

# Divorce and Its Effects on Child Development: The Case of Itsani Village in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa



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## ABSTRACT

The rate of divorce has been increasing in the world. Contemporary demographers estimate that approximately half of first marriages and about 60 per cent of second marriages will eventually end in dissolution. Studies show that parental divorce is linked with the increasing risk of adolescent adjustment problems for children, with less academic enthusiasm cited as the most worrying. Most of the children from these parents who have divorced end up dropping out of school, adopting disruptive behaviour, and abusing substances such as alcohol and illicit drugs. The purpose of this paper is to explore the effects of parental divorce on youth development at Itsani village in the Vhembe district, Limpopo province, South Africa. The study investigated whether parental divorce may be a contributing factor in the deterioration of their performance at school. The study used a qualitative explorative research design. The purposive sampling method was also used to select a sample from the population of the study. Face-to-face interviews were also used as a method of data collection from 10 participants aged 16 – 21 years, residing in the Itsani village. The results established that youth who are from a troubled family and facing divorce are mostly depressed and are unable to concentrate on their studies. Their parents' financial instability and lack of conflict resolution at home make them experience poor social relationships, and they are also reserved and introverted. Therefore, the paper suggests serious intervention mechanisms to help them cope with the sudden change in their family settings so that they can ultimately live a fulfilling life. The study also adds to the body of knowledge regarding divorce and its impact on the children.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to Abuzar, parental divorce is a global occurrence that signifies the dissolution of a marriage after a period of togetherness and bonding, especially for siblings. It is alarming that 50 percent of marriages end in divorce.<sup>1</sup> Abuzar has stated that divorce hurts both parents' and youths' conduct, as well as their well-being and actions. Changes take place in young people's lives because of parental divorce.<sup>2</sup> Depending on the age, the emotional and psychological reactions of youth affected by divorce may vary,

<sup>1</sup> Ghayoor Abuzar, "Experiences and Perception of Children (Now Adults) in Broken Families Due to Parental Divorce in Central Punjab, Pakistan" (Department of Sociology, Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Abuzar, "Experiences and Perception of Children (Now Adults) in Broken Families Due to Parental Divorce in Central Punjab, Pakistan."

and this occurrence may be both perplexing and traumatizing. Parental divorce is considered a long-term stressor as it negatively affects youth. According to Kasalova, these effects include difficulties forming relationships, communication difficulties, and frequent feelings of anxiety and irritability.<sup>3</sup> Maforah stated that parental divorce has been demonstrated to be a significant risk factor in the growth of children.<sup>4</sup> Some of them have been mentally stunted and confused as a result of their unbearable conditions at home.

De Coninck views parental divorce as a stigma to children in society.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, attitudes towards divorce differ according to the societies of the world. Parental divorce is a phenomenon that has destroyed families and caused a wide range of societal issues. Numerous social problems, including drug misuse, child labour, criminal behaviour, and many more, are in some way connected to parental divorce. Sillekens and Notten believe that the well-being and development of youth can be undermined by parental divorce, with negative side effects that last into adulthood. Although some children cannot cope with the effects of divorce, some have been able to accept this reality and move on with their lives.

Parental divorce is a growing concern in South Africa. Every year, the number of parental divorces increases. The new ways of living with a single parent who has just experienced a divorce are becoming a burden to young people. Itsani village is not excluded from this national concern. The village is troubled by child labour, child marriages, criminal activities and misuse of drugs. Most of those who are involved in such activities have children from dysfunctional families with separated parents. These youth end up experiencing feelings of anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges.

This paper, therefore, explores the effects of parental divorce on youth development with a focus on Itsani village, which is situated in the Limpopo Province, South Africa.

The objectives of the study include

- To determine factors that lead to divorce in Itsani village.
- To explore the effects of divorce.
- To determine the effects of divorce on society.

The study also seeks to answer the research questions

- Which factors lead to divorce in Itsani village?
- What are the effects of divorce?
- How does divorce affect society?

