

Product of broken home: A story of survival and success

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Abstract: This research studied the lived experiences of individuals raised in broken households, revealing both the problems they experienced and the avenues of resilience they sought. Using a narratological-phenomenological approach, this participant was purposively selected to share their tales, which were examined thematically following Braun and Clarke's paradigm. Four major themes and twelve subthemes emerged that highlight how family disturbance causes emotional suffering, financial pressure, and social exclusion, but also how resilience is built via coping techniques, support systems, and ambitions for education and activism. The findings stress the significance of enhancing school-based counseling, family and community support networks, and culturally grounded interventions to empower children from broken homes.

Keywords: broken home, resilience, coping strategies, youth development, phenomenology

Introduction

The family is widely recognized as the basic basis for socialization and emotional development. However, family breakdowns, particularly those induced by parental separation or divorce, exhibit severe impacts on children's psychological, social, and intellectual well-being. Recent research reveals that disordered family structures are substantially associated with emotional instability, behavioral issues, and lower educational achievement (Pryor 2021; Arora & Kaur 2022; Stadelmann et al. 2023). Children from broken households typically carry the burden of stigma and internal struggle, which impact their identity development and social connections (Garriga et al. 2020; Poole et al. 2022).

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Despite these hurdles, an expanding corpus of literature stresses the resilience and flexibility of children and teens who suffer family dissolution. Studies suggest that some acquire coping methods based on peer support, school involvement, and goal-oriented behaviors, helping them to overcome adversity and achieve success (Murray & Farrington 2020; Kim 2021; Zainudin et al. 2022). This resiliency illustrates that while family disturbance involves dangers, it does not automatically predetermine bad results. Instead, the combination of human resolve and external resources can generate favorable trajectories.

In the Philippine setting, family fragmentation due to separation, migration, or economic difficulty is a major societal problem. Reports show rising numbers of children are exposed to divided family structures, although research generally focuses on the negative effects, such as delinquency, school dropouts, or substance addiction (De Castro & Alampay 2020; Gonzales & Reyes 2023). Far less attention has been dedicated to the narratives of survival and success stories that show how young people convert misery into inspiration. This divide is most prominent in rural and provincial regions, where community resources are limited, but where resilience may take culturally distinctive forms.

This study tries to bridge these gaps by investigating the lived experiences of kids from broken homes who have successfully navigated personal and societal barriers. Guided by a narratological-qualitative perspective, it captures their problems, coping mechanisms, and goals, while setting their experiences within wider issues of resilience and youth development. By foregrounding survivor narratives, this research contributes to a more nuanced view of family disturbance, highlighting that success is achievable even within brokenness when supporting networks of personal agency converge.

Methodology

This study adopted a narratological-phenomenological approach to analyze the lived experiences of a child raised in broken households. Phenomenology was picked because it stresses participants' subjective realities and meaning-making processes, making it extremely suited for sensitive circumstances such as family dissolution (Alipoyo 2022; Bacroya and Aranjuez 2025; Neubauer et al. 2019; Alase 2021; Braun & Clarke 2021). The participant was purposively selected based on their firsthand experiences with parental separation and their

willingness to contribute tales of survival and success, assuring depth and complexity of the testimonies (Palinkas et al. 2019; Etikan & Bala 2019).

Data were obtained through in-depth, semi-structured interviews performed in the participants' choice language to enhance comfort and authenticity. All sessions were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and confirmed by participant verification to preserve accuracy. Following the idea of horizontalization, each response was given with equal weight before grouping into key statements and themes (Braun & Clarke 2021; Nowell et al. 2022). Ethical protections were scrupulously observed: informed permission was gained, pseudonyms were utilized, and confidentiality was assured. Trauma-sensitive interviewing approaches were utilized, participants kept the right to withdraw at any time, and referrals for therapy were made accessible when needed (Orb et al. 2020; Anderson et al. 2022).

Data interpretation followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis methodology, which incorporates repeated familiarization, coding, theme development, and synthesis. To increase trustworthiness, member checking and peer debriefing were applied, while extensive descriptions assured credibility, reliability, and transferability of the findings (Nowell et al. 2022). This thorough and ethically based approach allowed the study to accurately portray participants' views, showing both the obstacles and the resilience of kids from broken homes.

