

Beyond Winning: Lived Experiences of Thriving Young Professionals Raised in Solo-Parent Families

Giselle Ann E. Manansala*, Gladiola A. Eje-Dimaculangan
University of Batangas, Batangas City, Philippines

*Corresponding Author Email: giselleann.enriquez@ub.edu.ph

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Abstract. Understanding the factors and mechanisms contributing to the success of thriving young professionals raised in solo-parent families can provide valuable insights into how these individuals overcame challenges and achieved personal and professional fulfillment. The research aimed to propose an intervention program based on the lived experiences of adults raised in solo-parent families, specifically their experiences, their views of their challenges, how they thrived despite being raised in solo-parent families, and what intervention program companies can implement for young professionals raised in solo-parent families. The study employed a phenomenological approach to analyze the participants' lived experiences and used thematic analysis to examine classifications and identify recurring themes in the data. The experiences of the participants included financial struggles, lack of understanding regarding parental separation, parental abandonment, toxic family dynamics, adverse emotions, and a fearful-avoidant attachment style during adult life. The participants viewed their challenges with a positive perspective and motivation to thrive in life. Despite being raised in a solo-parent family, they thrived through faith, a positive mindset, and grit.

Keywords: Young professionals; Solo-parenting.

1.0 Introduction

The modern family structure has undergone significant changes over the past few decades, with an increasing number of young professionals growing up in solo-parent families. The young adults raised in solo-parent families, where one parent is primarily responsible for their upbringing, can have diverse and unique experiences and challenges. Many of these young professionals from solo-parent families may have encountered challenges that affected their personal and professional lives, as being raised in such a family can lead to emotional distress, including feelings of abandonment, low self-esteem, anxiety, or depression. These unresolved emotions can impact their overall well-being and professional performance. They may lack the stability and support systems typically found in intact families. They may need access to guidance, mentorship, or financial resources that could assist in their career development.

A report from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (2019) estimates that about 280 million people worldwide have depression, and one of the risk factors identified is a history of childhood trauma, including abuse and parental separation. Another report by the National Bureau of Economic Research (2022) found that children raised by single mothers are more likely to have lower educational attainment, experience unemployment, and have lower earnings in adulthood. The data mentioned supports the claim that parental separation can manifest in adult mental health. Individuals who experienced growing up in a solo-parent family during childhood or adolescence may be at a higher risk of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and relationship

difficulties later in life. The emotional and psychological consequences of parental separation can impact an individual's well-being for many years. The World Health Organization released another report that the Philippines has estimated that the overall prevalence of depression in the Philippines among young adults is 8.9% (World Health Organization, 2021), which suggests that about 1 in 10 young adults experiences moderate to severe depressive symptoms based on the 2021 population estimate (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022). The depressive symptoms are more prevalent in those with less education and toxic family systems, including domestic violence and separated parents.

Adults raised in solo-parent families, such as those who have experienced parental separation, can be at an increased risk of developing depression. The impact of a broken family on adult depression is influenced by various factors, including the individual's resilience, coping strategies, available support networks, and the specific circumstances surrounding the family breakdown. The experience of parental separation can be emotionally distressing for adults, even if it occurred during their childhood. Dissolution of the family unit, changes in living arrangements, and the associated feelings of loss, guilt, or rejection can contribute to the development of depressive symptoms. Being raised in solo-parent families can further affect the quality and stability of interpersonal relationships. Adults raised in solo-parent families may face difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy relationships due to trust issues, fear of abandonment, or challenges in expressing emotions. These interpersonal challenges can contribute to feelings of loneliness and isolation and can contribute to depressive symptoms.

Chen (2018) studied the effects of parental separation on the resilience of children who have experienced trauma. Results indicated no significant main effect of parental separation on resilience. However, trauma severity emerged as a significant moderator of the relationship between parental separation and children's resilience, and gender emerged as a significant predictor of certain aspects of resilient functioning. When more significant risks are found, we are beginning to understand better the factors that differentiate the children in single-parent families who develop disturbances from those who do not. Understanding why family instability places some children at greater risk is essential in planning programs and policies to promote healthy children and families. This section briefly summarizes five perspectives on the possible pathways through which these effects are transmitted: economic hardship, loss of parental support and supervision, lack of community resources, parental conflict, and life stress and instability (Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars, 2018).

Parental separation has been linked to an increased likelihood of reporting psychological distress in adulthood, but relatively little is known about how this association may have changed over time. One hypothesis is that as the experience of separation has become more common, the association with psychological distress will reduce (the 'reduced effect' hypothesis). Previous evidence using the British birth cohorts does not support this hypothesis, but past studies have several limitations that we aim to address. A study by Bartley et al. (2019) showed little evidence to support the 'reduced effect' hypothesis: parental separation was associated with a similarly increased likelihood of reporting psychological distress in adulthood for men and women in both cohorts.

Living in a solo-parent family can disrupt the usual support systems and family dynamics. The absence of one or both parents or changes in custody arrangements can impact an individual's sense of belonging, identity, and emotional stability. These disruptions can contribute to the development or exacerbation of depressive symptoms even during adulthood. These mental health considerations and factors can affect a person's ability to thrive, leaving most individuals to choose mere survival rather than thriving. When someone or something is in "survival mode," the primary objective is to overcome immediate threats and ensure their basic survival. It involves a reactive and often short-term approach to navigating challenging situations.

Within this context, there is a subset of young professionals who not only navigate the complexities of a solo-parent family but have also managed to thrive in their personal and professional lives. Understanding the factors and mechanisms contributing to their thriving can provide valuable insights into how young professionals from solo-parent families can overcome challenges and achieve personal and professional fulfillment. Thriving goes beyond survival and encompasses a more holistic and proactive approach to life. It implies a state of flourishing, growth, and fulfillment. Thriving involves meeting the basic needs and actively pursuing personal development,

well-being, and success in various aspects of life. It includes physical, mental, and emotional well-being, pursuing meaningful relationships, achieving personal goals, and finding purpose and satisfaction. Thriving is about embracing challenges as opportunities for growth and consistently striving for progress.

