenological study, a qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm. The researcher believed the perceptions and experiences of the participants informed and shaped their reality. By conducting a qualitative research study, the data findings provided data that highlighted the research questions using personal testimony of the experiences. Conducting interviews within this research design is the most widely used means for gathering data from participants, it can offer rich and thick descriptions according to Creswell and Poth (2018). Interviews also allowed the researcher to clarify statements recorded and reach out for additional information (Creswell and Poth, 2018). However, interviewers also hit obstacles throughout the process. Researchers conducting interviews often struggle to find participants as it can be a lengthier process than a survey. Along with finding participants, interviewing is a skill set that takes time and research to be done correctly. The interview process is time-consuming for the participant but also for the researcher. Additionally, interviews are not neutral means of gathering data, since interviews are the result of interactions between participants and interviewers, the power dynamics have been questioned (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Therefore, transcripts must be recorded accurately and verbatim to be considered a valuable form of representation of the data.

Throughout the previous research on single parents, quantitative data provided the barriers to single parents, but it did not provide personal accounts of why these barriers

matter in the scheme of being involved in a child's education. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that in social constructivism individuals strive to understand the complex world they live in, and it is important to take into consideration the view the participants have of their world. This allows the researcher to compile and begin to develop patterns of meaning through their research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study aimed to keep the experiences and ideas represented by the participants as the focus of the entire study.

Procedure

To begin the research, the researchers created a Qualtrics recruitment survey that was used to obtain participants in the study who specifically identified as single parents and whose child or children were in elementary school. The researcher began to promote her study and gain interest from potential participants by distributing a welcome flier containing information on her doctoral degree and upcoming research at a back-to-school event (See Appendix A). After the initial introduction, the researcher began developing the interview protocol and then officially sent out the Qualtrics recruitment survey by November 14, 2022, to all elementary parents. The recruitment survey was sent out again after two weeks and interviews were scheduled for various dates in December, based on participant availability.

The research study consisted of interviews with single parents whose child was attending elementary school. When participants were contacted to begin the interview process, the date and time for Zoom interviews were established. Reminders of the date and time selected by each participant were sent out, via email, two days before the interviews were set to occur. In that email, the researcher also included the Zoom link and password that was used to hold the interviews, it was password protected to ensure privacy for the participant. Starting about 10 minutes before the interviews began, the researcher opened the

Zoom link and took care to make sure volume and camera issues were accurate before the participant arrived. When the participant entered the Zoom call, the researcher began the interview protocol (See Appendix E). The researcher interviewed the single parents and gleaned their perceptions of parental involvement and their experiences with what current support school provides, what social support they receive, and what the single parents believed could be done by the school system to best support their needs. The following section will describe the step-by-step procedure of how the methods were carried out.

Participant Selection

The researcher used a convenience sampling strategy to recruit participants in the study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), convenience sampling utilizes sites the researcher has easy access to. In this case, the researcher utilized the current school she is employed at, as that provided an accessible and timely-mannered location to study.

To be included in the study, the participants who completed the initial survey would have to be self-identified single parents. The participants also would have their child(ren) attending elementary school for the 2022-2023 school year.

The study was only looking at children who were attending a school district; homeschooled children were excluded from the sample. Single parents with children in the researcher's kindergarten classroom for the 2022-2023 school year were also excluded. Parents who did not identify as single parents were removed from the study. The single parent had to have custody of their child during the duration of the study, shared custody was acceptable as it provided another layer to the complication's single parents face.

Participants were recruited for the study over a three-week period, in November and December of 2022. The recruitment survey held 11 questions pertaining to demographic

information, with the last question inviting those who identified as a single parent to participate in the study. The link for the survey was provided to the parents in an introductory email and the survey was sent weekly via email over a three-week period. (See Appendix B and Appendix C).

Participant Sampling

The participants for the study were self-identified single parents with their child attending elementary school in 2022. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were given to each participant and will be used throughout the study. Information on participants' demographics will be presented in chapter 4.

The researcher chose a snowball sampling type, this is a type of purposeful sampling that is used in qualitative studies. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated, “The logic of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 186). Thus, a snowball sampling was employed to gather as many single parents as possible through information-rich individuals for the participation in the study. The number of desired participants for the study was six to eight. To ensure the same size was achieved, the researcher sent out additional email reminders.

To collect a robust and in-depth picture of the lived experience of the group of single parents, no more than eight participants allowed the researcher to conduct extensive interviews. The small number of participants allowed the researcher to dedicate most of their time to combing through the data collected thoroughly to collect the best results. This allowed for the clearest picture of what single parents go through in the school setting.

To begin the participant selection process, a convenience sample was identified, which consisted of parents that had been identified by the Qualtrics recruitment survey (Appendix C) as having enrolled their child in elementary school for the 2022-2023 school year and identified as single parents. Criterion sampling is used when seeking cases that meet some specific criteria and is used for quality assurance (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sub-sample was selected by the researcher if the parent met the guidelines from the previous statement and left contact information on the last question of the survey, indicating they had an interest in being involved in the study. The recruitment Qualtrics survey was then sent out via email to all elementary parents at the beginning of November with a repeat email sent out a week later, to encourage more participation. The interviews were then scheduled for the end of November to the beginning of December to allow for parents to experience an adequate amount of the school year.

Protection of Participants

The researcher made sure the protection of the human subjects participating in the research were guaranteed. Participants were made aware that the researcher was conducting this study to complete a doctoral program degree. The participants were assured of their privacy via the implied consent form seen at the beginning of the recruitment survey (See Appendix D). Once the participant agreed to the study, they were sent the informed consent form and asked to sign and return it prior to beginning the interview process. Informed consent means that the participants were fully aware of the purpose and procedures of the study. The participants were assured of confidentiality, as the researcher explained that the use of pseudonyms would be implemented throughout the whole process. The participants were referred to as participant A, participant B, participant C, and so on. Any data collected

on the participants was kept under password protection on a private Google Drive, which is not accessible to anyone else. Recordings kept on a computer were stored in the researchers cloud under a passcode. The researcher will destroy the findings one year after the final publication of the study. The participants were made aware they could choose to participate or withdraw at any time during the study, presented to them verbally and in written form.

Data Collection

In the data collection process for the study, eight parents who identified as single parents and had their child attending elementary school were identified through the recruitment survey completed by November 2022. The eight participants met all the criteria for participating in the study, they identified as single parents, and their child was entering elementary school in the 2022-2023 school year. Participant 8 decided to stop her involvement with the study before the interviews took place. The participants were all made aware of their right to stop participating at any time and signed the informed consent forms by November 2022. After the informed consent forms were signed, the participants were scheduled for Zoom interviews. The interviews were held via Zoom and took place by the end of November or early December.

The researcher obtained data through semi-structured interviews with seven participants. The interview protocol, see Appendix E, was used to guide the interviews. The interview protocol was created by the researcher using the main research question and sub-questions as a guide to frame the interview questions. The questions utilized during the interview would best capture the experiences had by single-parent participants. When designing the questions for the interviews, the researcher examined previous research questions from other studies and changed them to fit the current study. The researcher also

utilized King and Horrocks (2010) six types of questions to use during an interview, which included questions based on demographics/backgrounds, experiences/behaviors, opinions/values, feelings, knowledge, and sensory questions. A pilot test on interview questions was conducted by the researcher before participant interviews were held.

The interviews took roughly 25 to 35 minutes per participant. Two days before the interviews were to take place, the researcher sent out reminders via email to the participants, and ensured the scheduled time still was acceptable (See Appendix F). The interviews were recorded via Zoom with subtitles and were held in the cloud until they were destroyed after one year of completion of the study.

Data Analysis

Once the data was collected from the interviews, they were analyzed using the data analysis spiral by Creswell and Poth (2018). The interviews will be recorded via Zoom and downloaded to the researcher's personal computer, which is password protected. The Zoom recording will then be uploaded to Otter.ai for transcription. The researcher read through the transcripts for accuracy and made corrections when necessary. When analyzing qualitative data, "...the researcher engaged in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 185). The data analysis spiral consists of five activities: manage and organize data, read and memo emergent ideas, describe and classify codes into themes, develop and assess interpretations, and represent and visualize the data.

Step One

The analysis of the data will follow that of Merriam's (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) methodological model for case studies. The data was first managed and organized, the

researcher listened to previous recordings and downloaded the interviews to a laptop before uploading the video to Otter.ai for transcribing.

Step Two

Once the data was collected and transcribed, the researcher began to make notations next to the data that seemed to be relevant for answering the research questions. This is called coding. Otter.ai also provided data on commonly used keywords and phrases that were utilized in assessing the transcripts. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that being as expansive as possible in this step is important as the analysis has just begun and open coding allows the researcher to be open to anything at this point. The participants received their transcripts from the interviews to check for clarity on the researcher's part.

Step Three

The research continued by assigning codes to data to begin identifying categories. Reading back through comments and notes allowed the researcher to pull out comments that seem to go together, sometimes called axial coding or analytical coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Step Four

The patterns or themes of the data items are sorted into categories. "It should be clear that categories are abstractions derived from the data, not the data themselves" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 207).

Step Five

Once the categories have been established, the researcher sorted the evidence for the scheme into the respective categories. This required the researcher to cut each coded data out according to the theme and place it in a digital file folder to be easily accessible. The

researcher used indicative coding by using the data to help establish codes and categories. The researcher will present the findings of this analysis in Chapter 4.

Instruments

The Qualtrics recruitment survey was created to gather demographic information and potential participants in the research study. The beginning questions asked in the survey contained general demographic information about gender, ethnicity, employment and school status, number of children, and relationship status. The last question determined if the participant met the requirements to be eligible for the study. They must have a child entering elementary school for the 2022-2023 school year and the parent must identify as a single parent. The researcher piloted the recruitment survey for ease of use and understanding.

The interview protocol was created with help from Creswell and Poth's (2018) sample of an interview protocol. The researcher began by introducing herself and explaining how and why this research topic came about. The format of the interview is laid out for the participants, indicating the interviews will last about 30 minutes and ensuring their confidentiality in all their responses. The interview questions were created to center around the research questions and sub-questions relating to how single parents experience involvement in their child's education and were talked through with the committee chair.

The following is a list of instruments that were also used throughout the qualitative research study: the researcher and Zoom. Zoom interviews were used in the study as a means of convenience and to provide health precautions to the participants and researcher. Also, the interviews were held online in respect of the participant's time and childcare concerns.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher took an active role in the study by personally collecting and analyzing all data received from the participants. The researcher collected interview data by asking semi-structured interview questions in Zoom meetings. All analysis of interview data was completed by the researcher.

The researcher worked in an elementary school for 10 years prior to the start of the study. The researcher held a Bachelor of Science degree in Early Childhood Education, and a Master of Science in Educational Leadership. While the researcher does not have experience as a single parent, the researcher recognizes the need to better explore the lived experiences of single parents as it relates to their involvement in their child's learning.

In order to remain unbiased throughout the study, the researcher did not know the participants personally. The analysis of the study was read by a second set of eyes to ensure that no bias was found to be held by the researcher.