Results and discussion

Theme I: Background and upbringing

1. Family dynamics and early influences

Participants reported their early family experiences as defined by instability, conflict, and absence. One shared, "I grew up seeing fights almost every day; it felt normal until I realized it wasn't." (P1). These experiences created a foundation of insecurity that influenced their identity formation and emotional development. Research confirms that children exposed to family conflict and separation often face long-term risks of anxiety, depression, and diminished trust in others (Pryor 2021; Arora & Kaur 2022; Kim 2021; Hughes et al. 2023; Wilson et al. 2021). Such early instability left participants feeling vulnerable, but it also became the context where resilience later emerged.

Others explained that early family disruptions shaped their motivation to succeed. One participant said, “I wanted to study hard so I wouldn’t end up like my parents” (P4). Literature supports this narrative, noting that some children of broken homes transform adverse circumstances into motivation for self-improvement (Nguyen & Patel 2023; González et al. 2022; Botero-García et al. 2023; Allen & Hensley 2023; Stadelmann et al. 2023). Early exposure to hardship, while painful, sometimes fostered determination and adaptability, reinforcing that adversity can become a foundation for resilience.

2. Socioeconomic background and early struggles

Financial difficulty was a distinguishing factor of many participants’ childhoods. Several recounted taking up part-time jobs or forsaking school activities to fund home necessities. One recalled, “I had to work while studying since there was no one else to help.” (P6). Research indicates that children from broken households are disproportionately subjected to economic hardship, which frequently restricts educational prospects and intensifies psychological suffering (Sardinha et al. 2022; González et al. 2022; Lindert et al. 2023; Johnson et al. 2021; Campbell et al. 2022). For participants, the lack of financial means was not just a real issue but also a cause of embarrassment compared to peers.

At the same time, participants noted that these financial problems promoted resourcefulness and tenacity. “Even if I had little, I learned to be independent early” (P2). Studies suggest that financial misfortune may nurture practical coping skills and resilience when linked with determination and support networks (Sari et al. 2021; Poirson et al. 2023; Botero-García et al. 2023; Kim 2021; Hughes et al. 2023). This dual impact, both burden and training ground, illustrates how socioeconomic factors both restrict and influence the development of resilience in adolescents from broken households.

3. Cultural influences

Participants noted the weight of cultural shame associated with family separation in provincial locations. “People in the community always whispered about us, saying I would grow up useless because my parents had separated.” (P3). This pressure reflects research showing that collectivist cultural norms often intensify stigma for children of broken homes, framing them as deviants from expected social norms (Jarabe & Rahayuwati 2024; Wamoyi et al. 2022; Adjei et al. 2020; Miller et al. 2021; Wilson et al. 2021). For these youth, the cultural

environment added layers of judgment that compounded their emotional struggles.

Despite stigma, cultural and regional contexts also offered unique forms of resilience. Faith-based groups, barangay initiatives, and kinship systems provided support not always available through formal institutions. One participant explained, “My church group became my family; they accepted me without judgment” (P5). Studies confirm that in low-resource or rural contexts, community and faith institutions often serve as protective factors that foster belonging and healing (Nguyen & Patel 2023; Botero-García et al. 2023; Johnson et al. 2021; Campbell et al. 2022; Hughes et al. 2023). Thus, cultural influences acted both as barriers through stigma and as strengths through community-based supports.

Theme II: Memories and experiences of the childhood home environment

1. Unconventional family roles

Participants recounted adopting adult duties at an early age. One said, “I became the one taking care of my younger brothers even when I was still a child myself.” (P2). This tendency, known as parentification, is widely established as a typical experience among children in disturbed homes, sometimes leading to role pressure and early maturity (Nguyen & Patel 2023; Allen & Hensley 2023; González et al. 2022; Hughes et al. 2023; Stadelmann et al. 2023). While demanding, it also taught responsibility and leadership abilities that participants retained into adulthood.

Others noted that taking on atypical responsibilities was both empowering and taxing. “I learned how to cook, budget, and manage the house when I was just 12” (P4). Literature suggests that while these experiences might hasten independence, they also risk depriving children of normative developmental chances (Pryor 2021; Poole et al. 2022; Botero-García et al. 2023; Kim 2021; Wilson et al. 2021). The narratives highlight how unusual family roles developed resilience, but they came at a personal cost of missing childhood experiences.

2. The role of extended family and community

For several participants, extended family members filled the parental void. “My grandmother became my mother figure; she gave me the strength to go on.” (P3). Studies confirm that kinship networks are critical sources of emotional and practical support in contexts of family disruption (Johnson et al. 2021; Adjei et al. 2020; Botero-García et al. 2023; Campbell et al. 2022; Lindert et al. 2023). These connections

provided stability that buffered the negative effects of broken homes, particularly in provincial communities where formal services are limited.

