



HOME ALONE: CHALLENGES THROUGH PARENTAL SEPARATION AND THE COMPLEXITIES OF FAMILY DYNAMICS

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Abstract :

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of five young adults aged 18 to 21 in General Santos City, Philippines, who lived alone after parental separation, focusing on their challenges, coping mechanisms, and realizations. Using a phenomenological qualitative research design and in-depth interviews, the study examined participants' narratives regarding their experiences of living independently after parental separation and the complexities of shifting family dynamics. Thematic analysis revealed nine emergent themes, including emotional and mental health struggles, lack of support systems, financial hardships, seeking emotional release and healing, building inner strength and self-reliance, seeking external support and escape, building strength and faith through resilience and responsibility, healing through personal commitment to breaking the cycle, and the importance of support systems for emotional well-being. The study contributed to the social work field by deepening the understanding of the effects of parental separation within the Filipino cultural context and offering insights for creating responsive interventions that supported emotional and mental healing, as well as familial stability. The study shed light on the strength and resilience of young adults facing life alone and provided a foundation for future research and culturally relevant policymaking.

Keywords: home alone, challenges, parental separation, complexities of family dynamics, Philippines

1. Introduction

In moments of solitude, a child who once thrived in a united family now grapples with the emotional toll of parental separation. The study "Home Alone" draws inspiration from the sentiment expressed in the TikTok trend "What About Me," focusing on the lived experiences of young adults left to face life alone as their parents form new families.

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The popular content sheds light on the struggles, resilience, and identity crises that children of separated parents often endure.

Parental separation extends beyond physical absence; it creates emotional gaps that affect a child's development. The quote, "*Kids need parents, not part-time visitors with a checkbook*" (Susi, n.d.), underscores the importance of meaningful parental involvement beyond financial support. Research indicates that children of divorced or separated parents frequently experience sadness, confusion, fear of abandonment, guilt, anger, and loyalty conflicts (Pedro-Carroll, 2020). Additionally, parental separation links to poor academic performance, behavioral issues, and emotional distress (Lee & McLanahan, 2015).

Globally, between 40 and 50 percent of marriages end in divorce, with factors such as infidelity, poor communication, and unrealistic expectations contributing to this trend (Rogers *et al.*, 2020). Studies in Iran identify "*wrong mate selection*" as a common cause, emphasizing the impact of mismatched expectations (Sibanda *et al.*, 2021). In the United States, nearly 40 percent of children experience parental separation before adulthood, often leading to instability, increased poverty risk, and mental health challenges (D'Onofrio *et al.*, 2019; Karhina *et al.*, 2023).

In the Philippines, while family remains central to society, annulment cases rise, with over 10,000 petitions filed annually since 2018 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021). A Manila-based study identifies infidelity and poor communication as primary causes of separation, resulting in miscommunication and emotional turmoil for children (Ibarra *et al.*, 2023). The 2021 UP Population Institute report finds that 38 percent of Filipino youth grow up without both parents, leading to higher stress levels, strained parental relationships, and lower academic performance ("*1 in 3 Filipino Youth Grew Up Without Both Parents*", 2022).

In Region XII, 75 percent of youth are raised by both parents, but 12.4 percent live with single mothers, and 4.2 percent lack parental involvement altogether ("*1 in 3 Filipino Youth Grew Up Without Both Parents*", 2022). These figures highlight concerns about economic hardship, emotional distress, and developmental challenges among children from separated families (Amato, 2005; Lansford, 2009).

In General Santos City, the phenomenon exists because parental separation disrupts a child's sense of security and stability. When families break apart, children experience deep emotional pain, feeling lost, abandoned, or forced to handle adult responsibilities too soon. Without proper support, they struggle with loneliness, financial stress, and mental health challenges. Some eventually adapt by building resilience, seeking help, or vowing to break the cycle. But many continue to suffer because they lack guidance and resources. In short, the problem persists because parental separation forces kids into difficult situations before they're ready, and without enough support, the wounds last longer. The study reveals that children require support and encouragement to heal and cope more effectively with the changes in their families.

This study aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) is relevant, as research indicates that parental separation

associates with mental health issues among children and adolescents (Karhina *et al.*, 2023). In some cases, children even develop physical symptoms as a result of psychological distress. SDG 4 (Quality Education) also connects to this issue, given that parental separation negatively affects children's academic performance (Corrás *et al.*, 2017; Li *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) applies, as family separation can undermine a child's sense of security and social stability.

On a personal level, the researcher witnesses the struggles of family and friends affected by parental separation, inspiring this study. Their experiences reveal a range of emotional and practical challenges, including suicidal ideation, academic decline, and financial struggles, emphasizing the need for targeted support systems.

Despite extensive research on parental separation, a gap remains in understanding the unique experiences of Filipino youth within the nation's cultural and legal framework. This study seeks to explore these perspectives, shedding light on their journeys and resilience while informing policies and interventions that address their needs.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study aims to explore the lived experiences of young adults in General Santos City, Philippines, who undergo parental separation and now live alone, facing the complexities of shifting family dynamics. It seeks to explore their challenges, coping mechanisms, and realizations to shed light on their struggles and help others in similar situations find support and guidance.

This study also aspires to provide insights that inform policymakers, researchers, educators, social workers, students, young adults, and families about the needs and experiences of these individuals. Ultimately, the findings contribute to the creation of targeted interventions and programs that foster emotional healing, familial stability, and a sense of belonging for children affected by parental separation.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions in this study are designed to explore the lived experiences of young adults facing life alone after parental separation, focusing on their challenges, coping mechanisms, and personal realizations. By examining their perspectives, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) What challenges do the participants face living alone after parental separation and navigating complex family dynamics?
 - 1.1 How do participants view their challenges of living alone after parental separation and the complex family dynamics?
 - 1.2 What coping mechanisms do participants use to manage the challenges of living alone as children of separated parents?
 - 1.3 What realizations do participants have from their experiences of living alone as children of separated parents?

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three key theories: Attachment Theory, developed by John Bowlby (1958) and later expanded by Mary Ainsworth (1970); Resilience Theory, based on the work of Emmy Werner (1982) and further developed by Ann Masten (2001); and the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective, introduced by Paul Amato (2000). Together, they offer an intricate understanding of the study by exploring how disrupted early bonds affect emotional well-being, how individuals adapt and recover from family breakdowns, and how the stressors of divorce impact adjustment over time. By examining the interplay of these perspectives, the study delves deeply into the lived experiences of young adults and uncovers patterns that inform both theoretical understanding and practical interventions.

Attachment Theory posits that early relationships between children and their primary caregivers play a critical role in shaping their emotional development, interpersonal relationships, and ability to cope with stress throughout life. This theory emphasizes the importance of secure attachment bonds, wherein children feel consistently supported and cared for, forming a foundation for their emotional well-being and social competence. Conversely, disruptions in these bonds, such as those caused by parental separation, lead to feelings of insecurity, abandonment, and emotional distress (Bretherton, 1992).

The study seeks to understand how young adults in General Santos City, Philippines, deal with the emotional, psychological, and social impacts of parental separation. In this context, attachment theory provides a lens to examine the participants' perceptions of abandonment and insecurity, which are central to the phenomenon being studied. The theory also explains how disruptions in attachment during formative years influence emotional resilience, coping mechanisms, and social interactions.

Furthermore, Resilience Theory explores how individuals adapt positively despite significant stressors or adversity (Masten, 2001). It highlights factors such as personal strengths, social supports, and environmental influences that help individuals bounce back from challenges. In the context of parental separation, resilience theory examines the protective factors that enable young adults to develop coping mechanisms and maintain emotional stability.

This theory directly aligns with the study's focus on coping mechanisms and the journey toward resilience for young adults affected by parental separation. By applying Resilience Theory, the study explores how participants develop strategies to overcome emotional struggles and adapt to shifts in family dynamics. It also offers a framework to identify key support systems that contribute to their resilience. This perspective not only deepens the understanding of their lived experiences but also informs interventions to enhance their emotional recovery and growth.

Lastly, the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective serves as a theoretical framework that explains how divorce and parental separation affect individuals, particularly children and young adults. According to this perspective, divorce is not a single event but a process that involves multiple stressors, including financial strain,

emotional turmoil, changes in living arrangements, and shifts in family roles. These stressors lead to short-term difficulties such as anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems, as well as long-term adjustments in relationships and self-perception (Lansford, 2009). However, the model also acknowledges that individuals vary in their ability to adapt, with some developing resilience through coping strategies and social support. Ultimately, this perspective highlights that while divorce can be disruptive, the extent of its impact depends on preexisting stressors, available resources, and individual coping mechanisms (Amato, 2000; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

In the context of the study, this perspective helps explain why some participants experience long-term emotional struggles, such as loneliness, anxiety, and academic decline, while others gradually adapt and build resilience. It emphasizes that the outcomes of parental separation depend on the balance between the stressors encountered and the coping resources available, such as supportive relationships, stable environments, and access to emotional or psychological support. By applying this perspective, the study better explores the varying adjustment experiences of young individuals and highlights the importance of strengthening support systems to reduce stress and promote healthy emotional recovery.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Parental separation significantly impacts the emotional and psychological well-being of children and young adults, especially those navigating the transition alone. This study, "Home Alone: Challenges through Parental Separation and the Complexities of Family Dynamics," examines the lived experiences of young adults in General Santos City who live independently after parental separation. By exploring their challenges, coping mechanisms, and realizations, it aims to provide insights that strengthen support systems and guide targeted interventions. In a country where family is central, parental separation has wide-reaching effects, making it vital to understand its impact. The findings of this study can help government agencies, NGOs, and advocacy groups design culturally relevant and sustainable programs that promote mental health, strengthen family-oriented policies, and build resilience among Filipino youth.

This research is valuable to various stakeholders. For students, it highlights shared experiences, effective coping strategies, and the importance of peer support. For parents, it reveals how separation affects their children and encourages them to provide stability and consistent emotional care. Educators gain knowledge to create inclusive environments and support affected students, while society benefits through increased awareness, reduced stigma, and stronger community support. Policymakers can use the findings to improve family-related policies and programs, and social workers can apply them to design tailored interventions and advocate for resources. Finally, it provides a foundation for future researchers to expand studies on parental separation in the Philippine context, focusing on long-term effects and culturally shaped resilience.

1.5 Delimitation and Limitations

This study is delimited to young adults aged 18 to 21 in General Santos City, Philippines, who experience parental separation and currently live alone. It specifically includes individuals whose parents separate during their primary school years and build new families. Those who undergo parental separation but continue to live with other family members or guardians are not included.

Young adults aged 18 to 21 are in the critical stage of “*emerging adulthood*,” where they face major life decisions and explore their identity, independence, and future goals (Bonnie *et al.*, 2015; Bassi *et al.*, 2021; Martel, 2021). Experiencing parental separation during this period deeply affects their emotional development, coping strategies, and overall life direction, especially when living alone without a strong support system. Their more mature perspective allows them to reflect on how these experiences shape their well-being, offering valuable insights into resilience and long-term adjustment (Springer & Wallerstein, 1983).

Geographically, the study is confined to General Santos City, Philippines, and does not extend to other regions or countries, where different cultural, economic, and social factors may influence experiences. Methodologically, the research employs a phenomenological qualitative research design, using in-depth interviews to explore personal experiences, excluding quantitative methods such as surveys or statistical analysis. The study is focused on experiences, coping mechanisms, and realizations that individuals face when their parents separate. It primarily examines the perspectives of young adults, excluding the viewpoints of parents, guardians, or extended family members, to maintain a respondent-centered approach.

Despite these delimitations and limitations, the study aims to provide meaningful insights into the experiences of young adults facing life after parental separation. By acknowledging these delimitations and limitations, the research ensures transparency and guides future studies in addressing gaps in knowledge on this important topic.

1.6 Definition of Terms

The following terms were operationally defined to improve the understanding of the readers and the researcher of this study:

- **Home Alone.** This term refers to young adults aged 18 to 21 who live independently without residing with parents, grandparents, guardians, partners, or roommates, having experienced parental separation during their primary school years, which resulted in both parents forming new families and the young adult lacking a primary residence in either parent's household, thereby facing daily life without consistent parental cohabitation or direct support.
- **Challenges through Parental Separation.** This term refers to the emotional and psychological difficulties faced by young adults aged 18 to 21, such as emotional pain, suicidal thoughts, food insecurity, academic struggles, and financial hardships, which they primarily attribute to their parents' separation during their primary school years.

- **Complexities of Family Dynamics.** This term refers to the shifting relationships, emotional adjustments, and social transitions experienced by young adults aged 18 to 21 after their parents' separation, which include adapting to new family structures such as stepparents and stepsiblings, changes in closeness with parents and siblings, and managing evolving roles, boundaries, and loyalties within the family system.

2. Review of Related Literature

This chapter reviews existing literature on the challenges faced by young adults from separated families, the coping mechanisms they develop, and the meaning-making processes that shape their resilience and adaptation. By examining both local and international studies, the review highlights the multifaceted impact of parental separation and identifies research gaps that the present study seeks to address.