Previous Knowledge and Bias

The researcher carries previous knowledge and bias based on her ten years in a public-school setting, having had numerous personal and professional experiences with single parents and families of all kinds. The researcher has also spent years as a classroom teacher attempting to facilitate parental involvement in the classroom setting but failed to realize the importance of parental involvement at home and the differences in appearance parental involvement can take on. The researcher intended to attend to the data and participants with an open mind and respect. Since this is not the reality of life for the researcher, she may not impact her own beliefs on the participants who experience single parenthood every day.

Qualifications

The researcher felt that previous training and classes through the Educational Doctorate program had prepared her to conduct this research. The research coursework throughout her graduate level pursuits and the action research conducted to obtain the Master of Science in Educational leadership contributed to the knowledge. The ability to communicate and build relationships with participants can be attributed to years of building positive relationships with parents as a kindergarten teacher.

Ethical Considerations

Before beginning the study, the researcher obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval through Minnesota State University Moorhead to ensure the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects. After obtaining IRB approval, the researcher used Creswell and Poth's (2018) steps to Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research (Table 3.2). Before conducting the interviews, the researcher made participants aware of their rights during the study. The participants were told prior and during the interview process that they could withdraw from the study at any time or decline to answer any of the interview questions. Participants were provided with the informed consent form and signed to agree before interviewing.

During the interviews the researcher made sure to state she was in no position of power over the participants. The researcher established trust with participants by identifying as a working parent that manages a household, work, and children seven months of out the year as her spouse works a seasonal job out of town. The use of pseudonyms and a secure location for data protected the participants' identities.

Conclusions

The research was conducted at an elementary school in midwestern Minnesota, and the sample came from elementary school parents. The recruitment survey was sent out to all current elementary parents and was used to recruit single parents. When the results of the survey came in, single parents were asked to partake in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven single parents who agreed to participate in the study regarding barriers and perceptions of parental involvement. The researcher made participant privacy and dignity her utmost priority and completed steps to ensure their confidentiality. The upcoming chapters explain the results of the qualitative case study on parental involvement for single parents as their first child experiences elementary school, public school and what the perceptions single parents have of parental involvement, and how the barriers they face impede them from being as involved as they would like. The results, found in Chapter 4, of this study aim to better bring light to single parents in the school system and how our elementary schools can best support them. In Chapter 4, the researcher presented the findings of the study in a clear and concise manner. The themes and patterns are showcased using direct quotes and descriptions to support the meanings of the themes.

CHAPTER 4. Results

The goal of this study was to implement a phenomenological approach to understand the single-parent experience of having a child attend school. Bloomberg and Volpe described the meaning of a phenomenological study as being focused “on attitude and the response to the phenomena under study” (2019, p.234). The following chapter provides an overview of the data collected during the research in Fall 2022. The recruitment survey was sent out to approximately 324 students’ parents and had 66 respondents to the recruitment survey. Of the participants that responded, nine identified as single parents and were interested in the research study. In total, eight participants agreed to take part in the study. After participants were asked to set up interviews, a possible participant declined the interview. The results from the interviews displayed the current experiences and perceptions of the seven single parent participants as their child attends elementary school. Understanding their lived

experiences as a single parent navigating elementary school offered insights to the researcher which are presented thematically in Chapter 4. The researcher was an active listener during the interviews and made sure to not impart any judgement on the listed findings. Chapter Four includes the researcher's role, methodology, and used tables to represent the demographic information on participants and the themes found during analysis. The findings from the study are organized by themes with direct quotes from the participants showcasing the codes that emerged throughout the interviews.

Researcher's Role

The interviewer's role in the study was that of a Minnesota kindergarten teacher who holds a passion for family involvement and exploring best practices for students and families. Throughout the study, the researcher worked as a full-time public-school teacher in kindergarten. The study took place in a rural elementary school in Minnesota with a student population of approximately 390 students. The participants were self-identified single parents of elementary aged students who attended the previously mentioned public school. Throughout the interview process, the participants were aware they could withdraw from the study as stated in the consent letter see Appendix D.

The training and experience of the researcher has been that of a kindergarten teacher in a rural Minnesota elementary school. The researcher has also been a part of Cohort Four from the Minnesota State University Moorhead doctoral program in educational leadership. The three years of courses that were part of the doctoral program allowed the researcher to gain understanding and practice of the phenomenological approach used in this research study. The courses provided the researcher with knowledge on how to collect data, protocols,

procedures, and how to analyze data. The researcher also used previous experiences through obtaining a Master's in leadership through Southwest Minnesota State University.

Description of the Sample

The research process started with the collection of participants by sending out the recruitment survey (Appendix C) to all Kindergarten- 5th grade parents at the rural elementary school. The survey asked demographic questions about the participants, including race, education level, employment status, number of children, and whether they identify as a single parent. There were 66 respondents to the survey from the parents of kindergarten through 5th grade students. The parameters for participating in the study included participants who self-identified as single parents and had a child attending elementary school in the 2022-2023 school year. Participants were not eligible to participate in the study if they had a child currently in the researcher's kindergarten class, which was the case for one of the possible participants. After the necessary elimination of participants were made, a sample size of eight individuals remained. The participants interested in the study were contacted via the email they submitted in the recruitment survey. Of the eight eligible participants, seven of the participants responded and expressed interest in the study. The eighth participant responded but opted to decline participation in the research.

Table 1

Participant information on Gender, Ethnicity, Employment, Education and Number of Children in Elementary School

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Employment	Education	Children in school/ Grade	Oldest Child started school
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Participant A	Female	White	Full time	H.S. Diploma/ GED	1/ 4th	14 years ago
Participant B	Female	White	Full time	College Degree	2/ K & 2nd	6 years ago
Participant C	Female	White	Full time	H.S. Diploma/ GED	1/ 5 th	7 years ago
Participant D	Female	White	Full time	College Degree	1/ 3rd	13 years ago
Participant E	Male	White	Part time	H.S. Diploma/ GED	3/ K, 1 st & 2 nd	32 years ago
Participant F	Female	2+ races	Full time	H.S. Diploma/GED	1/ 4 th	6 years ago
Participant G	Female	White	Other	H.S. Diploma	1/ 2 nd	3 years ago

Note: Single parent's gender, ethnicity, employment status, education level, number of children in elementary school, and number of years with children in school in this research study.

To protect the confidentiality of the participants, the subjects that followed through with the interview process were labeled as participant and plus an identifying letter. The list shown above (Table 1) is composed of self-identified single parents who agreed to participate in the interview and that have a child attending the previously mentioned elementary school. The table includes gender, ethnicity, and employment status (Table 1). The participants were also asked about their highest level of education achieved (Table 1). During the interviews, participants identified how many years they have had a child in school and how many children they currently have in elementary school (Table 1). The participants were asked the number of children they have but that data was left out of the demographic table to protect the participants confidentiality. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended it would be beneficial for the protection of participants to create a composite profile, so that specific participants are not identifiable during the reporting. The researcher worked to ensure each individual was protected and worked with the single parents individually to engage them in the data analysis process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The table listed below

contains information on the participants in the study with no identifying information on the participants or the elementary school.

The table above shows composite profiles of the seven single parent participants. The respondent population was mostly homogenous for race and gender, with most participant's self-selecting "white" for ethnicity and "female" for gender. There was one male participants perspective and one participant who identified as being of two or more races involved in the study. As found in the literature on single parents, majority of single parents as the primary caregivers are women.

Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis

The philosophical assumptions for the research study revolved around Moustakas's 1994 model, as "the aim is to achieve an analytical description of the phenomena not affected by prior assumption" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p.234). Moustakas's idea of bracketing, removing one's own experiences from the analysis of the study, was used in this phenomenological research study. Before the interviews began, the interviewer wrote down a hypothesis about the topic of single parents' engagement to examine the preconceived idea of single parenthood before the interview process began. The hypothesis stated the researcher would find that most single parents struggled with balancing daily life and all the responsibilities that came from raising a child. This practice was used to bring awareness to the researchers bias by making sure to note that these are just ideas, and they could be wrong. During the interview process, interviewing skills were utilized such as paraphrasing and using a clarifying question after the participant had shared a big idea, to ensure understanding.

Transcendental phenomenology begins by identifying a phenomenon, bracketing out experiences held by the researcher, and then collecting the data from willing participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The identified phenomenon in the study was that of experiences and perceptions of involvement of single parents who have children attending elementary school in a rural area. The researcher had to extract personal experiences as a classroom teacher after having many interactions with single parents throughout the years. Member checking was used after the interviews were transcribed, so the participants could verify their interview responses conveyed their true experiences and perspectives. The transcribed interviews were sent via email to the participants with a request to read through the transcript and check that everything said was what they intended to convey. The participants were encouraged to reach out with any questions or concerns.

The responses to the Qualtrics recruitment survey began coming in from November 13, 2022, to December 15, 2022. The data collection process from seven single parents who were willing to participate in interviews was conducted from December 7, 2022- December 22, 2022. The researcher emailed the 12 kindergarten through 5th grade teachers in the elementary school building with the link to a Qualtrics recruitment survey (Appendix C) and the introduction email (Appendix B) asking them to please send out via email or Seesaw to all their families on November 13, 2022. A reminder emailed was sent to the 12 classroom teachers again on November 18, 2022. On November 23, 2022, confirmation was made with the 12 classroom teachers that the survey was sent to their students' parents. There were 66 total respondents to the recruitment survey. The researcher began looking through the results of the recruitment survey and eliminated anyone that did not identify as a single parent and anyone who did not have a child in the elementary school in the 2022-2023 school year.

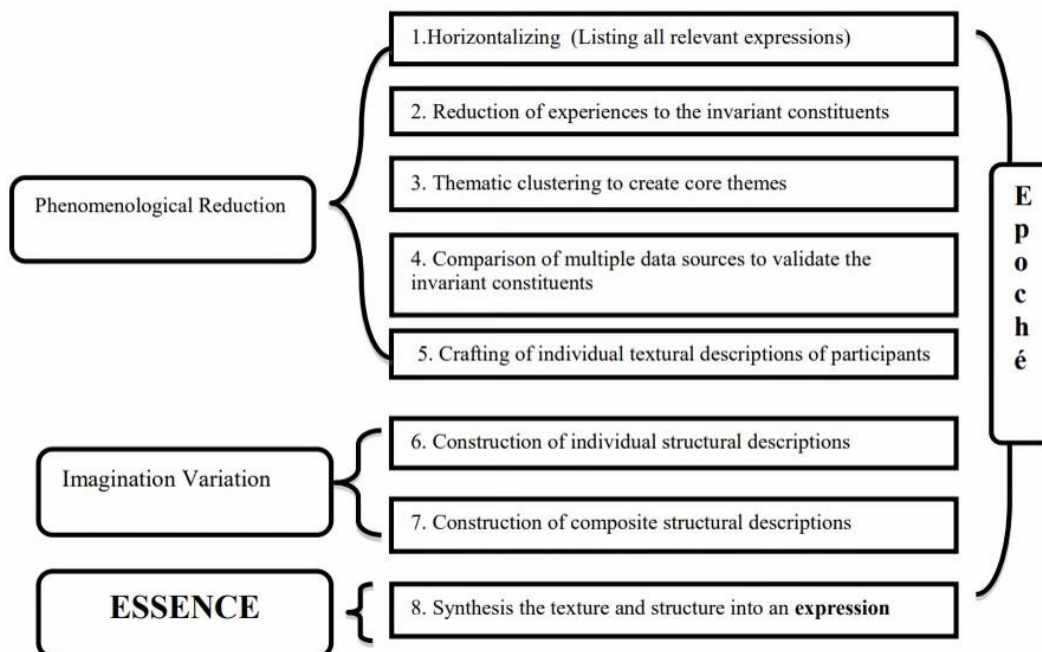
Additionally, all respondents who had a child in the researcher's current kindergarten classroom were removed from consideration.