Human thriving has attracted the interest of social and behavioral scientists for several decades. In the broader psychological literature, thriving is typically conceptualized as a dynamic adaptation process to physical, psychological, or social adversity, leading to positive outcomes such as personal growth and enhanced functioning. (Kleine et.al., 2019). Evolutionary psychology, though often not included in discussions on optimal human development, provides a framework that benefits considerations of human thriving. Humans exhibit a high degree of niche construction by altering their environment, affecting their offspring. Unique human capacities enable such niche construction, but these same capacities are then required to 'mind the gap' between human nature and the altered environmental niche. As such, thriving may be understood as the ability of the individual to navigate difficulties resulting from a mismatch between their nature and niche. (King, et al., 2018) While surviving focuses on immediate necessities and overcoming obstacles, thriving entails a broader perspective that encompasses personal growth, happiness, and fulfillment. Thriving individuals or systems often exhibit resilience, adaptability, and a proactive mindset in pursuing their goals and navigating life's challenges.

This research explored the experiences and perspectives of thriving young professionals raised in solo-parent families. By examining their stories, identifying the factors contributing to their success, and understanding their challenges, this study sheds light on the unique dynamics in their lives. Furthermore, it highlighted the potential implications of thriving for individuals who have grown up in solo-parent families, both in terms of their well-being and contribution to society. This study determined how these challenging experiences helped them thrive and become successful in their chosen paths. It also identified their coping mechanisms, mindset, and psychological stress responses during their journey toward achieving their goals and transcending the challenges met during their earlier years. The results of this study influenced the formulation of a new mindfulness-based intervention program for young professionals from solo-parent families of origin.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a phenomenological approach to analyze the participants' lived experiences. Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that focuses on studying an individual's lived experiences within the world. The goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of this experience – both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced (Neubauer, 2019).

2.2 Research Participants

The participants were selected through purposive sampling, which refers to intentionally choosing participants based on their common characteristics, backgrounds, and experiences. The present study employed the participation of five thriving young professionals raised in solo-parent families. Young professionals from different fields of work and reasons for parental separation were asked to participate in the study. This helped to establish variation, including documentation of individual differences based on their lived experiences. The selected participants of the study were young professionals from solo-parent families, aged 25-35, born and raised in the Philippines, who grew up in a solo-parent family, specifically from permanently separated parents, and are thriving individuals. They have completed their bachelor's degree before entering their current work, are working under full-time jobs for at least five years, and hold supervisory positions in their respective careers. To identify if the participants are thriving individuals, they were asked first to accomplish the Flourishing Scale, a brief 8-item summary measure of the respondent's self-perceived success in critical areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism. The Scale provided a single psychological well-being score. All the respondents obtained a score of 40-56, which implies they are qualified to become part of the final pool of participants.

2.3 Research Instrument

Conducting an interview was one tool for acquiring data in qualitative research; thus, it was the tool that was used to get the participants of the study to know their experiences. Interviews provided extensive information from individual participants and are especially useful for exploring sensitive matters that some may be hesitant to discuss in a group environment. It also discovered individuals' outlooks, experiences, principles, and inspiration

on specific topics. The researcher used The Flourishing Scale, a brief 8-item summary measure of the respondent's self-perceived success in critical areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism. The Scale provided a single psychological well-being score, which gave the researcher a grasp of the participants' flourishing score. Afterward, the researcher constructed semi-structured interview guide questions to be used in the data gathering. Semi-structured interviews were given to the participants of this study to explore more of their stories and experiences. For the basis in creating the interview guide questions, research problems were useful to fulfill it. The questions were centered on "what goes on within" the participants, and they were asked to explain their lived experiences in a language that has as much freedom of intellectual and societal constraints as feasible. (See Appendix B for the interview guide questions). Three field experts validated the semi-structured interview questions to ensure the content validity of the questions.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure and Analysis

Depending on the participants' preferences, interviews took place both virtually and face-to-face. The interview lasted 45-100 minutes, depending on whether the participant answered the questions. No one was allowed to enter the meeting while the session was ongoing except for the researcher and the participant to avoid hesitation during the interview. After the data has been gathered, data analysis follows using thematic analysis to examine classifications and identify recurring themes (patterns) in the data. The themes were obtained from the statements of the participants. Related statements were transcribed. Emerging concepts were drawn out from the transcriptions. Afterward, sub-categories and categories were obtained to develop the common themes among the participants' experiences. It also detailed the data and used interpretations to address the topic. After the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data, the themes obtained were validated by the respondents based on their experiences, views of challenges, and ways they thrived.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The researcher followed the ethical guidelines provided by the Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association and the University of Batangas, which resulted in observing ethical protocols. Before conducting the study, the researcher disclosed the nature and purpose of the study and respected norms and charters. Informed consent was given to and secured by the participants. They have the choice to withdraw from the study if they want to, and no participants will be forced to participate in the study. As was the data collection procedure, the interview process was explained to them comprehensively. Pseudonyms or code names were used for the participant's identity in line with anonymity and confidentiality. The respondents' identities were kept anonymous throughout the process, and all the details collected will be held strictly confidential. All the data were stored in a device or storage to maintain the privacy and safety of the information. The availability of the materials, such as the recordings and transcript of the interview, was restricted to the researcher. The researcher assured that the study would not harm the participants and did not ask questions beyond the scope of the study and research problem. Only matters relevant to the study were evaluated. Communication was clear and direct, and the use of appropriate and professional language was considered.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Experiences of the Participants

The experiences of thriving young professionals from solo-parent families encompassed unique challenges, opportunities, and dynamics that shaped their personal and professional lives. The themes obtained from their early experiences were financial struggles, lack of understanding regarding parental separation, parental abandonment, toxic family dynamics, and adverse emotions. The impact of their experiences manifested in their fearful-avoidant attachment style in their adulthood.