Parental separation proved to be a life-altering event that deeply influenced children's social-emotional development, well-being, and mental health. While the separation may have resolved marital conflict between parents, it marked the beginning of a complex journey for the children involved. Within Filipino culture, the family served as the central thread connecting every stage of life, from birth to death and every milestone in between, acting as a source of strength, guidance, and unconditional love. Rooted in values of unity, obedience, and respect, the traditional Filipino family shaped identity and moral grounding. Consequently, parental separation represented not only a deeply personal hardship but also a socially sensitive issue that challenged these long-held cultural ideals (Alampay & Jocson, 2011; Taas-Noo Pilipino, 2024; Waddoups *et al.*, 2019; Watanabe, 2024).

Against this cultural backdrop, the literature review centered on the lived experiences of children of separated parents, focusing on how they emotionally and mentally processed the event, how it reshaped their daily lives, and how they made meaning from their experiences over time. Understanding these experiences went beyond examining broad psychological theories or demographic statistics; it involved listening to personal narratives, identifying emerging patterns of coping and realization, and exploring the nuanced ways in which separation influenced identity, emotional development, and future relationships. By doing so, this review aimed to address a gap in the existing literature, particularly within the Philippine setting, where children's voices were often underrepresented in discussions regarding family breakdown. Gaining insight into these perspectives could, in turn, inform more compassionate, responsive social interventions and support systems.

To provide structure, the literature review was organized into several key sections. It began with an in-depth discussion of the challenges that young adults faced as a result of such separation. The review examined the unique coping mechanisms employed by young adults, followed by an exploration of how they engaged in meaning-making to understand their experiences. Finally, the review culminated in a synthesis that identified

research gaps and outlined the direction of the current study. Taken together, this structure ensured a comprehensive understanding of the topic while establishing the importance of localized, experience-based research on children affected by parental separation.

2.1 Challenges Faced by Young Adults Due to Parental Separation

The transition to adulthood, which typically occurred between the ages of 18 and 21 and extended into the distinct developmental phase of emerging adulthood, was a critical period marked by growing independence, identity exploration, and the pursuit of long-term goals such as career paths and romantic relationships. This period often involved the postponement of conventional milestones (Brito & Soares, 2023; Myers *et al.*, 2023; Wiegerink *et al.*, 2010).

During this phase, young adults managed inherent emotional, social, and academic challenges while redefining their relationships with family and peers. For those individuals who experienced parental separation earlier in life, this transition was uniquely complex, profoundly influencing their understanding of family structures, intimate relationships, and their own sense of self. Critically, family structure shaped the nature and severity of young adults' struggles, with those from separated families facing unique stressors that impaired their emotional well-being, mental health, financial stability, independent living, and complicated their identity formation (Smith-Etxeberria *et al.*, 2022; Stapley *et al.*, 2021).

Parental separation presented significant and multifaceted challenges for young adults, adversely affecting their emotional well-being, mental health, and financial stability compared to peers from intact families (Lanozo *et al.*, 2021). This experience frequently triggered profound emotional distress, including feelings of abandonment, grief, and instability resulting from disrupted family dynamics and altered living arrangements (Wechter, 1983). Familial conflict and restructuring heightened the risks of depression, particularly in the absence of adequate coping mechanisms (Myers *et al.*, 2023; Sugimura *et al.*, 2022). Beyond immediate distress, young adults often grappled with feelings of neglect, resentment arising from perceived parental favoritism, and a pervasive sense of loss that undermined their motivation and contributed to chronic exhaustion (Karhina *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, the collapse of consistent familial understanding and support, especially during difficult times, exacerbated feelings of vulnerability, particularly for those who lived alone (Peñalba, 2021).

Research indicated that exposure to inter-parental conflict and the divorce process itself, which encompassed changes in parenting, parental emotional states, and ongoing post-divorce conflict, significantly fueled attachment-related anxiety and avoidance in children. This exposure impacted their ability to form secure relationships well into adulthood. Furthermore, the reduced involvement of one parent frequently diminished crucial emotional support and guidance, exacerbating feelings of vulnerability and impeding preparedness for adult responsibilities and relationships. Consequently, these individuals often struggled to form secure attachments due to eroded trust. The

disruption of family dynamics also precipitated a lack of academic and emotional support, hindering their ability to thrive in educational settings and navigate the complex social landscape of young adulthood (Karhina *et al.*, 2023; Khattak *et al.*, 2018; Moen, 2023; Smith-Etxeberria *et al.*, 2022; Wood *et al.*, 2017).

Additionally, recent research underscored the profound psychological repercussions of parental separation on children and young adults. Parental separation triggered adverse psychological effects, necessitating a shift in perspective to fully comprehend the impact on children, with self-blame emerging as a significant risk factor for diminished well-being. Material and relational mechanisms were identified as linking parental separation to psychological distress in adulthood. Moreover, studies indicated that the effects of parent-child separation were consistently negative on children's social-emotional development, overall well-being, and mental health; these effects became even more severe when the separation was prolonged or accompanied by other forms of deprivation or victimization (Lacey *et al.*, 2014; Moen, 2023; Waddoups *et al.*, 2019).

Furthermore, children in separated or divorced families exhibited diminished academic performance, impaired social adjustment, and increased behavioral problems, including externalizing behaviors and internalizing symptoms. The disruption of early childhood relationships with trusted parents laid the groundwork for the development of attachment anxiety, disorganized attachment, and even post-traumatic stress disorder, further complicating their emotional landscape. These challenges were often compounded by a lack of a robust support system, leaving them feeling isolated and ill-equipped to cope with the multifaceted stressors that arose in the wake of family dissolution (Corrás *et al.*, 2017; Jie *et al.*, 2025).

Aside from that, young adults from separated families faced a particularly arduous path to self-sufficiency, marked by accelerated independence and significant financial instability (Sugimura *et al.*, 2022). They frequently assumed adult responsibilities like managing finances, household tasks, and decision-making prematurely, often without robust parental guidance. This lack of support overwhelmed their coping capacities, especially when strained family relationships limited access to familial assistance (Stapley *et al.*, 2021).

Financial instability was also pervasive; reduced parental support often necessitated part- or full-time employment, diverting focus from academics and escalating stress. This situation increased the risk of food insecurity due to insufficient resources. The resulting economic strain forced difficult choices between basic necessities and educational pursuits, while the need to secure employment frequently led to forgoing educational opportunities, thereby limiting future career prospects and perpetuating a cycle of financial hardship (Crittenden & Spieker, 2023).

Moreover, academic performance was similarly compromised by parental separation. Emotional distress, financial pressures, the challenge of balancing work and studies, and the potential lingering effects of earlier adverse experiences undermined concentration, motivation, and academic integration. Navigating the complexities of higher education proved particularly challenging for students from disadvantaged

backgrounds, including those from single-parent families. These students faced barriers such as financial constraints, limited access to resources, and a lack of academic preparation (Cohen *et al.*, 2016; Flanagan-Bórquez & Soriano-Soriano, 2024; Lanozo *et al.*, 2021; The Right to Higher Education, 2022).

In contrast, young adults from intact families typically exhibited stronger emotional well-being, benefiting from stable environments, consistent parental support, lower familial stress, and potentially more secure foundational attachment experiences. These factors collectively fostered psychological resilience and smoother navigation of emerging adult challenges. This divergence emphasized how parental separation intensified emotional difficulties and mental health risks, destabilizing developmental foundations and complicating identity and relational tasks (Moen, 2023; Sanwald *et al.*, 2023).

Children from intact families were more likely to receive consistent emotional support, guidance, and mentorship from both parents, which contributed to their overall well-being and fostered a sense of security and belonging. Conversely, those from intact families experienced a more gradual and supported transition. Parental involvement aided in skill development, confidence-building, and provided a safety net during setbacks, often within a more stable financial context. Thus, inadequate preparation time and absent support systems disproportionately hindered youth from separated families (Fernández-Simo *et al.*, 2021). Stable family environments bolstered achievement through tutoring, encouragement, reduced external stressors, and greater financial security; meanwhile, intact families typically provided steadier financial backing, enabling a greater focus on education (Öngider, 2013; Sabri *et al.*, 2023; The Right to Higher Education, 2022)

Notably, research confirmed that children in single-parent families faced higher rates of behavioral issues, social difficulties, and low self-esteem, with potential long-term consequences. These families were also at a significantly higher risk of poverty, often struggling to provide basic needs such as housing, food, and health services. Single parents experienced considerable challenges due to responsibility overload, heavy workloads, and psychological stress; parental separation itself negatively impacted children (Chavda & Nisarga, 2023; Dharani & Balamurugan, 2024; Rees *et al.*, 2023).

Consequently, children had to adjust to dynamic situations post-separation, often experiencing a loss of knowledge, skills, and resources. Furthermore, socioeconomic disparities compounded these issues, as higher-income families could invest more in human capital, thereby widening the achievement gap. However, outcomes were influenced by multiple factors beyond just household structure, including income levels and parental involvement (Rees *et al.*, 2023; Yan & Gai, 2022).

Therefore, accessible support systems, such as government programs, community resources, and family networks, were vital in mitigating these multifaceted disadvantages. Interventions should have been specifically designed to address the complex interplay of emotional, relational, financial, and academic challenges stemming

from parental separation, while considering protective factors like low conflict and meaningful non-residential parent relationships (Lamb *et al.*, 1997; Rees *et al.*, 2023).

2.2 Coping Mechanisms of Young Adults Facing Parental Separation

Managing the intricate landscape of parental separation has presented formidable emotional and psychological challenges for young adults, a group situated at a critical developmental juncture (Longstaffe, 2000). As they grappled with shifting family dynamics, understanding the coping mechanisms they employed became essential for comprehending their resilience and adaptation during this vulnerable stage of development (Seiffge-Krenke, 2013). These cognitive and behavioral strategies, broadly defined as methods to manage stressful situations, played a pivotal mediating role in how parental separation affected their psychological well-being and overall adjustment. Such strategies could be categorized as either adaptive (positive) or maladaptive (negative) based on their long-term effectiveness (Moen, 2023; Zimmer-Gembeck *et al.*, 2023).

To begin with, adaptive coping mechanisms have enabled young adults to constructively manage the stressors associated with parental separation. One key approach involved seeking emotional release and healing through activities such as journaling, engaging in creative arts, confiding in trusted individuals, or attending therapy to process difficult emotions, including grief, anger, anxiety, and depression. This process relied on effective emotional regulation, which had been critical for socioemotional adjustment (Longstaffe, 2000; Sbarra & Borelli, 2018; Tammilehto *et al.*, 2021).

Another vital strategy focused on building inner strength and self-reliance by fostering independence, resilience, and self-esteem through goal-setting, problem-solving, self-care, and transformative practices that helped restore a sense of control. This drew upon the developmental foundations of self-efficacy and involved increasingly effortful strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal (Paley & Hajal, 2022; Thümmeler *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, seeking external support through social networks, community resources, and professional help has provided essential validation, assistance, guidance, and a sense of belonging. Perceived social support had served as a vital protective factor that promoted self-control and enabled more effective stress coping (Ding *et al.*, 2024; Melton & Deutsch, 2020; Parikh *et al.*, 2019; Surżykiewicz *et al.*, 2022; Triana *et al.*, 2019).

Moreover, a vital component of adaptive coping had been the seeking of external support. Faith-based communities, peer networks, and extended family members all offered emotional sustenance, validation, and guidance. Faith institutions provided a sense of belonging and spiritual support, while peers offered empathy and shared experiences that helped reduce feelings of isolation (Feeney & Collins, 2015; Trends in Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology, 2020). Extended family members, such as grandparents or aunts and uncles, contributed to stability and continuity during periods of familial upheaval (Zimmer-Gembeck *et al.*, 2023). Community resources, including mental health professionals and school-based counselors, also played a pivotal role by

offering structured support to young adults navigating these transitions (Parikh *et al.*, 2019; The Right to Higher Education, 2022).

On the other hand, maladaptive coping strategies, although they may have provided temporary relief, often resulted in detrimental long-term consequences. These included substance use, social withdrawal, risky behaviors, and self-harm, typically fueled by a desire to escape emotional pain or by the absence of effective coping skills and supportive networks. Young adults from separated families also tended to internalize negative thought patterns that perpetuated feelings of helplessness and anxiety. Critically, the intensity and nature of parental conflict significantly influenced these outcomes, with heightened exposure increasing the risk of emotional and behavioral disorders (Christ *et al.*, 1994; Karhina *et al.*, 2023; Lamb *et al.*, 1997; Mastorci *et al.*, 2024; Sanwald *et al.*, 2023).

It was also important to note that coping strategies were not strictly dichotomous. Many young adults employed both adaptive and maladaptive mechanisms simultaneously, depending on contextual factors such as the family environment, access to resources, and personal temperament. These dynamics highlighted the complexity of divorce-related experiences and underscored the need for tailored support systems that took into account individual variability and evolving developmental needs (Kleinsorge & Covitz, 2012; Yu *et al.*, 2020).

Moreover, gender and cultural differences significantly shaped how young adults responded to parental separation. For instance, boys were often more inclined to externalize their distress through aggression, while girls tended to internalize their emotions, which manifested as anxiety or depression. Cultural norms surrounding family cohesion, emotional expression, and help-seeking behavior also influenced coping strategies. Some cultures emphasized collective resilience, whereas others prioritized individual autonomy. Recognizing these differences was critical to designing culturally sensitive and gender-responsive interventions (Trends in Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology, 2020).

