

# Students' Perspective on Parental Involvement in Children's Education: A Case Study of (at-risk) Secondary School Students under Punakha Dzongkhag

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## **Abstract**

Parental involvement is the active participation of parents in their children's educational processes and experiences. Numerous studies have established a significantly positive link between parental involvement and children's academic, and socio-emotional outcomes. Many studies explored parents' and teachers' perspectives, however, parental involvement being a multi-dimensional variable, requires requisite perspectives from all stakeholders. A global paucity of studies exploring students' perspectives and the absence of research on parental involvement, in the Bhutanese context, served as the impetus for this study. This study investigated the perspective of at-risk students on parental involvement in children's education. The 257 participants faced circumstance(s) such as divorce, separation, and death of the parent(s). The mixed methods approach was employed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to determine how the participants perceive parental involvement in their education. Survey questionnaires, focus group discussions, and narrative story writing were used to glean participants' perspectives. The findings reveal the extent of involvement for different members of the family, the perceived importance of parental involvement at different levels of education, some common barriers to parental involvement, areas of involvement and neglect, and the impact of death, separation, and divorce of parents, on at-risk students. The study primarily recommends relevant stakeholders create awareness of the value of parental involvement as well as devise policy instruments to promote it for the holistic development of at-risk students.

**Keywords:** *Active participation, at-risk, parental involvement, perspective, education*

## 1. Introduction

Parental involvement is defined in a variety of ways, as it encompasses a multi-dimensional perception (Fan & Chen, 2001; Fisher, 2016; Sebastian et al., 2017). Epstein (1995) proposed six dimensions of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, home-learning, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Likewise, Fantuzzo et al. (2004) presented three dimensions: home-based family involvement, school-based involvement, and home-school conferencing. Similarly, Shen et al. (2014) explicated two dimensions: traditional, and non-traditional. Johnson and Hull (2014), however, condensed these aspects into three dimensions: home-based , visible throughout the years of schooling...’ for Bhutanese students (Ministry of Education, 2012, p.7). However, the same policy also acknowledged that, for the majority of Bhutanese parents, this level of parental involvement would be impossible owing to their backgrounds. This study also attempted to explore such disenabling backgrounds and recommend interventions. While the ministry of education, through various policy documents attempts to promote and encourage parents’ involvement in the education of their children, it has not explicitly presented informed strategies to do so. It has at a broader level, recommended some mechanisms such as garnering community and parental participation through parental membership in School Management Board (SMB), and parents’ participation during Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTM) and School-based Parents Education and Awareness (SPEA) programmes (Ministry of Education, 2012). All these programmes do not warrant a thorough and holistic parental involvement, because they are a one-time event in most of the schools representing only a small segment of parents.

Correlational studies also explicate a variety of benefits of parental involvement in children’s education (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005, 2007). Children whose parents are involved in their education achieve higher grades, consistently devote more time to studies, persevere and graduate high school, and go for higher education (Perna & Titus, 2005). On the other hand, lack of parental involvement is linked with children’s negative behaviour, poor social-emotional conduct, and poor academic performance (El Nokali et al., 2010).

There are also studies that examine the beliefs and attitudes of key players such as parents, teachers, students, and school managers to form a perspective on

and determine predictors of parental involvement. McDowall et al. (2017) explored parents' and teachers' perspectives on parental involvement in primary school. The findings suggested teachers' beliefs about the usefulness of parental involvement and teacher invitations to parents are important predictors of parental involvement. Thomas et al. (2020) compared middle school students and parents' perceptions of parental involvement in children's education. The study revealed many parallels between students' and parents' perceptions. However, it also pointed out differences, such as, parents indicated a higher extent of involvement than their children, and students reported parental priority on monitoring grades, whereas, parents indicated the highest scores for interest in school and learning. Sebastian et al. (2017) assert that parents tend to over-report their involvement in the education of their children. Therefore, parents as the only source of information can be detrimental to the reliability of the findings. Moreover, most of the studies focus on either teachers' or parents' perspectives, with a limited number of studies exploring students' perspectives (Thomas et al., 2020). To address this research gap, as well as with a strong conviction to collect authentic data, the current study gathered information from the students only.

Scholars have asserted the importance of parental involvement for middle to high school students (e.g., Froiland & Davison, 2014; Pinquart, 2015), because at this stage parental involvement declines (Froiland & Davison, 2014), and children go through simultaneous and multiple changes (Toren 2013). Continuous adult or parental support is, therefore, crucial for children to successfully navigate through these multitudinous changes. Significantly, there is also a segment of students who experience circumstances that may jeopardize their ability to complete school or unfavourably affect their academic achievement. Particularly the students facing circumstances such as demise, divorce, or separation of their parents. This group of children is considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school. Therefore, this study used the term 'at-risk' to outline the vulnerability that exists in this group of children. They require a special and higher extent of parental involvement, more than the other regular children. The current study explored the perceptions of at-risk students about their parental involvement to glean recommendations for relevant stakeholders.

## 2. Research Questions

This study was guided by one overarching research question, which was answered with the help of six manageable sub-questions.

- I. What are the at-risk students' perceptions about parental involvement in their education?
  1. Which members of the family are actively involved in the education of at-risk students?
  2. Which parents' role is relatively important for the education of at-risk students?
  3. What are some common barriers to parental involvement in the education of at-risk students?
  4. What are parents/guardians' prominent areas of involvement and areas of neglect in the education of at-risk students?
  5. What corrective measures are used to discipline at-risk students by their parents or guardians?
  6. How does family dissolution (because of death, separation, and divorce of parents) affect at-risk students?

