

THE JOURNEY OF SOLO-MALE PARENTS OF PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract-The purpose of this phenomenological study was to scrutinize the experiences of the solo-male parents in raising their children in the public elementary schools of Sarangani Province revealing their journey, challenges and prospects. It also described the challenges in raising their children and their aspirations as solo-male parents. Phenomenological approach was utilized with 15 solo male parents from the different municipalities of Sarangani Province, Philippines for School Year 2015-2016 who were picked to undergo in depth interview and focused group discussion. The results of the interview were transcribed, translated and coded to produce themes. As regards to solo male parents' experiences in raising their children, the following were the themes: fears and insecurities, misery, fortitude, responsibility overload, setback and dividend of sacrifice. As to their challenges and prospects, the themes include: spending time together, staying in control, developing character, time management, and building support system. As to their insights, the themes generated were: success and progress, family solidarity, and another shot of happiness.

Keywords

Here are the definitions of terms that are used in this study to provide a clearer understanding of the contents of this paper.

Challenges. It means problems that consume us with guilt, panic attacks, or chronic fatigue that would pressure us from every side, threatening to crush or break us.

Life's journey. It is definitely the ups and downs of one's life. The storms and difficult times that come to every person.

Phenomenological Study. It is concerned with the study of phenomena as actually experienced by individuals. It is reliving the experiences of the participants involved in the study, going deeper into their thoughts to surface complex issues, identifying the essence of the experience as described by the participants, through interview and group discussions.

Prospect - is the possibility that something fabulous will happen. It comes from the Latin word prospectus which means a view or outlook.

Solo-male parent. It is a male parent who left solo or alone with the responsibility of parenthood due to the death, abandonment, or separation from his wife or partner.

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INTRODUCTION

Single parenting is hard. Single fathering is even harder.
- Dave Taylor -

Single parenthood is the toughest challenge a man could face. To be a solo parent is hard work involving anxiety and stress. Hence, the demand of childbearing for single parents involves an enormous responsibility of nurturing children, taking care of their present needs and planning and establishing their future.

Based on the research of Barajas (2011), single parenthood continues to be a reality for many adults and almost 50% of children born today spend significant time living with only one parent. A large body of research has documented the disadvantages of children raised in a single-parent homes relative to children raised in two parent homes. Lower high school graduation rates, lower GPAs, and greater rate for drug abuse are only some of the negative outcomes associated with growing up in a single-parent home. However, despite the statistics, many children from single-parent homes do attain academic success.

The study of Kwon (2010) revealed that the emotional challenges of raising a family alone may be even tougher for men. They concluded that single dads generally don't have as much confidence as single moms that they're doing a good job, and they're likely to be less stable and more discouraged because they have a hard time managing their frustration, anger and loneliness. Daily routines including sending kids to school create a tremendous amount of stress.

Single parenting is not the sole predictor of academic failure for children. There are many risks and protective factors that interplay to encourage a child's academic success or contribute to a child's poor school performance (Astone and McLanahan, 2010).

In the Province of Sarangani with which various economic and family backgrounds flourished, living as solo dad is quite a challenging role since the entire responsibilities of the kids rest upon their shoulders. A single dad has to try hard to provide that motherly affection to his kids while taking care of their education, basic needs and upbringing in totality (Bianchi, 2013).

Moreover, the academic success of children in provinces is less likely to propel due to limited opportunities. Living in a periphery of a dysfunctional family and being raised by a single-parent, public school children maintains a low academic profile. These experiences are too familiar to me since I am facing a couple of students in my class with such disposition. The family's finances and resources are drastically reduced following the parents break-up or death of one parent. It is plain to say that the coping mechanisms of the single parents significantly affect their children who pursue education. Single parents with their children in the public schools are less participative. Nevertheless, students revealed that solo parenting, particularly solo-male parents have become one of the family status in their community.

The study of Bianchi (2013) which mentioned that being a single parent is very challenging because the entire responsibilities towards the kids rest upon their shoulders and with the constant encounter with children from this family background, steered my interest in their journey and challenges in rearing their children.