Additionally, institutional support systems, particularly schools and community organizations, served as protective buffers. Schools identified at-risk students and provided access to counseling services, academic accommodations, and referral networks. Teachers and school staff were uniquely positioned to establish stable, supportive learning environments that fostered resilience. Community-based services, such as youth centers and mental health clinics, offered parenting workshops, family therapy, and support groups tailored to the specific needs of adolescents and young adults. When these services were interconnected and student-centered, they substantially enhanced young people's capacity to cope and succeed both academically and emotionally (Parikh *et al.*, 2019; The Right to Higher Education, 2022).

Therefore, understanding these specific coping mechanisms was essential for developing targeted interventions aimed at promoting positive adjustment and mitigating adverse consequences. Key priorities included identifying the factors that influenced coping strategies or their effectiveness, and conducting longitudinal research

to assess long-term impacts across psychological, social, and academic domains. Additionally, recognizing protective factors was vital for informing evidence-based support practices and policies for young adults navigating family transitions (Moen, 2023; Renouf, 1981).

2.3 Young Adults' Realizations and Meaning-Making from Parental Separation

The exploration of how young adults constructed meaning from their childhood experiences of parental separation revealed a complex interplay of personal growth, evolving perspectives, and the development of resilience. This meaning-making process was perceived as a journey shaped by relationships with others, self-reflection, and cultural influences, underscoring that resilience-building involved a wide range of contributing factors. As individuals mature, they acquire skills that enable them to create meaning in various ways throughout different stages of life. This ability to find meaning was not fixed; rather, it evolved as they developed more flexible and adaptive ways of thinking (Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; Fivush *et al.*, 2017; Theron & Theron, 2014).

During childhood and adolescence, the capacity to construct a clear and organized personal narrative proved especially important in managing painful or traumatic experiences, as it facilitated emotional and cognitive processing. This often involved forming a new understanding of the world, one that acknowledged the trauma while also allowing space for comfort and support from loved ones. Through this process, individuals made sense of their experiences, adjusted to their new realities, and continued to move forward (Sales *et al.*, 2012; Sambeek *et al.*, 2023).

The journey of these individuals was frequently characterized by encounters with adversity, which paradoxically fostered growth, inner strength, and self-reliance. In particular, the ability to derive redemptive meaning from suffering and hardship significantly contributed to improved mental health, well-being, and emotional maturity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Central to this transformation was the process of connecting one's sense of self to the emotional impact of challenging experiences. This connection acted as a catalyst for positive self-transformation, with exploratory narrative processing and the achievement of a coherent, positive resolution serving as key mechanisms for attaining healthy adult development (King & Hicks, 2006). Such processing inherently required a shift in perspective, prompting individuals to fundamentally re-evaluate their core beliefs about love, family, and life itself (Borden, 1992).

Furthermore, personal stories revealed a dynamic reciprocity between early experiences and future orientations; the key lay in connecting past cultural resources with present cultural challenges and processing them to construct meaning relevant to current developmental experiences (Flum & Buzukashvili, 2018). Consequently, children of separated parents had a unique opportunity to cultivate resilience and emotional intelligence by developing narrative skills that transformed past events into meaningful components of their identity (Armstrong, 2013).

This development of resilience and emotional intelligence (EI) often culminated in increased maturity and a deeper understanding of interpersonal relationships. Essential

strategies for recovering from trauma included cultivating self-compassion, practicing self-care, and strengthening personal capabilities (Caldwell & Henry, 2017). Moreover, the ability to navigate adversities was closely linked to the experience of positive emotions. These positive emotions broadened individuals' thought-action repertoires, built enduring personal resources, and played a crucial role in fostering resilience by enhancing creativity, problem-solving abilities, and social connectedness. Parental emotional support, in particular, proved vital in bolstering self-confidence and problem-solving skills throughout this process. Thus, fostering an environment of support and understanding was critical for children navigating parental separation, leading to enhanced resilience and emotional intelligence (Ding *et al.*, 2024).

Realizations about forgiveness and acceptance represented pivotal steps for young adults in coming to terms with their parents' separation and moving forward in life. Constructive forgiveness, marked by the release of resentment, bitterness, and desires for revenge, also involved cultivating positive emotions, attitudes, and behaviors toward those involved. In addition, promoting self-efficacy and providing strong social support were vital for building resilience among adolescents from divorced families (Murniasih & Irvan, 2023). Collectively, these factors significantly contributed to the development of healthy coping mechanisms, enabling individuals to manage complex family dynamics and cultivate stronger, more resilient selves (Trends in Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology, 2020).

In summation, the meaning-making process for these young adults had integrated personal growth, shifting perspectives, and the development of resilience and emotional intelligence (Masten *et al.*, 1990; Paley & Hajal, 2022). Moreover, emotionally intelligent abilities, encompassing the management of emotional information from oneself and others, tended to increase naturally with maturity (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). This journey often culminated in realizations about forgiveness and acceptance, which were essential components for healing and moving forward (Ansar *et al.*, 2021; Riggs, 2010; Surżykiewicz *et al.*, 2022; Trends in Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology, 2020). Resilient individuals, possessing psychological and emotional stability, were able to confront stressful situations calmly and make effective decisions (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023).

The experience of parental separation had precipitated myriad challenges that extended into young adulthood, fundamentally shaping trajectories related to personal growth, emotional intelligence, and perspectives on family. The transition to adulthood, already inherently complex due to identity formation and major life changes, had been further complicated by these experiences. This resulted in unique patterns of adaptation, resilience, and meaning-making as individuals grappled with long-term consequences (Lament, 2019; Myers *et al.*, 2023; Springer & Wallerstein, 1983; Sulimani-Aidan, 2020).

Understanding this multifaceted impact required recognizing divorce not as a singular event, but as an ongoing process with diverse effects on children (Smith-Etxeberria *et al.*, 2022). This journey had involved a complex interplay of stressors and mediators that influenced outcomes (Seijo *et al.*, 2016). A common stressor was the decline

in living standards, particularly in single-mother households, which increased the risk of material disadvantage during adolescence (Lacey *et al.*, 2014). As a result, children had encountered challenges that affected academic performance, social interactions, familial bonds, and mental well-being. These impacts frequently persisted into adulthood, shaping their social, psychological, and economic development. Adverse psychological effects had often been common responses to difficult life changes such as loss and divorce (Khattak *et al.*, 2018; Moen, 2023; Trends in Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology, 2020).

Nevertheless, children of separated parents often demonstrated accelerated personal growth, driven by the need to navigate complex emotions and assume responsibilities prematurely. This adversity cultivated heightened self-reliance, independence, coping mechanisms, and problem-solving skills at an early age. Their increased independence specifically stemmed from the necessity to resolve issues autonomously. It was crucial to note that the effects were either immediate or delayed, with unforeseen circumstances often altering their developmental trajectories (Lamb *et al.*, 1997; Seijo *et al.*, 2016; Trends in Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology, 2020; Wood *et al.*, 2017).

Over time, developing resilience became a defining characteristic as they adapted to shifting family structures and emotional demands. While some studies highlighted negative outcomes, others indicated that children could emerge stronger and more self-reliant through adversity. Potential outcomes included increased maturity, deeper understanding, and significant shifts in their perspectives on love, family, and life (Chavda & Nisarga, 2023; Crittenden & Spieker, 2023; Khattak *et al.*, 2018; Trends in Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology, 2020; Waddoups *et al.*, 2019).

These experiences often led to profound transformations in how they viewed fundamental concepts. For instance, witnessing the breakdown of their parents' relationship often fostered skepticism toward romantic permanence, while simultaneously deepening their appreciation for healthy relationships. Consequently, their understanding of family dynamics became more nuanced, acknowledging the inherent complexities and imperfections (Collardeau & Ehrenberg, 2014; McLanahan & Sawhill, 2015).

Additionally, exposure to marital conflict frequently altered their perceptions of relationships and commitment, prompting many to undergo a fundamental reevaluation of their values and priorities. This process often resulted in a more mature, realistic outlook, marked by a deeper comprehension of the complexities of human relationships (Paul, 2014). Ultimately, this journey often nurtured a broader understanding of forgiveness and acceptance, enabling individuals to make peace with their circumstances and to make more informed decisions in the future (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2023).

Experiencing parental separation also required children to develop resilience and emotional intelligence (Masten, 2001). Many cultivated greater empathy after learning to understand and respond to others' emotions through firsthand experiences of family

conflict (Dunn *et al.*, 1991). Living amidst conflict and daily disruptions often forced them to adjust quickly and manage their emotions effectively (Davies & Cicchetti, 2004). Within this environment, children learned to cope with stress, adapt to changes, and regulate their feelings, skills essential for positive mental health and healthy development (Compas, 2006; Morris *et al.*, 2007). Their exposure to emotional challenges also enhanced their ability to identify and process their own emotions and to extend empathy toward others (Sulistiasih *et al.*, 2024). As a result, this heightened emotional intelligence often helped them build stronger relationships and navigate social challenges more successfully in adulthood (Brown, 2006).

A crucial part of the healing process involved realizations about forgiveness and acceptance. Coming to terms with the past, forgiving their parents (and themselves), and accepting the new family structure were essential for emotional recovery. Acceptance requires letting go of resentment and bitterness in order to move forward, without necessarily condoning the actions that led to the separation. Indeed, some individuals expressed forgiveness toward their parents, which aided in emotional healing and improved their interpersonal relationships. Overall, positive adaptation often depended on embracing the restructured family unit and developing effective coping strategies for the associated challenges. This journey was rarely linear and frequently involved periods of anger, sadness, and confusion. Nevertheless, embracing forgiveness and acceptance ultimately freed individuals from emotional burdens, enabling them to pursue more fulfilling, emotionally balanced lives (Renouf, 1981).

2.4 Synthesis

Parental separation was a profoundly impactful life event that significantly affected children's social-emotional development, well-being, and mental health. Within the Filipino cultural context, where the family held a central role in shaping identity and was imbued with values of unity, obedience, and respect, separation constituted not only a personal crisis but also a challenge to deeply rooted societal ideals. Consequently, young adults who had experienced parental separation faced unique and multifaceted challenges during their critical transition to adulthood. Specifically, they often endured heightened and persistent emotional distress, including feelings of abandonment, grief, depression, and anxiety, which frequently impaired their ability to form secure attachments and romantic relationships. Moreover, the premature assumption of adult responsibilities, financial instability, and compromised academic performance compounded these difficulties, creating distinct disparities compared to their peers from intact families.

To manage these complex adversities, young adults employed a range of coping strategies, broadly categorized as adaptive or maladaptive. Adaptive mechanisms fostered resilience and included, first, processing emotions through outlets such as journaling, creative arts, or therapy; second, building self-reliance and a sense of control through problem-solving, goal-setting, and self-care; and third, actively seeking external support from peers, extended family, faith communities, or professionals. Conversely,

maladaptive strategies, such as substance use or social withdrawal, offered temporary relief but often resulted in significant long-term harm to their well-being. The effectiveness of these coping strategies was heavily influenced by contextual factors, including the intensity of parental conflict, gender norms, cultural background, and, notably, access to institutional support systems such as schools and mental health services.

Over time and through reflection, these young adults engaged in a profound process of meaning-making, actively transforming their experience of separation. This journey frequently led to significant realizations and personal growth. Foremost, navigating adversity cultivated accelerated maturity, resilience, independence, and enhanced emotional intelligence, marked by greater empathy and refined emotional regulation. Simultaneously, their perspectives on love, family, and commitment evolved toward a more nuanced and realistic understanding. Ultimately, a pivotal step in their healing involved achieving constructive forgiveness, releasing resentment, and accepting their restructured family dynamic. This acceptance liberated them from the burdens of the past, enabling forward movement and demonstrating that, despite the inherent risks of parental separation, supportive environments and reflective processing empowered young adults to emerge with deeper self-understanding and considerable resilience.

3. Methodology

In this chapter, I presented a comprehensive overview of the research methods and approaches I employed, outlined my role as a researcher, detailed the participants involved, and described the data collection and analysis techniques I used, along with the ethical considerations I adhered to during the study.

3.1 Research Design

In my study, I employed a Phenomenological Qualitative Research Design to explore the lived experiences of young adults in General Santos City, Philippines, aged 18 to 21, who had gone through parental separation and were now living alone, navigating the complexities of family dynamics.

I found that phenomenology offered a careful description and interpretation of human experiences, awareness, and meaning. It primarily focused on studying consciousness from a first-person perspective, allowing me to understand how individuals perceived and made sense of the world around them. A central aspect of this approach was exploring the intentional relationship between lived experiences and their objects. This emphasis highlighted the direct and self-evident understanding of existence as encountered and expressed by the individuals I studied (Blok, 2023; Byrne, 2024; Seamon, 2024; Zhongwei, 2020).