The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the effects of divorce on youth development. It will further provide clarity on the specific domains of youth development that are mostly affected by divorce, providing insight into potential areas requiring intervention and support. The study's results will also assist policymakers, educators, psychologists, and parents in understanding the challenges faced by youth after divorce and guide the development of effective strategies to mitigate negative consequences and promote positive outcomes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Prevalence of Parental Divorce in the World

According to Westrick et al, the rate of parental divorce has been increasing in the United States.<sup>6</sup> The family profiles that have been recently reported in the United States rated divorce as 15.5 per 1000 married women in 2019 and 14.9 divorces per 1000 women in a first marriage in 2018, which was the same in 2019. Contemporary demographers estimate that approximately half of the first marriages and about 60 percent of second marriages in the United States will eventually end in dissolution.<sup>7</sup>

D'Onofrio mentioned that previous studies show that parental divorce is linked with an increasing risk for adolescent adjustment problems.<sup>8</sup> Students from divorced homes experience academic difficulties

<sup>3</sup> Petra Kasalova et al., "Anxiety Disorders and Marital Satisfaction," *Neuro Endocrinology Letters* 38, no. 8 (February 2018): 555–64.

<sup>4</sup> N. F. Maforah et al., "Psychosocial Effects of Divorce on Young Women Who Grew up in Divorced Families at Rustenburg, Moruleng Village," *Technium Soc. Sci. J.* 23 (2021): 689.

<sup>5</sup> David De Coninck, Shauni Van Doren, and Koen Matthijs, "Attitudes of Young Adults Toward Marriage and Divorce, 2002–2018," *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 62, no. 1 (January 2, 2021): 66–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2020.1833292>.

<sup>6</sup> Krista K Westrick-Payne, "Divorce Rate in the US: Geographic Variation, 2020," *Family Profiles, FP-22* 8 (2022).

<sup>7</sup> The National Center for Family & Marriage Research (NCFMR), *U.S. Divorce Rate* (Ohio: Bowling Green State University, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> B. D' onofrio and R. Emery, "Parental or Separation and Children's Mental Health," *World Psychiatry* 18, no. 1 (2019): 100–101.

such as lower grades and dropping out of school, disruptive behaviour, problems with substance use, and depression. Young people from divorced parents mostly experience painful feelings or encounters, which involve having to worry about their future, such as whether both their parents will be there for them during their graduation or for their weddings. Zhao et.al. view parental divorce as one of the contributing factors to deviant behaviour in young adults.<sup>9</sup>

In China, young people who are affected by parental divorce appear to have low self-esteem. Parental divorce is associated with criminal activities such as theft and robbery. These criminal activities are said to be the result of poor parental guidance and exposure to food insecurity. Zakhour et.al. added that verbal and physical aggression, anger, and hostility in adolescents are factors that are mainly associated with divorce.<sup>10</sup> Azzi et.al. also discovered that due to the anxiety and stress of enduring the daily challenges of adjusting to new ways of living after their parents have divorced, young adults become more addicted and engage in substance abuse (smoking cigarettes, drugs, and *dagga*).<sup>11</sup>

According to Dodo, Zimbabwe is mentioned as one of the countries in which the rate of parental divorce is high.<sup>12</sup> This country's main contributing factor to divorce is poverty. Men and women mostly separate from their spouses due to moving from their countries to nearby countries in search of job opportunities. Those who relocate to nearby countries are more likely to have other partners there. This situation leaves Zimbabwe with approximately 157 married couples divorcing every month and 40 divorces every week. In 2015, the report from the Bulawayo High Court illustrated that 1102 married couples filed for a divorce. The cases of divorce in Zimbabwe pose negative effects on young people because they believe that the family is the first institution where children at a young age develop physically, emotionally, spiritually, educationally, and morally.

Miralles et.al. have stated that parental divorce affects the family system and is influenced by inter-parental conflict, defensiveness, and withdrawal, which pose a threat to family integrity.<sup>13</sup> Conflicts between parents end up in dissolution, which finally leads to parental divorce. Furthermore, the environment wherein parents always fight disrupts the children's development and interferes with their holistic development from the academic level, as well as other social interactions. There is more to parental divorce than affects young people, and it negatively impacts their development. Young people may encounter emotional and sexual abuse by members of the family in the absence of their parents because a single parent would often leave their children with a stepfather, uncle, grandfather, or cousins for work or other activities. Young girls become victims of rape because of the lack of protection from both parents.

Miralles et. al. believe that the development of youth is disturbed through the traumatic experiences that they undergo when the parent who is raising them is depressed or financially strained due to divorce.<sup>14</sup> In these cases, the parents use the children as intermediaries to communicate with each other. These children find themselves in a confused state because they must often take sides. They find themselves trapped in a situation that arouses their anger, causing a disconnection and the rejection of one parent. After a divorce, it is rare for young adult children to have a positive relationship with both parents due to experiences that they have come across while their parents were in the process of divorce, and this plays a part in how they grow and perceive things in the social context.