Considering that I am one of the many single-female parents who truly experienced the different challenges along the way in raising my children and providing their needs, it is also

imperative to discover if the solo-male parents experienced the same as solo-female parents do. This study would show the coping mechanisms that the solo-male parents encountered along their way in raising their children. Their aspirations in 5 to 10 years would give the readers glimpse of their children's future.

METHOD

This section presented the nature of the study, the research design used in terms to presentation, analysis and interpretation, the philosophical assumptions, role of the researcher, research participants, the data collection process, data analysis, truthfulness which includes the following: credibility, validity, actuality and authenticity of the study and all individuals involved and the moral considerations in the process.

Research Design

Descriptive qualitative method specifically phenomenology was applied in this research study. Phenomenology is concerned with the study of human perception of events or phenomena from the actual happenings in the real world. It is reliving the experiences of the participants involved in the study and going deeper into their thoughts, identifying the essence of the experience as described by the participants, through lengthy discussions (Campbell, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Speziale and Carpenter, 2007; Willis, 2007).

We used the phenomenological approach in this study because we believed that it is an effective instrument in getting comprehensible human experiences, piercing into their thoughts, feelings and actions in order to obtain awareness from their experiences. It clearly demonstrates the specific details of the experience and how they are seen by the subjects in the situation. It was a suitable instrument in my study wherein we visualized and investigated the actual experiences of my participants who were all solo-male parents.

In our study, we made use the specific methodologies such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and note-taking, giving much attention to details and importance of the emotional content to open up an array of human experiences of the subjects involved in the study.

In our research study, we classified themes of the phenomena with 7 respondents for in-depth interviews and 8 respondents for focused group discussion. According to Creswell (2006); Giorgi (2009); and Kvale and Brinkmann, (2009), in qualitative research such as phenomenology, it is recommended that for in-depth interviews, researchers could interview 5-25 participants who had experienced the same phenomenon, if one would want to achieve the goal of representativeness and generalizability as a criterion, from a small number of research participants.

Role of the Researcher

Since I am an educator, one among my roles is to help the parents mold the school children not only academically but also spiritually including the shaping of their human values, and with co authors' intention to create harmonious relationship with all the participants, that's why it is our concern also to have a background check to each and every student that we have in our school so we will know their differences and the causes why some of them are misbehaving while others are well behaved.

Every school needs to improve their services for the learning and so with the shaping of the children's values in the community where they belong. There should be collaborative partnership between the school and the community so to gain support from each other. These two units of the society are very indispensable. It is based on the memorandum which emphasizes that at the school level, any existing organization such as PTCA, NGO, and Barangay Council that demonstrates interest towards collaborative problem solving on educational needs and opportunities will be generically called School-Community Partners (School Community Partnership Manual, 2007). So the school and the community together with their stakeholders are partners in shaping the future of our school children.

Since this study has a personal meaning to me, being a solo-female parent myself, a Master Teacher and a Doctor of Education student with co-author, we personally gathered the data by conducting the in-depth interviews with all the seven informants and eight participants for the FGD, which we also facilitated, with the assistance of a colleague who took down notes during the interviews and FGD and served as one of my independent readers and analysts. Moreover, we asked the assistance from another independent reader and analyst. The three of us analyzed the data gathered from the audio recordings of the interviews and FGD. After coming up with the same findings, we had sought the expertise of a professional data analyst for data analysis and interpretation and thereafter, form our personal insights.

Research Participants

Prior to the conduct of our study, we identified our respondents through referrals of my friends or relatives who have knowledge where to find some of the solo-male parents, got some personal information about them so that I could have some hints if my inquiries are best suit to their individual unique personalities to avoid embarrassments for both the researcher and the respondents. Some of our respondents also were our friends whom we personally knew who are residents of Alabel, Sarangani Province and its neighboring municipalities.

These identified solo-male parents, 7 of them for in depth interview and 8 for FGD were chosen through purposive sampling as our respondents based on a pre-selected criteria relevant to the research study (Richards and Morse, 2006; Saunders, 2012;Speziale and Carpenter, 2007) in this case, they are all solo-male parents who have been raising their children alone in more than 5 years respectively. They were referred here in this study as solo-male parents who were left alone by their spouse/partner by death, abandonment or even in separation who have 2 or more children under their care.