## 3. Methods

### 3.1 Research context

The study involved at-risk students from nine secondary schools under Punakha Dzongkhag, comprising three lower secondary (Bjibjoka, Lobesa, & Shelgana), two middle secondary (Kabesa & Khuruthang) and four higher secondary (Tashidingkha, Punakha, Dechentshemo, & Dashiding) schools. Three out of the nine are day schools, whereas the six cater to both boarding as well as day scholars. The participants of the research were engaged in a Youth Engagement Program (YEP) conducted by Dzongkhag Education Office, for one week.

### **3.2 Sampling**

The Education Office compiled the list of all the at-risk students in the Dzongkhag, which became the population of this study. As advised by the Education Office, the schools sought consent from parents to allow their children to attend the Youth Engagement Program, and participate in this research. Out of 554 students, schools could garner consent for 275 students. Convenience sampling was used to select all 275 (92 boys and 165 girls) students for this study. The sample comprised students from grades 7 to ten (31% from 7, 30 % from 8, 19% from 9, 16% from 10, 3% from 11, and 2% from 12). The participant's ages ranged from 10 to 22 years (45% - 10 to 14 years, 54 % - 15 to 19 years, and 1% 20 years and above).

### **3.3 Data collection instrument(s)**

This study employed mixed methods approach. The quantitative data was collected by administering a survey to 275 students. The qualitative data was garnered through focus group discussions and narrative story writing as detailed below.

### **3.4 Survey Questionnaires**

The survey questionnaires were framed in line with the objectives set for the study. The questionnaires used a combination of both closed-ended and open-ended questions phrased in simple sentences.

### **3.5 Focus Group Discussions (FDG)**

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were also employed to gather information for the study. The FGDs guided by a set of questions were executed one time with five different groups of students. All FGDs were audio recorded using a voice-recorder app on mobile phones.

### **3.6 Narrative Story Writing**

All the participants wrote a narrative story (NS) highlighting their life experiences and their perspectives on it. A template containing question prompts guided NS writing. It drew on their experiences and perceptions of parental involvement in their education.

The participants were oriented on the question prompts, and encouraged to write freely and openly with a guarantee of confidentiality.

### **3.7 Multiple Perspective and Triangulation**

Since the study used a mixed methods approach to collect data, triangulation was attempted in the discussion and the interpretation of the results, to synthesize multiple perspectives and scrutinize if the findings reveal the same conclusion.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

The quantitative data from the questionnaire were converted into percentages and processed into charts for analysis. The charts were employed to explore, describe, explain, and evaluate the findings in relation to the research questions.

The qualitative data from all the instruments such as the transcribed data from the FGDs, and the NS were analyzed using a qualitative analytic method called Thematic Analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) define Thematic Analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within data.

The researchers followed the six phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as follows: repeatedly read the data searching for meanings and patterns, manually coded any interesting features, collated codes into potential themes, reviewed data extracts for meaningful connection to the themes, defined and named the themes, finally, analyzed and reported using compelling data extracts as per the research questions.

### **3.9 Results and Discussion**

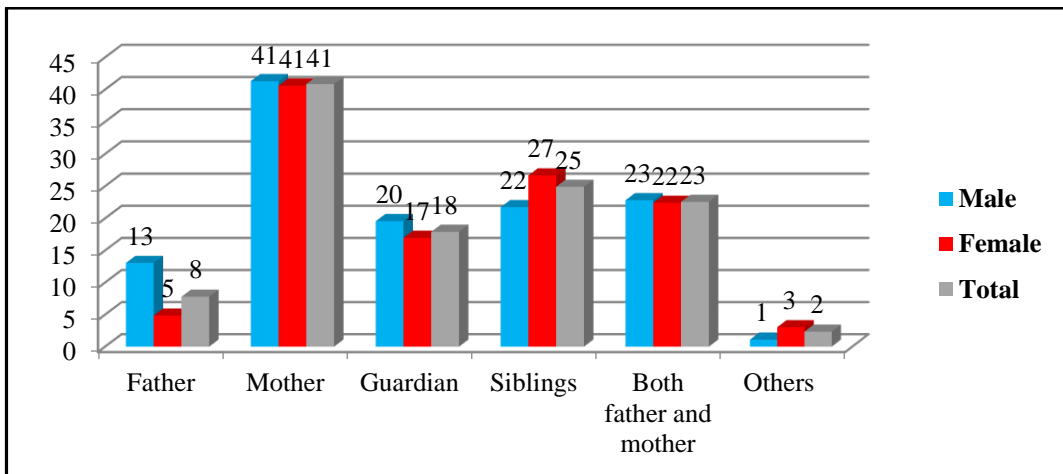
Results and discussion are organized into six different parts corresponding to the six research sub-questions.

- 1. Which members of the family are actively involved in the education of at-risk students?**

The survey data revealed that every member of a family has a role in the children's upbringing and may look at a specific area as evident from Figure 1. At-risk students benefit the most from the participation of the members of their families. Figure 1 shows the people involved in children's education.

About 41% reported the mother's involvement in their education, while only 8% reported the father's involvement. Besides, 25% reported siblings' involvement, 23% reported both father and mother's involvement, and 18% reported guardians' involvement in their education.

Comparatively, a very high percent reported mother's involvement in their education. As 78 % of respondents were from divorced families, a higher extent of the mother's involvement can be associated with mothers acquiring legal custodianship of children after divorce (Wangchuk & Zangmo, 2019).



**Figure 1:** *Persons Involved in the Education of At-risk Students*

Similarly, the data from NS revealed parental involvement by either of the parents the child is domiciled with. For instance, a grade twelve female highlights the financial support rendered by her divorced mother as she wrote (NS), "All my educational expenses are borne by my single mother. I can understand my mother's situation. She has to bear all expenses both for me as well as my cousins". Further, a grade 7 female stated that, after her mother's demise, her father provided all the necessary support and never let her feel that she is a 'motherless child' (NS). Familial interaction deteriorates after family dissolution resulting in reduced contact and

engagement of the parent who doesn't hold custodianship of the child (Fischer, 2007). This could be the reason why the father's engagement is reported as minimal.