The interview recruitment emails were sent on November 3, 2022, to participants A, B, D, E, F, and H. Participants C and G received interview emails with the consent form on December 12, 2022. Participants C and G responded later to the recruitment survey and therefore received the interview recruitment emails later than the other participants. The participants all responded within two days opting to participate in the interview process. All interviews were scheduled for the month of December in 2022. The participants were given the choice between in-person, phone, or Zoom interviews and the interviews were held at their preferred time of day. All interviews were held on the date and time requested by participants. The researcher utilized the interview protocol (Appendix E). Interviews with participants were held between December 7th, 2022, through December 22nd 2022. Phone interviews were opted for by four of the participants and in-person interviews, which took place in the interviewer's classroom, were opted for by three of the participants. The recordings for the interviews were captured by several means including Zoom and a recording app called Audio Recording Application from the interviewer's phone.

Once the seven interviews were conducted, the researcher uploaded the saved recordings to the website otter.ai (Liang & Fu, 2016). The researcher utilized otter.ai (Liang & Fu, 2016) as a transcription service, as the researcher had difficulties in working with Zoom and the transcription feature. The otter.ai computer software provided an extra step for the researcher, but the website was user friendly. For each transcription there were spelling errors or other errors to words/punctuation not picked up accurately by the transcription software that required corrections. The participants were sent a copy of their transcriptions to

read through for clarity on January 28, 2023. All participants received their transcriptions and replied that the transcriptions reflected their experiences accurately. No changes were made.

After conducting interviews, significant statements were gathered and used to generate themes. The seven transcripts were printed from the participants' interviews and then were cut out and grouped by statements based on the interview questions. Once the participants responses were grouped by the 13 interview questions, the researcher began re-reading through the responses to better see any codes. As each statement made by the participants were read through, notes were made as codes began appearing. The codes were identified and then grouped together by similarity. The researcher then read through the codes and began to form the themes that related to answering the research questions. The researcher went through that process for all 13 interview questions. The following themes emerged: perception of homework, the importance of extracurricular activities as involvement activities, employment, and housework as crucial to day-to-day lives, single parenting being more difficult because of COVID-19, single parents feeling alone with responsibilities, the importance of familial support, self-efficacy of parental support, parental pride in their child's independence and gains, and schools being welcoming and supportive to parent's needs.

Figure 3*Procedures for Conducting Phenomenological Research*

Note: This is a visual report of the process of data analysis in a phenomenological study (Avidnote, 2021).

After the themes were collected, the researcher was able to develop textural and structural descriptions of what the single parents experienced and perceived. Using the textural and structural descriptions the researcher was able to report the essence of the phenomenon. In an essence composite, the passage “focuses on the common experiences of the participants” and “it means that all experiences have an underlying structure” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 80). Finally, the researcher presented the understanding of the essence in a written form. The findings were represented using Moustakas’s approach (1994) with an introduction, a personal statement from the researcher’s point of view, the research procedures, the data collection and analysis, a report containing significant statements from

the single parents, and a conclusion stating the essence of the phenomenon. Figure 3 shows a visual representation of the steps used to find the essence of a phenomena.

Findings

To collect the experiences of the single parents in the study, the following interview questions, found in the interview protocol, were used (Appendix E). The findings from the participant interviews have been grouped according to their alignment with the research questions.

Table 2

Research Question 1 Themes and Codes

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

What are the perceptions and experiences related to involvement in education for single-parent households who have a child attending the K-12 school system via elementary school?

<p>Theme 1: All 7 participants described employment and housework as crucial to their day-to-day lives, resulting in daily stresses, especially with COVID.</p> <p>Codes: 1. Jobs 2. Household Management 3. School</p>	<p>Theme 2: Single parenting was made more difficult because of the impact of COVID-19.</p> <p>Codes: 1. Financial Strain 2. Emotional Strain</p>	<p>Theme 3: Single parents feeling the difficulty of being alone with responsibilities.</p> <p>Codes: 1. Alone 2. Responsible 3. No interactions 4. Overwhelming 5. Hectic</p>	<p>Theme 4: Familial support was important for single parents.</p> <p>Codes: 1. Parents 2. Extended Family 3. Family 4. Judged</p>
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Note: Themes and codes from research question 1 were compiled and synthesized from 7 participant interviews.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions and experiences related to involvement in education for single parent households who have a child attending the K-12 school system via elementary school?

The main research question in the study looked at what perceptions and experiences single parents had as their child was in elementary school. Three main themes were created based off the codes found in the interviews, displayed in Table 2.

Theme 1: The importance of jobs and household management as crucial to their day-to-day lives.

The most prominent theme for question number one was the importance of jobs and household management as crucial to their day-to-day lives. All seven participants spoke about this theme. Jobs inside and outside of the home were emphasized in stories from these single parents. The participants worked a variety of jobs and hours. When describing what a normal week is like for them, four of the seven participants expressed stresses of their work schedules as single parent. Participant C told the interviewer, “I go to work every weekday, come home, and repeat.” The delivery of this comment included an exasperated expression that showed the researcher this was intended to be a negative comment versus a detailed description of what they do every day. Participant G also described her stress as stay-at-home single mom whose work was managing the household. They said, “I am a stay-at-home mom right now, my youngest is two and we cannot find daycare for her. I became her daycare. But I do watch another child for a family and that’s how I make my income.” (Participant G). Participant E similarly shared, “I do work outside of the home just on weekends. I work seven days a month. But then I am at home all other times caring for kids and doing housework.” Participant B spoke on her heavy work schedule that required her to find overnight care for her children. They said, “I have my 60-hour weeks, or I have my 24-hour weeks. So, When I work the heavy weeks, they usually stay at my mom’s house a time or two during the week.” (Participant B).

Two of the participants described owning and operating a business and one of those participants also mentioned working outside of the home. Participant F stated, "I have a full-time job. I started a business on my own." Similarly Participant D said:

I own my own business, It's in my home. Then I am working at the school. One day a week there I am scheduled for, and the rest is just subbing but it has become a basically full-time job there too.

Participant A also had a job at the school, she stated, "I work here at school. So, I work here from 6:30 to 1:30. And then I go home, and I basically do chores." The variety of ways single parents work to access income is varied and wide from the seven participants.

School was a theme that was prevalent for all seven participants as they mentioned having children attending elementary school daily. There were six out of seven participants that mentioned an aspect of school as part of their weekly schedule. The participants described getting children up and ready for school and then waiting for them to get home and start homework. Participant D said, "We go home (from school), and I start work. In between that time, she's old enough now she comes downstairs, but she does her homework and that stuff." Participant A mirrored the sentiment by stating, "Then the kids usually come home, And I try to see what they need for their homework, if they have any." Many participants described in detail the morning routines of their week. Participant E described the stresses of getting four children out of the door on time every morning. The researcher noted the very tired tone of this voice with his statement. They said, "Then the children have school, it's getting them up in the mornings, feed them get them off and trying to catch the school buses, we have two different school buses that come here." (Participant E). Participant C also

mentioned morning routines by stating, “We wake up, get ready for school, I take them to school and head to work.” Participant F further contributed by adding:

A typical week? Yeah, it starts with getting up and going to school. Every day, Monday through Friday, eight o’clock. He’s got to be at school. I have to be at work at nine. He is at school until three and I go and pick him up in the middle of my workday. Sometimes he able to go with my mom but otherwise he comes to work with me.

Preparing to get to school and the after school demands like snacks and help with homework were mentioned, as large portions of the participants in a typical week.

Within household management several different domestic tasks were mentioned by the participants. In fact, four out of the seven participants described the tasks they have throughout the week. Household management was typically talked about after their jobs and comments on school aged children. The following statements described chores, supper making, taking care of the household and caring for smaller children as their additional daily responsibilities. Participant A described her day with emphasizing that household chores take up a large part it. They said, “I basically do chores, and then get supper started, more chores, like laundry and other chores.” Participant G added to this by listing all the chores she received no help with. They said, “Since I stay at home, I take care of the cleaning, cooking, laundry, all the stuff that makes up our house. I have a baby tagging along so that can take me longer.” Participant C had a tone of annoyance and similarly mentioned, “Cleaning, it’s never ending.” Participant E expressed frustration with the task of making dinner and feeding his children. They said:

After they catch the bus, I come back in and drink some coffee, or usually clean the house up a little bit. Then when they get home, I try to make them supper, and they don't eat. Then they are hungry again.

Theme 2: Single parenting made more difficult due to impacts of COVID-19.

Emotional strain was spoken about by five of the seven participants in relation to how COVID affected their jobs and responsibilities. The participants explained the situations they faced that caused them varying degrees of stress. The five participants that commented on how COVID-19 impacted them, spoke with conviction and openness on their levels of stress. Participant B had a tone of relief, when speaking on the previous year's stresses with the pandemic, the researcher believed her relieved tone was due to life returning to normal as the years have passed. Participant B said, "That was brutal. When you were exposed, it was a lot of sleepless nights." Participant C had similar sentiments, "So I had family to help, because obviously I was the only one working. So, I don't think it affected anything besides mentally, obviously. It was very mentally draining." Participant E explained how stressful the distance learning was for him to navigate. They noted:

The at home learning was too hard. That was a bad deal. The shutdown happened and the kids are in the house all the time. I had no rest period. The house was in constant disarray, all the time. It was more to manage at home.

The emotional strain of sickness itself affected Participant F with thoughts of how her child's health would be affected. Participant F still had a tone of fear as she spoke on the topic of COVID-19. She said:

It was scary. We didn't know anything about COVID and how it would affect him medically. And when you are sick with it, it affects everything. It takes you down and

out and quarantining when you are the only parent home was so hard. It was hard on him when I had to separate for his health. Worrying was at an all-time high.

Participant G spoke on the strain of losing daycare, she said, “We lost our daycare due to COVID, that was so stressful. I had to figure it all out so I could keep working.”