Furthermore, Creswell (2006) recommended that researchers could adopt 5-25 individuals who had experienced the same phenomenon for in-depth interviews. Relative to this, (Englander,

2012) stated that, in qualitative research, the researcher pursues knowledge by deeply penetrating to the core of the experience, to seek the essence of a phenomenon, not how many people who have experienced such phenomena.

Only widowers, abandoned and separated or solo-male parents who were left alone by their spouses or partners who raised their families all by themselves were included in my study. We made sure that my respondents were well prepared and properly oriented on their involvement. During the preliminary meeting, we explained to them that in the actual interview, the flashback of those painful memories would be inevitable so they had to prepare their heart and mind to combat those negative burst of emotions. We assured them that we understood their doubts and apprehensions and that we did not intend in any way, to cause them harm. We see to it that they felt comfortable, to encourage openness. We conveyed the message that they were important to me and express sensitivity to their feelings. When embarking in qualitative interview, the researcher was aware of the situation and culture in which the respondent is located, to be polite, display courtesy and facilitate talk without judgment or critical opinion in order to establish trust (Silverman, 2006).

We also emphasized to them that we might encounter problems along the way but the outcome of the study would be very relevant in solving the problem of the journey of solo-male parents of public elementary school children, which most people are not aware the life experiences of these people. We made them understood that their contribution to this study could make a difference in the lives of solo-male parents.

Data Collection

In the collection of data of the study, we undergone these processes namely: in-depth interview with seven of the respondents and conducting focus group discussion with the other eight solo-male parents which note-taking and audio-video-recording.

Before we conducted the actual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with the study respondents, we made sure that ethical considerations were properly observed. We applied the key principles of ethical issues (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006;Bricki and Green, 2007;Kaiser, 2009; Mack et al, 2005) that should be considered in any research study which are consent and confidentiality.

Since establishing rapport is an essential component of an interview (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006), we had arranged a preliminary meeting with them and explained the details of the study, made them understood that everything will be done in confidentiality. After gaining their trust, we asked them to sign a written consent. Essentially, rapport involves trust and respect for the interviewee and the information he shares. It is very important to provide him a safe and comfortable environment for sharing his personal experiences (Bloom andCrabtree, 2006). To comply this requirement, we made sure that the setting of the interview is conducted in a quiet room that ensured privacy and away from distractions like a private office or in the comfort of their homes, if they prefer.

In-depth interview is one approach that is to be done in order to gather information from the study participants. The in-depth interview is a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research topic (Mack et al, 2005). Focus groups resemble

interviews, but in focus group discussions, both the strengths and the weaknesses of focus groups flow directly from their two defining features: the dependence on the researcher's focus and the group's interaction (Morgan, 2013).

Data were collected through audio recordings of interviews since audio or video recording improves the accuracy of the content shared in the focus group or in-depth interview, as well as the speaker's intonations (InSites, 2007) with the participants in a private setting either in their respective homes or private offices or another neutral site such as a quiet coffee shop or private room. This audio recording of the interview were transcribed verbatim and checked by the participants for confirmation if everything was taken as it is. Confidentiality is observed in all sessions and with all informants, consistently addressing them by their first name or nickname without using their family name to conceal their real identity (Bricki & Green, 2007).

Analysis of data

Analysis of data in a research study involves summarizing the mass of data collected and presenting the results in a way that communicates the most important features (Hancock et al, 2007). Data will be analyzed using a method which included data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2007), adding that qualitative content analysis is "any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings.

Trustworthiness

To build the trustworthiness of the study, we observed some of the following components like the credibility, conformability, transferability and dependability of the study.

Ethical Consideration

Since our research study involves solo-male parents, we believe they were hesitant to disclose information out of embarrassment and withheld some data. However, as part of research accuracy, several safeguards were applied to erase their feeling of hesitations and promote trust. We ensured that our study was guided by ethical principles as described by (Mack et al, 2005), namely: respect for persons, beneficence, justice, consent and confidentiality.

As researchers, we always consider the safety of the research participants and think about the stigmatization and further trauma that they would undergo during the interview (Bricki and Green, 2007), therefore, we have to observe proper care and be cautious with my questions so as not to hurt their feelings and is ready to provide support and comfort as they experienced again the grief they went through. Respect to right of privacy was given due importance in this study. Participants/respondents were informed ahead that they have the right to refuse to answer any of the interview questions if they do not feel comfortable.