Financial Struggles

Solo-parent families often have limited support systems compared to two-parent households. This might mean fewer opportunities for sharing expenses, such as housing or utilities, making it even harder to manage finances effectively. A challenge faced by solo-parent families is usually the solo income of the parent left with their children. All participants experienced financial struggles, specifically getting support from other people and financial abandonment, since their parents separated.

One specific reason the respondents experienced financial struggle was because of the lack of child support after the separation. The respondents' financial struggles were significantly exacerbated by the non-custodial parent's lack of child support. Child support is typically intended to help cover the costs of raising a child and can provide much-needed financial support to the custodial parent. When this support is lacking, it can create additional challenges for the custodial parent and the children involved.

Most of the participants experienced getting economic support from other people. Four participants narrated stories of getting economic support from other people, including extended families and University professors. After their father left them, YP 5 stayed at their aunt's place since her mother also left her to work as a volunteer abroad. Around four months after the breakup, her mother left to volunteer in Africa. As a volunteer, she only gets allowances, which do not suffice for her basic needs and tuition fees. She relied heavily on monetary support from other family members, especially her aunt, who cared for her during these times.

"Yes, I experienced financial difficulty because it also came at a time when my mother had no job. My mother was working as a volunteer, so the salary in Africa was only an allowance. How much more can I get? So, I heavily relied on my mother's brother, who teaches at the school."

YP 1 experienced the same, and his grandmother also helped him, and his sister get financial support since his mother does not have a permanent job.

"My mother really supported me, with the help of my grandmother. They are the ones who helped my mother and my sister graduate. We can continue our studies with everyday expenses because my mother's work is not permanent but from client to client."

Another common experience is the financial abandonment of parent/s. Respondents narrated how they struggled because the father did not regularly support the children. YP 3 recalled how her mother often gets antagonistic feelings toward her father for failing to give her monthly allowance. Her father would send her a small amount from time to time. She would accept them, but the lack of monetary support from her father and having a single income to rely on led to the family's lack of financial resources.

"My father cannot provide for us; he is not the one who can send money regularly."

YP 1, on the other hand, had the same experience. He lost communication with his father, who does not give regular support.

"Afterward, my mother raised me as a single mom. Although there was communication with my father, it was not what you can say is consistent, especially with the financial support."

The respondents' financial struggles have roots in their poor family status, specifically the lack of economic resources and difficulty obtaining financial resources. For YP 2, his extended family in the province cannot support him because they heavily rely on their fishing occupation for their monetary needs. On days without a catch, they would struggle as a family regarding economic needs, but he reiterated that his extended family tried their best to support him in every way they could. He still expressed gratitude to his extended family for their help during his difficult times.

"My relatives cannot support me financially. In Mindoro, there is no means of living except when there are many fish to catch; only then will you make money. So, I cannot force them to support me. But they provide for my basic needs: food and transportation."

YP 2 also remembered how he experienced poverty at a very young age, as one of the poorest families in their barangay. They struggled financially and experienced a lack of economic resources. He narrated how he and his siblings experienced eating only two heavy meals a day instead of the regular three.

"Our family is one of the poorest in our barangay. By poorest, it means we can only eat twice a day."

YP 2 remembered difficulty obtaining financial resources while living in the province. After the separation, he stayed with his aunts and uncles, and his extended family could not financially support his education and activities. The only source of income was fishing, which is a seasonal business. Four out of five respondents experienced an early onset of responsibility due to their unique circumstances. They found themselves taking on additional financial burdens at an early age and assuming more mature roles within their families through fulfilling multiple tasks as a student, looking for multiple ways to earn money, and cultural expectations on the role of the eldest in the family. This early burden pushed them to step into a parental role, needing to provide economic support to their siblings or even their parents during challenging times. Some took on part-time jobs or contributed to the family expenses to alleviate the financial burden on their parents and siblings and support their needs and aspirations.

YP 2 fulfilled multiple tasks as a student. In addition to academics, he was also a school paper contributor and a student assistant. He regularly sold snacks to the University offices to provide for his boarding house, allowance, and other living expenses. He had to juggle multiple roles since he had no one to rely on and had to support himself to finish his studies.

"Then sometimes I go home at around ten o'clock because we are still working on articles. Then, my duty as Student Assistant (SA) is sometimes from 6:30 AM - 1:30 PM; my class will start right after, maybe until 8:30 PM, and then I will do articles for the school paper. Then I spend Saturdays and Sundays working for the teachers, giving massages, cleaning their houses, doing laundry, and ironing; what I earn from there, I save money to pay for the rent. After that, I also sold snacks for my additional allowance. So those are the many crying moments of being SA before."

YP 3 had an experience where she had to find three jobs in a day to provide for the family's needs, including her father's medical expenses. She looked for multiple ways to earn money, and she later became a full-time government employee, a part-time College instructor, and a radio disc jockey.

"That is why I had three jobs in a day. I worked in the government, taught at a university, and worked part-time at the radio station. There were months, or was it a year, when I had three jobs in one day because one of my main reasons was that I needed some extra income to support my family."

YP 1 took on freelance clients in addition to his full-time job as a physical therapist so he could send his younger sister to a good school. He wanted to provide for his sister the life he could not live as a child. As the eldest sibling, he was responsible for raising his sister and paying for her education.

"I had to take a full-time job and some part-time clients to earn more to provide my sister with a life not provided for me."

The resilience theory by Taormina (2018) excludes external factors in an individual's resilience, which is evident in how these participants thrived despite their financial struggles. They experienced various financial struggles, yet they could finish their education and sustain their lives.

Lack of Understanding Regarding Parental Separation

For the participants, the lack of understanding regarding parental separation was a huge experience that they had to bear during challenging times, and it had significant emotional and psychological impacts on them. The participants' lack of understanding regarding their parents' separation stemmed from their parents' lack of explanation. For all of them, no one properly explained the reason for the breakup. There was no proper transition, and they experienced high levels of stress at the abrupt change in their lives after their parents parted ways.