Importantly, I recognized that phenomenology rejected reductive scientific frameworks and abstract philosophical systems. Instead, it aimed to reveal the fluid, relational, and co-constitutive nature of existence and subjectivity. Through its

descriptive method, which prioritized the suspension of preconceptions (*epoché*), I uncovered hidden meanings and transformative possibilities within these lived experiences (Rijos, 2024; Seamon, 2024).

The choice of phenomenology was justified for my study because it enabled a deep exploration of young adults' personal experiences of parental separation. It centered on understanding their emotions, cognitive processes, and meaning-making as they faced familial changes. By examining their shared stories, I discovered how they navigated the emotional and social effects of separation, particularly the impact on their sense of self, relationships, and daily life (Anderson, 2020).

As a result, phenomenology helped me provide meaningful insights into how these young adults adjusted, communicated, and rebuilt their identities during this significant stage of their lives.

3.2 Research Participants

In my study, I included both male and female young adults who met specific inclusion criteria. The participants were between the ages of 18 and 21, resided in General Santos City, Philippines, had experienced parental separation, and were currently living alone. I specifically targeted individuals whose parents had separated during their primary school years and who had formed new families. During the period of separation, these participants may have lived under the care of a single mother, a single father, grandparents, an aunt and uncle, or guardians. Ultimately, they took on the responsibility of caring for themselves, but I excluded those who had undergone parental separation but continued to live with other family members or guardians. I included five participants to allow for a thorough exploration of their experiences while keeping the data collection and analysis manageable.

To select participants, I used a purposive non-probability sampling technique. This approach involved choosing individuals based on clear criteria that aligned with the goals of my research (Andrade, 2020; Campbell *et al.*, 2020). I found that purposive sampling was particularly beneficial for gathering rich information from a small group, which made my data collection more focused and efficient (Belbestre & Chieng, 2024). It was also useful when working with hard-to-reach groups, especially given the time and resource constraints I faced, making it less demanding than random sampling (Stratton, 2024). In addition, this technique helped uncover important themes and differences in the data, leading to a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences (Denieffe, 2020). By clearly articulating the reasons for selecting these participants, I enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of my study.

Throughout the recruitment process, I emphasized that participation was completely voluntary. I reminded participants during recruitment, before the interviews, and during our conversations that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences. This ethical safeguard ensured their comfort and encouraged honest sharing. Finally, to collect the data, I conducted in-depth interviews with these selected individuals.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection was a vital part of my research because it provided the information needed to answer the research questions and understand the issue being studied. In my study, collecting data was especially important because it allowed me to hear directly from young adults about their real-life experiences. Their voices and stories helped reveal the emotional, social, and practical challenges they faced, making the study more meaningful, accurate, and grounded in lived realities.

To begin with, before I gathered the data, I created a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions to explore my participants' challenges, coping mechanisms, and realizations following parental separation. This guide was designed to examine how my participants managed changes in family dynamics and adapted to the challenges.

After that, I sought the approval of validators for my research instrument to ensure that the questions were clear, relevant, and accurately measured what they were intended to. This step strengthened the credibility and reliability of my study.

Once I received the approval, I complied with the notice to proceed. Following that, I began selecting my participants, who were aged 18 to 21 and resided in General Santos City. After selecting the participants, I scheduled face-to-face interview sessions and obtained the consent form, verification form, and agreement form. Subsequently, the data collection took place.

Before the interviews, I informed the participants about the purpose of my research, the goals of my study, and their rights as participants. They were also asked to sign an informed consent form, which covered both their voluntary participation and the assurance of confidentiality. This process ensured informed consent while building trust and upholding ethical standards. I made sure they fully understood their role and could choose to participate freely, creating a safe and confidential environment for them to share their experiences. Following this, I conducted in-depth interviews, allowing the participants to express their thoughts openly while adhering to the prepared guide.

During the interviews, I used my phone as an audio recorder to capture their responses and ensure accurate data collection. The data collection concluded with giving each participant a token of appreciation.

By following this method, I ensured ethical standards were maintained and collected reliable, valid data to address my research questions effectively.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected through interviews were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step method, a thorough phenomenological approach designed to uncover the essential structure of lived experiences. To ensure depth and accuracy in the analysis, the researcher sought assistance of a thematic analyst.

First, all interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were read multiple times to develop a comprehensive understanding of the participants' narratives. Second, significant statements relevant to the participants' challenges, coping

mechanisms, and realizations regarding parental separation and the complexities of family dynamics were extracted. Third, meanings were formulated from these statements, focusing on the underlying journeys conveyed by the participants.

Fourth, these meanings were organized into clusters of themes. The thematic analyst played a crucial role in ensuring that these themes remained grounded in the participants' expressions. Fifth, an exhaustive description of the phenomenon was developed to capture the full scope of the lived experience. Sixth, the fundamental structure of the experience was identified and refined.

Lastly, to validate the findings, I sought verification from my participants to ensure that the interpreted themes genuinely reflected their experiences. This methodological process, grounded in Colaizzi's approach, allowed for a nuanced exploration of how young adults in General Santos City dealt with the emotional and developmental impacts of parental separation, guided by theoretical frameworks such as Attachment Theory, Resilience Theory, and the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective.

3.5 Trustworthiness

Ensuring the trustworthiness of my qualitative study was essential to establish the credibility, validity, and reliability of the findings. I employed four key measures to uphold the rigor of the research process: credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability. These measures were discussed below, along with the corresponding strategies I used to ensure validity:

- **Credibility.** This referred to the accuracy of findings in representing what was studied and reflecting the participants' authentic thoughts and experiences (Lim, 2024). In my study, credibility ensured that the insights drawn about the impacts of parental separation accurately represented the lived experiences of the young adults. To enhance credibility, I collected data through in-depth interviews and other reliable methods, ensuring that the participants' voices were heard clearly and authentically, without distortion or misrepresentation.
- **Confirmability.** This indicated that the results were grounded in the actual data and represented what the participants shared, rather than being influenced by the researcher's personal opinions or biases (McLeod, 2024). Confirmability ensured that the conclusions drawn from the study were grounded in the participants' experiences of parental separation and the shifting family dynamics, not influenced by my personal views. I maintained a neutral stance throughout data collection and analysis, carefully documenting all processes and decisions to minimize bias and ensure that the findings were directly linked to participant input.
- **Transferability.** This suggested that the research findings could be applied to other situations, environments, or groups that bore similarities to those studied (Kakar *et al.*, 2023). In my study, transferability ensured that the conclusions regarding how young adults faced challenges, coped, and realized with parental separation were relevant to other groups in similar socio-cultural contexts, even if

they were in different geographic or family situations. I provided sufficient context and rich descriptions to allow the findings to be potentially applicable to other communities, helping to draw parallels with other cases of parental separation.

- **Dependability.** This denoted that the research findings were consistent and reliable over time, involving a clear and organized record of the research process that allowed others to follow or review how the study was conducted (Riazi *et al.*, 2023). In my study, dependability ensured that the conclusions drawn about the challenges, coping mechanisms, and resilience of young adults were consistently supported by the data and that the research process was transparent and reproducible. I documented the methods and data analysis procedures to maintain consistency, and I tracked all stages of the research to ensure that the findings remained reliable in future studies or similar contexts.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

Before, during, and after this study, I followed the proper ethical standards to make sure everything was done with care and respect for my participants. Ethics in research guided how I designed and carried out the study. I valued participants' permission highly and made sure they fully understood the goal of my research. I also reminded them that they had the right to withdraw at any point. I followed the ethical guidelines of the Ramon Magsaysay Memorial College Ethics and Review Committee (RMMC ERC), especially when it came to respecting participants and handling their data responsibly.

3.6.1 Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. No one was obligated to take part, and participants retained the right to withdraw at any time if they felt uncomfortable during the research process.

3.6.2 Privacy and Confidentiality

I explained to all participants the purpose, scope, and potential benefits of the research, while ensuring that their rights were fully assured in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Participation was strictly voluntary, and individuals were informed that they could withdraw at any time without repercussion, obligation, reparation, or entitlement to any benefit. To safeguard their privacy and confidentiality, participants signed an informed consent form after being assured that their personal information and responses would be treated with the highest ethical standards and used solely for academic purposes.

3.6.3 Informed Consent Process

Before conducting interviews, I explained the study's purpose, methods, and benefits to the participants. I also provided an approved letter from the superintendent's office and made sure they fully understood what their involvement entailed. To obtain written consent for their participation, each participant signed an informed consent form, which

ensured that their rights, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were protected. Since all participants were adults, there was no need for parental consent. Their participation was entirely voluntary, and they were free to withdraw at any time.

3.6.4 Recruitment

I encouraged my participants by demonstrating how their involvement would benefit individuals in similar situations and supported the development of informed conclusions and recommendations that reflected real-life experiences. They understood how their insights contributed to meaningful changes.

3.6.5 Risks

I made sure participants were protected and felt safe. Their responses were kept secure, and I ensured they were emotionally and mentally ready before participating.

3.6.6 Benefits

This study benefited not only me as a researcher but also the participants, parents, educators, society, policymakers, and social workers. It contributed to identifying meaningful ways to design and improve programs and policies that supported children and young adults in coping with the challenges of parental separation.

3.6.7 Plagiarism

I submitted this research to the RMMC ERC for evaluation and utilized plagiarism detection tools such as Grammarly. I ensured that all sources, whether from books, journals, research papers, or other references, were properly cited. I remained committed to academic honesty and integrity by presenting reliable, original, and well-documented findings.

3.6.8 Fabrications

I reported all results honestly. I did not make up or change any data. Everything in my study came from real interviews and actual responses.

3.6.9 Falsification

I did not alter or mislead any part of the study. There were no manipulated tools or modified data. Everything was done with integrity.

3.6.10 Conflict and Interest (COI)

I had no financial sponsors. I funded this research on my own for academic growth. The participants were selected fairly, with no personal connections, and there were no rewards given. My goal was to learn and contribute knowledge in a professional way.

3.6.11 Deceit

I did not deceive any participant. I protected their rights and respected their trust throughout the research process.

3.6.12 Organization/Location Permission

I was granted permission to conduct the study in General Santos City. All data collection was done following the city's policies and with full consent.

3.6.13 Authorship

I am a Bachelor of Science in Social Work student at the College of Arts and Sciences. With the help of my adviser, panel members, and RMMC ERC editors, I finalized this study following the ethical format required by the committee.

4. Results

This chapter explored the participants' narratives, outlined the data analysis methods that were employed, detailed the steps taken to identify emerging themes, provided responses to the interview questions concerning each research problem, and summarized the participants' answers.

4.1 Description of Participants in the Study

This study consisted of five participants: three males and two females, all residing in General Santos City, Philippines. The participants used pseudonyms: AA, JJ, Andrei, EJ, and San-San. These were their following descriptions:

Participant 1 was named AA. She was a 20-year-old female who lived in Barangay Lagao, General Santos City, Philippines. At the time of the study, AA was a second-year college student pursuing a Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) at one of the prestigious schools in General Santos City. She had been living independently for five years, as her parents separated when she was eight years old. After her parents' separation, she initially stayed under the care of her father. However, when her father left, she went to live with her grandparents. Tragically, when she was in ninth grade, her grandparents passed away, leaving her to fend for herself.

Participant 2 was named JJ. He was a 21-year-old male who resided in Barangay Calumpang, General Santos City, Philippines. At the time of the study, JJ was a second-year irregular college student pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Criminology (BS CRIM) at one of the prestigious schools in General Santos City. He had been living independently for three years, as his parents had separated when he was eleven years old. After his parents' separation, he initially stayed with his mother. However, after being sent by his mother to General Santos City due to his destructive behavior, he moved in with his father and stepmother. Unfortunately, their relationship was strained, so he left and ended up living on his own.

Participant 3 was named Andrei. He was a 20-year-old male living in Barangay Fatima, General Santos City, Philippines. Andrei had completed his senior high school education and was working at one of the BPO branches in General Santos City. He had been living independently for four years, as his parents had separated when he was still a baby. After the separation, he stayed under the care of his grandmother. Unfortunately, when his grandmother passed away, he was left to take care of himself.

Participant 4 was named EJ. He was an 18-year-old male residing in Barangay Calumpang, General Santos City, Philippines. At the time of the study, EJ was an out-of-school youth due to truancy and absences from school. He had been living independently for two years, as his parents separated when he was just one year old. After the separation, he was initially cared for by his aunt. However, due to family conflicts, he left and began taking care of himself.

Participant 5 was named San-San. She was an 18-year-old female who resided in Barangay San Isidro, General Santos City, Philippines. San-San had recently graduated from Senior High School, focusing on Humanities and Social Sciences from one of the prestigious schools in General Santos City. She had been living independently for the past three years, as her parents separated when she was five years old. After the separation, she initially lived with her father and stepmother, but the relationship was challenging. Consequently, she moved in with her aunt. However, due to ongoing conflicts with her aunt, San-San decided to leave and care for herself.

4.2 Analysis of Themes

I transcribed and translated the audio recordings from the in-depth interviews with the participants into English. To identify the major themes that emerged from the interview data, I consulted a thematic analyst.

I based the core ideas on the frequency of the participants' responses to several key questions: How do participants view their challenges of living alone after parental separation and the complex family dynamics? What coping mechanisms did participants use to manage the challenges of living alone as children of separated parents? What realizations did participants gain from their experiences of living alone in this context?