Justice requires a commitment to ensuring a fair distribution of the risks and benefits resulting from research. It is important to build into the research plan a method of acknowledging the contributions that participants make to the success of the research process and to reimburse

them in various ways for their efforts (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). In conducting the study, we ensured that the respondents did not spend any amount for the interview and their comfortableness was my priority. They were also given tokens of appreciation for their efforts, and their contributions would be a legacy because it is through them that people especially solo-male parent’s benefit from the study and somehow, it would free the participants from the shadow of their hurtful past. According to Bloom and Crabtree (2006), research should enrich the freedom of the participants more than it improves the author’s career.

RESULTS

This chapter presents the experiences of the study participants, their abilities to share their experiences, challenges and prospects as solo-male parents.

The following research questions made possible the production of data from the informants.

1. What are the experiences of solo-male parents in raising their children?
2. How do solo-male parents cope with the challenges in raising their children?
3. What are the aspirations of solo-male parents?

Table 2

Themes and Thematic Statements on the Experiences of Solo Male Parents in Raising their Children

Essential Themes	Thematic Statements
Fears and Insecurities	Afraid of the sole responsibility of tending to the children
	Worried for children; nobody to attend to them while I’m at work
	Anxious of the enormous responsibility of rearing kids alone
	Afraid of getting sick – no one will attend to my children
	Barely have time for my kids; what if they get sick?
	Uncertain about life since I no longer have a partner in life
	No mother figure at home
Misery	Lost desire to live
	Financial problem would always follow us
	I turned to women and vices
	I became irritable; I would blow up into a fit for no apparent reason
	I tried to kill myself by slashing my wrist
	It is so sad to lose a partner
	Went on denial; neglected children, became drunkard, womanized
	Frustrated at the stigma of being a “broken family

Fortitude	I need to be strong for my children
	Had to be tough for the sake of the kids
	Had to help kids recover from the pain of losing their mother
	Had to summon fighting spirit to go on without my wife
	I mustered enough courage to go on for the sake of my kids
	I need to manage and support the needs of my children
	I thought I couldn't live without her – but I managed

Table 2. Continuation

Themes and Thematic Statements on the Experiences of Solo Male Parents in Raising their Children

Essential Themes	Thematic Statements
Responsibility Overload	Very tiresome rearing all of my children by myself
	Worked double time to meet my children's needs
	Had to bring my 3-year old toddler to work – no one to tend to him at home
Setbacks	It is so difficult without a wife and mother
	Children kept looking for their mother; longed for mother's care
	Children kept getting sick; reduced weight
	Children lost interest in schooling
	Children lost appetite and zest for life
	Kids would stare blankly into space
Dividends of Sacrifice	Bond with children became stronger; we became closer
	Became closer to God; became religious
	Children became independent
	Children became close to each other
	Children's attention became focused on me
	Children became disciplined because I gave them responsibility at home

From the data collected on the experiences of the study participants, six main themes emerged. These themes helped me determine which core ideas to report. These themes are:

Fears and Insecurities- The discussion enormously circulated on their fear of demands and responsibility of rearing kids alone. They have reiterated concerns on how

they could continue to provide for their children now that they have to assume the responsibility of a mom and dad to their children.

Misery- The responses from the informants revealed that their concern on the financial problem have grown more immensely.

Fortitude- They have admitted to have been deeply affected by it and thought they couldn't live without their partner nor go on with their respective lives, they in turn developed the fortitude and managed to face the challenges that they were in.

Responsibility Overload- Based on the responses of the participants as reflected in this study, the solo male parents were overwhelmed by the responsibilities that went with the loss of their wives. Working double time to meet their children's needs were done.

Setbacks- Admittedly, the loss in the family have created setbacks among the children of the respondents of this study. It was found out that their children lost interest in schooling.

Dividends of Sacrifice- They have noticed that their children became independent and were now able to fix their stuffs and manage the household chores without constant supervision.