The lack of understanding regarding parental separation led to the respondents' confusion, emotional distress, and a range of challenges as they tried to make sense of their changing family dynamics. They struggled to comprehend the complexities of adult relationships from the lens of a child and the factors that contribute to their parents' separation. Their limited understanding gave rise to various misconceptions and created additional emotional burdens for them during this difficult time.

Four out of five respondents had a lack of understanding regarding their parents' failed marriages. YP 2 said no one explained the reason for the parent's separation. They were left out of the blue, and no one talked about the situation because, during those times, marital separation and infidelity were taboo and were avoided during conversations.

"It seems like we were left out of the blue. It is like we do not know anything. No one explained what happened either. At that time, in 2008, those things were taboo, and that is why we did not know."

YP 1 said that he almost did not feel the transition in the family since his father had been working abroad since he was a child. His parents did not explain the reason for the breakup. His mother was pregnant with his younger sister at the time of separation. He understood that when his father did not go home, he knew his parents were already separated.

"Then, it led to the point that they broke up. For example, my father was there one day, and the next day, he was gone. There was no proper explanation. For example, my parents talked to me that they were going to break up."

YP 4 knew the reason for the parental separation since it became public by then, but his parents never explained what would happen with the family. He had already seen the separation, but his father had left without saying goodbye. He left without any plans on how he could sustain them despite his father being the sole breadwinner of the family.

"My father just left us without an explanation. However, we expected them to separate because they always fight."

Meanwhile, YP 3 was left questioning most of her childhood. She did not understand that she came from a single-parent family while growing up. Nobody explained the family situation to her, and she was just stuck waiting for the day when her father would go back home, not knowing that her parents already decided to separate ways.

"Right after, there was nothing I did not understand. I think it was only when I got older that I understood that I came from a broken family."

Parental Abandonment

Parental abandonment following separation was a significant aspect of the lives of the respondents and had profound effects on their well-being and development. The absence of a parent was an emotionally challenging time for the respondents, disrupting the sense of security, stability, and routine they may have previously experienced. The respondents experienced parental abandonment through the lack of a father figure and falling apart in the family. Four participants experienced a lack of a father figure. YP 1 and YP 3 both struggled living with an absent father. YP 5 had to bear with a toxic family setup, while YP 2 lived a life with a loss of communication with his father.

YP 3 grew up without a father figure, even his uncles. She longed for one, especially during adolescence. When she had her first romantic relationship, she longed for a father who would protect her and give her advice when she needed it.

"I do not have a father figure. I did not experience the father who would look for me. Why are you not there at night? I do not have that; I was looking for that because I did not experience that. I looked for my father to advise me about love life, but there was no such thing."

Ho (2018) outlined the effect that a father's absence can have on child development, highlighting the importance of having a father figure and the negative ramifications that a father's absence can have. Associated effects include stability and behavioral problems, as well as social and emotional withdrawal.

YP 5 recalled when her mother did not allow her to communicate with her father. Being much older than her, her sister would make up stories so her mother would allow her to go with her sister, not knowing that they would meet their father.

"We only see each other when my sister runs away with me once or twice a year. My father's name differs on the phone, so they cannot know because I will be scolded."

One respondent experienced a loss of communication with their father. YP 2 said he did not remember his father reaching out after his parent's separation, nor did he try.

"I had no communication with my father after they separated."

The respondent finally rekindled communication with his father when he was employed near his father's residence.

Some respondents also experienced the family falling apart due to physical distance from family members. Due to conflicts brought on by the separation, they also experienced stress, breakdowns in communication or relationships, and physical separation, leading to a deterioration of the family unit. Parental separation occurs rarely without emotional distress to at least one member of the family. All five participants had to endure the falling apart of the family on top of the parental separation. YP 2 recalled one of the "darkest moments" of his life when, after the separation of his parents, he had to be physically separated from his mother and siblings.

Two respondents experience falling apart from the family through physical distance from family members. YP 2 remembered physical separation from mother and siblings. After their parents separated, his mother suffered from a mental illness that incapacitated her to support her children. His extended family decided to take one child each since no one could support all five siblings.

"Our relatives decided to separate us as siblings. So I was there with one of my aunts, and my other siblings were with other aunts."

After YP 5's parents' breakup, her sister stayed with her father while her brother had to own a family by then. Her mother left her to stay with her aunt to work as a volunteer abroad 3-4 months after the separation. Maybe a good 3 or 4 months, and then she left for Africa as a volunteer. Our relationship did not strengthen after the separation; she left to volunteer. She recalled experiencing the trauma of being abandoned while many things happened at the same time. The separation, her mother leaving, and her living with the extended family she barely knew was too much for her to bear, causing her emotional distress because of the separation of the family members from her parents and siblings. Falling apart from the family also hindered regular communication and limited the quality and depth of interactions among family members, leading them towards psychological distress during times of struggle. The abandonment is falling apart pointed out significant implications for their relationships and overall well-being. Although a study by Jackson (2017) about the impact of parental divorce showed that the results indicate that the quality of social support had a significantly positive relationship with career expectations and romantic relationship confidence, the participants somehow found quality relationships even amidst the antagonistic relationships within the family.

Toxic Family Dynamics

Toxic family dynamics can exist in various families, including solo-parent families. When the respondents' respective families experienced a breakdown or separation, it contributed to additional challenges and complexities in the family dynamic. The respondents experienced toxic fathers and toxic interactions with family members. Some respondents recalled having to deal with their toxic fathers, mostly due to the vices of the parents who left, both before and after the separation. For most of them, their father became the precipitation of their parents' separation.

YP 4's father was involved in many toxic vices. The toxic vices of the parents who left included alcohol, gambling, and women. During the interview, YP 4 said that he was not comfortable talking about his father and that he still possesses ill feelings toward him. He remembered his father as someone with many vices, including women, gambling, and alcohol, which burdened the family physically and emotionally.