However, data from FGDs and narrative story (NS) writing predominantly revealed the lack of parental involvement. Some respondents gave examples of support they expected, such as a 14-year-old female who wrote, "The assistance that I need... is some tips to study... I can't focus on my studies as I have to help my mother in her business..." (NS). This highlights the negative impact of family dissolution where a student's energy and time are divided between her responsibility for work and her education. Most who experienced family dissolution reported executing household chores at a very young age. A grade eleven respondent reported that he saw only educated parents help their children with homework and complained about the absence of this support from his uneducated parents (FGDs).

When it comes to the roles played by the members of the family, the survey data reveals that each member of the family plays different roles and engages to a varying extent in children's education. Figure 2 shows the areas of involvement of parents, guardians, and siblings in the children's education. The varied areas of involvement are broadly grouped into two spheres; academic, and pastoral.

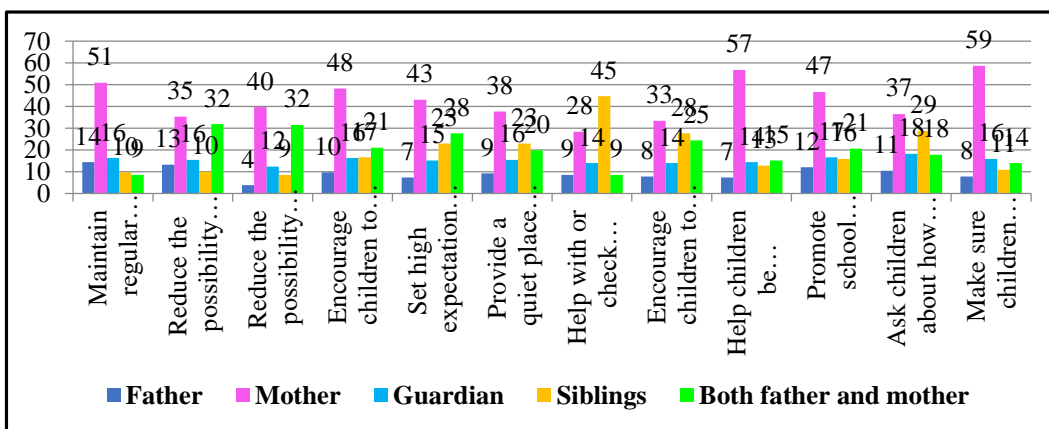


Figure 2: Number of Involvement of Parents, Guardians and Siblings

Among the family members mother tops all areas of involvement except for the academic aspect of checking and helping children with homework. About 51% of



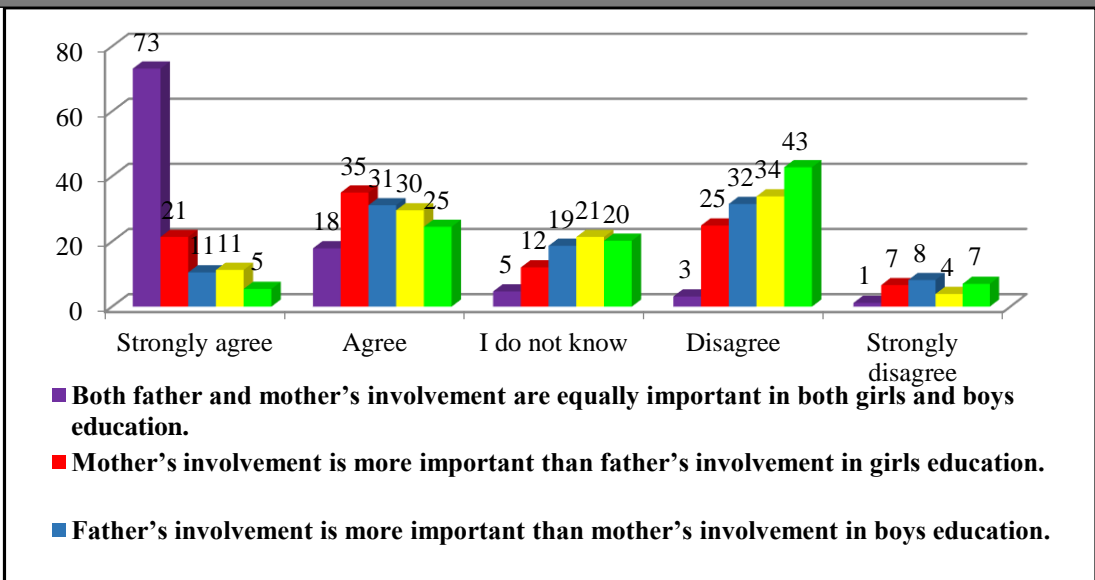
the participants pointed out mothers being responsible for maintaining regular contact with the teacher, which could be for both academic and pastoral purposes.

More than 50% reported mothers' involvement in the two very important areas of pastoral care, viz., preparing children for school (57%), and providing timely meals (59%). Moreover, the mothers are also reported to be engaged in almost all areas of academic care, viz., encouraging children to study (48%), goal-setting (43%), providing a conducive study environment (38%), and discouraging absenteeism (47%). Notably, 45% reported the involvement of siblings in checking and helping with homework. Whereas, only nine percent reported the fathers' involvement and 28% reported the mothers' involvement in helping with homework.

It should also be noted that fathers' involvement in both the academic and pastoral spheres is reported to be minimal compared to that of mothers, guardians, and siblings. As 78% reported their parents are divorced, it can be surmised that they received fewer educational resources from their fathers due to reduced contact (Fischer, 2007). Moreover, neglect by one of the parents and the resulting lack of parental engagement and financial hardships of single parents pose an educational risk of higher dropouts, as children from such disrupted families become academically disoriented (Black & Stalker, 2006).