Table 3

Themes and Thematic Statements on How Solo Male Parents Cope with the Challenges of Raising their Children

Essential Themes	Thematic Statements
Spending Time Together	We go to church together
	Watch movie together
	Giving time for recreation/bonding with them
	Going to places with them
	Give priority to children
Staying in Control	Always giving the children advice
	Communicating with/explaining to the children the reason why their mother left
	Give them assurance that they are not alone; that I am on their side always
	Give them proper guidance for kids
	Always encourage them
	Taught my children to accept the reality that their mother is gone
	We helped one another adjust to a life without their mother
	Endeavored to do my part as a parent well

Developing Character	Teaching them to be always prayerful and close to God
	Giving my children responsibility at home
	Teaching them to be strong against life's adversities
Time Management	I had to prioritize
	I manage my time properly
	I wake up very early each day and sleep late at night
	I divide my time for children and work properly and appropriately
	I did all the household chores before going to work
Building Support System	Hired a house helper to help in the household chores
	Asked for help from family and friends

On the questions related to how solo-male parents cope with the challenges in raising their children 5 essential themes emerged. These are:

Spending Time Together- solo-male parents are giving their children priority. They spend their time together in going to church, watching movies, going to recreational places where their children like to go. These activities it help their children forget or maybe accept the reality that their mother is not with them anymore.

Staying in Control – This became the top concern of the solo male parents since they needed to assure their children that although their mom is gone, they are not alone, that they could rely on them for proper guidance.

Developing Character- They were dedicated to develop the character of their children. They taught them to be strong against life's adversities and to be always prayerful and close to God.

Time Management-They divide their time for children and work properly and appropriately.

Building Support System- a few number of solo-male parents hired a house helper to manage the household chores.

Table 4

**Themes and Thematic Statements on the Aspirations of
Solo Male Parents**

Essential Themes	Thematic Statements
Success and Progress	That children will finish their studies
	That I will be able to secure a good job
	To acquire own house and lot
Family Solidarity	That children will remain close to each other and not fall apart
	That they will be strong to withstand life's trials
	Build own complete and happy family
	Never turn our back on our children no matter how difficult life may be.
	Make children's welfare top priority; seek own happiness after theirs.
	That wife will come home and our family will be whole again
	Take care of the kids well so that they will also take care of you when you grow old.
Another Shot at Happiness	To remarry – to have company when I'm old and infirm
	Remarry someone who is good and kind if God permits
	To find someone who has a stable job who can help me through life's difficulties
	Find a partner who will accept the kids as his/her own; that siblings can connect with
	Remarry because I am still young; don't want to grow old alone
	Choose a partner who will stick by you through thick and thin

On the question related to the aspirations of solo-male parents there were 3 themes emerged. The following themes are:

Success and Progress- They aspire that their children could finish their studies and that they too could handle the demands of the fast changing world of work and as they become old, they could secure a good job or to have stable source of income.

Family Solidarity- The solo parents hope to see their children live a successful family life. They do not want their children to follow the malady that they have experience in their married life.

Another Shot of Happiness- Some of the solo male parents that I had interviewed plan to remarry someone who is good and kind if God permits.

Summary

The results of the study as revealed during the in-depth interview and focus group discussion showed that Solo-Male Parents have fears and anxiety in raising their children. The discussion enormously circulated on their fear of demands and responsibility of rearing kids alone. They have reiterated concerns on how they could continue to provide for their children now that they have to assume the responsibility of a mom and dad to their children.

The participants were blunt about admitting that misery has succumb them after the absence of their wives. The responses from the informants revealed that their concern on the financial problem have grown more immensely. They generally thought that hardship in terms of money-making and financial stability have disturbed them. Aside from the finances, they were also saddened and frustrated at the stigma of broken family, as they viewed this to be a failure.

The data gathered from the in-depth interview and FGD also showed that the solo male parents felt the urgency and need to be strong for their children. Apparently, they showed tenacity after the loss of their wives. Although they have admitted to have been deeply affected by it and thought they couldn't live without their partner nor go on with their respective lives, they in turn developed the fortitude and managed to face the challenges that they were in.