Financial strain was a theme derived from four of the seven participants’ statements in relation to jobs during COVID-19. Having to quarantine and shut down due to COVID was the cause of financial strain on the participants. Participant B said, “That took away my income because I couldn’t work since I’m the only one home with them. So that was tough.” Participant D struggled with losing both her jobs. She said, “I got shut down, so I had nothing. And at that time, I was also not full time at school. So, I couldn’t help out there either. It was so terrible.” Participant F said, “Having COVID twice financially messed me up. Having to take off work for 4 weeks, who can do that?” When participant G lost daycare, she also struggled financially with having to search for other options. She said, “I had no daycare, I had to pay more money for drop-in care or take off work when I couldn’t find anything. It was a mess.” The financial burden of COVID was unpredictable and stressful for the participants, who rely on that money to support their single parent household.

Theme 3: Single parents feeling the difficulty of being alone with responsibilities.

Being alone was a code generated from six out of seven participants. Nearly all the parents mentioned different aspects of things being more difficult when there is not a co-parent to help on a consistent basis. Participant F defined the difference between solo parents and single parents:

There’s a debate right now on single parents and solo parents, like to me, single parents are like somebody that has help on like, every other weekend, or every other

Wednesday night or you know, however they figure it out. They at least get a break. And they get to have their alone time and they get their stuff done without a child around. Whereas a solo parent doesn't have that help from the other parents. And I think that it is...it is difficult. I mean, it's difficult at times. And I mean it's a blessing and a curse all at the same time.

Participant A falls under the category as a solo parent, a parent with no co-parent, and had a tone of sadness with this comment: "...and your alone? You know? Because I mean, this is new to me being a widow. He was always there to help and helped with everything. Now I am trying to learn and keep up with it alone." Participant B mirrored that sentiment and said, "Gosh, um, after school, getting ready for bed, all that good stuff because it's just me doing it." Participant D spoke on being single and having one income to contribute to the household. She said, "I try to do as much as possible when she's at her activities, or my sons at work, to get my own work in. Being a single parent and having only one income, I have to work but yet not push it. So that's why I keep my weekends strictly for family stuff." The theme of being alone was the top challenge single parents stated.

The numerous responsibilities single parents face was mentioned by five out of seven participants. Participant E mentioned, "The most challenging part of my week is just trying to keep the kids from themselves or fighting or screaming. Just trying to meet all their needs I guess." The participants mentioned many responsibilities that they oversee in a day that they perceive to be a challenging part of the week. Participant C said, "Trying to get everything done in one day." Participant A explained it as, "getting it all done, just having to be responsible for everything." The single parents expressed that these responsibilities were some of their biggest challenges throughout the week.

Hectic was a code created from various key phrases that three of the seven participants used. Participant A described her week as “very crazy” and “it’s a lot of running.” While after listing all the things she accomplished after her first job, Participant D said, “I feel like we chase a lot.” Participant E explained, “I use a calendar on the wall. I put all my appointments there. And that’s kind of what I go by for the schedule, that calendar.” Participant B spoke on a 60-hour work week and her children “hopping back and forth between my house and my mom’s house.”

All seven of the participants gave insight that revolved around the overwhelming feelings of being a single parent. The following are the direct quotes from all seven participants from interview question 13, that asked for any additional insights on their lived experiences with being a single parent. The researcher chose to leave these quotes together as it showed similarities in the message the participants wanted to share at the end of the interview. These statements helped create the theme of single parents feeling the difficulty of being alone with responsibilities.

Participant A said:

It’s just a lot. I mean, I feel like sometimes we get looked at like, okay, why didn’t you do this? What didn’t you? I mean I want to! I just don’t have enough time today. I get too overwhelmed. Especially being an anxious person, you know, shy. It makes it even harder, so it’s like a dread. I want them to know I am trying.

Participant B said:

I don’t know. It’s a lot harder than most people understand. Trying to keep up with all the daily activities? Like cleaning and laundry, you know, they’re having to read every night or just like daily things gets to be a lot sometimes.

Participant C said:

I don't know. I know it's definitely not the easiest.

Participant D said:

Depending on the day, it can be like, damn, I can't do this!

Participant E said:

Well, I think my situation is a little bit unique. I have kids that all have IEPs. I think having to help them function in school is a lot harder than parents who have where their kids don't need the extra help and stuff like that.

Participant F said:

I just kind of touched on the difference between being a solo parent and a single parent, like there is a huge difference. It's hard being a solo parent.

Participant G said:

Single parents work hard and get the shaft of the deal.

Academic struggles were mentioned as a negative experience for three out of the seven participants. These parents spoke about the struggles their children with special needs face at school and how that can be difficult to witness. Participant F said, "I think the difficulty would be with special education. I've got one child, that even though she gets special education services, she isn't developing academically like the way I would expect so she isn't getting caught up." Participant A expressed how math can be a negative experience, she stated, "The different learning...how to do say math? I can't help her because I don't understand." When speaking on negative experiences Participant B said this about her child, "She is super shy, a little bit reserved, and is academically behind where she's supposed to be at. But other than that, that's probably the only negative experience."

While only one participant cited this theme as a negative experience for her child, the researcher felt that adding it was important and that there were not more participants speaking on this theme because of the lack of racial diversity in the study. Participant F had a tone of hesitancy when she said,

Being a minority and in a broken home, and you know, looking different than the majority of the other kids. We have had to talk about kids touching his hair and like asking him certain questions and so that's been, how do I say that....I guess it hasn't been difficult. It's just been not something I was really prepared for at this age.

Two of the participants explained they had limited interactions with other parents at the school which attributed to feeling alone. Participant A said, "I don't really intermingle with other parents because we're just not on the level. I don't know." Participant B mirrored participant A and said, "No, I'm kind of not a social butterfly." When asked about interactions with other parents at school, the majority of participants, four out of seven, described minor interactions with close friends or relatives who they find support in throughout the school year. Participant A said, "I just go with my sister, she kind of says the same things as me. But she's a single mom right now too. And then ones that are married, I guess or have two people there, they seem to have it together more." Participant E also mentioned a close friend, "I have a friend of mine, and we talk about the school, and they express problems they have with the school. I don't have those problems, but I could see that is a problem for them."

Participant F went on to describe her experiences with gaining friendships from other parents. She said:

It was difficult to kind of get to know a lot of people because everyone here knows everyone. Felt like everybody here knew everybody and so you like go to a dance class or whatever and sit there and wait and watch all the other parents come in and talk to each other and know each other. They just pick up conversations and so like trying to get into somebody's group or like make friends has been difficult. We had one parent invite us over before and that was fine but it's not like a friendship.

Participant G also mentioned a parent from school helping her out but not anything blossoming into a friendship. She said, "Someone from school will help me out and we talk a little but that's about it."

Theme 4: Familial support as important to single parents.

Familial support in this study was made up of the parents and siblings of the participants, referred to as extended family for clarity. Participants C and D have much older children that they mentioned as supportive and was coded as a support system.

Parents were mentioned by four of the seven participants. Typically, if the participants mention family as outside support, then they did not mention any other kinds of support. Only one of the participants mentioned their children's other parent as being supportive. Participant B said, "I've got just my parents and my sister. Well, and like their dads are very helpful. They're just not very local." Participant C happily stated, "My parents, my parents are amazing. They help a lot when I need it."

Extended family members were mentioned by two of the seven participants, in conjunction with their parents. Participant A said, "Oh, my sisters. And then my dad and mom. They help a lot too."

Participant F said, “So we have, like in the area here, I have my mom and sister. And so (son) has grandma and that...That’s it. And she helps out.”

Older children were mentioned by two of the seven participants. The participants cited their teenage children as support outside of themselves. Participant E said, “I rely heavily on my, the oldest child, in the house. She’s 15 and I kind of parentized [sic] her a little bit and so she’s able to do things.” When the participants did not have support from another custodial parent, they mentioned their older children more often in the study.

Participant D named her son as helpful by stating, “he helps run her to activities and yea, other things for me.”

Outside support mentioned by three of the seven participants referred to someone that comes to clean, neighbors and their child’s friend’s parents. Participant G said, “One of my son’s friends’ parents helps us out because she knows I have the babies at home. They drop him off from sports and just help me out.” Participant D mentioned both neighbors and friends by saying:

I have awesome neighbors that helped me out. I mean, if I need somebody to pick her up, she has friends that they know what my work schedule is so they occasionally offer to help, knowing I can’t. It’s been nice.

Research Sub Question 1: How do single parents describe their level of involvement and the impact it has on their child’s development?

Table 3

Research Sub Question 1 Themes and Codes

Research Sub Question 1	
How do single parents describe their level of involvement and the impact it has on their child’s development?	
Theme 1: Most participants did not perceive	Theme 2: Extracurricular Activities, such as sports,

homework as part of their involvement.	were viewed as important and consuming involvement activities
Codes:	1. Sports
1. No Homework	2. Practices
2. Difficulty Completing	3. Games
3. No Responsibilities	4. Extracurricular Activities
4. Schoolwork	5. Running Around

Note: Themes and codes from research question 2 were compiled and synthesized from 7 participant interviews.

Table 3 showcases the themes and codes found through interview questions related to research sub question one, how single parents describe their level of involvement. Two themes were found to be important for this research question.

Theme 1: Frequency and difficulty of homework

Theme one was created using the codes of no homework, difficulty completing homework, lack of responsibilities and schoolwork. The following section will highlight participants' thoughts on schoolwork assigned.

On the topic of work assigned by school, five out of seven participants cited their children have no homework. Participant A said, "She never really has homework besides like spelling tests." Almost all the participants mentioned their children getting their work done at school. Participant B said, "Right now, they don't come home with much of anything. They mostly do it in school." Participant F agreed, "Everything's done electrically and, in the classroom, and there's not really a lot that's sent home."

Another code was the difficulty of child's homework mentioned by three out of seven participants. Participants cited having difficulties with understanding the work that does get sent home or expressed gratitude there is not much work sent home because it may be difficult for them to comprehend the topics, especially in math. Participant B said:

It's just a couple of math problems, which is okay, but I suck at math, so it's still stressful. Especially the new math they they're learning. I'm like, yeah, that's not how it works. This is how I'll teach you.

Participant A was similar in her response, "But then I'm kind of glad at the same point, that she doesn't have much work, because I don't understand the work. It's all different and trying to keep up is scary." Participant E spoke at length about homework in his house by stating:

Ah homework, I try not to do it. And not that I try not to do it, it is jut easily neglected here. My child struggles to complete work and is very behind academically. You know, we are not supposed to get maybe over 20 minutes' worth of work to do. But she had to write between one and 100. And it took her an hour to get up to 46. And at that point I gave up. I had a very bad experience growing up with my homework and I just don't like homework.

Theme 2: Extracurricular Activities, such as sports, were viewed as important and consuming involvement activities.

Extracurricular activities were talked about with six of the seven participants as being a part of their typical week. All the extracurricular activities involved their children, which included sports, practices, games, tournaments, and appointments. Participant A said, "I think it's usually Mondays and Tuesdays (Child's Name) has basketball, and Wednesdays she does library." Participant E stated, "It's a lot to schedule, I just learned through the years to use a wall calendar. I put all the appointments there and that's just what I go by." Many single parents manage multiple kids in multiple sports and practices and games take up many weeknights and weekends. Participant F added, "For those last two hours after that, it's

either basketball or wrestling, or being involved in some kind of sport or dance. Weekends are more sports, if there's tournaments on the weekend.”