## **2. Which parents' role is relatively important for the education of at-risk students?**

The survey data shows that each parent plays a unique and important role in a child's life. Parents serve as the primary role model for their children. Particularly, when parents participate in their children's education, they model the importance of education and learning which will subsequently influence the children's academic engagement and outcome (Berkowitz et al., 2021). The presence of both parents and their equal involvement is important in children's education. Figure 3 compares the perceived degree of importance of parental involvement in children's education.

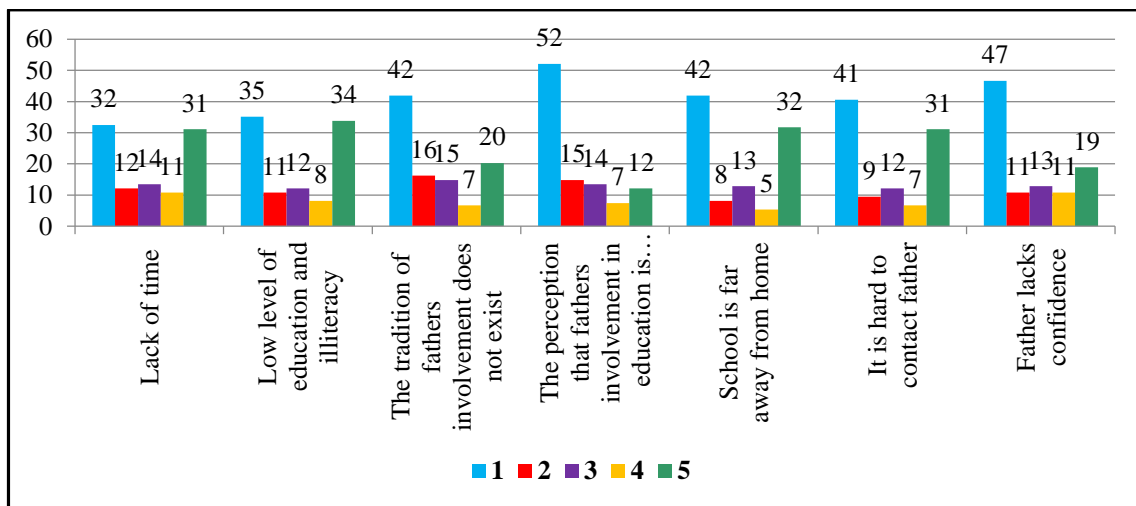


**Figure 3:** Comparative Importance of Parent's Involvement

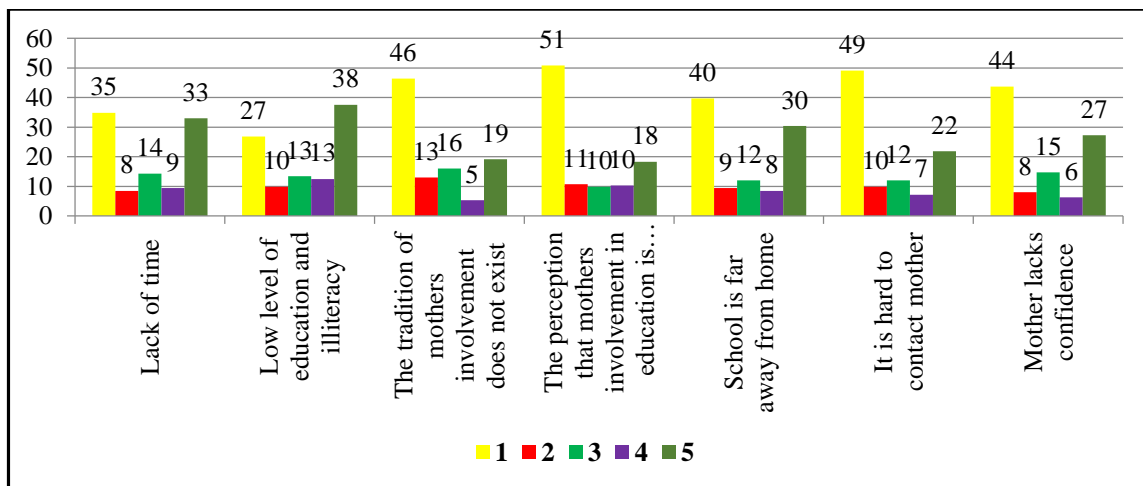
The majority (73%) of the participants strongly agreed with the statement that both father and mother's involvement is equally important in both boys' and girls' education. Notably, 35% and 21% affirmed by 'agreeing' and 'strongly agreeing' respectively, that for the girl's education, mothers' involvement is more important than the fathers'. This shows that more than 50% of respondents perceive mothers' involvement as more important than fathers'. More than 50% expressed disagreement to the statement that 'father' involvement is more important than mother's involvement in girls' education.' Parents need to realize the importance of the symbiotic involvement of both parents in the education of their children, to ensure both emotional, psychological, and physical well-being, as well as academic achievement of their children (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

**2. What are some common barriers to parental involvement in the education of at-risk students?**

Seven variables were presented as probable barriers to parental involvement. The respondents rated each barrier on a scale of 1 to 5. The least relevant barrier was marked as 1 and the most applicable barrier as 5. Figure 4 & Figure 5 show some common barriers to fathers' and mothers' involvement respectively, in the education of at-risk students.