Parental divorce is a global issue in which many families are broken. In South Africa, parental divorce and separation have increased by 13.1% since 2020. In 2021, 188208 divorces were granted. With 54 divorces for every 100,000 people, the Western Cape has the highest divorce rate, followed by the Northern Cape with 50 divorces for every 100,000 and the Free State with 47 for every 100,000 residents.

<sup>9</sup> Shou-Ying Zhao, Rong-Rong Ren, and Wei Chen, "A Mediated Moderation Model of Negative Life Events, Self-Esteem, Rumination and Parental Divorce on Depression among Chinese Juvenile Delinquents," *Scientific Reports* 13, no. 1 (2023): 1793.

<sup>10</sup> Maha Zakhour et al., "Association between Parental Divorce and Anger, Aggression, and Hostility in Adolescents: Results of a National Lebanese Study," *Journal of Family Issues* 44, no. 3 (2023): 587–609.

<sup>11</sup> Vanessa Azzi et al., "Parental Divorce and Smoking Dependence in Lebanese Adolescents: The Mediating Effect of Mental Health Problems," *BMC Pediatrics* 22, no. 1 (2022): 471.

<sup>12</sup> Obediah Dodo, "Selected Approaches for Conflict Resolution in Marriage Disputes in Zimbabwe," *International Journal of Modern Anthropology* 15, no. 2 (May 27, 2021): 414–38, <https://doi.org/10.4314/ijma.v15i2.2>.

<sup>13</sup> Paloma Miralles, Carmen Godoy, and María D. Hidalgo, "Long-Term Emotional Consequences of Parental Alienation Exposure in Children of Divorced Parents: A Systematic Review," *Current Psychology* 42, no. 14 (May 25, 2023): 12055–69, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-02537-2>.

<sup>14</sup> Miralles, Godoy, and Hidalgo, "Long-Term Emotional Consequences of Parental Alienation Exposure in Children of Divorced Parents: A Systematic Review."

The North-West has the lowest GDR, with only 15 divorces per 100,000 residents. Regardless of population type, the median age of male divorcees was 25 compared to 41, which was higher than the median age of female divorcees overall. At younger ages, divorce affected more women compared to divorced men. Many divorces resulted from unions that lasted between 0 and 9 years, followed by unions that lasted between 10 and 14 years. Divorces that occurred in 2021 affected 17345 children under the age of 18.<sup>15</sup>

## **Factors that Lead to Parental Divorce**

### ***Infidelity in Marriage***

Marital infidelity is a serious problem that leads to dissolution. According to Apostolou et.al., cheating can cause a married couple to want out of the marriage. This factor reduces the chances of being trusted again in the marriage and brings expressions that the offending partner has been in the habit for a while.<sup>16</sup> Though marriage is a lifetime commitment, trust and loyalty are key components that build it and maintain the love that one has for their partner. Once these factors are lost, they can never be repaired. The one who is being cheated on develops low self-confidence and feels betrayed, and this further develops frustrations as well as uninformed verdicts that may potentially contribute to a lot of damage and loss.

### ***Domestic Abuse***

Domestic abuse involves physical, emotional, and psychological abuse within the family context. Children and a mother are abused by their father, though it is not only the mother who can be abused. In some cases, a father may be abused by his wife, but this is not very common. Spousal abuse is often influenced by the patriarchal system, wherein men use their power and masculinity to intimidate their families.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Sexual Dissatisfaction***

Some marriages are negatively affected due to sexual dissatisfaction. When partners are unable to satisfy each other sexually, their bond and affection erode, and they start to feel dissatisfied. This leads to a disconnect, and one partner may seek sexual pleasures outside marriage, which often results in divorce.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Financial Challenges***

Financial challenges are one of the reasons married couples divorce. In events where a partner hides money from the other or when the marriage is in total absence of money, it imposes temptations and other negative impressions. Couples may end up having financial disagreements. Financial issues generally include the matter of debt that one must settle without full support from the other partner, or the misuse of finances without notifying the other partner, especially spending on things that are not beneficial to the family or marriage.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Lack of Communication***

Parental divorce can be caused by a lack of communication between the couple. The problem arises when a partner is not allowed to express their feelings over a certain issue. The issue can be that one is wrong or treating the other unfairly; instead of expressing their feelings and concerns, the blame is shifted to them and this can contribute to silence as well as harmful responses.<sup>20</sup> Unresolved issues lead to conflict

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<sup>15</sup> Stats Sa, *Census, 2022* (Department of Statistics South Africa, 2022),

[https://census.statssa.gov.za/assets/documents/2022/P03014\\_Census\\_2022\\_Statistical\\_Release.pdf](https://census.statssa.gov.za/assets/documents/2022/P03014_Census_2022_Statistical_Release.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Menelaos Apostolou and Yan Wang, "What Makes It Difficult to Keep an Intimate Relationship: Evidence From Greece and China," *Evolutionary Psychology* 19, no. 1 (January 1, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474704920987807>.