Based on the data gathered regarding the challenges faced by the study participants, three key themes emerged, as outlined in Table 1: Emotional and Mental Health Struggles, Lack of a Support System, and Financial Hardships. These themes reflect the multifaceted difficulties encountered during their experience of parental separation. In terms of coping mechanisms, the analysis of the collected data revealed three main themes, presented in Table 2: Seeking Emotional Release and Healing, Building Inner Strength and Self-Reliance, and Seeking External Support and Escape. These themes highlight the varied strategies participants employed to manage their emotional distress and navigate their circumstances. Lastly, the participants' reflections on their experiences led to the emergence of three core themes related to their realizations, as shown in Table 3: Building Strength and Faith through Resilience and Responsibility, Healing through Personal Commitment to Breaking the Cycle, and

Support Systems are Essential to Emotional Well-Being. These insights underscore the transformative process participants underwent, emphasizing growth, healing, and the importance of social and emotional support.

5. Views on Challenges of Living Alone after Parental Separation

5.1 Emotional and Mental Health Struggles

Participants described parental separation as a profoundly painful experience, characterized by sorrow, jealousy, hardship, and suicidal ideation, which took a significant emotional and mental toll. This burden was exacerbated by living alone and unresolved familial issues, which substantially impacted their mental health. These accounts underscored the serious emotional and psychological consequences of parental separation on young adults. It revealed how emotional neglect, academic pressure, isolation, and unresolved family issues converged to create a mental health crisis that, in some cases, led to suicidal ideation.

For example, AA shared the great sorrow she felt, particularly when comparing herself to peers with intact families, stating:

"Mahirap po talaga. Masakit po talaga-na heartbroken po talaga ako. Umiiyak ako every night. I was jealous of my classmates with complete families." (AA) Lines 15-18

"It is really hard. It is really painful—I was truly heartbroken. I cried every night. I was jealous of my classmates who had complete families."

Similarly, San-san disclosed how being neglected after parental separation led to emotional distress, bringing out feelings of being less important, which also resulted in resentment.

"Lisod siya, labaw na'g bulag akoang parents. Naay mga adlaw nga dili ko tagaan og kwarta kay naa na silay bagong pamilya na mas priority nila. Dako kaayo siyag apekto sa akoo kay dili ko maka focus sa akoang pag swkela. Naa koy pangluod sa ilaha." (San-san) Lines 414-416

"It is difficult, especially since my parents are separated. There are days when they don't give me money because they already have new families who are now their priority. It has a big impact on me because I can't focus on my studies. I feel resentment toward them."

Aside from that, JJ expressed the overwhelming challenge of managing academics alongside emotional struggles and extracurricular commitments.

"Unya, pag second-year nako, karang nawalaan kog gana ba (sigh heavily). Um, dili na nako kaya ipagsabay akoang pagdula og takraw ug pag eskwela nako kay naga conflict na gyud siya sa akoang studies, unya kulang na akoang tulog (sigh heavily). Tapos, may problem pako ato sa akoang past relationship that time." (JJ) Lines 202-205

"Then, when I reached my second year, I started to lose motivation (sighs heavily). Um, I could no longer manage both playing sepak takraw and studying because it really started to conflict with my academics, and I wasn't getting enough sleep (sighs heavily). On top of that, I was also dealing with problems from a past relationship at that time."

Additionally, San-san recounted her testimony of hitting a breaking point, saying:

"Affected kaayo ko mentally ug emotionally to the point nga naa nakoy mga suicidal thoughts-nag attempt nako [to do suicide]." (San-san) Lines 418-419

"I was deeply affected mentally and emotionally to the point that I started having suicidal thoughts—I even attempted [to take my own life]."

5.2 Lack of Support System

The absence of support networks emerged as a major difficulty. Living independently posed notable challenges for the participants, particularly in terms of financial security, self-care, and emotional support. Participants expressed feelings of hopelessness when they needed to complete homework and/or receive emotional guidance. These testimonies suggested that parental separation not only broke emotional bonds but also forced individuals into premature independence, often before participants felt completely ready. The lack of reliable support figures meant that individuals had to face difficulties on their own, which often resulted in increased vulnerability and loneliness.

For instance, AA stated that without parental assistance, she struggled with completing schoolwork and had no one to turn to during personal crises.

"Kapag need ko ng help sa pag study ko or sa assignment ko, wala akong malapitan, walang guma-guide sa akin. And when I'm at the point of my life na need ko sila dahil may problema ako, wala akong makausap or maiyakan." (AA) Lines 66-67

"When I need help with my studies or my assignments, I have no one to run to, no one to guide me. And when I'm at a point in my life where I really need them because I have a problem, there's no one I can talk to or cry to."

Similarly, JJ highlighted the difficulty of handling daily life alone, stating:

"Dili gyud dali na mabuhi nga walay parents, especially inig magkasakit ko; walay mag alaga. Need nako magmata para magluto ug alagaan akoang sarili kay wala may maghimo ana para sa akoo." (JJ) Lines 135-138

"It is really not easy to live without parents, especially when I get sick; there's no one to take care of me. I need to wake up to cook and take care of myself because there's no one to do that for me."

Additionally, Andrei expressed the emotional difficulty of not having a complete family to rely on during times of hardship.

"Wala koy complete family na madaganan nako in times na galisod ko." (Andrei) Lines 281-282

"I don't have a complete family I can turn to in times when I'm struggling."

Andrei also shared the deep challenges he faced, including financial strain and a strong need to feel understood.

"Lisod gyud kaayo siya. Sa financial, bereavement, ug the needs to be understood ba-mao ni ang mga butang nga gina ka-struggle nako as my relationship sa akoang family kay naga fade. Affected gyud kog mayo, labaw na sa emotions nako." (Andrei) Lines 252-254
"It is really very difficult. In terms of finances, bereavement, and the need to be understood—these are the things I'm struggling with as my relationship with my family is fading. I'm really deeply affected, especially emotionally."

5.3 Financial Hardships

Financial difficulties were a recurrent and deeply felt challenge. The repeated mention of sacrifices made to meet fundamental needs highlighted the burden of financial hardships these young people had to carry. These accounts showed that living alone after parental separation put young people in a vulnerable situation, forcing them to assume premature responsibilities and cope with difficulties associated with parental or family support.

To illustrate, AA, JJ, and EJ resorted to extreme budgeting techniques, such as eating once or twice a day.

"Kapag magpadala siya ng pang allowance ko ... gina tipid ko talaga, like magkain ako twice or once a day lang." (AA) Lines & 103-105

"When he sends my allowance... I really try to stretch it, like I eat only twice or even just once a day."

"Naga tipid ko, tapos once or twice a day lang pud ko naga kaon kay dili man maka hatag akoang mama permi, labaw na akoang papa og kwarta sa akua." (JJ) Lines 207-208

"I am trying to save money, and I only eat once or twice a day because my mother can't always give me money, especially my father."

"Once or twice a day rako naga kaon pud para maka tipid 'te. Challenging gyud kaayo magtipid 'te, karang ipagsakto imohang allowance sa pagkaon, pag eskwela, pati bayad sa balay gud 'te." (EJ) Lines 384-386

"Once or twice a day I eat as well so I can save, sis. It's really challenging to save, trying to make your allowance last for food, school, and even the rent, sis."

JJ also stopped his studies for a semester to look for a job and settle school obligations.

"Katong time nga naga-struggle ko financially, to the point nga nag-stop kog isa ka semester sa college kay need nako mangitag trabaho para mabayaran akoang balance sa school." (JJ) Lines 167-169

"During the time when I was struggling financially, to the point that I had to stop one semester in college because I needed to find a job to pay off my school balance."

Andrei and EJ shared the toll of balancing academic and exhausting work demands, often at the expense of their health and mental well-being.

"I can say that it supports my daily needs, pero mao gani to, I have to sacrifice my health tungod sa akoang working schedule, which is graveyard shift ko." (Andrei) Lines 307-309

"I can say that it supports my daily needs, but that's just it, I have to sacrifice my health because of my working schedule, which is a graveyard shift."

"Challenging gyud kaayo magtipid 'te, karang ipagsakto imohang allowance sa pagkaon, pag eskwela, pati bayad sa balay gud 'te." (EJ) Lines 384-386

"It was very challenging to budget, sis, like when you should budget your allowance for food, school, and even the payment for the house, sis."

Table 1: Views on Challenges of Living Alone after Parental Separation

Clustered Themes	Emergent Themes
Emotional pain and jealousy towards peers Feelings of neglect, resentment, and prioritization Loss of motivation and exhaustion Suicidal Ideation	Emotional and Mental Health Struggles
Lack of academic and emotional support No emotional comfort during difficult times Vulnerability due to living alone Lack of familial understanding and support	Lack of Support System
Food insecurity due to insufficient allowance Struggles financially after parental separation Going to work, sacrificing health to survive Limited financial resources	Financial Hardships

6. Coping Mechanisms for Challenges of Living Alone after Parental Separation

6.1 Seeking Emotional Release and Healing

Seeking emotional release and healing was a critical way of managing emotional pain, according to the participants. These testimonies showed that participants leaned on emotional catharsis to cope with strong emotions, consequently providing immediate comfort and grounding.

AA recounted finding solace through meaningful conversations with a lover and enjoying food she had been deprived of in childhood, as well as going to the beach to relax after experiencing suicidal thoughts.

"Naga punta ako sa dagat para ma relax kasi dumating sa point na I want to end myself (fake laugh). I don't want to live anymore. Tapos naga deep talk ako sa boyfriend ko, binibili ko yung mga pagkain na hindi ko nakakain nong bata pa ako, and kinakain ko mga favorite foods ko." (AA) Lines 77-80

"I go to the sea to relax because it reached a point where I wanted to end myself (fake laugh). I didn't want to live anymore. Then I had a deep talk with my boyfriend, I bought the food I couldn't eat when I was a child, and I ate my favorite foods."

Likewise, JJ mentioned that during moments of emotional heaviness, crying became his way to relieve emotional load, and they deliberately avoided making decisions under stress.

"First, inig bug-at na gyud kaayo, ginahilak nalang gyud nako para mogaan akoang paminaw. Tapos wala dayun ko naga desisyon inig emotional kaayo ko." (JJ) Lines 192-193

"First, when it really becomes too heavy, I just cry to lighten what I feel. Then, I don't make decisions when I'm too emotional."

San-san also vented frustrations through a Facebook post to release pent-up emotions.

"Mag rant gyud sa FB [Facebook] since wala man koy maistoryahan." (San-san) Line 441
"I really rant on Facebook since I have no one to talk to."

6.2 Building Inner Strength and Self-Reliance

Reflected in the participants' responses in their attempt to strengthen themselves internally was the desire to build their inner strengths and self-reliance. These narratives showed that individuals purposely nurtured personal growth and self-sufficiency as tools to combat adversities in life.

AA emphasized how her personal beliefs, values, and past experiences shaped her coping strategies, implying that internal foundations had been essential for resilience.

"My personal beliefs, values, and past experiences play a big role in shaping my coping mechanisms, kasi without these, magiging weak ako and masisira yung future life ko." (AA) Lines 83-84

"My personal beliefs, values, and past experiences play a big role in shaping my coping mechanisms, because without these, I would become weak and my future life would be ruined."

Andrei revealed a strong self-taught strategy for facing adversity.

"Drei, you have to conquer every triumph." Mao ra gyud ni. Self-taught lang gyud ang way nako to comfort myself, not to give up." (Andrei) Lines 287-288

"Drei, you have to conquer every triumph." That's really it. I just taught myself how to find comfort, to not give up."

Moreover, Andrei adopted a mindset rooted in present-oriented living, stating:

"I choose to live in the present because, uh, I believe, the only true reality is the now, where I can be most effective." (Andrei) Lines 291-293

EJ underlined self-reliance and building strength by stressing that, despite physical weakness, maintaining physical strength and nutrition had been an act of self-care.

"Gina maintain pud nako na maging physically strong gud 'te, bisag ani akoang larwas [skinny], ug magkaon og sakto kada adlaw." (EJ) Line 378-379

"I also make sure to stay physically strong, sis, even though my body is like this [skinny], and I eat properly every day."

6.3 Seeking External Support and Escape

Finally, seeking external support and escape represented another vital coping mechanism. These accounts suggested that when emotional self-regulation fell short, individuals turned to external relationships, communities, and spiritual practices as supplementary coping strategies.

JJ initially sought social support through substance use and companionship with friends, but later transitioned to a more spiritually grounded support system after going through a religious conversion.

"I used to go sa mga beerhouse dati kauban akoang mga classmates, ug naga, um, smoke [marijuana] (fake laugh) pud ko sabay akoang mga barkada." (JJ) Line 174

"I used to go to beerhouses before with my classmates, and I also used to, um, smoke [marijuana] (fake laugh) together with my friends."

"Pero katong na find ko ni Lord, I experienced His true love. I surrendered my life to Him and nag sugod kog live my life with a purpose." (JJ) Line 178

"But when I found the Lord, I experienced His true love. I surrendered my life to Him and started to live my life with a purpose."