**Figure 4: Barriers to Fathers' Involvement**



**Figure 5: Barriers to Mothers' Involvement**

Regarding fathers' involvement, about 34 % reported a 'low level of education, and illiteracy' as the most relevant barrier to fathers' involvement. Likewise, about 32 % reported 'school being far away from home' as a barrier to fathers' involvement. About 31% reported 'difficulty in contacting father' as a barrier and this could be because of 'school being far away from home'. About 31% reported 'lack of time' as the most relevant barrier to fathers' involvement. Notably, 20% reported 'the tradition of fathers' involvement does not exist' as the most relevant barrier to their involvement. In addition, 12% reported 'the perception that fathers' involvement in education is not his role' as the most relevant barrier. This shows that although people generally hold

the perception that fathers' involvement in a child's education is pivotal, traditionally fathers' involvement or participation is still minimal.

Regarding mothers' involvement, about 38% reported 'low level of education and illiteracy' as the most relevant barrier to mothers' involvement in their education. Many scholars have cited a lack of educational attainment as a prominent barrier to parental involvement in school (e.g., Bæck, 2010; Lee & Bowen, 2006). A fourteen years old female validates how an educated parent can help in academic learning and vice versa. She wrote, "Before they (Parents) divorced, my father used to help me in my study. Now as my mother is a farmer, she could not help me much in my study." Thus, illiteracy is a barrier to parental involvement, particularly in the academic sphere.

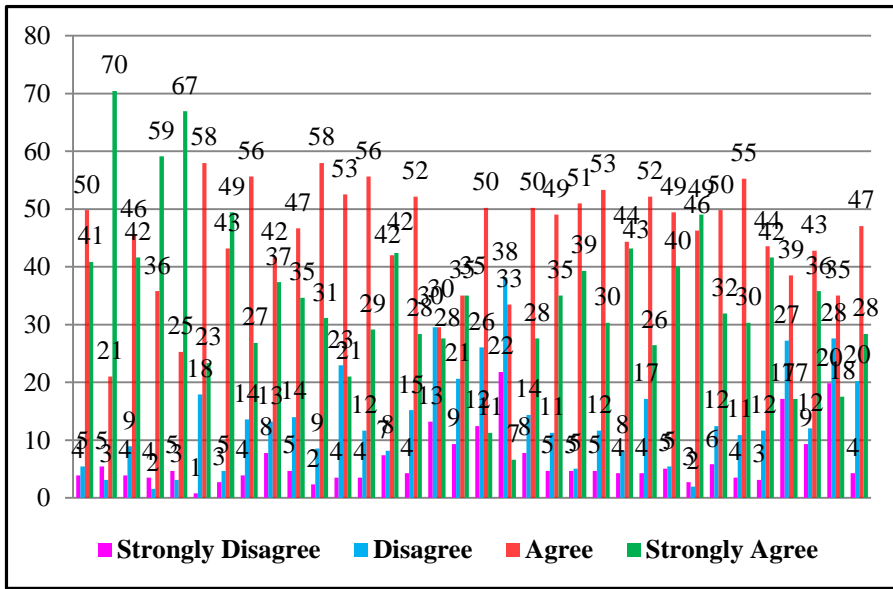
About 33% reported 'lack of time' as the most relevant barrier to mothers' involvement. According to Williams and Sanchez (2011), parents and school personnel also identified 'time poverty' as a pertinent barrier to involvement for urban parents. McDowall et al. (2017) found that parents' perception the availability of time is a strong predictor for engagement, suggesting that it is parents who should manage and prioritize time for their children. Data from NS also revealed family dependency on a single earner deprived children of parental time and attention. To this, a seventeen years old female wrote (NS), "I live with my mother, grandmother, uncle, and children of my mom's younger sister, looked after by my mother. All our expenses are borne by my single mother. She is all the time very busy." Similarly, a fourteen years old male elucidates lack of time as a barrier to his mother's involvement:

My mother works and runs the house and she isn't able to give enough time to us and because of that she is unable to know well about our studies. We are not able to find mistakes in ourselves. That is why our studies are going very low. (NS)

Notably, 46% and 51% reported 'the tradition of mothers' involvement does not exist' and 'the perception that the mothers' involvement in education is not her role' respectively, as the least relevant barrier for mothers' involvement. This hints that the responsibility of educating a child is traditionally associated with mothers.

### **3. What are parents/guardians' prominent areas of involvement and areas of neglect in education of at-risk students?**

The survey included 34 statements encompassing both the areas of academic and pastoral care purveyed by parents and guardians to their children. For each statement item, the respondents checked against one of the four Likert-scale options, viz. Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Figure 6 presents respondents' perceptions of the prominent areas of parental involvement and neglect.



**Figure 6:** Prominent Areas of Parental Involvement and Neglect

In the academic sphere, the majority of the survey participants reported they 'agree' that their parents and guardians make frequent follow-ups on their academic progress (50%) and school attendance (42%), help them organize and manage time for study (58%), and help them set and achieve academic goals (56%) as reflected in Figure 6.