"My father is a womanizer; he gambles, and then he usually goes out with his friends; he seems to put his friends before his family, and then he is a drunkard, and even though he does not hurt us children, he hurts my mother physically and emotionally."

YP 3 narrated how his father was involved in gambling during her childhood. She did not understand the gravity of the situation back then, but she recalled a certain instance when she had to fetch his father from the gambling area as a child. She also witnessed how his father learned to drink alcohol more than a decade after the separation, which made her feel ashamed of her father.

"Then, I was an only child, and in my recall of my story, I was four years old when they separated from the house; my daddy was the one who left because, at that time, he was addicted to gambling. Then, while Daddy was in Ilijan, apart from everyone else, he also liked to drink, which is typical of those in rural areas."

Three respondents remembered experiencing a toxic interaction due to a conflicted relationship with family, which manifested in the harmful interaction between family members, both from immediate and extended families. YP 2 narrated a relationship conflict with their aunt when he goes home late. While he was a student assistant during college, he was also part of the school publication. With all his duties, he normally goes home late at night, and with this, he had a conflict with his aunt, leading him to decide to take the challenging risk of renting his room.

YP 4 also remembered a conflicted relationship with extended families after the father committed infidelity with the participant's aunt. After the revelation that his father had a relationship with his mother's sister-in-law, what used to be a happy and tightly-knit family relationship was broken. He felt lonely because his cousins, who used to be his closest friends, became estranged after what happened with their mother and the respondent's father. He acknowledged that his cousins were not the ones to blame, but they felt strong negative emotions and shame from what their parents did, so they had to separate ways. His cousins left their compound to find a new residence.

"He is my cousin. I am quite close to him because he is my age, so we are very close. But after it happened, we did not expect my father and aunt to do that, so our family was broken. So we had no communication; we separated, and they went elsewhere."

YP 5 recalled her life after the separation when, after three months, her mother had to leave the country to volunteer in Africa. She felt abandoned when she was left to her aunt to be taken care of. She found it difficult to adjust to the situation, much less to adjust to the new people in her life. During this time, she had difficulty adjusting when left with the extended family, from being the pampered youngest sister to someone who needed to adjust to a different family with a different culture.

"So when I moved in with my aunt, that was my struggle because they always scolded me, and my cousins always fought with me because I did not behave at home; it was like my aunt who seemed to be my guardian; maybe she was also protecting me because it seemed like she knows I do not know how to do the chores. It is like I do not know what I am going to do. Suddenly, my mom left like that, and then you do not want to be there with my dad, so I asked myself, what would I do?"

Adverse Emotions

The respondents experienced adverse emotions while they were growing up. These emotions became a negative defense mechanism during their struggles, and, as a result, they mourned the absence of the nurturing and stable family environment they desired or experienced before the separation. Adverse emotions refer to negative or unpleasant feelings and emotional states that had a detrimental impact on the respondents' well-being manifested through their adult relationships. The participants manifested negative defense mechanisms.

Defense mechanisms are psychological strategies people use to cope with or protect themselves from uncomfortable or distressing emotions, thoughts, or situations. While some defense mechanisms can be adaptive and helpful, others can be considered negative or maladaptive because they may ultimately lead to more significant psychological issues or hinder personal growth. Some respondents noted using negative defense

mechanisms to cope with their challenges. Specifically, the respondents experienced long-term denial, envy, and resentment before accepting the situation.

YP 1 narrated that she was in a long-term denial before accepting the situation stage for a long time, and she was only able to accept the reality of being raised in a solo-parent family when his father got sick. Then, she decided to stop questioning when he would have a father.

"When my father got sick, that is when I accepted that I came from a broken family."

YP 4 manifested latent feelings of envy in his statement that being envious of others did not help him cope with the challenges.

"I also value being contented because envy of others will only cause harm."

Meanwhile, YP 1 showed resentment towards his father growing up due to their conflicted relationship since he was a child. YP 1 narrated how he had an adverse relationship with his father as a child because of his harsh ways when he disciplines.

"My relationship with my father growing up was not okay."

The disruption in the respondents' family dynamics evoked feelings of loss and longing. They experienced a variety of adverse emotions, which led them to experience emotional distress. There may be various effects of divorce on children. According to Eyo (2018), some effects of parental separation on children might be problems of adjustment, psychological problems, becoming objects of abuse by parents/teachers, hatred towards one parent, lack of balance training, and being prone to social problems.

3.2 Impact of the Experiences in Adulthood

The respondents' experiences in childhood through adolescence from solo-parent families had lasting impacts on individuals as they transitioned into adulthood and established their relationships.

Fearful-avoidant Attachment Style

The fearful-avoidant attachment style, also known as the disorganized attachment style, is one of the four main attachment styles identified in attachment theory. The respondents exhibited various fearful-avoidant attachment styles manifested in their negative relationship behaviors because of their upbringing and the dynamics they experienced. The respondents admitted to negative relationship behaviors that manifested during their adulthood, specifically difficulty establishing relationships, need for validation and need for belongingness. Negative relationship behaviors are actions and patterns that can be harmful. The results of Zhiyuan et al.'s (2022) study supported this, finding that positive experiences buffer the effects of adverse experiences.

YP 1 had difficulty establishing relationships due to the emotional distress brought on by his father's wrongdoings. He often tends to distrust the genuineness of other people's behavior toward him, leading to difficulty forming relationships. This was supported by a study by Lacey et al. (2020), which stressed that disentangled the mechanisms between parental separation in childhood and adult psychological distress.

YP 5 narrated that she needs validation and is constantly trying to prove herself. Over the years, she became an overachiever because she wanted others to see her as someone who should not be looked down upon.

"I constantly desire to prove that I can do it; I must be on top of situations."

YP 5 stated that she has a high need for belongingness, which she found with her friends. She looks for love in her friends and their family. This also led her to get married very early, at 19, right after graduation. She wanted to "belong" and establish her identity by having her own family. However, she admitted that it was more difficult than it seems. It led to the eventual failure of her marriage. Her hesitation to tell more about her marriage was evident during the interview.