During moments of isolation, especially when abandonment was fresh, JJ held onto the Bible verse Psalm 27:10.

“May verse sa Bible na ‘Even if my mother and father forsake me, my Father in heaven would not’ [Psalm 27:10]. Kato ang permi nako gina panghawakan nga assurance, which is gikan kay Lord.” (JJ) Lines 181-182

“There’s a verse in the Bible that says, ‘Even if my mother and father forsake me, my Father in heaven would not’ [Psalm 27:10]. That is the assurance I always hold on to, which comes from the Lord.”

Similarly, EJ shared that he engaged in group activities like smoking and hanging out at a computer shop while simultaneously balancing escapism with prayer.

“Magsigarilyo, maglaag-laag kauban akoang mga barkada. Mag adtog computeran para malimtan nako akoang gina again. Tapos naga pray sad ko kay Lord.” (EJ) Lines 363-364

“I smoke and hang out with my friends. I go to the computer shop to forget what I’m going through. Then I also pray to the Lord.”

On the other hand, San-san confessed that when she struggled with suicidal ideation, they looked for validation and support from others.

“Kapag naa koy suicidal thoughts kay naga adto ko sa mga tao nga kabalo ko maka hatag og advice sa akoo.” (San-san) Line 459

“When I have suicidal thoughts, I go to the people whom I know can give me advice.”

Table 2: Coping Mechanisms for Challenges of Living Alone after Parental Separation

Clustered Themes	Emergent Themes
Relaxation and recreation Emotional tension is released through crying Leaving it all to God Carpe diem Expressing through social media	Seeking Emotional Release and Healing
Positive self-view Motivating oneself Self-reliance Meditating and unwinding Self-care routine	Building Inner Strength and Self-Reliance
Enjoying the companionship Sharing deep talks Companionship and social support Spending time with friends	Seeking External Support and Escape

7. Realizations from the Experiences of Living Alone after Parental Separation

7.1 Building Strength and Faith through Resilience and Responsibility

The participants underlined that their lived experiences of living alone after parental separation were formative in building their self-esteem and self-reliance. Throughout

these narratives, individuals' survival and ultimate success were mostly determined by their resilience and the development of personal responsibility.

AA stated that her parents' separation molded her into the strong individual she had become, capable of completing chores they had believed were impossible before, such as cooking, doing laundry, traveling, and going to the hospital independently.

"I realize that all of this (human noise), um, happened for a reason kasi yung separation nila mama at papa is na mold talaga ako para maging strong person. Nagagawa ko na yung mga bagay na hindi ko kaya, like ang magluto para sa sarili ko, maglaba, mag travel, and magpunta sa hospital na wala sila. Para sa akin ha, achievement yun." (AA) Lines 109-112

"I realize that all of this (human noise), um, happened for a reason because the separation of my mom and dad really molded me to become a strong person. Now, I can do things that I couldn't do before, like cooking for myself, doing laundry, traveling, and going to the hospital without them. For me, that's an achievement."

Andrei also shared the difficulties of having "no one to depend on" and the need to be cautious in correcting his own mistakes, thus emphasizing the burden on young people without parental guidance.

"Lisod. I have no one to depend on, and no one can correct my mistakes. So, I have to be cautious gyud ba." (Andrei) Lines 313-314

"It is hard. I have no one to depend on, and no one can correct my mistakes. So, I really have to be cautious."

Despite these challenges, San-san came to understand that living independently was manageable as long as one was "practical and resourceful."

"Kadugayan na realized nako nga dili diay lisod manginabuhi nga mag isa basta practical ug madiskarte lang ka na tao." (San-san) Lines 467-468

"Eventually, I realized that it's not really difficult to live alone as long as you're practical and resourceful."

7.2 Healing through Personal Commitment to Breaking the Cycle

One powerful insight that emerged was the participants' deliberate choice to prevent the recurring painful family experiences. These personal vows to "break the cycle" reflected not just coping but proactive healing. The participants' insights and choice to change future family patterns showed a proactive and optimistic approach to overcoming hardship.

AA promised herself that she would establish a "complete family" for her future children and have a good home and life that she had once been denied.

"I promise sa sarili ko na I will have a complete family, na yung future children ko is hindi nila ma experience yung nangyari sa family ko. I promise to myself na magkaroon talaga ako ng magandang bahay, kasi wala ako no'n (fake laugh). And magkaroon ako ng good life." (AA) Lines 120-122

"I promise myself that I will have a complete family, that my future children will not experience what happened in my family. I promise myself that I will have a beautiful home, because I don't have that (fake laugh). And I will have a good life."

JJ echoed this sentiment, understanding the deep pain of abandoned and neglected children, and promised himself that his future family would not go through the same agony.

"Unta dili na siya maulit [to my future family]. Nag promise ko sa sarili nako nga dili ni maulit, labaw na dili siya ma experience sa akoang mga anak sunod." (JJ) Lines 214-215

"I hope this won't happen again [to my future family]. I promised myself that this won't happen again, especially that my children won't experience this in the future."

7.3 Support Systems are Essential to Emotional Well-Being

Despite their efforts at self-reliance, participants emphasized the necessity of love, trust, and emotional support. Even when in the position of independence, participants emphasized that emotional connections, whether with family, friends, or faith, remained fundamental to well-being.

True love and faith in a relationship with God helped in shaping a new perspective on human relationships and commitment.

"Para sa akoo, ang true love gyud is naa kay Lord. Sa Iyaha [the Lord] lang gyud makita ang love. Dili dali mag hatag og trust sa ibang tao, pero kay Lord ko mosalig. Kay diba God commanded us nga love Him and love your neighbors, too? Didto na shaped akoang pananaw sa love, trust, ug sa commitment-importante gyud siya." (JJ) Lines 229-232

"For me, true love is really found in the Lord. Only in Him can you find love. It's not easy to trust other people, but I trust the Lord. Because, right? God commanded us to love Him and love your neighbors, too. That's where my perspective on love, trust, and commitment was shaped—it's really important."

While learning to be self-reliant, it was also valid to long for emotional comfort from parental presence, especially during trying times.

"Self-reliance is hard to learn by myself at an early age. I wish I had my parents, so when I need someone to cry on, when things get tough, I would have them." (Andrei) Lines 317-318

"Self-reliance is hard to learn by myself at an early age. I wish I had my parents, so when I need someone to cry on, when things get tough, I would have them."

EJ recognized the value of those who continued to provide him support and love, emphasizing that trust and commitment were fundamental to maintaining family bonds.

“Gina pahalagahan nako tong mga tao nga naga hatag og love sa akoo. Tapos para sa akoo, importante gyud kaayo ang trust ug ang commitment kay kung wala ni, maguba gyud imohang pamilya.” (EJ) Lines 400-401

“I value those people who give love to me. And for me, trust and commitment are important because without them, your family will definitely fall”

Table 3: Realizations from the Experiences of Living Alone after Parental Separation

Clustered Themes	Emergent Themes
Self-improvement, resilience, autonomy, adaptability, and self-sufficiency Hope, family aspirations, growth, and responsibility Maturity, awareness, hardships, responsibility, and early independence Independence, adaptability, resourcefulness, and resilience	Building Strength and Faith through Resilience and Responsibility
Healing, transformation, determination, hope, and generational commitment to change Longing, grief, and abandonment	Healing through Personal Commitment to Breaking the Cycle
Healing, commitment, renewal, forgiveness, and hope Abandonment, loneliness, grief, longing, and resilience Faith, spirituality, love, trust, and strength Jealousy, longing, family ideals, and hope Belongingness, trust, gratitude Family, bond, commitment, and trust Love, trust, commitment, relationship, and stability	Support Systems are Essential to Emotional Well-Being

8. Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the results of a qualitative study involving five young adult participants, three males and two females, from General Santos City, Philippines, all living independently due to parental separation during childhood. Through in-depth interviews, three major challenges emerged: 1) Emotional and Mental Health Struggles, including profound grief, jealousy, isolation, academic pressure, and suicidal ideation stemming from the separation and lack of familial support; 2) Lack of Support System, where participants faced significant difficulties managing daily life, academics, finances, and emotional crises without reliable guidance or care; and 3) Financial Hardships, forcing participants into extreme budgeting (e.g., eating once/twice daily), work sacrifices impacting health, and even temporary withdrawal from studies.

In response to these challenges, participants employed three primary coping mechanisms: 1) Seeking Emotional Release and Healing (e.g., crying, venting, engaging in comforting activities); 2) Building Inner Strength and Self-Reliance (developing personal resilience, self-comfort strategies, and focusing on self-care); and 3) Seeking

External Support and Escape (turning to friends, substances initially, faith/religious conversion, or online platforms).

Key realizations from their experiences centered on 1) Building Strength and Faith through Resilience and Responsibility, recognizing their forced independence fostered self-reliance but also a burden of caution; 2) Healing through Personal Commitment to Breaking the Cycle, with participants vowing to create stable, complete families for their future children; and 3) the Essential Role of Support Systems for Emotional Well-Being, acknowledging the fundamental need for trust, commitment, love, and emotional connections despite their self-sufficiency.

The data, analyzed through thematic identification, highlighted the severe psychological, practical, and financial toll of early independence post-parental separation, alongside the resilient coping strategies and transformative insights developed by the participants.

9. Discussion

This chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the major themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews conducted with the participants. It includes the interpretation of findings, the integration of related literature, and the application of relevant theoretical frameworks. The chapter also provides answers to the research questions posed in this study. Furthermore, implications for practice, suggestions for future research, and concluding insights are discussed.

9.1 Discussion of Findings

The themes explored in this research were derived from the participants' responses and were further examined through the lens of existing literature and theoretical frameworks. These frameworks include Attachment Theory, created by John Bowlby and expanded by Mary Ainsworth; Resilience Theory, which emerged from the study of Ann S. Masten; and Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective, proposed by Paul Amato.

9.2 Emotional and Mental Health Struggles

The first major theme that came out from this study was the deep emotional and mental health struggles experienced by young adults after their parents separated. Participants shared that the experience was very painful and emotionally heavy. They felt sadness, jealousy, abandonment, anger, and, in some cases, even had thoughts of ending their lives. For many, the pain became worse because they didn't have enough family support and had to deal with life on their own while managing school and personal problems at the same time.

One participant shared how heartbroken and lonely she felt, especially when she compared herself to classmates who still had complete families. This made her feel even worse about her own situation. Another participant said that being ignored by a parent, especially when the parent seemed to care more about their new family, made her feel

bitter and affected her studies. Many described how hard it was to keep up with schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and personal struggles, which led to mental exhaustion and loss of motivation. Some even mentioned thinking about suicide, showing just how serious the emotional pain was.

These emotional and mental health issues are best explained by Attachment Theory, which helps us understand why the participants felt this way. Attachment Theory, developed by John Bowlby and later expanded by Mary Ainsworth, says that the emotional bond between a child and their caregiver is very important for the child's sense of safety and mental development. When this bond is broken, like in cases of parental separation, young people often feel anxious, scared of being abandoned, and emotionally insecure (Bretherton, 1992).

The participants' stories clearly show what happens when these emotional bonds are broken. Many felt abandoned, missed the presence of a parent, or felt emotionally left out, experiences that match what Attachment Theory describes. For example, one participant who said she cried every night and felt heartbroken showed a strong need for love and emotional connection, signs that the attachment bond had been harmed. Others said they felt jealous of peers with stable families, which shows their deep desire for a safe and supportive family environment that makes them feel loved and valued. These feelings suggest that without steady emotional support, the young adults found it hard to build healthy emotional connections and feel secure in themselves.

Research also supports these findings. When parents separate, especially when there's a lot of fighting or when a parent becomes emotionally distant, it can lead to anxiety and fear in relationships later on. Without strong emotional support, young adults may feel alone and insecure, making it harder for them to trust others or handle emotional problems (Smith-Etxeberria *et al.*, 2022; Wood *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, broken family bonds can lead to serious mental health issues like trauma or PTSD, showing how big the risks can be when emotional needs are not met (Jie *et al.*, 2025; Waddoups *et al.*, 2019).

In this study, Attachment Theory not only helps explain the participants' emotional pain but also gives a deeper understanding of why they felt that way. While Resilience Theory and the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective are helpful in looking at how people cope and recover, Attachment Theory focuses on the root cause of the emotional struggles, the broken emotional connections and the insecurity that came after. It explains why the participants felt emotionally unstable and alone.

In conclusion, the emotional and mental health problems faced by the participants are best understood through Attachment Theory. Their stories show how losing early emotional connections with their parents can leave deep emotional wounds. These wounds affect their mental health, how they relate to others, and how they see themselves as they grow into adulthood. These findings highlight the need for early help and consistent emotional support for children of separated parents, so they can avoid long-term mental health problems and grow up with healthier emotional relationships.

9.3 Lack of Support System

The second theme highlights one of the most painful realities faced by young adults after their parents separate: the absence of emotional, financial, and practical support during crucial moments of growth and challenge. Many participants shared how hard it was to manage daily tasks, handle emotional stress, and stay on track academically without anyone to guide or support them. They felt abandoned and overwhelmed, especially during times of illness, school pressure, or personal problems. These young people were often forced into independence too early, without the tools or nurturing that a stable family usually provides.