Research Sub Question 2: How do single parents perceive the resources that are available to them?

Two themes were found as it pertains to research sub questions two, how parents perceive the resources that are available to them. Resources were used as a broad term to investigate what the participants perceptions of the word would be. The codes found throughout the interviews created the themes of additional support and ideas, and school being a welcoming place that supports parents as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

<i>Research Sub Question 2 Themes and Codes</i>	
Research Sub Question 2	
How do single parents perceive the resources that are available to them?	
<p>Theme 1: Areas of additional support and ideas for improvement</p> <p>Codes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Services 2. IEP 3. Meeting student's needs 	<p>Theme 2: The school is welcoming and supports parents with a variety of needs.</p> <p>Codes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wi-Fi 2. Clothing 3. Counseling 4. Open House 5. Open House packet 6. Meet the Teacher 7. Health Support 8. Allergy Support

Note: Themes and codes from research question 3 were compiled and synthesized from 7 participant interviews.

Theme 1: Areas of additional support and ideas for improvement.

Two of the participants expressed how they felt classroom events held during the school day were inconvenient and difficult for them to attend. Participant A said, “In the classroom activities during the day are kind of hard, hit or miss, it all depends on my work.”

Participant G also expressed her frustration with day class events. She said, “Trying to attend day class events were hard with work. I had to try to take off and I couldn’t always get off. It’s not very convenient for single parents at all.”

Two of the participants described wanting the staff to be understanding of their situation. Participant A said:

I think just kind of understand that I do try. And I mean, like, if somethings not done or signed or anything, it’s not that I don’t want to get it done. Like sometimes you just...there’s so much going on that it’s hard to, you know, put all the ducks in a row. Sometime just give me grace.

The understanding a teacher gives can mean knowing they need to be flexible, as one parent oversees everything at home. Participant F said, “I think you just get into a mode where you’re just so used to doing everything on your own that you don’t really think about that kind of thing. Flexibility is nice, having conferences on the phone instead of having to go in can make it hard because it’s just me.”

School help was cited by two of the seven participants as what else schools can do to support them. Participant G said, “It is so hard for me to keep track of all the technology parts. I would appreciate more paper options being sent home. Then I can stick in on my fridge and see it every day to remind me.” Schools can use a vast means of communication with parents, handing out more paper options can allow for things to be remembered more easily.

Participant E wanted to see more homework support from staff. He said, “So I guess if there was one thing, I wish school could do would be provide that time in school to do homework or provide a person to come to the house and do the homework with the children.”

Participant E struggled greatly with completing the required schoolwork, as expressed in previous questions, and would want to see more homework help given.

Theme 2: The school is welcoming and supports parents with a variety of needs.

The finding statement of school being a welcoming and supportive place for parents and children with a variety of needs came from codes on different support that is given to families, including clothing, counseling, wireless internet, and staff support. The other codes mentioned to create this theme were open house, health and allergy support, and supportive staff.

The accommodations teachers at the school were willing to do was mentioned by three of the seven participants. The participants were mainly referring to the teacher's flexibility and helpfulness during conferences. Participant D said, "And I feel like everybody's always been really accommodating. Like oh, I can sneak you in quick and get it done." Participant E furthered the theme by stating:

I didn't sign up for conferences and they just want ahead and gave me the times to go. And they were all consecutive. Which how do they do that? I don't know. But all consecutive for each child so that was... I was happy about that.

Participant F mirrored the previous sentiments by saying, "I was able to do a phone conference with his teacher. Just between being sick and having to work. It just didn't work out going into the classroom." The participants showed examples of how their child's teacher was able to accommodate them for parent-teacher conferences, the participants expressed gratitude for that.

Adequate support was felt to be experienced by three of the seven participants. They were not sure what else could be done to better support them. Participant C said, "Everything

is fine. If I ever had a question, I could just call, and it wasn't a bother." These participants felt the staff at the school has been supportive since the beginning. Participant D stated, "All the staff we have encountered in the years has been helpful and supportive. My son and daughter have had great teachers."

Participant E said:

I do appreciate the school and principal and what she's done there. I like the school.

Participant F said:

I just appreciate everybody that's out there that can help, and I know that if I really needed to, I could turn to people at the school. I know there is people I can talk to. And that's nice. I mean, you hear about the shoe exchange, or you hear they do the clothing stuff so I know if we ever like needed anything that I could ask the school and they would put me in touch with somebody.

Open house was brought up by two of the seven participants. Participant D said, "You mean like open house? That's nice meeting the teacher." Participant F spoke about the open house packet that explained expectations and routines for the school year. The open house event is meant to allow parents and students to find their new classrooms, meet their teachers, and allow them to have assistance with any paperwork that needs to be filled out for the year.

Early childhood and family education (ECFE) services were mentioned by three of the seven participants. Participant G said, "We used the Get Ready for Kindergarten ECCE class and that was helpful." Participant C also mentioned the kindergarten camp, "Obviously, when the kids were little, they had like the kindergarten camp and stuff. That was helpful." The ECCE program focuses on getting parents and children set up for success in school.

Participant C made a point to talk about the wireless internet hot spots provided to all families without access to wireless internet during COVID. Participant E gave positive reviews of the school by saying, “I think the school is doing an excellent job helping with my family. If he needs a new short or something at school, you know, he comes home with a new shirt, I think that’s just appreciated.” Participant 6 spoke on her son’s allergies, “The nurse has been really helpful with getting lunches in order and being on top of his allergies.”

Research Sub Question 3: How do single parents view their parental involvement?

Table 5

<i>Research Sub Question 3 Themes and Codes</i>	
Research Sub Question 3	
How do single parents view the adequacy of their parental involvement?	
Theme 1: Self-efficacy of parental support.	Theme 2: Parents felt pride in their child’s ability to do work independently and make academic and social gains throughout the school year.
Codes:	Codes:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Judgement 2. Responsibilities 3. Alone 4. Balance 5. Overwhelmed 6. Hectic 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Responsible 2. Routines 3. Efficient 4. Maturity 5. Gains 6. Friendships 7. Learning Environments 8. Teacher interactions 9. Special Education Support

Note: Themes and codes from research question four were compiled and synthesized from seven participant interviews.

Table 5 lays out the themes found through research sub question three and the codes that were used to create those themes. Sub question three had two major themes relating to how parents viewed their parental involvement.

Theme 1: Self-efficacy of parental support

The theme self-efficacy of parental support was created from codes pulled from participant interviews. Common statements that became codes were references to balance, hectic lifestyles, a feeling of being overwhelmed, judgment and being alone.

The ability to attend school events was mentioned by four out of seven participants as easily attainable. The participants felt they had no issues coming to after school or evening functions. Participant C claimed, "I have never had a problem or anything like that." Attending school events could mean conferences, back to school nights or classroom events. Participant F said, "There was one day that they have like a come and check out our room and see what we're doing in class. So, I was able to go into that. He showed me his math work and how they do different things on the computer."

Balance was another prominent code to how parents felt they were participating in school, four out of seven participants mentioned balancing in their interviews. Participant G said, "It the act of balancing all the activities, the chores, and your own sanity all at the same time." While not many participants have mentioned how they take time for themselves, their interviews show they struggle with balancing out work, chores, and family life. Participant D stated, "So it's just about balancing it out. So like, I don't want her upstairs for a long period of time by herself. I have to work because of only having one income, I have work to do. So that's why I try to keep weekends strictly for like, doing stuff." Personal time was mentioned by only three of the seven participants. Participant A told the researcher, "And then I'll maybe take a couple minutes for myself." While Participant E mentioned taking a nap or drinking coffee once the kids were off to school. Finally Participant F alluded to "hanging out time" after supper, showers, and homework were complete. Hardly any personal hobbies or ventures were mentioned by the seven participants at all.

The participants concluded overall that their strength in parenting alone comes from inner awareness, having a good support system, and love of their children.

Participant C said:

It's twice the work but twice the outcome, twice the reward back. I don't know how to say that. You know what I mean. I don't have to share with somebody else because their mine. Their father is not involved. I don't know. I mean, obviously, no one wants to be a single mom but when it happens, it happens and that's okay. But if I didn't have my parents...there's no way in heck I could have ever done it. They helped with everything.

Participant D said:

I think it made me stronger, having to do it alone.

Theme 2: Gains academically and socially

The codes found throughout the interview questions to create this theme of parental pride in their child's ability to work independently while also making gains academically and socially were responsibility, routines, efficient, maturity, gains, friendships, learning environments, teacher interactions, and special education. These codes molded together to show single parent's belief in their children's progress.

The academic progress of students was mentioned by six out of seven participants, stating the learning that their children are doing in the school has been great and a positive experience for their child so far. Small classes sizes and positive comments about teachers were said in relation to this theme. Participant D said, "She's just always had really good teachers. All the staff here are really nice." Participant C stated, "School is easy for them. They are good kids and they are good for their teachers." Positive interactions and

experiences with teachers have been stated as positive experiences for the participants' children. Participant F said, "I mean, he's learned so much from you guys. It's just, you don't really think about it until you hear him talk about their school day and stuff, like how much they're actually learning."

Participant B had similar sentiments on the positive school environment and said,

Some of the positives? He's making really great friendships. And he's with, you know, the kids rotate between the two classes every year. So, I mean, sometimes he is with the same people and sometimes not, but there's such a small group that I mean, everybody knows each other. So that's a really great thing. I guess that's part of living in a smaller town (Participant B).

Positive interactions were mentioned in three out of seven participants. Participant A mentioned feelings of intimidation when interacting with teachers at first but still felt the interactions were positive. She said:

I think they have been, for the most part, positive. I mean, I'm extremely shy. So sometimes it's hard. Like, it's intimidating when you go in there, and you don't have somebody else to sit in when you talk or whatever. I don't know.

Participants D and E stated they felt supported by their child's teacher. Participant E said, "When I asked about the homework, I just don't have time to do that. I just, just don't. So, they realize this and yeah, I didn't feel that they thought it was a reflection on me." Six of the participants felt they had no responsibilities during the week for their child's schooling. Participants D and C cited their children were at an age of independence with homework. Participant D said, "No, nothing that I can think of. She is at the age where she can do her own work. But it's not like she got a whole thing of spelling, and a whole thing of math."

Participant C mirrored the previous statement and said, “Nope, they come home, and they have their routine, they do their work. If they need help, then I help but other than they they’re pretty much efficient.” Participant D mentioned the effect not having so many responsibilities with school means for her family, “And it kind of gives us more time to do other things that can still involve learning, you know?”

Synthesis/Summary

The qualitative phenomenological research study was focused on single parents’ experiences and engagement as their child attended elementary school. Seven participants from a rural Elementary School in west central Minnesota had initially expressed interest in completing the study for this dissertation. By the time the interviews took place, only seven participants went through with the interview portion of the dissertation process. Table 6 shows the codes and themes found throughout the study and what research questions were used to create them. The participants were asked 13 interview questions that guided the exploration of their beliefs and perceptions related to raising a child as a single parent. The first two interview questions were used for demographic information and were not used in the data findings of this study.