"As someone coming from a solo-parent family, I observed myself clinging to whatever validation in love and belongingness I wanted in my family. I clung to my friends, so during those moments, my friends seemed to fill me. That is why I am big on friendship."

The abovementioned findings were supported by Liang et al.'s (2020) study about adult attachment. Their attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance were also remarkably higher. The findings suggest that left-behind experiences impaired the development of the emotional-motivation system of left-behind experiences in childhood but facilitated the development of their survival-protection system.

3.3 Participants' Views on Their Challenges

Positive Perspective

All the participants saw a positive perspective, specifically feelings of gratitude, forgiveness, and hope for their situation despite the challenges they experienced. The lives of the respondents were not without challenges, yet despite the hardships, they chose to have a positive perspective, looking at and interpreting the world that focuses on the bright side of things, emphasizes the potential for growth and improvement, and seeks to find solutions and opportunities even in challenging situations.

Gratitude, the practice of recognizing and appreciating the positive aspects of life and acknowledging the kindness and support of others, was evident in YP 1 and 4 based on how they expressed their feelings of thankfulness.

YP 4 is full of inspiration due to his brother's sacrifices for the family, and he used gratitude to fuel his motivation to do well in life.

"I felt at that time that painting in construction would be my job until I grew old, but maybe my brother had a dream in life. His dream was not only for himself but also for his family. So what he wants is to get out of trouble; what he wants is to sympathize with us."

Furthermore, he is also thankful for the challenges and what he has achieved so far. He reiterated that he never even asked for anything but was blessed with so much more than what he had worked for.

"But I also feel thankful for where we are now. It is like we've overcome all the trials, and then I'm thankful that I didn't really ask for it, I didn't even pray for it, but it was given to us."

Looking back at his experiences, YP 1 cannot help but feel appreciation towards his mother because he was able to nurture a good relationship with her, and he was very grateful for his mother's efforts to raise him and his sister.

"Maybe I just appreciated my mother more because I got closer to her growing up."

The respondents showed conscious and deliberate decisions to release resentment, anger, or a desire for revenge toward the parent who has hurt them, regardless of whether the person deserves their forgiveness. Two participants also found forgiveness in them despite their parents' wrongdoings. One respondent developed a lack of resentment toward their father, while one was able to nurture feelings of acceptance.

YP 1 has been an active member of the Catholic Church's charism. Since going to church often, he developed a lack of resentment towards his father. His father might not have asked for forgiveness, but he gave it because he wanted to let go of the emotional baggage caused by his father's wrongdoings.

"I only had forgiveness for my father recently when I became active in the church. That showed me that he is not the one who is struggling with my decision not to forgive him but me because I carry it with me, that I have emotional baggage to carry because I can finally let go when I give myself the forgiveness that my father did not ask for."

Acceptance was also evident in the respondents, who acknowledged and embraced their reality, including their thoughts, feelings, circumstances, and the actions of others. YP 3 recalled that a major life event (sickness) led to her acceptance of the situation. After years of longing for a complete family, she finally accepted that she was indeed raised from a solo-parent family.

"When he got sick, it was like a turning point for me, and I said this is the time to stop questioning when he will be my father."

YP 2 and 5 also shared how they have hope for the future in the middle of the challenges. They believe that things can get better and that there are opportunities for improvement and positive change, paving the way for them to never stop reaching for their goals. For YP 5, this hope for the future kept her going. She recognizes that this hope is not toxic optimism. Rather, she knows that everything is going to be fine. She attributes it to being raised as a devout Catholic.

"It's not toxic optimism. I know that this is not the end. If I'm struggling now, this is not it; there's always another path that I'll be okay on, and everything will be okay."

During his statements, YP 2 expressed his hope to understand what happened in the family. This was because he only knew about what happened through hearsay when he was a young boy. No one in the family was able to explain to him the reason behind his parents' separation.

"I thought to myself, at the end of the tunnel, maybe there is a light that can explain what really happened."

In connection with the Adult Resilience Theory of Taormina (2018), the participants showed resilience despite challenging times, setting aside external factors. Maintaining a positive perspective involves cultivating positive thinking, which includes acknowledging and appreciating the good things in life, practicing gratitude, and reframing negative situations or setbacks as opportunities for growth and learning. It does not mean ignoring or denying the existence of challenges or difficulties but rather choosing to approach them with a hopeful and proactive mindset.

Motivation

Motivation is one of the evident themes in the views of the challenges expressed by the participants manifested through their grit. The respondents viewed their challenges as motivation to strive and create opportunities. The motivation to break the cycle of dysfunction and create a different narrative is strong. They are determined not to repeat the negative patterns they witnessed in their own family and, instead, actively work towards building healthier relationships and environments and a more comfortable life for their family.

The respondents' statements revealed grit. They possess a motivation to have a better life in the future and perseverance, particularly in achieving long-term goals. They can sustain effort and interest in a goal over an extended period, even in the face of difficulties, setbacks, and failures. One guiding principle for the success of people with traumatic childhood experiences is Duckworth's (2016) theory on grit. Grit is defined as the passion and sustained persistence applied toward long-term achievement, with no particular concern for rewards or recognition along the way. According to the author, grit is the greatest predictor of life achievement.

Common among four out of five respondents is the grit manifested through their motivation to have a better life in the future. YP 2 remembers his parents and how they were somehow stuck in poverty. He wanted to be the one to take the family out of poverty.

"My parents didn't work hard for us, so I want to step up so that the next generation after me will not have to suffer and will have a good life."

YP 1 reiterated his determination never to experience a lack of financial resources again. He wanted to provide for his mother and sister and secure a better life for his future family.

"I have not been able to get rid of what I have been carrying with me until now: I am afraid of being without anything financial-wise because I know the feeling of struggling. So it seems that until now, I have carried that with me that I do not want to experience, and I do not want to experience that with my future family. The future, so maybe I made too much of a way to work to earn money because I went through that as a kid growing up."