<sup>17</sup> Priyabrata Patra et al., "Intimate Partner Violence: Wounds Are Deeper," *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 60, no. 4 (2018): 494–98.

<sup>18</sup> Fatemeh Daneshfar and Afsaneh Keramat, "Sexual Dysfunction and Divorce in Iran: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care* 12, no. 3 (2023): 430–39.

<sup>19</sup> Johanna Peetz, Zoe Meloff, and Courtney Royle, "When Couples Fight about Money, What Do They Fight About?," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 40, no. 11 (November 5, 2023): 3723–51, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075231187897>.

<sup>20</sup> Teresa P Nguyen, Benjamin R Karney, and Thomas N Bradbury, "When Poor Communication Does and Does Not Matter: The Moderating Role of Stress.," *Journal of Family Psychology* 34, no. 6 (2020): 676.

and misunderstanding, which later create an emotional distance and poor engagement in conversations between the couple. This disconnect causes both inter- and intra-personal conflicts.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Lack of Support***

Support is a crucial aspect of marriage for a relationship to be stable and functional. Hence, a lack of emotional support by a spouse or any other support in times of challenges creates feelings of wanting out of the marriage. Spouses want partners whom they can fully depend on and always rely on. Marriage is all about being there for each other, even in their worst time and ensuring all support in whatever is occurring.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Mental Health Issues***

Psychological challenges such as unmanaged anger, untreated depression, anxiety, or personality disorder can cause stress in a marriage and further contribute to chaos. A case where the mental health issues of the other spouse are untreated negatively affects the marriage, bringing about a lot of confusion and misunderstanding.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Social and Peer Pressure***

The pressure that one can get from family, friends, and societal norms can contribute to divorce. Social pressure can be dangerous within marriages because, in some cases, one partner can depend on the inputs and perceptions of others about their marriage without verification. This often creates pressure on the family, which, if not checked, can lead to cheating or divorce.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Effects of Divorce on a Person's Mental, Emotional, and Social Well-Being**

UNESCO showed that kids, whose parents' relationship would later end, called pre-disrupted families, have more problems with school, emotions, behaviour, and drugs compared to kids whose families stayed together.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, first-grade students with married mothers are less likely to behave badly. Children who don't listen to their teachers and are mean to other kids tend to have more problems, often stemming from dysfunctional families. One study also showed that children whose parents are divorced have more difficulty with math and reading.

### ***Youth Participation at School***

According to Wyn, children and teenagers who have parents who are married and living together are more likely to care about doing well in school.<sup>26</sup> They do their schoolwork without being forced and put in more effort than just the minimum required. Wyn supported that they also complete their homework.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, teenagers who live in blended families or families where their parents have remarried are less enthusiastic about school, unlike those who come from families with both biological parents living together.

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<sup>21</sup> Justin A. Lavner et al., "Family-Centered Prevention Buffers the Effect of Financial Strain on Parenting Interactions, Reducing Youth Conduct Problems in African American Families.," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 89, no. 9 (September 2021): 783–91, <https://doi.org/10.1037/ccp0000680>.

<sup>22</sup> Scott Gerschwer, "Conflicts over Intimacy within Mature, Happy Marriages Reliance and Reliability in Intimate Relationships: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis," *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (March 23, 2022): 261–74, <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.21321>.

<sup>23</sup> Beth A. Latshaw and Deniz Yucel, "Work-Family Conflict and Partners' Agreement on Fertility Preferences among Dual-Earner Couples: Does Women's Employment Status Matter?," *Journal of Family Research* 34, no. 4 (December 5, 2022): 1151–74, <https://doi.org/10.20377/jfr-689>.

<sup>24</sup> Akbar Zare Shahabadi and Fatemeh Teymouri, "A Study of the Social Factors Related to Divorce among Divorce Applicants in Yazd," *Journal of Social Behavior and Community Health*, November 28, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.18502/jsbch.v5i2.7849>.