**Table 1** Description of variables for figure 6

1	My parents/guardians make frequent follow ups on my school academic progress.
2	My parents/guardians provide me with school requirements timely (school uniform, fees and other school contributions, exercise and reference books, pocket money).
3	My parents/guardians frequently make follow ups on my school attendance.
4	My parents/guardians usually inform me about the importance of education for self, the family and the society.
5	My parents/guardians provide me with proper balanced diet, clothes and shelter.
6	My parents/guardians frequently ask me about what I have done at school during the day.
7	My parents/guardians care for my health and often provide me with proper health check-ups.
8	My parents/guardians encourage me to express my opinion and talk to me about my feelings, my school and my academic progress.
9	My parents/guardians frequently keep their promises made to me about my studies.
10	My parents/guardians frequently reward me when I perform well in exams.
11	My parents/guardians help me to organize my activities at home so that I get sufficient time for study at home and school.
12	My parents/guardians frequently take their time to assist me with my school homework, project work.
13	My parents/guardians help me to set and achieve my school academic goals.
14	My parents/guardians provide me chance to study irrespective of my gender at home.
15	My parents/guardians ensure that I get sufficient time to rest after school every day.
16	I am provided with a working table and chair at home to do my school works.
17	I am provided with a special space in the house where I can do my homework, project work undisturbed.
18	My parents/guardians provide me with additional literacy and numeracy work.
19	My parents/guardians take me to the library and other places which help in educating me more.
20	My parents/guardians make frequent follow ups with school about my behaviour.
21	My parents/guardians participate in various school programmes meant for parents and pupils.
22	When I present my school report to my parents/guardians they look at it critically and give me advice.
23	My parents/guardians frequently show sympathy to me when I am upset with anything, including school related issues.
24	My parents/guardians allow me to participate in social service activities in community.
25	My parents/guardians take time to know my school friends.
26	My parents/guardians teach me about culture and religion.
27	My parents/guardians teach me about Drig-Lam-Nam-Zha
28	My parents/guardians share inspiring stories to me.
29	I always sense that there is a good relationship between my parents/guardians and my teachers.
30	My parents/guardians applaud me when I join and participate in games and sports at school
31	The walking distance from home to school leaves me exhausted when it comes to attend lessons in classrooms and doing assignments.
32	My parents/guardians talk to me about the importance of avoiding anti-social activities at home and at school.
33	My parents/guardians arrange proper tuition sessions for me.
34	My parents/guardians applaud me when I play cognitive games.

However, some respondents reported (NS) a lack of parental involvement, especially in the academic sphere. For instance, a 14 years old female mentioned that

her single mother is not able to provide her with study tips. Moreover, she also highlighted being overburdened by household chores. It should also be noted that, while the majority reported favourable parental involvement in the academic area, it would be unwise to overlook the 18% who reported that their parents and guardians do not follow up on the daily activities of the school. Likewise, 14% reported that their parents and guardians do not encourage them to express their opinion and discuss school and their academic progress. If the goal of education and society is to take everyone on board, this segment of youths cannot be neglected.

Similarly, 21% reported that their parents and guardians do not keep the promises made to them about their studies. Likewise, 19% reported that their parents or guardians do not reward them for their good academic performance. Moreover, 23% reported that their parents and guardians do not assist them with assignments. More than 40% reported they are not provided with a working table and a chair at home. Notably, around 60% reported that their parents and guardians do not take them to the library or places which foster learning. It is a matter of concern that some of the parents have failed to participate in some of the important areas of education which can prove detrimental to the progress and learning of their children.

In the pastoral area, the majority of the respondents reported 'strongly agree', that their parents or guardians provide school requirements (70%), educate them on the importance of education (59%), provide a balanced diet, clothes, and shelter (67%), and make frequent follow-ups on their behaviour (50%).

However, 22% reported that their parents or guardians do not make frequent follow-ups on their behaviour at school. This is a huge percentage of students being neglected and not made behaviourally accountable. Frequent parental follow-up or communication with the school or teachers greatly contributes to children's enhanced school-related outcomes (Berkowitz et al., 2021). Moreover, 17% reported that their parents or guardians are least interested in their friends and do not invest time to know their friends. About 21% reported that their parents or guardians did not educate them on the importance of avoiding anti-social activities. Similarly, around 48% reported that they are not provided with proper tuition.

Data from NS also revealed that after the dissolution of the family, many children face deprivation and mistreatment. Moreover, new members of their family

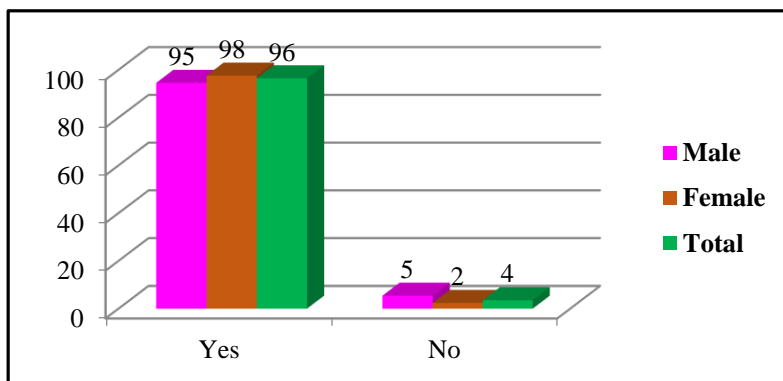
mistreated them by depriving them of their inherent rights like meeting the other parent and participating in activities they prefer. To this a grade 10 female wrote:

*My mom’s parents don’t allow me to meet with my dad. If they see me meeting my dad, they scold me and sometimes beat me. I stay with my mom’s brother and his wife. I couldn’t get any support in studies and they also did not support me to participate in activities I like. (NS)*

Children need support and guidance as well as adequate time to adjust to the new family structure. As there is a multifaceted impact (emotional, psychological, and in some cases even physical) of family dissolution on children (Evans et al., 2001), adult support is sine quo non.

**4. What corrective measures are used to discipline at-risk students by their parents or guardians?**

Disciplining a child for any form of inappropriate behaviour is an important parental responsibility. At-risk students are more likely to involve in socially unacceptable activities, out of frustration and loss of focus (Wangchuk & Zangmo, 2019). Therefore, timely support and administration of proper discipline by the parents is a crucial predictor of children’s future success. Figure 7 shows whether parents and guardians administer discipline and explanations to the at-risk students for their inappropriate behaviour.