He also remembered telling himself as a child that he planned to help the family have a better life in the future. He wanted to give back to his mother for all her sacrifices and provide a comfortable life for her sister.

"I'm still young, and I don't really have any plans for that, although my father was no longer with me when I was growing up; my plans are how I can comfort him and how I can help him afterward."

Perseverance was evident in the statements of YP 2 and 4. YP 2 acknowledged that his parents were not able to provide well for their family. He belonged to a family that experienced poverty for several generations, and he was the one who stood up to become the person to lift the family from poverty.

"My parents didn't work hard for us, and that's why I want to step up so that the next generation after me will have a good life and not have to suffer."

YP 2 said that his experiences did not affect his dreams of having a better future. He established concrete plans on how to achieve his goals. He said reaching his dreams was just harder, but he knew he would make it.

"To me, his separation no longer affects my future plans because, before their separation, I had a plan ahead."

YP 4, on the other hand, continued to strive despite the apprehensions, especially because he was older than most of his classmates. He recalled that others would always ask him if he was studying, and he would deny it because he was too ashamed. But he also came to a point where he just continued working towards his dream.

"I do not pay attention to others anymore, and then I say in my mind that I am already here, so I will study and not think about what other people are saying anymore, even though I am quite old. I also really regret the money my older brother spends on my education."

All participants had the strong grit to rise above the challenges they faced growing up as individuals from solo-parent families. They developed a strong determination and perseverance to overcome the difficulties they encountered during their upbringing.

3.4 How the Participants Thrived Despite Being Raised in a Solo-Parent Family

The respondents thrived by drawing upon their unique experiences and strengths. This quality continued to serve them well as young professionals, enabling them to overcome challenges and persevere in adversity. The themes of how the young professionals thrived despite belonging to a solo-parent family were faith, flourishing, grit, and external validation.

Faith

Three participants, YP 3, 4, and 5, experienced extreme circumstances, even considering they came from a solo-parent family. They believed that faith in God brought them to where they were. The participants showed a deeply personal and profound belief in the existence and presence of a divine or higher power. Their beliefs have significantly impacted the respondents' views, values, and choices. Their faith in God helped them thrive as individuals and helped them get through the challenges. They stated their belief in God, constant prayer, and joining religious organizations, and they believed that these were instrumental in how they thrived despite being raised in solo-parent families.

YP 5 remembers the moments when she had to seek the help of prayer to get through and hope for a better future while working on it.

"Well, apart from my deep faith, I would always pray. Prayers are what help me."

YP 4 said that the belief that God will never forsake him and that there is a reason behind everything was a huge help during trying times. YP 4 said that whenever he prays, he thanks the Lord for the smallest to the biggest blessings he receives.

"I am talking to God. I am thankful even for the little things because God is generous. He will not abandon you; there is a reason why that happened to us, too."

Meanwhile, YP 3 narrated that her mother encouraged her to join faith-based affiliations, which gave her a deeper understanding of her life. At first, she did not understand why her mother imposed this, but later on, she was grateful because this might have been her mother's way of filling in the void of her growing up without a father figure. She also attributed her close relationship with God to the faith instilled in the Catholic institution where she studied.

"I became a member of Singles for Christ because that is what my mom wanted. Even as a child, she asked me to join the young people who danced in front of the church. "

YP 4 further stated how the family exemplified belief in God and was able to cling to the hope for better days. They also stated that God is behind everything that is happening. Despite the circumstances that are not ideal, they accepted and believed that God had something better in store for the family.

"So we accepted it and thought that God had perfect timing for us."

Ultimately, these young professionals turned to their faith as a source of solace, guidance, and hope. They found strength in their religious community, prayer, scripture, or religious practices.

Positive Mindset

Despite being raised in solo-parent families, the respondents maintained a positive mindset. Their mental attitude was characterized by optimism, hope, and a focus on constructive thinking. They cultivated a perspective that looked for good in situations and approached challenges with resilience and a belief in their ability to overcome them. Kindness, gratitude, optimism, and humility were evident from their statements.

The respondents were able to show kindness through acts of goodwill and the intention to positively impact the well-being of others. YP 3 believed that one should be kind even if others do not do the same. She believed that kindness is fundamental for a person to succeed because her mother instilled that you need other people to help you achieve your goals.

"Be kind, and you will be good even if others are not kind to you."

Flourishing results from the pursuit and engagement of an authentic life that brings inner joy and happiness through meeting goals. Participants could embrace their reality, live through self-acceptance, and feel thankful for how their challenges shaped their mindset. YP 4 expressed his gratitude for what he has achieved in life and what he needs to experience. He said he sees himself as someone always thankful, no matter what life throws at him.

"Always be thankful, even if the blessing is big or small. If, for example, you pass the exam or have a salary, no matter how much, even if it is small, it is still a blessing. It is not luck; it is not unlucky. So, for me, it is a blessing, even small."

The respondents also attributed their thriving to nurturing optimism despite the challenges. They believed the future would improve, leading to hopefulness, positive emotions, and a proactive approach to challenges.

Despite experiencing many hardships, he even compared his life story to the stories featured in a famous television series entitled "Maalaala Mo Kaya," he is very optimistic and has high feelings of hopefulness. When he finds everything difficult, instead of complaining, he tells himself that what he is experiencing will eventually pass and is only temporary. During University, he was willing to suffer for five years (to obtain his degree) in return for a good future.

"As I said before, it is only five years. I will persevere for five years. But the result is not just five years, not just ten years, not just fifteen years in the future."

The respondents were able to cultivate a value of humility, which was shown through modest and unassuming views of oneself, an acknowledgment of one's limitations and imperfections, and a willingness to learn from others. YP 3 and 4 exemplified feelings of humility, evident in their statements during the interview. YP 3 was thankful because she experienced studying at a public school in elementary school. According to her, it helped her stay grounded in the realities of life.

"I am thankful that I attended elementary school in a public school and learned the realities of life there."

YP 4 reiterated how humility helped him stay humble despite his professional achievements.