<sup>25</sup> UNESCO, "Global Guideline on Student Participation in Education Governance," 2019, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000367029>.

<sup>26</sup> J. Wyn, "Youth Participation in Education Governance: A New Policy Paradigm?," *Educational Review* 70, no. 3 (2018): 287–300.

<sup>27</sup> Wyn, "Youth Participation in Education Governance: A New Policy Paradigm?"

### ***The Socio-economic Status***

Parental divorce has a serious effect on the socioeconomic status of youth. This effect can directly and indirectly influence the youth's socioeconomic status and can vary depending on various factors. Mackova et al. believed that these factors include the financial situation of the family before the divorce, post-divorce family arrangements, and how supportive the parents are to their children.<sup>28</sup> The economic socio-status of youth can be influenced by the reduced household income. Parents pay less than their children's needs because they are taking care of two separate households. These include having to pay child support. The reduced household income leads to the youth having to experience a lower standard of living.

Financial instability is one of the main reasons parents find it harder to provide continuous financial support to their young children. The instability can affect the ability to afford basic needs, extracurricular activities, and educational expenses for youth. According to Doku et al., lack of money resulting from divorce often affects youth's educational opportunities; they need extra classes to better their grades so that they can have good academic performance as well as a certain amount for their tertiary education in order to prosper.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Social Relationships***

After a divorce, the parent relationship may change and affect the child. Youth might spend less time than usual with the other parent because of custody arrangements that affect the quality of their relationship with that parent. According to Grape (2024), youth may have conflict loyalties between their parents. Youth who are affected by divorce tend to withdraw from social interaction with peers as they experience emotional stress caused by their parents' divorce. Youth may feel ashamed of their family situation, which causes them to be in denial of their status.

More often than not, a person with divorced parents has a negative attitude towards marriage and a more positive attitude toward divorce. A negative attitude about marriage leads to a lack of commitment to a romantic relationship. Youth whose parents are divorced tend to have a low level of trust in their partners. According to Lee, lack of trust in a relationship results in one having multiple partners and young people who have experienced the divorce of their parents might develop different attachment styles in their romantic relationships, such as fear of commitment or difficulty in trusting.<sup>30</sup> Parental divorce can serve as a model for youth, in which youth will have poor communication and lack conflict resolution styles.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a qualitative approach because it describes the lived experiences of the subjects of the study. This design allowed the participants to give in-depth information and to give references according to their experiences.

### **Research design**

The study used an explorative research design to explore and have a broad understanding of the effects of parental divorce on youth development. The need to conduct this study arises from the repeated problem in the area of Itsani. Parental divorce can be a result of many factors, depending on the families associated with it. The researcher wanted to explore and gain an understanding of the effects of parental divorce on youth development and how it affects the growth of young people in families where divorce has taken place.

### **Sampling Procedure**

In this study, purposive non-probability sampling was used to select the sample to explore the effects of parental divorce on youth development in Itsani village. Purposive sampling, which is known as a

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<sup>28</sup> Jaroslava Mackova et al., "Crisis in the Family and Positive Youth Development: The Role of Family Functioning," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16, no. 10 (2019): 1678.

<sup>29</sup> David Teye Doku et al., "Health and Socioeconomic Circumstances over Three Generations as Predictors of Youth Unemployment Trajectories," *European Journal of Public Health* 29, no. 3 (2019): 517–23.

<sup>30</sup> Sun-A Lee, "Romantic Relationships in Young Adulthood: Parental Divorce, Parent-Child Relationships during Adolescence, and Gender," *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 28, no. 2 (2019): 411–23.

judgemental procedure, was used because it enabled the researcher to select subjects from the researcher’s sampling frame simply because they have specific characteristics that the researcher desired. The researcher selectively targeted the youth affected by parental divorce in Itsani village.

**Sample size**

The sample size selected from the whole population is 10 participants who formed part of the study. It was selected from different variables such as age and gender. The study focused on participants from 16 – 21 years of age.

**Data collection methods**

In the process of collecting information, the researcher first asked for permission from the village gatekeepers, and participants had to sign a consent form. The researcher used face-to-face interviews to gather information since interviews helped the researcher gather more information.

**Data analysis**

The research used a qualitative approach. It explored the social interactions and social behaviour of the effects of parental divorce and its location. The data was analysed using thematic analysis. Data was presented in a narrative form.