Conclusion

The current chapter reviewed the demographic information on the participants and then continued with dissecting each interview question to pull out themes from the participants interviews. The results and emerging themes are laid out in the table above. Chapter 5 will detail a summary of the results of the seven participants interviews based on the themes generated and direct quotes. The results will be interpreted in comparison with

other research found on single parents' experiences and engagements with their elementary aged children.

Table 6

<i>Overview of Codes and Themes by Research Questions</i>		
Research Question	Codes	Themes
1	Jobs, Household Management,	Employment and housework as crucial to everyday life
1	Financial Strain, Emotional Strain	Single parenting was made more difficult because of COVID-19
1	Alone, Responsible, No Interactions, Overwhelming, Hectic Parents, Siblings, Family, Judged	Single parents felt the difficulty of being alone Familial Support
Sub 1	No homework, Difficulty Completing, No Responsibilities, Schoolwork	Homework was not perceived as part of involvement
Sub 1	Sports, Practice, Games, Extra curriculars, Running Around	Extracurricular Activities viewed as an important involvement activity
Sub 2	Meeting student needs, IEP, Services	Areas of additional support and ideas for improvement
Sub 2	Wi-fi, Clothing, Counseling, Open House, Packet, Meet the Teacher, Health Support, Allergy Support, Supportive Principal	School is welcoming and supportive
Sub 3	Judgement, Responsible, Alone, Balance, Overwhelmed, Hectic	Self-efficacy of parental support
Sub 3	Responsibility, Routines, Efficient, Gains, Friendship, Learning Environment, Teacher Interactions	Gains Academically and Socially

Note: The codes listed help create themes for the main research question and three sub questions.

CHAPTER 5. Discussion of Findings

The intention of the current research study was to gather experiences and perceptions of parental involvement of single parents of elementary aged children. The researcher wanted

to fill in the gap regarding how single parents engage with their children and the everyday experiences of single parents at a rural Minnesota school and provide suggestions on how the school might better support single parent's involvement in education. From previous literature, some experiences parents faced have been identified regarding parental involvement. The current study addresses how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted single parents.

The interview questions used in the study provided insight into the lives of single parents and how they navigate life and their involvement. The overarching research question was: *What are the perceptions and experiences related to involvement in education for single-parent households who have a child attending the K-12 school system via elementary school?* In order to better understand the central research question, the researcher used three sub-questions:

2. *How do single parents describe their level of involvement and the impact it has on their child's development?*
3. *How do single parents perceive the resources available to them?*
4. *How do single parents view the adequacy of their parental involvement?*

Much of the previous research found on single parents and their children has focused on success for the child in school. If studies were conducted with single parents, typically mothers, on their stress levels the studies were conducted through surveys or questionnaires which is what led the researcher to explore the phenomenon in a qualitative manner. The study design focused on discovering the phenomenon of single parenthood and the involvement the parents perceive they have but also to discover what in their daily lives could hinder or help that involvement.

The participants brought many unique experiences to the interviews, for example, widowhood, solo parenting, single fatherhood, and raising children with IEPs. Throughout the study, the researcher began to discover that each parent's journey to single parenthood began very differently and while some themes emerged that were similar, their past experiences played into their current involvement. It was not surprising to find that the participants that had been single from the start of parenthood did not find being involved as difficult as the participant that was recently widowed, as they have been experiencing doing it all alone since their child was born. The single father expressed difficulty in being involved from his statements and reported his situation was even more challenging as all his children have special needs. Further investigation into single parents who are single because of widowhood and single fathers could offer more a more in-depth picture of their experiences and involvement.

The main findings the researcher deducted from the participant interviews were that parents did not indicate homework was an involvement activity they participated in and that employment and household management tasks were mentioned as crucial to day-to-day life. The study also discovered how greatly single parents in the study were affected by COVID-19. All the participants in the study perceived single parenthood to be harder than coparenting. Additionally, the participants acknowledged ways the school system has supported them with very few suggestions for change. While all the single parents in this study described difficulty in balancing all the responsibilities they face, solo parents, the parents without a co-parent, appeared to be the most stressed. One of the participants described herself as a solo parent, which she described as not having support from the other

parent. The researcher realized five of the seven participants, under that definition, would be solo parents.

The participants varied in how they became solo parents, the main reasons the other parent was not present was death, being not involved at all, and being a foster/adoptee parent with no spouse. The widowed participant expressed perceptions of feeling judged by others more readily than the other participants. The other two participants made mention of their children seeing their other parents on the weekends.

The following chapter will begin by interpreting the findings statements. This chapter will conclude with the limitations, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Interpretations of Findings

The main research question was used to guide the study and find out the experiences and perceptions single parents have regarding involvement in elementary school. Four finding statements emerged from interviews with seven participants. A variety of questions were used to explore various aspects of day-to-day life of single parents to better understand their lived experiences. The questions were answered with many examples and stories of their daily lives.

Finding #1: All seven participants described employment and housework as crucial to their day-to-day lives.

The first finding statement helped to directly answer research question one and it expressed the importance of employment and housework in the daily lives of the participants. All seven participants were working parents, their hours and jobs varied greatly but it was

apparent that holding a job was an important aspect of their lives. Many solo parents cited its importance with comments about being the ‘sole supporter for their family’ or being a one income household.

Household management was a code mentioned throughout the interview questions and helped shape the first theme. This code also translated to theme number two under the first research question, in that parents felt responsible for everything with limited or no support, which five of the seven cited was the most difficult part of their week.

According to the Census Bureau (2020), 29% of single parents were jobless in 2020, this is likely attributed to 31% of single parents living below the poverty line and 28.7% being food insecure (Census Bureau, 2020). All seven participants were employed, held two jobs, or sought ways to bring income to their family, in the case of the stay-at-home mom doing daycare for one other child. It is evident that single parents are resilient in their efforts to provide financial stability to their families. It is an important and crucial part of their lives.

Meeusen and Van Laar (2018) explained parental pressure to be the perfect mother or perfect parent, as it applies to all single parents. Most participants described household management and sustaining the household chores as being a huge aspect of daily life. Participant A, as a widow, was especially overwhelmed with expectations of household management that now fell solely on her shoulders. Participant A also expressed feeling judged and not able to complete everything in a timely manner throughout the interview. Other participants also showcased their exhaustion with cleaning, cooking, and laundry, possibly displaying parental burnout from pressures of completing tasks typically done with help in a two-parent household.

Financial stability and management of household chores are two areas that single parents find themselves consumed with daily. The burden of being solely financial responsibility for a family is stressful, combined with parental burnout and pressure to complete all tasks for a household have made single parents lives overwhelming.

Finding #2: Single parenting was made more difficult due to the impact of COVID-19.

This finding statement helps to directly answer research question one. COVID-19 and the shutdowns that ensued during the height of the pandemic caused financial strain as multiple participants stated they had to shut down business or miss work due to having to quarantine themselves or their children. The code of financial strain during the pandemic also caused a domino effect of another code: emotional strain. Some participants cited ‘sleepless nights’ and ‘constant worry’ during the pandemic, due to loss of income, worry for the health of their families, and the negative social effects they feared their children faced.

In previous literature, financial considerations were previously cited as a major barrier for single parents (Camacho-Thompson et al., 2016; Harris & Goodall, 2008), so the simple fact that COVID-19 had broad financial implications to people from all walks of life, it’s natural to think that this was almost a double burden for single-parents. Similarly, from previous literature, we know single parents are more stressed and that stress can impact their engagement with their children, therefore their additional emotional stress from the pandemic is another double burden for single parents to carry. The extent of the impact COVID-19 shutdowns has had on society is still unknown but from these findings from single parents it is evident that the pandemic has caused them tremendous amounts of stress. Since stress on single parents has been shown to impact their levels of engagement with their child’s learning, it could be reasonable to assume during the pandemic single parents struggled with

distance learning. Participant E spoke candidly about his struggles with being engaged in distance learning. The educational impacts of COVID-19 are being felt in classrooms today, with a possible explanation of highly stressed parents trying to survive during that time.

Finding #3: Single parents struggled with the difficulties of being alone with responsibilities.

An additional finding statement that emerged from the data relating to the first research question was single parents and the feeling of aloneness with responsibilities. As mentioned above, Participant F defined herself as a solo parent, which meant she did not have support from the other parent for her child. She went on to state that solo parents have a whole different world to navigate as they never have anyone else to support their child. The child does not go anywhere every other weekend and so this type of parent has limited time for themselves. If that definition was to be used toward the other participants, the researcher could claim five of the seven participants as solo parents as well. Those five participants did express the themes of being alone and being the sole caregiver more often than the two parents classified as single parents, having the other parent to their child being involved in their lives.

The participants' responses to being asked about their interactions with other single parents could contribute to their feelings of loneliness in parenting. Their circles appeared very small, which could be some of the cause of the feelings of being overwhelmed. The researcher did not find any literature on what impact friendships and support groups had on single parents' loneliness; it is important to note the lack of mention of friendships by the participants.

Other reasons for overwhelming and hectic feelings came from describing their typical week. On top of being a parent, navigating getting their children to and home from school, all the extracurricular activities, work, and household management, these single parents accomplish so much in a single week, they felt this load was never ending and stressful. Only three participants mentioned any time spent for themselves, using words like “couple minutes for me”, “drink coffee, or nap” and “hang out for a little”. None of the parents mentioned spending time out with friends or any activities they do specifically for themselves. A possible reasonings for the lack of activities outside of the house single parents participate in, besides working, could be financial considerations and difficulty in finding daycare outside of working hours.

Finding #4: Familial support was important for single parents.

The next finding statement represented from the analyzing of the data was the support for their families being important to their lives. This finding statement helped to answer research question one. The researcher asked the participants to share any insights they wanted to add at the conclusion of the interviews, all the participants mentioned that being a single parent was more difficult than other people realized but the support of parents, grandparents, and siblings is crucial to them. Two of the participants mentioned how they would not have been able to do it without the support of their parents. The researcher also found that several of the participants relied on their older teenage children to help them throughout the day. While the participants struggle with the demands of their daily lives, while doing it as a single parent, the support they feel through their families, who have helped with childcare and emotional support, is a prominent part of their success as single parents. Familial support seemed to ease the burden of finding daycare after school hours for

many of the single parents, when their jobs required them to work in the evenings or overnight. Besides the support of daycare, participants stated their family supported them in other ways, such as, emotionally, and socially. It would be logical to assume single parents felt less judgements from their family when expressing distress or financial struggles as opposed to friends. The support single parent's families provided them with was reliable help and that aided their resilience in parenting.

Finding #5: Most participants did not perceive homework as part of their daily involvement.