One participant explained how they felt emotionally lost when facing academic and personal problems. Another shared the burden of having to care for themselves without parental help. These stories show how the lack of a support system, both emotional and practical, makes it much harder for young adults to cope with life's demands. Not only are they dealing with emotional pain from parental separation, but they also carry heavy responsibilities like managing money, school, and self-care on their own.

This theme fits best with Resilience Theory, which looks at how people adapt and recover when faced with serious life challenges. Resilience isn't just about inner strength; it also depends on the presence of outside support, like caring adults, stable routines, and reliable relationships (Masten, 2001).

In this study, Resilience Theory helps us understand how the lack of support, emotional, financial, and social, makes it harder for young adults to "bounce back" after family separation. While some developed coping skills, many felt stuck, isolated, and emotionally drained. This shows that resilience is not just about personal willpower. It also relies on having people and systems that offer guidance, encouragement, and care. The theory also explains why some participants struggled more than others. Those who felt most emotionally lost often had no trusted adults or mentors in their lives. On the other hand, research shows that young people are more likely to develop resilience when they have strong relationships and structured environments to help them cope (Masten, 2001).

Other studies support this view. Researchers found that young adults from separated families often face more emotional and financial challenges, especially when support from parents fades (Smith-Etxeberria *et al.*, 2022; Stapley *et al.*, 2021). Also, the emotional pain caused by separation gets worse when there's no one to turn to (Lacey *et al.*, 2014; Peñalba, 2021). Participants in this study reflected this too, saying they felt emotionally neglected and disconnected from family. Furthermore, when parents are less involved, young adults often feel unprepared for adult responsibilities, another struggle that came through clearly in the participants' experiences (Karhina *et al.*, 2023).

Through the lens of Resilience Theory, this theme becomes even more powerful. It shows that the path to resilience is not something young people can walk alone. Their ability to grow, adapt, and succeed depends heavily on the strength of their support

systems. Without these, the emotional and practical challenges of life after parental separation become much harder to manage.

In conclusion, the lack of a support system is not just a side effect of parental separation; it is a major barrier to healing and growth. Recognizing this opens the door to meaningful interventions. Support from schools, counselors, mentors, and community programs can help fill the gaps left by broken families, giving these young adults the resources and relationships they need to build resilience and move forward with confidence.

9.4 Financial Hardships

The third theme that came out of the study focuses on financial hardships, a serious and ongoing challenge faced by young adults dealing with life after their parents' separation. Many participants shared that they had to make big sacrifices just to meet their basic needs. This included eating only once or twice a day, stopping or delaying school because they couldn't pay their school fees, and working long hours in tiring jobs. Their stories showed a daily struggle to survive, where limited support from parents, especially the one they don't live with, forced them to take on adult responsibilities too early. These included budgeting for food, paying school fees and rent, and trying to balance work and school, often affecting their physical and mental health.

Their testimonies highlighted that the effects of parental separation go beyond emotional pain and family problems; they also cause real financial difficulties that affect their daily lives and plans. With little financial and emotional support, becoming independent was a painful process filled with stress, tiredness, and sacrifices.

Among the three theories used in this study, the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective best fits this theme. This theory, introduced by Amato (2000), sees divorce as a process that brings many kinds of stress, like money problems, changes in caregiving roles, and emotional struggles. It explains that these problems don't happen separately but are connected and affect how well a person can cope and adjust over time. In this theme, the financial struggles that result from losing one income or getting irregular support from parents are especially important.

This perspective helps us understand the financial difficulties participants experienced. It shows that how well someone adjusts after their parents separate depends on the support and help, they have. In this study, problems like not having enough allowance, stopping school, and being too tired from working show that when support is lacking and stress is high, it becomes harder to adjust. Participants who had to manage on their own faced setbacks that affected their health, studies, and emotional well-being, showing that the weight of money problems seriously slows down their journey into adulthood.

Research also supports this. Money problems are a common and harmful result of parental separation. These often lead to fewer chances to continue school and hurt young people's well-being (Lamb *et al.*, 1997; Lanozo *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, young adults from separated families face obstacles to academic success because of low income and

lack of parental guidance (The Right to Higher Education, 2022). Moreover, when families break apart, young people are often forced to act like adults early, working while studying or handling household expenses, without enough preparation or emotional support, which matches the participants' experiences (Stapley *et al.*, 2021; Sugimura *et al.*, 2022).

The Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective also explains why participants reacted differently to these struggles. Some stopped studying to earn money, while others worked night shifts even if it hurt their health. This supports Amato's point that people don't all adjust the same way; their reactions depend on how much stress they face and what help they can get. This theory doesn't just explain where the money problems come from; it also helps us understand why different people deal with them in different ways. In conclusion, money problems are a big part of what young adults go through after their parents separate. The Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective clearly explains this by showing how financial stress is one of the biggest challenges after separation. This theory shows how the lack of enough parental support, early independence, and school problems make these young people more vulnerable. It also points to the need for help, like financial aid, counseling, and community programs, to lessen the long-term effects of money stress and support fairer chances for young people from separated families.

9.5 Seeking Emotional Release and Healing

The fourth theme highlights a powerful coping strategy used by young adults dealing with the emotional turmoil caused by parental separation. Participants often described the need to release their emotions to manage overwhelming feelings of sadness, abandonment, confusion, and even suicidal thoughts. Many turned to personal rituals like crying, talking with someone they trusted, or doing things that brought them comfort, such as eating favorite childhood foods, visiting calming places like the beach, or spending time with a romantic partner. One participant shared how such activities helped them regain emotional peace during a particularly dark time. Others used social media to express their pain, especially when they felt they had no one to talk to.

These accounts show that emotional release was not just a way to express distress; it was also a path toward healing. Participants weren't only reacting to pain but actively searching for ways to feel better, to ground themselves, and to move forward. This theme shows how important emotional regulation is in helping young people cope with family disruption and maintain a sense of emotional stability.

Among the three guiding theories, Resilience Theory best explains this theme. Resilience Theory focuses on how people recover from hardship and develop coping strategies to adapt over time. Emotional regulation and self-awareness are key parts of building resilience, and both are clearly present in the coping behaviors described by the participants. Acts like crying, venting, talking to someone, or finding comfort in familiar routines are all adaptive responses that help reduce emotional overload and promote healing (Masten, 2001).

Research supports this interpretation. Scholars explain how emotional expression, whether through conversation, journaling, crying, or sensory activities, helps people process grief and anxiety. These methods are especially effective in helping individuals regain a sense of clarity and control (Longstaffe, 2000; Sbarra & Borelli, 2018; Tammilehto *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, participants in this study found comfort and relief through small yet meaningful acts of expression. Also, being able to express pain, especially when it is met with understanding or validation, plays a critical role in managing psychological distress (Melton & Deutsch, 2020; Zimmer-Gembeck *et al.*, 2023).

Additionally, Resilience Theory emphasizes personal agency, how individuals take steps to care for themselves even in the absence of strong support systems. Many participants made conscious choices to express their emotions rather than suppress them, demonstrating emotional insight and a desire for self-preservation. These actions, while simple, reflect deep inner strength and determination to heal, key elements of resilience (Caldwell & Henry, 2017; Milojevich *et al.*, 2017).

However, it's also important to recognize that not all forms of emotional release are equally healthy. Some participants used social media to vent because they lacked someone to talk to. While this gave them short-term relief, it also carried risks, such as being misunderstood or judged publicly. Coping strategies can range from helpful to harmful depending on context and support. Still, the willingness to express emotions, even in less-than-ideal ways, shows a desire to heal, which is a core part of building resilience (Kleinsorge & Covitz, 2012; Yu *et al.*, 2020).

In conclusion, the theme of Seeking Emotional Release and Healing reveals how young adults turn to emotional expression as a way to manage the pain of parental separation. Through the lens of Resilience Theory, these behaviors are not signs of weakness but signs of strength and growth. They reflect efforts to regain emotional balance in the face of instability. Understanding these coping strategies is essential for professionals developing psychosocial support systems, as it emphasizes the need to create safe spaces for expression, validation, and emotional recovery in youth experiencing family disruption.

9.6 Building Inner Strength and Self-Reliance

The fifth theme highlights how young adults affected by parental separation consciously cultivate their inner strength and self-reliance as essential coping mechanisms. Participants expressed a profound awareness that personal beliefs, values, and lived experiences form the foundation of their resilience and enable them to endure emotional challenges. One participant reflected that without such internal resources, they would feel weak and vulnerable to a grim future. Another described a self-taught determination to face hardships by focusing on present realities and drawing comfort from inner resolve rather than seeking external validation. Additionally, some engaged in deliberate self-care practices, such as maintaining physical health through proper nutrition, signaling a holistic approach to strengthening both mind and body.

Among the three theoretical frameworks guiding this study, Resilience Theory most effectively aligns with these findings. Resilience Theory explains how individuals adapt positively despite significant adversity by developing personal strengths and coping strategies that sustain emotional stability (Masten, 2001). The participants' accounts of self-directed coping and valuing personal beliefs reflect processes of self-efficacy and emotional regulation, which are key to resilience and recovery from hardship (Milojevich *et al.*, 2017; Thümmeler *et al.*, 2022).

Moreover, these narratives resonate with existing literature on adaptive coping. The cognitive strategies participants described, such as living in the moment and emotional self-soothing, align with established adaptive techniques like cognitive reappraisal and emotional regulation, known to foster socioemotional adjustment during family transitions (Longstaffe, 2000; Sbarra & Borelli, 2018; Tammilehto *et al.*, 2021). The emphasis on physical self-care also reflects holistic resilience models that recognize physical well-being as a vital resource for emotional recovery (Caldwell & Henry, 2017). Through these approaches, young adults actively reclaim control over their lives, promoting resilience via self-reliance consistent with the theory's focus on both personal and environmental protective factors (Ding *et al.*, 2024; Melton & Deutsch, 2020).

While Attachment Theory provides important insights into the emotional vulnerabilities stemming from disrupted early bonds, and the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective helps explain cumulative stress and variable adjustment outcomes, this theme centers on participants' agency in cultivating resilience. It highlights their capacity to build inner strength rather than focusing solely on their vulnerabilities or stress reactions. This perspective complements the others by emphasizing the dynamic and proactive processes through which young adults not only survive but also pursue psychological growth and independence amid adversity (Amato, 2000; Bretherton, 1992).

In summary, Theme 5 underscores the vital role of inner strength and self-reliance as adaptive mechanisms among young adults facing parental separation. Resilience Theory provides the most comprehensive framework for understanding these processes, supported by literature identifying cognitive, behavioral, and physical strategies as key contributors to positive adjustment and long-term emotional well-being in this population.

9.7 Seeking External Support and Escape

The sixth theme is highlighted as a vital coping strategy among young adults dealing with parental separation. Participants described turning to various external sources for emotional relief and validation during intense distress, including peer companionship, social activities such as substance use and leisure outings, as well as spiritually grounded supports like religious faith, prayer, and scripture.

For example, one participant initially coped through beerhouse gatherings and marijuana use but later found solace and purpose through religious conversion, holding onto biblical assurances that helped mitigate feelings of abandonment. Others balanced

escapism through smoking and socializing with prayer, while some sought advice and emotional support from trusted individuals during moments of crisis, such as suicidal ideation. These accounts reveal that internal emotional regulation alone was often insufficient, prompting reliance on community, faith, and social networks as crucial buffers against isolation and psychological turmoil.

Among the three theoretical frameworks underpinning this study, Resilience Theory best captures the complexity and adaptive nature of this theme. Resilience Theory emphasizes the dynamic processes through which individuals harness personal strengths, social supports, and environmental resources to recover and grow despite adversity (Masten, 2001). The participants' movement from maladaptive coping (e.g., substance use) toward adaptive supports such as faith and trusted relationships exemplifies this theory's core premise: resilience is fostered not only by internal resources but also through positive external engagements. This perspective complements the findings by illustrating how coping extends beyond individual effort to involve active seeking and utilization of protective networks that sustain emotional recovery and foster a sense of purpose.

While Attachment Theory provides valuable insights into the origins of emotional distress, highlighting how disrupted early caregiver bonds may lead to insecurity and feelings of abandonment, it does not fully explain the active coping strategies participants used to regain stability. Likewise, the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective offers a broad understanding of the stressors and variable adjustment outcomes following parental separation, but it is through Resilience Theory that this study most clearly elucidates how external supports and personal agency interact to facilitate adaptive coping, transformation, and well-being over time.