**Ethical considerations**

The researcher considered the following ethics:

**Informed consent:** In this study, the researcher used the ethic of informed consent to inform the participants about what the study is all about and the advantages and disadvantages. The researcher introduced herself to the gatekeepers of the place where the study was conducted (Itsani village) and explained the purpose of the study and what the village could benefit from the study.

**Voluntary participation:** The researcher did not force participants to participate in the study. However, if the participants changed their minds and wanted to withdraw, the researcher respected their decision.

**Confidentiality:** The researcher intends to keep the information of the respondents confidential in a way that no one will be able to access the information given by the participants.

**Avoidance of harm:** The researcher did not expose participants to any physical or psychological harm. The researcher did not ask sensitive questions that would harm the participants. If the participant needed counselling, it followed immediately after the participation.

**PRESENTATION OF DATA AND ANALYSIS**

This section presents findings on the effects of parental divorce on youth development in Itsani village. The data is presented using the thematic system and narrative forms.

**Biographical Information**

The youth at Itsani village were interviewed to investigate the effects of parental divorce on youth development. The selected youth have experienced parental divorce while growing up. The profile consists of 3 aspects, namely, age, gender, and marital status of parents. The bibliographical information of the study participants is indicated in Table 1.

**Biographical information**

Age	Gender
16	Female
21	Male
18	Female
17	Female
20	Female
19	Male
18	Male

19	Female
16	Male
20	Male

From the above information, a conclusion can be drawn that the number of participants was equal.

### Factors that lead to Parental Divorce

Most of the contributing factors that lead to parents getting divorced were said to be domestic abuse, financial problems, lack of support, and mental health issues. These are explained below:

#### *Domestic Abuse*

Domestic abuse is the term used to define the violent actions taken by an individual against another, especially in a family setting. The following are the participants' views:

**Participant A**, *“My father was an abusive man; he used to abuse me and my siblings as well as my mother. The abuse was mostly emotional and physical, to the point where my mother was forced to file for a divorce and to live separately from him.”*

**Participant C**, *“In my case, it was very different as I endured sexual abuse from my father; it repeated itself for months until I decided to write a note to my mother because I was afraid to tell her in person.”*

The participants above are male and female who encountered domestic abuse in their homes. They both believe that domestic abuse led to their parents getting divorced. The above quotes give evidence that domestic violence contributes to negative and traumatizing youth development. The findings correlate with those of Brassiolo, who found that domestic abuse results in marriage dissolution.<sup>31</sup>

#### *Financial problems*

In this regard, participants responded as follows:

**Participant B**, *“My mother was the only one who was working, she always picked fight with my father and insulted him for not contributing any money towards the upbringing of the family.”*

**Participant D**, *“My parents are not working. They depend on my younger sibling’s child support grant, which is not enough to buy groceries for the whole month. This is the main problem that makes them quarrel daily.”*

These two participants believe that financial problems that are brought about by unemployment generally lead to verbal abuse and, most often, quarrels and physical abuse as well. This is a consistent general opinion that financial problems are harmful to married couples and can cause serious problems in a marriage.

#### **Lack of support**

In this vein, participants said the following:

**Participant A**, *“ There was a time when my mother suggested to my father that she should open a business outlet in the township. My father answered by saying that he would not contribute anything to this endeavour because my mother lacked the acumen to make it as a businessperson.”*

**Participant D**, *“I have noticed that my mother does not give care to my father, especially when he is sick. This increases the level of his depression and anger. Unfortunately, he unleashed this anger on us as his children because he was unable to face my mother.”*

<sup>31</sup> Pablo Brassiolo, “Domestic Violence and Divorce Law: When Divorce Threats Become Credible,” *Journal of Labor Economics* 34, no. 2 (April 2016): 443–77, <https://doi.org/10.1086/683666>.

The findings show that parents who divorced due to a lack of support. The lack of emotional and financial support by a spouse in times of need creates the feeling of wanting out of the marriage. Wallerstein found that spouses want partners whom they can fully depend on and always rely on. Marriage is all about being there for each other, even under adverse circumstances.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Mental Health Challenges***

Under this theme, participants responded as follows:

**Participant F**, *“My mother lacked anger management skills, and this led to her being so violent at home. She would beat us harshly so that my father decided to leave her and eventually took us with him just to protect us from her.”*

**Participant J**, *“I witnessed the insecurities and anger of my mother. Her manners and attitude drove my father out of the marriage, and he went to stay with his newly found mistress. My mother would insult and belittle him in public. This she continued to do even in front of us.”*

The above-mentioned participants believed that the cause of their parents’ divorce was due to unmanaged anger, insecurities, and unmanaged depression. The findings indicated that depression and anxiety are the cornerstones of uncontrolled anger. Mental wellness is highly needed, as the lack thereof limits marriage functionality in many families. From the data presented and the analysis above, respondents agreed that parental divorce is caused by, amongst others, domestic abuse, financial difficulties, lack of support, and lack of mental wellness. Some participants also indicated that emotional abuse and insecurities can ruin a marriage.