The finding statement helped to answer research sub question one, which came as a surprise to the researcher, was many of the participants did not perceive homework as part of their involvement. It appeared, from the participant interviews, that many of their children did not have homework assigned to them. They either get class time to complete homework or have support staff that assist with homework help during class. A few participants cited their child had reading requirements each night, but they were old enough to complete that task independently. This finding statement conflicted with recommendations and findings from Epstein (1991) and Castro et al., (2015), as both stated homework as an important factor to parental involvement. Elementary schools have possibly changed their stance on homework based on parent statements of not having time or the knowledge to help their child with homework. Some of the participants seemed confused about the lack of homework, comparing it to their older children's days in elementary school or even their own but on the same side being thankful for it, as it is not seen as an additional responsibility that can cause conflict between child and parent.

The participants engaged with their children at more of a home-based level, teaching them responsibilities and expectations of what needs to be done. Their children are receiving praise for attributes their parents have instilled in them and have modeled for them in their resilience as single parents. The participants also cited extracurricular activities as important ways they are involved with their children.

Finding #6: Extracurricular activities, such as sports, were viewed as important and time-consuming involvement activities.

The finding statement above developed from the research sub question one on involvement and explained single parents found extracurricular activities as important and consuming involvement activities. Six of the seven participants stated they spent an abundant amount of time during their week attending practices and games for their child's sports. This is seen as an enjoyable activity for parents and children to partake in, it promotes teamwork and can be a positive experience with the school. Choi et al., (2015) found the importance of parental involvement that fosters positive attitudes, responsibility, and persistence as it relates to student success. Extracurricular activities are another way that parents can continue to support and be involved.

Attending games and practices for multiple different sports for multiple children can become overwhelming and consume much of their time. Some participants said they felt they were constantly running around taking kids to this activity and then that activity. Overall, the feelings on extracurricular activities had a more positive tone and was one major area parents perceived themselves to be involved in.

The purpose of research sub question two was to find what resources single parents perceived to be available to them. The resources were not defined throughout the study, to

identify what the participants perceived resources to be. The intent was to see what parents felt was impactful and helpful for their family.

Finding #7: The school was viewed as welcoming and supports parents with a variety of needs.

The finding statement for research sub question 2 was that the school is welcoming and supports parents with a variety of needs. Five of the participants named additional ways that they felt the school has supported them throughout their time in elementary school. The other two participants did not mention any support they could think of. Possibly because they did not believe they needed additional support from the school. The participants felt the school was good at assessing the needs of the students, offering clothing, information on reduced lunch, setting the student up with counseling, and health/ allergy support. Participants mentioned feeling comfortable calling the school to ask for something and two participants mentioned the principal by name and went on to praise her for everything she has done at the site. It was the researcher's understanding that the participants felt comfortable and understood by the school. A welcoming space can create a mutual and respectful bond between families and schools, and it appears these participants are feeling the effects of that through interactions with staff and having their child's needs met. Previous research on schools located in smaller districts found that the schools can better foster parent-school collaborations (Feuerstein, 2000; Rodriguez & Elbaum, 2014). This was found to be accurate at the current site. The parents felt their children have had great teachers, and a few participants mentioned small class sizes. The small class sizes might have provided teachers with more time to engage with their students' parents. Providing the parents with a welcoming and caring environment.

The ECFE program, mentioned by three of seven participants, stands for Early Childhood and Family Education program. The research site has spent the last four years working hard to improve the program and draw in more families with young children. The researcher has been part of the initiative to improve the ECFE program and was delighted to hear participants speak positively about the program. The parents found the ECFE classes helpful at providing activities and giving them an understanding of how to be involved with their child. The classes held the summer before kindergarten were mentioned as beneficial to introducing them to the teachers and giving their child a glimpse into kindergarten. At the time when this research took place, the early childhood team at the site was very involved with the families they service. The researcher saw the teachers form wonderful bonds with families and they strive to support all children.

Finding #8: Parents felt pride in their child's independence and saw academic and social gains throughout the school year.

The finding statement for research sub question three was parents felt pride in their child's ability to do work independently, with routines in place, work and chores get completed. Through the interview responses on the questions asked about their responsibilities with their child's work throughout the week, almost all the parents cited their child was independent with the little amount of work that was brought home. The researcher could sense the pride in their child, that they had instilled that responsibility in their child through their own hard work and grit with life's circumstances. Routines help children know the expectations at home and school. They can also make daily life easier, so it would make sense that the participants have routines set in place for their child to follow the school day is done in attempt to make the week go by more smoothly.

The participants felt that considering all the responsibilities they hold, while trying to balance multiple roles, and feelings of stress, that they were supportive and loving to their children. The researcher heard two parents refer to single parenthood as double the work but twice the reward. There was a sense of pride in what they accomplished with their life and children in a day. One participant even stated being a single parent has made her stronger.

The participants felt their children continue to make gains academically and socially. A major code for this finding was friendships for their children in the school setting. Friendships were mentioned as the main answer to positive experiences in school so far. The parents contributed their children's success in school to their learning environment and positive teacher interactions, but it could also be said that their positive responses to the school have had an impact on their child's success. As previous research has shown parents having positive reactions to learning have a positive correlation to students doing well in school. Ogg and Anthony (2020) looked at home parental warmth can have a positive academic outcome for children. Through the statements made by participants, it was apparent to the researcher that the parents expressed warmth regarding teachers and the school. The participants expressed pride in their children and that has had a positive impact on their child's school life.

Implication for Social Change

Single mothers are often more stressed and fatigued than partnered mothers (Meier et al., 2016), and the current research pointed out the many responsibilities that single parents take on and the lack of support they have outside of familiar support contributed to the stress and fatigue. The impact of the last three years of COVID-19 pandemic have not been fully

felt yet. It could be time for the community and school system to work through solutions to aid parents who are struggling.

Using Bronfenbrenner's theory (1992) and the results from the study, the school and community are missing some support services that will better aid families and children. Uri Bronfenbrenner (1992) declared that successful childhood outcomes should come from early childhood interventions, timely wrap-around services for families, and preventive social and involvement initiatives at the individual, parental, and community levels. While the participants reported feeling that the school has provided services that have been helpful there are more services that would be beneficial. Implementing involvement activities in the school setting that allows for students to receive positive feedback from their parents can allow feelings of validation and pride for both parent and child (Hall 2020). Since the participants were not engaging in homework as an involvement activity, holding parental involvement activities that showcase previously completed work would not cause any additional stress on the parent to have a project completed. A community art night held as an evening event at the school would allow students to showcase their work, it would allow parents to provide positive feedback to their child, and it would encourage and welcome community members into the school. This activity would align with previous research from Ogg and Anthony (2020) that stated parental warmth toward education has the potential to make a positive relationship between parent, child, and learning. Additionally, it supports conversations about their work and school day, which supports higher literacy scores (Dove et al., 2015). This aligned with the current studies participants, as they commented on all their child has learned and the pride they felt at their child's abilities.

With the help of the growing ECFE program, this can continue to change and adapt to the different needs in the community. For preschool aged children, early literacy activities at home have had positive correlations to reading literacy and parental education, strengthening the need for the ECFE program to continue to support and educate the parents in the community (Ogg & Anthony, 2020). Support staff through the ECFE program could be used to explore what other needs the parents attending may have with their older children. Since the ECFE program has grown to over 25 families from the communities attending various events throughout the month, they can utilize their relationships to gather input.

The current study revealed that being a single, or solo, parent comes with stressors revolving around the reliance of employment and the pressure to maintain household tasks to sustain daily lives, this aligned with previous studies that focused on parental stress. This stress and pressure continue to build for single parents that lack outside support systems. The utilization of ECFE classes to foster relationships with staff and other parents could offer some much-needed social support for single parents.

This study has shown that single parents from the study site found their responsibilities of household management and jobs as a source of difficulty for them during the week which aligned with findings from Stack and Meredith (2018). Specifically, if they fall under the criteria for solo parenting, which does not allow them to have a respite from parenting at regular intervals. The researcher believes that since homework was not a nightly concern for the participants, that contributed to the positive connection with the school. The lack of homework perhaps allowed them to feel involved with their child in other ways, like extracurricular activities. Therefore, elementary schools could look at the amount of homework being assigned and either lessen the amount or remove homework all together.

The current study filled in the gap on how single parents experience involvement with elementary aged children. Current research was lacking on qualitative studies done with single parents, as the studies were typically quantitative and focused on student achievement. By conducting a qualitative study, a more holistic look at the lived experiences and perspectives of involvement offers a wider picture for school staff to examine how their practices may affect single parents lives.

Recommendations for Action

While this study cannot be broadly generalized, it does contextualize some of the existing literature and offer insights on what can be done with the research. The recommendations could be used to improve parental engagement in general, and specifically address some of the concerns mentioned in the literature and participants. The findings and recommendations from this study will be shared with the school site principal, so the principal is aware of how some single parents are feeling about their experiences and perceptions of parental involvement.

As a current elementary school teacher, the researcher intends to adopt practices in the classroom that would support single parents. A practice that the researcher has already considered is sending out involvement activity information a month or more, in advance and making sure the parents know other family members may attend such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and any other family members. Another practice that will continue in the researcher's classroom would be not assigning homework. The intention behind this practice would be to honor the time the parents have with their children, which can be limited during the week due to attending school, work, and taking care of chores.

Based on the findings of the research study, the researcher makes the following recommendations based on the results of the study and previous literature, for the school site and possibly other small rural schools that feel they are struggling to engage parents effectively:

- First and foremost, develop a needs assessment survey that can be distributed to all parents with children attending elementary school. The assessments' purpose is to discover if there is anything the parents need in terms of school support, transportation, and information about their family that might be helpful for the school to know. The tone of the survey should steer clear of sounding degrading or full of pity. It should be shared in a positive tone and with a message that shows how much the students and family matter to the school. When results are collected, the school could create a team that can sort through the data and see what needs are repeating to brainstorm possible initiatives to support or change policy.
- A re-examination of the homework policy could be done by the principal. Since participants in the study either enjoyed the lack of homework or struggled with understanding and completing homework, it could benefit the school culture to explore what teachers are giving for homework, to what extent it supports learning at home, and what percentage of the homework is being completed. The homework policy should be considered, as it could allow for more beneficial and enjoyable involvement activities to take place at home.
- Along with a re-examination of the homework policy, another recommendation is to develop the process of educating parents on in-home activities that encourage their involvement. A monthly newsletter with a handful of activities could be sent out to

- parents, showing the school's support for parental involvement. The newsletters would be supported by literature to include literacy and math activities for specific ages and grades. Teacher support on this initiative would be beneficial to tie in topics that are currently being covered in class and could be supported at home. Another beneficial aspect of the newsletter would be to include community activities or local attractions that could support social engagements for parents and children.
- Schools could also hold parent involvement activities in the evenings, between school sports, to promote engagement and at a time of day that could work better for parents who work when their children are at school. It is important to acknowledge that these evening activities could be attended by grandparents and other family members as the participants stated their families play a big role in supporting them with childcare and other needs.
 - The current school site could improve upon their Homework Help afterschool program that has been held in previous years. The previous program was open to third through fifth grade students, three days a week during the months of March and April. The possibility of opening the program to more grades and throughout the school year may assist parents who struggle with homework. There are many high school students that volunteer in the elementary classrooms during the school year, possibly partnering with the high school principal to see if that could continue after school hours to help staff the program.
 - Encourage the school counseling program to include more family sessions, to better assess the needs of the student and family. With the possibility of supplying the parents with resources for therapy services as needed.