This theoretical alignment is further reinforced by existing literature on coping among young adults facing parental separation. Research shows that adaptive coping involves seeking emotional release, building inner strength through self-reliance, and crucially, leveraging social networks and community resources for validation and assistance (Longstaffe, 2000; Moen, 2023; Seiffge-Krenke, 2013). The protective role of perceived social support, from peers, extended family, or faith communities, is well-documented in fostering self-control and effective stress management (Melton & Deutsch, 2020; Parikh *et al.*, 2019; Surżykiewicz *et al.*, 2022). Spirituality and faith-based involvement provide belonging and hope, buffering against abandonment and loneliness (Feeney & Collins, 2015). Moreover, external resources such as school counselors and mental health professionals offer structured environments that reinforce resilience and promote emotional adjustment (Parikh *et al.*, 2019; The Right to Higher Education, 2022). Conversely, literature also warns that maladaptive coping, such as substance use and social withdrawal, even if initially perceived as escape, often exacerbates emotional distress over time (Christ *et al.*, 1994; Sanwald *et al.*, 2023). The participants' narratives of transitioning from such behaviors to more positive supports demonstrate resilience in action. Additionally, coping complexity is underscored by the coexistence of adaptive and maladaptive strategies shaped by contextual factors like family environment,

cultural norms, and gender (Trends in Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology, 2020; Yu *et al.*, 2020).

In sum, this theme underscores the critical role of social and spiritual resources in young adults' coping repertoires after parental separation. It highlights the importance of reinforcing these external supports, fostering healthy coping skills, and recognizing the multifaceted pathways through which resilience develops, thus informing effective interventions for youth navigating family disruption.

9.8 Building Strength and Faith through Resilience and Responsibility

The seventh theme highlights how young adults experiencing parental separation in General Santos City developed a profound sense of strength, self-reliance, and responsibility through their lived realities of independence.

Participants consistently described how the absence of parental guidance pushed them to take on tasks and challenges they previously deemed impossible, such as cooking, managing household chores, traveling alone, and even attending to their health needs independently. These experiences, while difficult, were seen as formative achievements that shaped their identity and personal growth. The theme captures a journey from vulnerability to empowerment, underscored by a growing recognition that survival and success hinge on resilience and practical resourcefulness.

Among the three theoretical frameworks underpinning this study, Resilience Theory most closely aligns with these findings. Resilience Theory focuses on individuals' capacity to adapt positively despite significant adversity (Masten, 2001). The participants' accounts of overcoming challenges through practical skills and self-discipline illustrate this adaptive process vividly. Their stories embody the protective factors that resilience theory emphasizes, personal strengths, self-efficacy, and resourcefulness, that enable young adults to not only cope but thrive amidst the disruptions caused by parental separation. This theory complements the theme by illuminating the dynamic interplay between stressors and coping mechanisms, revealing resilience as a process that evolves through active engagement with life's challenges rather than a static trait.

While Attachment Theory explains the emotional distress and insecurity often linked to disrupted early bonds, it is less directly reflected in the participants' emphasis on practical independence and personal responsibility (Bowlby, 1982; Bretherton, 1992). However, it remains relevant as background context; early attachment disruptions likely set the stage for the initial emotional challenges these young adults faced, which then required resilience to overcome. Similarly, the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective acknowledges the multifaceted stressors and adjustment processes following parental separation but tends to emphasize the variability in outcomes rather than the specific development of practical competence and self-reliance highlighted here (Amato, 2000).

Supporting the primacy of Resilience Theory, existing literature on young adults' meaning-making after parental separation underscores how adversity can foster personal growth, emotional intelligence, and self-reliance (Fivush *et al.*, 2017; Theron & Theron, 2014). The process of narrative meaning-making helps individuals reframe painful

experiences into sources of strength, cultivating resilience through self-reflection and adaptive coping (King & Hicks, 2006; McAdams & McLean, 2013). This is consistent with participants' realizations that their struggles shaped their maturity and independence. Furthermore, research suggests that managing emotional challenges in family disruption develops emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills, which in turn enhance resilience and promote healthier social relationships (Brown, 2006; Ding *et al.*, 2024).

Importantly, the participants' narratives about having no one to depend on and needing to be cautious in decision-making resonate with findings that resilience often involves heightened self-awareness and responsibility (Caldwell & Henry, 2017). Their emphasis on practical resourcefulness aligns with resilience's focus on environmental and personal factors that support adaptation (Masten, 2001). The journey toward self-reliance also reflects the literature's recognition of forgiveness and acceptance as key emotional milestones in healing from parental separation (Ansar *et al.*, 2021; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). Ultimately, the theme portrays resilience not only as bouncing back from hardship but as building a foundation of strength and faith in oneself, a transformative process that integrates responsibility with emotional growth and maturity.

9.9 Healing through Personal Commitment to Breaking the Cycle

The eighth theme reveals a profound process wherein young adults consciously resolve to transform their painful family experiences into a catalyst for positive change. Participants expressed a strong determination to build stable, loving families in the future, families that would avoid replicating the emotional neglect, abandonment, or instability they endured. This commitment to break the cycle of family dysfunction represents not merely coping but a proactive, intentional form of healing.

For instance, one participant vowed to create a complete family and provide their children with the warmth and security they lacked, while another expressed hope that future generations would be spared similar hardships. These narratives reflect a forward-looking resilience characterized by hope, agency, and personal growth, suggesting that the painful legacy of parental separation can serve as a motivational force for nurturing healthier family environments.

Among the three theoretical frameworks grounding this study, the Resilience Theory best captures the essence of this theme. Whereas Attachment Theory elucidates the origins of emotional wounds from disrupted early bonds and the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective explains stress and adjustment challenges post-separation, Resilience Theory provides the most comprehensive lens to understand how young adults transcend adversity through adaptive coping and personal growth. The participants' conscious decisions to create better family outcomes embody resilience's core concept: positive adaptation despite hardship (Masten, 2001). Their healing journeys involve cultivating internal strengths and reauthoring personal narratives, processes that align closely with resilience as an evolving developmental capacity.

This interpretation is supported by existing literature emphasizing meaning-making and personal growth as central to resilience development among children of separated parents (Fivush *et al.*, 2017; Theron & Theron, 2014). Narrative processing enables individuals to transform painful experiences into coherent, redemptive stories that facilitate emotional regulation and self-understanding (King & Hicks, 2006; McAdams & McLean, 2013). The participants' vows to prevent repetition of family dysfunction resonate with these transformative processes, illustrating how adversity can underpin healthier future relationships and stronger identities. Moreover, literature highlights emotional intelligence and forgiveness as key to fostering resilience, allowing individuals to reconcile with the past while embracing hope and positive aspirations (Ansar *et al.*, 2021; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). The participants' reflections demonstrate this emotional maturity, underscoring resilience as encompassing not only survival but flourishing.

Although Attachment Theory explains the emotional insecurity and abandonment experienced, the participants' proactive, hopeful stance toward future family-building extends beyond the theory's initial focus on disrupted attachment. Likewise, the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective sheds light on stress and coping variability but centers more on reactive adjustment than on the explicit, intentional commitment to break negative cycles observed here.

In summary, the theme of healing through personal commitment exemplifies resilience theory in action. The participants' conscious efforts to create nurturing families and better futures illustrate adaptive growth and meaning-making amid adversity. This dynamic interplay between past pain and future aspirations highlights resilience not just as a buffer against parental separation's effects but as a powerful force shaping young adults' emotional recovery and generativity.

9.10 Support Systems are Essential to Emotional Well-Being

The last theme underscores the vital role of support systems, whether through family, friends, or faith, in fostering emotional well-being among young adults affected by parental separation. Although participants emphasized their growing self-reliance and independence, they also acknowledged an ongoing need for love, trust, and emotional connection as essential anchors during difficult times. Many described how their relationship with God shaped their understanding of true love, trust, and commitment, providing a stable foundation of hope when human relationships seemed fragile or unreliable. This spiritual support not only reframed their perspectives on interpersonal connections but also bolstered their capacity for emotional healing and resilience. Despite their increasing autonomy, the longing for parental presence and emotional comfort remained a poignant element of their experience, highlighting that healing is deeply relational rather than solely individual. These findings reflect a dynamic interplay between personal agency and relational support in breaking cycles of family disruption and fostering growth toward healthier futures.

Among the three theoretical frameworks, Resilience Theory best captures this theme's essence. This highlights the protective influence of personal strengths and accessible social supports in enabling individuals to recover from adversity (Masten, 2001). Participants' narratives illustrate not only internal coping and self-reliance but also the critical buffering role of emotional connections, especially through faith and trusted relationships, in sustaining resilience. This aligns closely with resilience theory's emphasis on environmental resources and social bonds as foundations for emotional stability and psychological recovery.

The literature further supports this alignment by showing that resilience after parental separation involves complex meaning-making, narrative reconstruction, and evolving self-perceptions, all deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts (Fivush *et al.*, 2017; Theron & Theron, 2014). Studies indicate that emotional intelligence and forgiveness emerge through these processes, enabling individuals to reframe trauma, accept new family realities, and embrace hope (Ansar *et al.*, 2021; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015; McAdams & McLean, 2013). The participants' reliance on spiritual faith exemplifies the cultural dimension of resilience, reinforcing that recovery is not solely an individual trait but a socially mediated phenomenon (Ding *et al.*, 2024; Theron & Theron, 2014). This echoes Masten's "ordinary magic," where resilience flourishes through accessible support networks and adaptive coping.

While Attachment Theory provides insight into the emotional insecurity resulting from disrupted early bonds, and the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective highlights the varied stressors and adjustment patterns following parental separation, the theme's focus on healing through commitment and support underscores resilience as an active, ongoing developmental process (Amato, 2000; Bretherton, 1992). Participants' valuing of trust, emotional support, forgiveness, and acceptance indicates that early attachment disruptions and stressors, though impactful, do not rigidly determine outcomes. Instead, access to meaningful support systems and personal agency in breaking negative cycles is pivotal for positive adjustment, complementing the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment model's recognition of coping resources mediating long-term effects.

In summary, this theme affirms that healing from parental separation is a nuanced, multifaceted journey in which resilience, nurtured through supportive relationships and faith, plays a central role. Integrating Resilience Theory with these lived experiences offers a comprehensive framework for understanding young adults' growth, emphasizing that adversity does not preclude recovery and emotional well-being. This insight enriches theoretical perspectives and informs practical interventions focused on strengthening family ties and community supports to assist young adults navigating parental separation's challenges.

10. Implication for Practice

For young people going through emotional and mental health struggles, social workers and counselors must offer safe spaces where they can talk about their feelings and get

support for anxiety, sadness, or confusion. When there is a lack of a support system, building strong connections through peer groups, school programs, or trusted adults can help young people feel less alone. In cases of financial hardship, support such as scholarships, part-time job opportunities, or financial aid can ease their burden and help them stay focused on their goals.

When they are seeking emotional release and healing, using creative activities like journaling, drawing, or talking to someone can help them manage their pain in healthy ways. Helping them with building inner strength and self-reliance means teaching them practical skills like making decisions, solving problems, and staying calm during challenges. When they are seeking external support and escape, guiding them toward positive places like school, community programs, or trusted friendships can prevent harmful behaviors.

For those who are building strength and faith through resilience and responsibility, encouraging their beliefs, values, and sense of purpose can help them stay strong and focused. Supporting healing through personal commitment to breaking the cycle means helping them understand their family's past and giving them tools to create better, healthier relationships in their own future. Finally, since support systems are essential to emotional well-being, it's important to connect them with people and groups they can rely on, whether that's family, friends, mentors, or professionals who truly care.

10.1 Implication for Future Research

The findings highlight the need for multi-level interventions. Practitioners should offer trauma-informed mental health services that are easy to access, especially for children and young people affected by parental separation. These services should focus on healing attachment issues and teaching emotional regulation (e.g., school counseling, grief support groups). Schools should also provide financial aid, academic support, and mentorship to reduce the impact on students' education. Communities can help by building strong support systems, including peer groups, mediation services, and partnerships with faith-based groups. Early intervention is key; teachers and healthcare workers should be trained to spot signs of emotional distress and refer youth to the right services. Parenting programs should also guide separated parents in offering consistent emotional and financial support.

Additionally, future research should use long-term studies to understand how children cope over time and how early experiences affect adult relationships and parenting. It's important to compare different cultures and income levels to see what helps or hinders recovery. Studies should also test which interventions work best (e.g., attachment-based therapy vs. resilience workshops). Research should explore the role of spirituality in healing, as well as risks like increased substance use. Lastly, involving young people with lived experience in the design of support programs will help make those services more relevant, especially around needs like financial independence, emotional safety, and breaking cycles of family problems.

10.2 Concluding Remarks

This study explored the experiences of young adults after parental separation, focusing on nine themes and framed by Attachment Theory, Resilience Theory, and the Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective. Attachment Theory highlights the emotional challenges from disrupted bonds, while Resilience Theory emphasizes coping strategies and support systems. The Divorce-Stress-Adjustment Perspective points to practical stressors, like financial difficulties. Findings reveal significant emotional pain but also demonstrate how individuals develop resilience through internal and external resources. Many participants expressed a desire to create healthier family dynamics in the future. The discussion concludes that while all three theories offer valuable insights, Resilience Theory best captures the processes of adaptation and growth, underscoring the importance of relational healing and accessible support for long-term well-being.

As a researcher, engaging deeply with the participants' narratives has been both humbling and transformative. Their stories reaffirmed my belief that resilience is not defined by the absence of struggle but by the quiet, persistent resolve to keep moving forward despite it. This study has strengthened my commitment to advocate for systems and spaces that nurture individuals emotionally, socially, and spiritually, ensuring that no young person has to bear the burden of transformation alone.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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