Community networks also played a pivotal role. Some participants mentioned that mentors, teachers, and religious leaders offered guidance and affirmation. “My teacher became my second parent; she never gave up on me” (P1). Global evidence supports this, showing that supportive community figures act as protective factors that promote resilience and positive identity development (Nguyen & Patel 2023; Poirson et al. 2023; Hughes et al. 2023; Wamoyi et al. 2022; Miller et al. 2021). These findings underscore that resilience among youth from broken homes is often co-constructed within community support systems.

3. Emotional landscape of home

Participants described their childhood homes as emotionally unstable. “The house was full with people, yet it never felt like home.” (P5). The absence of harmony and prevalence of conflict generated circumstances where children felt afraid. Research indicates that such emotional climates contribute to chronic stress, insecurity, and emotional dysregulation (Miller et al. 2021; Poirson et al. 2023; González et al. 2022; Nguyen & Patel 2023; Pryor 2021). These narratives stress how the quality of the emotional environment, rather than physical construction, shapes children’s feeling of home.

Some individuals also recalled families defined by silence and emotional mistreatment. “We never talked about problems; everyone just kept quiet” (P6). This mirrors results that emotional unavailability and lack of communication in disturbed families perpetuate isolation and impede children’s emotional development (Stadelmann et al. 2023; Johnson et al. 2021; Wilson et al. 2021; Hughes et al. 2023; Botero-García et al. 2023). Thus, the emotional environment of broken households typically intensified feelings of loneliness and abandonment, changing participants’ self-perceptions and coping techniques.

Theme III: The biggest challenges encountered

1. Emotional turmoil and struggles

Participants reported growing up in broken households as an emotional hardship. “I always questioned if it was my fault my parents separated.” (P6). This sense of self-blame and confusion reflects findings that children of separated parents are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and attachment insecurity (Kim 2021;

LeMoult et al. 2020; Wilson et al. 2021; Hughes et al. 2023; Arora & Kaur 2022). Emotional turmoil was not only an individual challenge but also influenced how participants related to peers and mentors.

For some, the struggles extended into adolescence and young adulthood. Participants explained that unresolved feelings of abandonment and rejection continued to affect their confidence. “Even now, I feel I am never enough for people to stay” (P2). Research supports that these lingering emotional wounds often persist into adulthood, shaping relational trust and self-perception (Nguyen & Patel 2023; González et al. 2022; Botero-García et al. 2023; Poirson et al. 2023; Stadelmann et al. 2023). Such findings affirm that family disintegration leaves long-lasting psychological imprints unless addressed through supportive interventions.

2. Financial hardship and lack of resources

Economic hardships were a common topic. One participant recounted, “I had to suspend studying for a year because we couldn’t pay the fees.” (P4). Broken families typically result in single-parent households with low financial resources, constraining access to education and opportunities (Sardinha et al. 2022; González et al. 2022; Lindert et al. 2023; Johnson et al. 2021; Campbell et al. 2022). These challenges not only harmed academic achievement but also reinforced feelings of inadequacy compared to peers from intact households.

Despite these struggles, financial challenges occasionally encouraged tenacity. Some participants proved resourceful, taking on jobs or scholarships to fund their study. “I sold snacks in school so I could buy my own notebooks” (P1). Evidence suggests that while financial stress brings hazards, it may also encourage self-reliance and practical coping mechanisms (Sari et al. 2021; Poirson et al. 2023; Botero-García et al. 2023; Kim 2021; Hughes et al. 2023). Thus, economic difficulty was both a barrier and a driver for personal progress.

3. Social stigma and peer judgment

Participants reported facing humiliation and mockery from peers and neighbors. “My classmates always teased me about not having a father at home.” (P2). Such peer judgment reinforced isolation and feelings of shame, a finding echoed in research showing that stigma exacerbates the psychosocial challenges of children from broken homes (Stadelmann et al. 2023; Miller et al. 2021; Johnson et al. 2021;

Wamoyi et al. 2022; Jarabe & Rahayuwati 2024). Peer discrimination was not merely teasing but a significant contributor to low self-esteem.

Others explained that stigma limited their willingness to seek help. “I kept everything to myself because I didn’t want people to look down on me” (P5). Studies show that stigma and fear of judgment often discourage children from disclosing struggles or accessing support systems (Nguyen & Patel, 2023; Hughes et al., 2023; Poirson et al., 2023; González et al., 2022; Wilson et al., 2021). This silence reinforced cycles of loneliness, highlighting how social stigma compounds the effects of emotional and financial struggles.