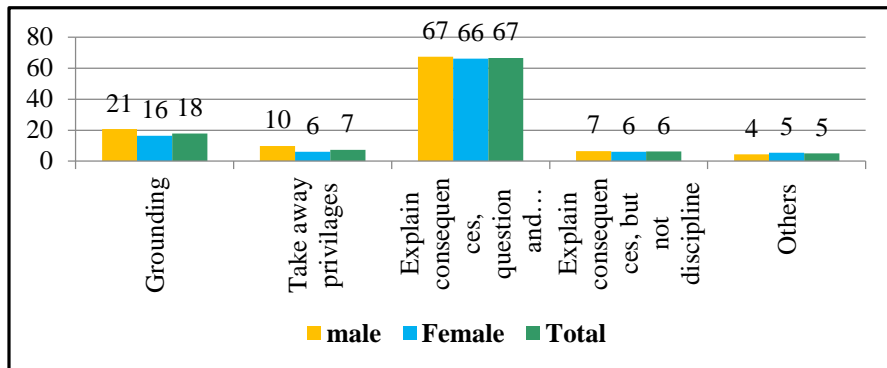


**Figure 7:** Administration of Discipline and Explanations for Inappropriate Behaviour

While the majority of the respondents (96%) reported that their parents and guardians administer discipline for their inappropriate behaviour, however, about 4%



reported the absence of disciplining and provision of explanations for the same. This left-out minority is a concern for schools and the community.



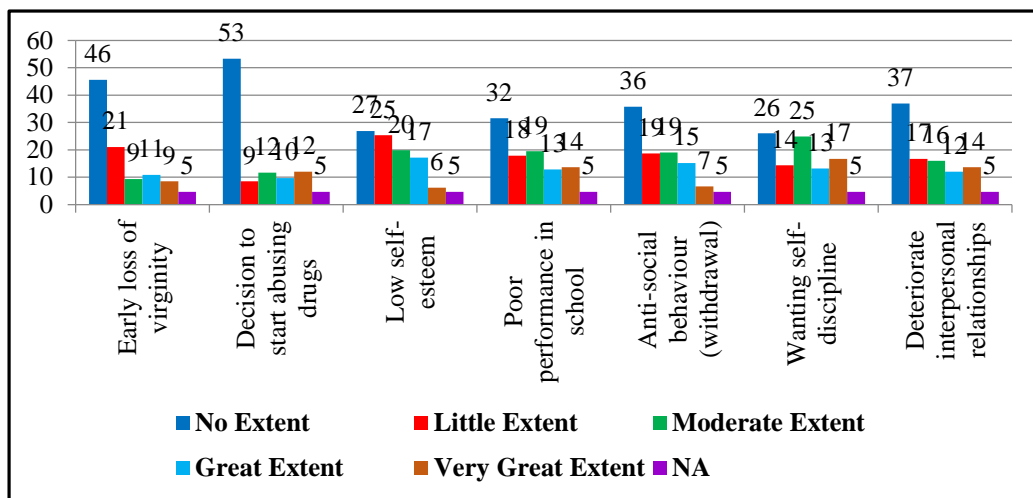
**Figure 8:** Various Corrective Measures Used

Figure 8 shows the popularity of a range of corrective measures administered by parents and guardians. The most popular mode of disciplining among parents is 'explaining consequences, question and discipline' with 67% of parents using it. This was followed by grounding (18%), and the least popular being, taking away privileges (7%). It shows parents and guardians are aware of the appropriateness of disciplining techniques for their children. However, as is evident in Figure 8, the survey did not include any form of physical punishment, the findings, therefore, are inadequate to confirm the prevalence of such a technique.

##### 5. How does family dissolution (because of death, separation, and divorce of parents) affect at-risk students?

A family undergoing a period of instability as a result of divorce, separation, or death may have children who experience an increased likelihood of problems associated with academic performance, and socio-emotional development, and are more likely to drop out of school (Black & Stalker, 2006). Figure 9 shows the degree of impact in

different areas as a result of family dissolution (because of a parent’s death, separation, or divorce).



**Figure 9:** Extent of Effects of Parent’s Death, Separation, and Divorce on Children

About more than 50% reported that early loss of virginity resulted from little to a very great extent because of family dissolution. The qualitative data hinted that after family dissolution, the members become vulnerable. To this, a 14 years old respondent reported that she did not feel safe and protected and wrote (NS), “...when my mother went to work, I was always left behind. I always felt afraid of what if some strangers come to our house when I am alone.” Dissolution of the family always leaves the members and particularly women and children vulnerable (Black & Stalker, 2006).

In addition, about 43% reported decision to start abusing drugs resulted from little to a very great extent because of family dissolution. This is also likely because after family dissolution many children reported (NS) experiencing alienation and social isolation, psychological and emotional breakdown, and family insecurity. The qualitative data revealed that children going through emotional turmoil started to create problems and resorted to drugs and alcohol to ease the stress, at the expense of their youthful energy and vibe. For instance, an 18 years old grade eleven male wrote (NS): ‘My dad used to beat my mother and she ran away from home many times. So, this situation makes me dishearten and I smoke and drink alcohol to calm myself down.... I become addicted in marijuana.’ He also underscored how drug addiction affected his academic and social life. Some respondents highlighted that unfavourable home atmosphere gave them added impetus to abuse drugs.

Moreover, about 68% reported that low self-esteem resulted from little to a very great extent because of family dissolution. This also is probable because children going through a period of family instability suffer in many ways such as; academic disorientation, financial insecurity, and social isolation (Evans et al., 2001). A 14 years old male reported being ostracized at school (NS). He reported conflict with his mates as they called him an orphan. When a child is shunned by a social group, the child may develop anti-social feelings. This can have emotional as well as the psychological impact on the child. The data reveals how the respondent felt very low and hints that the taunting sabotaged his self-worth.