### **The Effects of Parental Divorce on Youth Development at Itsani Village**

The researchers wanted to establish the effects of parental divorce on the psycho-social development of youth in Itsani village. The question was posed to participants to understand if there was a correlation between divorce and the poor performance of children of divorced parents at school. Their responses are presented below:

#### **Poor Academic Performance**

Poor academic performance refers to the low grades an individual obtains. This is the minimum grade one acquires than a normal grade one can obtain. The following views from participants are an indication that parental divorce negatively affects children’s academic performance.

**Participant A**: *“I am in grade 11, and my parents have just divorced. Life has never been easier for me at school. It was hard for me to concentrate on my studies because of what my parents were going through. I spent a lot of time thinking about their separation rather than focusing on my studies.”*

**Participant C**: *“In spite of the challenges my parents went through with their divorce case, I managed to pass my grade 12 exams well. I poured out my frustrations on books and my studies, and this paid off well. However, I have seen a lot of students whose parents went through the same fate, struggling with their schoolwork.”*

**Participant D**: *“My father stopped paying for my extra classes after he divorced my mother, and that has negatively affected my grade.”*

Most participants reported that parental divorce has negatively affected their academic performance. They indicated that instead of focusing on their studies, they found themselves thinking about their lives after the separation of their parents. This separation posed challenges in their lives, especially since they were now unsure of who was going to pay their fees.

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<sup>32</sup> J. Wallerstein, *The Good Marriage: How and Why Love Lasts* (Plunkett Lake Press, 2019).

### **Financial Instability**

In responding to the questions posed about their financial stability (or lack thereof), participants responded as follows:

**Participant B**, *“Before my parents divorced, I was provided with everything essential by both my parents. The divorce changed it all as I was taken to my grandmother’s place with no parent taking care of my essential needs, such as toiletries.”*

**Participant D**, *“My father does not give us money every month like he used to. My mother feeds us on the child support grant of my younger siblings.”*

### **Poor Social Relationships**

The participants had this to say.

**Participant A**, *“I am deeply depressed. My development was not as normal as other young people from my neighbourhood. I isolated myself from others and had suicidal thoughts.”*

**Participant D**, *“Keeping friends is one of the hardest things for me, I just feel unaccepted, and this makes me distance myself from others, I am just too ashamed of my family situation.”*

**Participant E**, *“It is difficult for me to date one person at a time; having one girlfriend gives me endless insecurities, thinking that my partner might be cheating on me.”*

Parental divorce leads to poor social relationships. The young people find it hard to accept and adapt to the new ways of living. These effects of parental divorce have contributed to the social withdrawal of many young people who have been stressed a lot about their status. The findings correlate with the study of Manyema, who states that youth turn to withdraw from social interaction with their peers as they experience emotional stress caused by parental divorce. In addition, Lee said that youth who experienced parental divorce are more likely to have a lack of trust in their relationships.<sup>33</sup>

The data collected shows that parental divorce not only affects the social relationships of young people, but it also affects their emotional well-being and their self-esteem. Manyema argues that most of these youth believe that nothing good can come out of their hard work.<sup>34</sup> In addition, a lot of young people view themselves as incompetent with nothing to achieve. In some cases, it is evident that young people lack financial support for their basic needs because they have no parent who is providing them with such.

### **Effects of Parental Divorce on Youth Development**

Some young people mentioned various issues that are alarming in their village. These issues are reported to be happening on a daily basis, as indicated below.

**Participant A**, *“Dropping out of school was the best option for me after my parents got divorced because I struggled to pass my subjects without attending extra classes. My mother could not afford to pay, whilst my father decided not to pay.”*

**Participant B**, *“You know it is hard to live a normal, healthy life after parental divorce while you are a female child living with the stepfather. I was molested and raped. When I told my mother, she told me not to tell anyone, including the police, because we would be left homeless with no one to financially take care of us.”*

**Participant D**, *“My life has been a mess, now I have become more violent toward other youth whose parents still live together. I am angry that neither of my parents is living with me. I really miss them, how we spent time together as a family.”*

<sup>33</sup> Lee, “Romantic Relationships in Young Adulthood: Parental Divorce, Parent-Child Relationships during Adolescence, and Gender.”