Based on the responses of the participants as reflected in this study, the solo male parents were overwhelmed by the responsibilities that went with the loss of their wives. Working double time to meet their children's needs were done. They have shown flexibility in handling the demands of being both the mother and the father to their children. Those who were not used to doing household chores have learned it. They were able to assume both the responsibility of becoming the financial provider and the household pillar which is the main task of a mother and a wife.

Admittedly, the loss in the family has created setbacks among the children of the respondents of this study. It was found out that their children lost interest in schooling. They also lost the appetite of doing the everyday chores because they kept looking for the care of their mother. They have been severely affected to the point of withdrawing to the usual errands that they used to be doing. The solo parents opted to various ways to cover up the scenario and eventually lessen the emotional disdain felt by the children.

On coping with the challenges of raising their children, the data revealed that the solo parents prioritize giving time for recreation/bonding with their children. In order to pacify the misery, the solo parents viewed bonding with the children as their one tool to battle sadness. They bring their children to church and allow their kids to engage in activities that they enjoy the most. They took time to spend quality time in conversation as time permits. Quality time is viewed by the participants as the essential thing in order to cope with misery.

Staying in control became the top concern of the solo male parents since they needed to assure their children that although their mom is gone, they are not alone, that they could rely on them for proper guidance. The data on this revealed that the solo-male parents were dedicated to develop the character of their children. They taught them to be strong against life's adversities and to be always prayerful and close to God.

On coping with the challenges of raising their children, the data revealed that the solo parents divide their time for children and work properly and appropriately. This study revealed that a few number of solo hired a house help to manage the household chores. Although this was not a prominent response from the solo male parents, Kwon (2010) confirmed that the fathers seem to be burdened with the household chores. Doing them is a menial task that they would not choose if given a chance. They are the kind of people who work diligently in their respective areas of strength, but when the chores at home call they become indifferent.

The result of this study also revealed that the solo male parents hope for the success and progress of their life. They aspire that their children could finish their studies and that they too could handle the demands of the fast changing world of work and as they become old, they could secure a good job or to have stable source of income.

This study revealed that the solo parents hope to see their children live a successful family life. They do not want their children to follow the malady that they have experience in their married life. Thus, they want them to build their own complete and happy family. With their aspirations, the solo male parents make their children's welfare their top priority. Based on the data gathered, the main purpose of their hard work and toil is the very future of their children because they wanted them to seek own happiness after theirs.

The data on this study revealed that there were a few of the solo male parents who were planning to remarry someone who is good and kind if God permits. While others still wallow in the nostalgia of family failure or marriage disdain, these groups of individuals believe for another shot of happiness, of another chance to companionship.

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings, the following implications for practice are offered:

On Handling The Public School Children Raised By Solo Male Parents. In view of the reported challenges of solo parents, it has been established that some children wanted to quit because of inconveniencies and challenges at home. In this reason, it would be advisable for public school teachers to know the family background and scenario of children. Hence, it could provide them better understanding of the children's behavior, absences or tardiness in school. Children raised from their solo parents must be given attention, proper guidance and support in school so that they would be guided to continue studying despite the odds at home.

On Encouraging Solo Parents. The experience of the solo male parents reflected in this study showed that their hesitant to share their fears, concerns and responsibilities in raising their children to other people, it would be better to assume that they need help since it has been revealed to be legitimate in this study. Parents must be called by the school guidance counselor to keep them abreast with the school performance of their children, so as to be given advice by proper authorities to prioritize the needs of children especially their education.

Implication for Future Research

Since the phenomenological study presented evidences about the experiences, challenges and coping mechanisms of the solo male parents, a research on its effect on their participation in their children's education to assess their priorities in the account of their children's needs.

A future research that concentrates on the educational achievements of children of solo male parents could be done to track the efforts of the male parents in sustaining the education of their children in the absence of their spouse.

Concluding Remarks

The result of this study upheld the assertion of Campbell (2011) that a descriptive qualitative method of research particularly phenomenology is better at bringing to surface the human perception from the actual happenings since through discussions, the participants could relive the essence of their experience.

The two methods gave birth to this study in which the experiences of the solo-male parents regarding the challenges and coping mechanisms in raising their children were investigated. Thus, they have left insights in coping with their challenges by handling and managing their family responsibilities by working double time and in assuming both the responsibilities of a mother and father.

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