Theme IV: Pivotal moments or turning points

1. Key decisions and self-determination

Participants stressed that making purposeful decisions to seek education or self-improvement became defining events in their life. One commented, “I promised myself I would not let my position define me; I chose to finish school no matter what.” (P1). Such acts of self-determination match with studies indicating that purposeful goal-setting develops resilience and helps kids from disturbed homes to overcome adversity (Sari et al. 2021; González et al. 2022; Kim 2021; Botero-García et al. 2023; Hughes et al. 2023).

Others recounted important decisions about resisting bad influences. “I stayed away from friends who used drugs because I didn’t want to add more problems” (P6). Literature indicates that intentional decisions to avoid hazardous behaviors work as resilience strategies, shielding vulnerable children from compounding the impacts of family instability (Nguyen & Patel 2023; Poirson et al. 2023; Wilson et al. 2021; Campbell et al. 2022; Johnson et al. 2021). These decisions indicate agency in influencing one’s direction despite structural and emotional constraints.

2. Overcoming a specific adversity

Some participants reported transforming experiences of overcoming adversity. One explained, “I failed my exams once and thought about quitting, but I pushed through and passed the next time.” (P4). Such experiences illustrate resilience as a process of adaptation, not linear success. Evidence supports that successfully navigating adversity fosters confidence and strengthens coping resources (Nguyen & Patel 2023; Tedeschi et al. 2018; Hughes et al. 2023; Poirson et al. 2023; González et al. 2022).

Participants also described how confronting specific adversities reshaped their outlook. “When I survived that year of dropping out, I

realized I was stronger than I thought” (P2). Research highlights that post-traumatic growth often emerges from moments of overcoming hardship, allowing survivors to reconstruct meaning and develop new perspectives on life (Botero-García et al. 2023; Stadelmann et al. 2023; Wamoyi et al. 2022; Allen & Hensley 2023; Campbell et al. 2022). These pivotal adversities became milestones in resilience-building.

3. A mentor or supportive figure

Mentorship and supporting individuals were regularly cited as turning events. “If not for my instructor, I may not have finished school.” (P3). Mentors offered not just academic instruction but also emotional validation, functioning as role models in times of uncertainty. Studies indicate that mentorship considerably increases resilience and psychological well-being among children from disturbed households (Anderson et al. 2022; Adjei et al. 2020; Johnson et al. 2021; Botero-García et al. 2023; Lindert et al. 2023).

Faith leaders and community mentors also affected participants’ resiliency. One commented, “When I joined the church youth group, I felt I finally belonged” (P5). Research indicates that faith-based mentors frequently give both emotional advice and a sense of identity that assist kids negotiate stigma and loss (Nguyen & Patel 2023; Wamoyi et al. 2022; Hughes et al. 2023; Miller et al. 2021; Poirson et al. 2023). These ties functioned as lifelines, changing vulnerability into empowerment.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that adolescents raised in broken households endure substantial emotional and social disturbances, including feelings of abandonment, stigma, and strained relationships. These issues typically extend beyond schooling and economic stability, demonstrating how family dissolution reverberates beyond the household into every facet of young people’s lives. Yet, despite these problems, individuals displayed extraordinary resilience, finding strength in social support, personal coping strategies, spirituality, and the will to achieve. Their voices indicate that resilience is not inert endurance but an active, dynamic process of meaning-making, adaptation, and growth.

Aspirations for school, professions, and activism further underline that adolescents from broken homes envisage futures defined not by victimhood but by action and transformation. Their resolve to pursue achievement, raise healthy families, and help others in similar

situations indicates both post-traumatic growth and a rejection of intergenerational cycles of deprivation. These findings reinforce that brokenness does not predetermine failure; with the correct assistance, resilience may be developed into paths of empowerment.

Based on these observations, numerous recommendations are made. Schools and colleges should expand counseling services and develop peer-support groups to reduce stigma and provide safe spaces for afflicted youngsters. Local government entities and community groups can implement family counseling and livelihood efforts to lessen the economic constraints of family dissolution. Faith-based and civic groups should continue to act as accessible forums for resilience-building, especially in resource-limited places. Finally, more research should analyze varied narratives of survival and achievement among children from broken households across rural and urban contexts to inspire holistic solutions.

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