<sup>34</sup> Mercy Manyema and Linda M. Richter, “Adverse Childhood Experiences: Prevalence and Associated Factors among South African Young Adults,” *Heliyon* 5, no. 12 (December 2019): e03003, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2019.e03003>.

As per the data presented above, it is evident that parental divorce affects society. Youth struggle to accept the new changes happening in their families, which results in some of them becoming more aggressive towards others. While some are stigmatized, they become bullies as a way of trying to cope with stress and to have a sense of belonging in society. Youth are more affected by divorce because some of them are at risk of contracting diseases and unplanned pregnancies after being raped.

The different responses clearly show that parental divorce has adverse effects on the development of youth and the community. Although few respondents participated because it was voluntary participation, it has been revealed that, indeed, there is a relationship between poor academic performance, financial instability, poor social relationships, and parental divorce.

### **Discussion Summary**

The study revealed that there were several effects of parental divorce on the development of youth. The study shows that the youth's poor academic performance, financial instability, and poor social relationships were the result of parental divorce. Youth development was disturbed and traumatising, which led to improper growth. This shows that youth were not provided with essential tools to help them grow in a healthy environment. The study concluded that youth development under divorce is depressing, leading to future financial instability and a lack of conflict resolution, which results in poor social relationships. Finally, the study concluded that parental divorce causes some youth experiencing it to have suicidal thoughts in the village.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Serious interventions are needed to curb the effects of parental divorce on youth development at Itsani village and to help youth experiencing parental divorce cope with the sudden change in their family settings. The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study.

#### **The Role of the Government**

The government should introduce programmes that are led by a well-trained therapist in rural areas such as Itsani village to help youth experiencing parental divorce cope. Such programmes will help them adapt to the new ways of living and help them understand why divorce is sometimes the only solution. The government should set up a mandatory policy to monitor the youth whose parents have just divorced. This will help them know whether an individual is safe to live in that environment or not. Dialogue sessions will further help youth express their feelings, thoughts, and emotions about the change; such a thing can help improve their ability to let go of the past and focus on making a greater impact in their lives. The government should introduce after-school programmes with young tutors who will be helping those who are unable to perform well in their studies.

#### **The Role of the Youth**

Youths should accept help from different stakeholders who are reaching out to them. They should understand that their parental divorce is not their fault and that it must not change them for the worse, but rather change them for the better. Youths are responsible for their own failures and successes; this should make youths focus more on their studies rather than worrying about what they cannot change. Youth in Itsani village should stand united to fight the abuse and trauma inflicted on them by seeking help from the relevant officials. This is because youth are part of the community that can fight rebellious, criminal, and victimizing activities. The youth at Itsani to engage more in social activities, social engagement will help bring their self-confidence, have regard for the interests of others and enable them to get used to the situation at hand quickly.

#### **The Role of Itsani Village Leaders**

Itsani village leaders need to advocate for youth who are afraid of reporting physical, emotional, and sexual abuse to police officers. The community leaders need to set up programmes that will keep the youth busy. Some of the programmes will serve as a counselling process. However, counselling should be provided to the affected youth for them to be able to come back to social activities or social engagement.

## The Role of Social Workers

The social workers should take on serious measures to protect youth who are being molested and raped, some being physically abused and ensure law enforcement. Some youths are living with relatives due to parental divorce. Basically, the findings show that youth lack basic needs. Social workers should provide solutions rather than only listen to their challenges.

## CONCLUSION

The study sought to examine the factors leading to divorce, how divorce affects youth development, and how it affects society. The findings show that domestic violence contributes to marriage dissolution, resulting in negative and traumatising youth development. The study has further illustrated the lack of support, mental health challenges as factors contributing to divorce, and strongly affects the lives of youth living in that situation. Findings show that there is a need for coping strategies for youth experiencing divorce, and recommended solutions based on the four roles: the government's roles, youth roles, social workers' roles and the village's role. The study concludes that youth are negatively affected by divorce, and coping strategies are needed for them to be able to deal positively with the traumatic experience of divorce. Particularly, findings support the need for various interventions to develop defence mechanisms against the effects of divorce.

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