"Just be humble. No matter what you achieve, you should still be humble."

The study's findings parallel Tessa et al. 's (2022) study on the forgiveness, gratitude, and flourishing of emerging adults with divorced parents. Findings suggest that forgiveness and gratitude can predict flourishing in emerging adults whose parents are divorced; in this case, the role of gratitude is greater than forgiveness. Interventions that combine the basis of forgiveness and gratitude can be used to optimize the flourishing of such emerging adults whose parents are divorced.

Grit

Grit was defined as the passion and sustained persistence applied toward long-term achievement, with no particular concern for rewards or recognition. According to the author, grit is the greatest predictor of life achievement. (Duckworth, 2016) Analysis of the respondents' statements gleaned perseverance, conscientiousness, courage, and resilience.

All five participants' statements contained grit. Four recalled how they persevered by striving for educational attainment instead of giving up. They strive for educational attainment to achieve their goals. YP 3 has an innate love for learning, which she feels is helpful as she achieves her goals.

"I have always loved to learn and gain knowledge, so whenever there are opportunities to learn, my mother has been supportive from then until now. "

YP 2 stated that he had to instill discipline to get to where he is now. He combined discipline with educational attainment to elevate himself.

"So, I will use my degree and my skills. I will say, "I am going to use this as an edge to elevate." You will use not only your brain but also your discipline."

YP 1 said he was tempted to throw his whole future when he experienced the hardships. However, he chose to stay motivated and learned the importance of education in achieving his goals.

"I could have thrown my whole future away just by not studying, but I chose to study."

YP 4 used to feel ashamed while studying in college because he was already older than his classmates. After he obtained his degree, he felt pride in his educational achievement.

"It is like my shame was replaced, and my mother became proud because, compared to others, she thought we had no hope of finishing school."

Their statements were conscientious. They demonstrated this through high organization, self-discipline, dependability, and goal-oriented behavior. The respondents felt that it was not enough that they were skilled in their crafts. YP 2, 3, and 4 tackled how they met the challenges through conscientiousness by cultivating useful self-help skills in their journey. They took time to enhance their self-help skills, like good work ethics, giving their best efforts, and time management skills. YP 2 said he used his time management skills from being a student assistant as one of his ladders to his success.

"So before, even if I was a student assistant, even if I did school papers, even if I was a vendor, I managed my time well."

YP 4, on the other hand, noted that he ensures that the job is done with 100% effort. He said he is generally a "go-with-the-flow" person, but when tasks are given to him, he gives them his best effort.

"I go with the flow, which is all for me, but I give my all to achieve something."

Further, YP 3 discussed how her mother taught her a good work ethic that she still applies today, especially in her job as a government employee.

"Then, my mother taught me integrity at work because being ethical is important."

The respondents experienced courage, manifested through confronting fear, pain, danger, uncertainty, or other forms of adversity despite feeling afraid or threatened. They showed courage by nurturing feelings of inspiration and motivation. YP 2 and 4 draw inspiration and motivation from the courage they witnessed from other people. YP 2 recalled watching inspiring stories on a television show that featured stories of people from rags to riches and how he wished to be that person one day. This helped him fuel his dreams and make them goals he had to accomplish.

"I look up too many people. I also read and watch a lot, especially MMK (Maalaala Mo Kaya). I like to watch MMK, ma'am, especially those who have gone from scratch or garbage to success."

Another value that helped the respondents is resilience, or the ability to bounce back from difficulties. They could withstand and cope with difficult situations, stress, and challenges. Two respondents reiterated how resilience helped them thrive. YP 5 stated that she gains a sense of fulfillment by taking control of the things thrown at her. After her father chose his secretary over his family, she felt a huge emotional burden. She said she formed the attitude of being on top of situations because of so many events in her life that she had no control over. From then on, she felt like she had to take control of her life despite what others said.

"It is like you have an additional burden because you are like, ahh, maybe he cheated, or maybe it is because of his parents, but I am focused on what I want. It is like I am always on top of the situation."

YPs 2 and 5 also focused on building a resilient attitude. YP 5 further stated that she built her resilience by handling the hardships as best she could.

"The building of my resilience. A resilient attitude means that you can handle hardships because you have been through a lot."

YP 2 recalled how he continued to strive despite antagonistic attitudes from others. He told stories about his experiences during college when he had to sell snacks to earn money for living expenses. People mocked him, saying he smelled like vinegar, but he continued his journey.

"I said to myself, why are people treating me like this? But I said to myself, I will still go on. "

Thomas & Otis (2010), as rewritten by Ferreria, et al. (2021), defined resilience as the competence to cope and adapt in the face of adversity and to bounce back when stressors become overwhelming is considered a significant protective factor against instances of compassion fatigue, and burnout and mental and physical illness. Having grit to pursue their dreams was instrumental in helping these thriving young professionals from solo-parent families cope with the emotional impact of their childhood experiences and build a foundation for a successful and fulfilling life. They have a long-term perspective, set goals, and work persistently toward achieving them, even in the face of obstacles or setbacks. They understood that setbacks are a natural part of life and used them as opportunities for learning and growth. This mindset can help individuals from broken families navigate relationships, self-esteem, and emotional well-being challenges.

4.0 Conclusion

This research delved deep into the experiences of thriving young professionals raised in solo-parent families. The study has striven to address the fundamental questions and objectives set forth at the outset through meticulous data gathering, comprehensive thematic analysis, and rigorous interpretation. As the final piece of the research paper, this section encapsulates the concepts gleaned from the experiences. The participants can thrive despite being raised in solo-parent families. Before they thrived, they experienced numerous challenges due to their family situation. It was shown that the participants viewed their challenges from a positive perspective and through motivation. The thriving young professionals from solo-parent families thrived despite the circumstances because of faith, grit, and a positive mindset.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Giselle Ann E. Manansala - conceptualizing, writing, encoding, analysis, interpretation, revision
Gladiola A. Eje-Dimaculangan - advising and supervising

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

Authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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