Future Recommendations of Study

This study looked at the experiences and perceptions of single parents and their involvement with their child attending elementary school. The concept of solo parenting was mentioned by a participant, who identified as a solo parent, and it would be interesting to examine that concept in comparison to single parents because the researcher did not come across that term in previous literature on single parents. Through the data, there were some nuances that appeared for solo parents compared to single parents. Most obvious was the absence of time away from their children, for a break, since the children did not have their other parent to live with. Additionally, conducting research on what activities parents do with their child at home and their reading and math achievement in 2nd grade using either qualitative or quantitative could provide schools with an idea of what parents are or aren't doing and how to better supply aid. This type of study would fill in gaps in the current study by uncovering what activities parents of school-aged children are doing and the impact it has on their reading and math scores. Another gap to fill would be how single parents experience school with their first-born child. While that might only affect a small number of parents, there could be an opportunity to create best-practices early for single parents so that they have a stronger opportunity to stay involved for the first and subsequent children.

While the experience of the researcher and relationships formed with participants helped build an understanding with the participants, there was also a real possibility that previous experiences could have interfered with the objectivity of the study. A bias of the study was the interviewer, who is very compassionate, being careful to not let that compassion turn into pity for the participants, that could influence the way information is seen or presented. Another bias on the part of the interviewer was the idea that all single

parents struggle with life, child rearing, and being involved in the school process, when that is not the truth for everyone. The researcher was aware of these biases before beginning the research and made efforts to ensure research questions did not imply pity or only highlight struggles but allowed for open ended responses from the participants.

Reflection

The researcher became interested in the topic of single parent's experiences and perceptions of their involvement because personal experiences with families in the classroom led the researcher to wonder how schools and teacher could best understand, appreciate, and encourage single parent households. It has been the researcher's experience that current practices in schools tend to lean toward two parent households and the researcher was interested in investigating how single parents experience those practices and what other practices might benefit families with only one adult in the household. The researcher also wanted to collect personal accounts of the daily lives of single parents, to better see a full picture of their positive and negative experiences around life, child rearing, and navigating the school system. The research provided a well-rounded look into the lives of single parents to best understand what, or if anything, could support their families.

The motivation for the study was to investigate this topic under the belief "it takes a village to raise a child" and the staff at school are part of that village. Since the beginning of the researcher's teaching career, an interest in parental involvement has always been present. Perhaps it started with an interest in early childhood, that gave a view of what comes before the school age years and its importance in a child's development. That interest led to a pursuit in teaching with younger elementary grades and become an active member of the early childhood and family education program. These two experiences allowed for exposure

to family structures that differed from the norm and encouraged the researcher to embrace, welcome, and support the atypical families from the classroom.

The researcher's background in elementary education for the past nine years in a rural public school will strengthen and celebrate the vision and findings of this doctoral research study. As mentioned above, the researcher has spent much of her career in kindergarten, with one year in second grade, and many years teaching early childhood and family education courses throughout those nine years. The researcher is also a parent to children of similar ages of the participants in the study, which portrays a level of understanding from the researcher and comradery between interview and participant. The research can also relate on a personal level, while not being a single parent in the typical sense, can self-identify as a single parent during the months of construction in Minnesota, as the researcher's partner is gone out of the house for extended periods of time.

As a classroom teacher, the researcher wants to encourage continuous and flowing change into school systems as family structures change and grow. Parent involvement in their child's learning is important and crucial to how the parents see themselves at school, with continual investigation and learning it is possible to support families as they need to best work collaboratively as a family, home, and community involved society.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the research study the researcher felt she understood just a little bit more of what a single parent works for at the end of the day. The participants shared their experiences with parental involvement, and it showed that things are changing within the school setting, homework is no longer the main way parents are involved. Parents appeared to be more involved in their child's interests and enjoyed engaging in their extracurricular

activities together. That is not to say they did not encourage their child's school learning but rather seemed to be teaching them skills to improve their abilities to learn by implementing routines and instilling responsibility. The single parents in this study believed that they encountered more challenges than parents who are married, they have less support in the home as far as housework and child rearing are concerned but they believed this brought them strength and a sense pride in themselves. The most genuine takeaway from one participant was when she said, "It's twice the work but twice the outcome, twice the reward back."

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APPENDIX A. Back to School Letter

Meet the Teacher

About Me

Hi! My name is Mrs. Gort. I am so excited to be your teacher this year!

I've been teaching at this school for 9 years. I love being a teacher because I enjoy making learning fun for others.

I am currently working on my Educational Doctorate and will be starting my research for my dissertation. I have a big passion for young children and parental involvement. I would be so honored to have some of you participant in my research. Please be on the lookout for a recruitment survey in September!

I am looking forward to this year. It's going to be great!



My Favorites

COLOR: Blue

HOBBY: Reading

DRINK: Coffee

SUBJECT TO TEACH: Reading

CANDY: Gummy Worms



Contact

Email:
sgort@isd2190.org

APPENDIX B. Introductory Email

Dear Families,

I am currently pursuing my Educational Doctorate at Minnesota State University Moorhead. I am in my final year and am ready to start conducting my research. Throughout my nine years as a teacher and through my continuing education I have been passionate about how families engage with their children. My awareness of different family types and how they engage has brought about my interest in how to best support families, for my study I am specifically wanting to discover how single parents navigate parental involvement and simply navigate the school year. It is my hope to use my research to better help our school district, and possibly others, best support single parents. I have attached the recruitment survey to this email in hopes that you can spare a minute and complete it to see if you meet the requirements for the study.

https://mnstate.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dd6ArCkqnIHwzMa

If you have any additional questions, please feel free to email me at any time!

Thank you,

Mrs. Gort

APPENDIX C.**Recruitment Survey**

Are you a parent?

- yes
- no

What gender do you identify with?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

What is your ethnicity? (Choose all the apply)

- Native American or Alaskan Native
- White
- Black
- Latinx
- Two or more races
- Asian
- Unknown
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other

What is your employment status?

- Not employed
- Employed part-time (work less than 40 hours)
- Employed full time (work 40 hours or more)
- other

Are you currently enrolled in college?

- yes
- no
- will be

What is the highest education you have received so far?

- Still attending high school
- High school diploma/GED
- College Degree
- Masters or Doctorate Degree

What is your current relationship status?

- married
- single
- separated

How many children do you have? Choose one.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- more than 4

Do you identify as a single parent?

- yes
- no

Thank you for filling out my survey, since you identified as a single parent, I would greatly appreciate your help in participating in my study.

If you would like to hear more and are interested in participating, please provide your name and an email address to contact you.
Again, thank you!

APPENDIX D.**Implied Consent Form**

Please read this consent agreement carefully before agreeing to participate in this study.

Title of Study: A Phenomenological Study on Single Parents Experiences and Engagement as Their Child Attends Elementary School

Purpose of the Study: To better understand how school systems can support single mothers' first experience with parental involvement.

What you will do in this study: The qualitative case study will include a demographic survey, individual interviews, and participant journals collected through the summer and fall of 2022.

Time required: 30–45-minute interviews.

Risks: There are no known risks if you participate in this study.

Benefits: The information you share will shed light on obstacles of single mothers in the school system and provide school systems with ways to support single mothers in the future.

Confidentiality: Interviews will be facilitated and recorded via Zoom or in person when applicable. The recordings on Zoom will only be audio and not video recordings to protect identities. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only the researcher will know your identity as a participant. To help protect your confidentiality, the storage of data, audio files, and notes will be kept in a secure location accessible only to the researcher, and all personally identifiable information from transcripts and research reports will be purged. All stored data will be destroyed within 30 days of successful dissertation defense, expected spring 2023.

Participation and withdrawal: Your participation in this study is voluntary; you are free to decide not to participate at any time.

Contact:

Dr. Andrew Burklund, principal investigator, 320.224.7174, andrew.burklund@mnstate.edu

Samantha Gort, MA, co-investigator, 320.226.6900, santaellasamantha@gmail.com

Whom to contact about your rights in this experiment:

Dr. Ximena Suarez-Sousa, suarez@mnstate.edu, 218.447.2007, School of Teaching and Learning or else you may contact Robert Nava, Chair of MSUM Institutional Research Board, at irb@mnstate.edu, or 218.477.4308.

Agreement:

In signing this agreement, I also affirm that I am at least 18 years of age or older.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name (print): _____

APPENDIX E. Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

I. Introduction

Hello, my name is Samantha Gort, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program at Minnesota State University, Moorhead. I am working on my dissertation which is focused on single parents and their perceptions and lived experiences as their child attends elementary school. This interview will provide invaluable information for my dissertation. I am interested in this topic because as a Kindergarten teacher, I want to know more on the experiences of single parents and how I can best help them navigate this unfamiliar territory with future classes. It is my hope this dissertation will reach teachers and administration to shine light on the struggles single mothers might face and offer solutions to better assist them in schools.

I appreciate your participation and honesty while we talk. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes. I will be asking questions to better understand your experience with the school district, teachers, and any barriers you may face. All your answers will be confidential and there are no right or wrong answers. I will be recording only the audio of this session for future data analysis. Do you have any questions before we begin?

II. Discussion Questions

- a. How long have you had a child attending school?
- b. How many children do you have? How many just in the elementary school?
- c. What are some positive experiences for your child in school so far? What are some negative experiences for your child so far?
- d. What responsibilities do you have in your life? (Children, school, jobs, caring for others?)
- e. Can you tell me what a typical week looks like for you?
- f. What is the most challenging aspect of your week?
- g. Describe any outside support you have.
- h. Describe ways that your school has prepared you and your child for school?
 - i. Were they helpful?
 - ii. Has the school your child attends offered any resources to you?
 - iii. Is there a before/after school program?
- i. What are your thoughts on the work your child has been assigned?
 - iv. What are your typical responsibilities during the week for school?
 - v. Have you been able to attend school events like back-to-school night, parent teacher conference, field trips or classroom visits?
- j. What kind of interaction or experiences have you had with staff regarding being a single parent?
 - vi. What are some ways teachers can better communicate or support you

and your child?

- k. Can you describe your experiences with other parents at school?
- l. How has COVID impacted you and your child's life?
- m. How has it impacted your ability to be a mom and handle your other responsibilities?
- n. Would you like to share any additional insights about being a single parent?

III. Closing

Thank you for participating in my interview. Please feel free to reach out to me with any additional information you think of. Would I be able to follow up with you if clarification is needed on anything we have talked about? Thank you again!

APPENDIX F.**Email Reminder Before Interview**

Hello (participants name),

I hope this email finds you well. I am very excited to start our interview process on (insert interview date) at (insert time) on Zoom. If that date and time does not work for you anymore, please let me know and we can reschedule. I wanted to send out my thanks again for agreeing to participate in my study, your firsthand experiences and knowledge will be used for future parents in years to come.

Thank you again and please reach out with any questions or concerns,

Samantha Gort