Likewise, about 64% reported poor academic performance resulted from little to a very great extent because of family dissolution. The qualitative data also supports this finding. Family instability has been proven to be a pertinent source of stress for children and eventually affected how they performed in academics at school (Wangchuk & Zangmo, 2019). Besides the decline in academic performance, it has also led to the discontinuation of education altogether (Bernardi & Radl, 2014). A 13-year-old female from a divorced family expressed similar distraction and loss of focus. She wrote (NS), "I can't also study very nicely because I can't concentrate at my study. When I try to concentrate, I feel very sad... and can't control myself and miss my father." Family dissolution results in distraction and emotional breakdown in children (Babalís et al., 2014). On the other hand, the findings show that about more than 70 % reported a 'longer concentration period' and 'good performance in academics' resulted from little to a very great extent because of their parents living together. The data validates that family instability is a pertinent source of stress in children and intact family is equated to safety and security.

About 60% reported anti-social behaviour and deterioration of interpersonal relationships resulted from little to a very great extent because of family dissolution. As there is a social stigma attached to family dissolution by divorce, children may feel social discrimination after the divorce of their parents (Hill & Taylor, 2004). This may develop an antisocial outlook in the psyche of young children and adolescents alike. A 13 years old male reported (NS) being branded as 'Kocktey' (*to mean illegitimate child equivalent to the disapproving term 'bastard' in Tsangla Language*) by his friends after the dissolution of his family. Thereafter, he reported abhorring social groups as

his peers attempted to exclude him. On the contrary, the findings also show that about more than 70% reported 'highly sociable nature' and 'friendly nature' resulted from little to a very great extent because of their parents living together. About 71% also reported that anxiety is either low or well-managed in intact families. The reason behind this could be experiencing unending happiness in intact families.

In brief, the findings show that family instability negatively impacts various aspects of a student's life, such as; academic performance, security, social life, and emotional and psychological well-being. On the other hand, the merits of parents living together are experienced by children in several areas such as; longer concentration periods, good academic performance, high sociability, increased well-being, intelligence, and low levels of anxiety.

## 6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are presented for the important stakeholders:

1. Since 78% of the respondents reported divorced parents, schools are recommended to carefully prepare an inventory of divorce cases and provide educational programs to the parents and children, on relationship management, and educational parenting. These programs can cater to various aspects of parenting. It should emphasize positive role modeling to the parents as around 18% of the respondents reported that their parents are not good role models. Besides, it can also educate parents on a crucial academic enhancer – reading, which only 32 % of the respondents reported that their parents support.
2. Moreover, as the data revealed that the education of a child is customarily associated with mothers, parenting education also should focus on debunking this myth and emphasize that both the parents' involvement is pivotal for a child's holistic development. In addition, about 41% reported the mothers' involvement in their education, whereas, only 8% reported the fathers' involvement. Therefore, stakeholders should explore avenues to empower mothers, and educate and encourage the participation of the fathers, by devising policy instruments that can enable and promote equal participation of both parents.
3. Around 38% reported a 'low level of education and illiteracy' as the most relevant barrier to mothers' involvement in their education. As reported, the majority of

the respondents are domiciled with mothers who actively engage in their education, mothers' education and empowerment should be accorded the highest priority.

4. Students from vulnerable families and with a single parent have reported financial insecurity. Therefore, the education sector in collaboration with local governments should identify such needy students and prioritize their admission in boarding schools.
5. As divorce is found to be very damaging to children, the education sector and schools should work towards the prevention of this social ill. Schools should educate and create awareness of the impacts of divorce on children and the family. Schools should train and empower school counsellors to be able to support and mitigate the impact on students experiencing divorce.
6. Schools should not bar the admission of siblings together in the school as the findings reveal that elder siblings provide guidance and support in both the academic and pastoral areas.

## **7. Recommendations for Future Research**

The following recommendations are proposed for future researchers:

1. Since this study did not look at the relationship between parental involvement and students' academic performance. Future researchers are encouraged to include data on the academic performance of the participants over time and correlate it with the changes in their family dynamics.
2. Future researchers can also take up case histories of a child's behavioural patterns over time gauging the changes in the behavioural parameters of the child prior to and post-family dissolution.
3. As this study collected perspectives from students only, future research can also attempt to garner perspectives from parents and correlate them with that of the students to figure out points of agreement and disagreement.

## **8. Conclusion**

This study investigated at-risk students' perceptions on parental involvement in their education. Besides, it surveyed students' perceptions on their parents' active involvement, areas of involvement and neglect, barriers to parental involvement, and the impact of family dissolution on at-risk students.

Findings show that the majority of the students who believe that parental involvement is pivotal for a child's holistic growth were also satisfied with the roles played by their parents. However, quantitative as well as qualitative data reveal that mothers are comparatively more actively involved than fathers in their children's education. Students also reported that both parents are equally important and therefore, upscaling the father's participation is important to meet children's expectations. The results also show that parents were aware of and practice positive disciplining to correct their child's misbehaviour. Time poverty was a prominent barrier to fathers' participation, while low level of education and illiteracy was popular barrier for mothers. Parents and guardians also provided support such as following up on academic progress and attendance, helping children plan and organize, and setting and achieving academic goals. However, some percentage of parents and guardians exhibited deficiency in the area of academic support such as the provision of extra reading materials, not keeping promises made about studies, and lack of assistance with homework. The various impacts of the dissolution of a family as a result of divorce, death, and separation of parents are also clearly established and supported by both quantitative and qualitative data. A multitude of recommendations for relevant stakeholders, and future research are also clearly articulated.

### **Author Contributions:**

SZS developed the study design, collected data, performed data analysis and interpretation, and drafted the manuscript. RS envisioned the research and developed the study concept. JD substantially contributed to the study concept and instrument design. All the other authors contributed in data collection, data treatment, and data interpretation. All the authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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### Supplementary Material

The supplementary materials (Survey Questionnaires, Narrative Story Writing Guidelines, Prompts for FGDs, Survey Questionnaire Data, Respondent Information) for this study have been published online by Mendeley Data at: <https://data.mendeley.com/datasets/dy3cfkkprx/2>

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