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Factors Affected the Psychological Trauma of Children Living in Incomplete Families – The Concern in Vietnamese School Counseling

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Abstract: Domestic violence, separation and divorce are becoming increasingly common and leaving psychological traumas that are not easily healed for family members, especially for children in Vietnamese incomplete family. In this article, we identify the factors affecting the psychological trauma of children in the incomplete families by using Achenbach T. M's Children Behavior Checklist (CBCL). We design 2 experiments and 3 steps to filter the main factor affected the psychological trauma of children living in incomplete families. In results, we found out that up to 46.42% of children had psychological traumas when living in incomplete family with an extremely high level of 8.16% and an average of 57.14%. The results showed not only by living in incomplete family but also other factors such as the pressure from public opinion and community affected the children psychological trauma. It is necessary to minimize the effect of psychological trauma of children in Vietnamese families.

Keywords: *Children, factors, incomplete family, psychological trauma, Vietnamese school counseling.*

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Introduction

Family is the cell of society (Reczek, Spiker, Liu, & Crosnoe, 2016; Laing, 2018). It is a combination of relationships, behaviors, personality value, love, morality, duties and responsibilities towards the community and nation (Van, 2012; Bzostek & Berger, 2017). Therefore, the sustainability of the family is the foundation of social development (Lee, D., & McLanahan, 2015; Dinisman, Andresen, Montserrat Strozik & Strozik, 2017). Previous study found that, family is also an important environment to form, nurture and educate human personality, to preserve and promote traditional culture, to prevent social evils, and to provide human resources to serve the country (Brown, Manning & Stykes, 2015; Bzostek & Percheski, 2016). Recognizing the great importance and pivotal role of the family in the development of the country, the 11th National Congress of the Communist Party pointed out the objective: "It is essential to build a prosperous, modern, happy family which is a truly healthy cell of society and a healthy environment to educate lifestyle and form personalities of the children." (Central Committee of the Communist Party, 2011).

Recently in Vietnam, the family status has not been stable, the rate of separation and divorce tends to be higher and higher, especially in young families (Tra, 2015). According to statistics of the court of law, in 2000 there were only 51,361 divorce cases, in 2005 it increased to 65,929 cases; by 2010, this number had reached 126,325 cases (Hoa, 2015). While in the United States, the divorce rate is 53%, which means every 6 seconds there is a divorce case. In France, the divorce rate is 56%; in Spain is 61% and in Belgium is 71% - the highest in the world (OECD, 2018). This situation has made the Vietnamese family gradually become incomplete and due to this, a lot of psychological problems have been appeared and affected the children.

The surveys of Mishcon de Reya law company (UK) (2009) with 2,000 participants who have divorced parents showed that: 42% of the interviewees witnessed arguments, 49% had to console their parents, 24% could only choose to live with father or mother, 10% committed crimes, and 8% wanted to suicide as a relief (Mitchell & Harvey, 2015). A study in 2010 also pointed out some statistics that was alarming. According to this study, there were 60% of children experienced big family upheavals including divorce, losing their loved ones, having remarried parents, graduating from high school late when they were 20 years old. Noticeably, divorce accounted for 78%. The younger the child is, the

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more seriously divorce will affect them. After the divorce, father or mother would remarry which leaves deep psychological wounds and makes it difficult for their children to focus on studying (Batista-Pinto Wiese, 2010). Furthermore, in Farrington's study, children who were born and raised in unhappy families, and often witnessed their parents using violence or committing crimes, would be more likely to have violent behaviors and commit crimes in the future, especially in school times (Farrington, 2011). The authors Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (2017) also agreed that children who grow up in an incomplete family and often suffer domestic violence are prone to have psychological trauma and aggressive behaviors in the future. Compared to the international publications, Vietnam still lacks in-depth studies on how to detect and support for children with psychological trauma caused by families.

Therefore, it can be said that the disappointment and sorrow in incomplete family cause massive changes in the psychology of children which affected the life of these children when they come to school. That poses the question of what factors and how they can affect children's psychological trauma? What can a school counselor do in identifying and supporting these children? In this paper, we analyze the factors affecting the psychological trauma of children in the Vietnamese incomplete families as a children development problem needed to concern in school counseling. We expect the results to contribute to a tool-system to filter for psychological problems that are currently lacking in Vietnamese school counseling model.

Methodology

Participants

According to the Vietnam Children Law, children are under 16 years old. There were 336 participants who were children living in an incomplete family. The selection of a filtered sample at the first stage only surveyed children and parents of children from 6 to 15 years old (school age and have educational intervention from psychologists) in Ho Chi Minh City, Long An and Tay Ninh provinces.

- Regarding gender, there are 220/336 (65.47%) of female and 116/336 (34.52%) of male. Among 336 parents, there are 297/336 (88.39%) of female and 39/336 (11.61%) of male. The above data is relatively appropriate because single mothers are the subject of the survey and most of the divorced family circumstances, the majority of children live with their mothers, so the number of female parents is higher than that of male. Moreover, female parents are easily accessible, easy to share their views, thoughts and most of the time they spend with their families and children (especially women in the countryside) so their time is plentiful and they easier to agree to support researchers when convinced than male parents.

- Regarding the education level, there are 150/336 (44.64%) of children at primary school level and 186/336 (55.46%) of children at lower secondary level corresponding to the number of parents.

- Regarding family status, up to 252/336 (75%) of children were in divorced parents' families and 84/336 (25%) of children in single-parent families. This is a remarkable figure when the thesis provides a realistic view on the proportion of divorced families which is much higher than that of single-parent families.

Experiment 1 – Determine the proportion of children who live in incomplete families suffering psychological trauma, the psychological traumatic level and expression of these children

We used CBCL scale of Achenbach T. M (Achenbach & Ruffle, 2000): For children from 6 to 15 years old, study using CBCL table with 8 indicators/112 items evaluated by parents including: expression "withdrawn/depressed" (6 items); "anxiety – depression" (16 items); "somatic complaints" (9 items); "attention problems" (8 items); "thought problems" (7 items); "social problems" (9 items); "rule-breaking behavior" (11 items); "aggressive behavior" (19 items). The reliability of CBCL scale in this study is 0.91 (excellent level, see in Table 1):

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha test on the CBCL scale

CBCL (parents)	a	ICC	df ₁	df ₂
Internalizing	0.87	0.87	60	60
Externalizing	0.89	0.87	60	60
Total	0.91	0.91	60	60

Each expression in the scale is evaluated on a scale of 0 - 1 - 2, equivalent to 3 levels "not true", "sometimes", "often". Based on the evaluation of parents, based on the total score of each clinical expression and the overall average score for initial screening of children's mental health in 3 groups: no psychological trauma, boundaries, have psychological trauma.

In order to determine the level of psychological trauma of children in incomplete families (high, medium or low), researchers must find out the percentage of children having psychological trauma in 336 participants. However, the hypothesis is that not all children suffering psychological trauma caused by living in incomplete families. Therefore, we

had to conduct examining through many stages to determine the proportion of children having psychological trauma in the most objective way. Stages include:

- Contact with the School-board, parents and students to select and give the questionnaires directly to parents and students who live in incomplete families (selecting between ordinary families and incomplete families).

- With 336 parents were surveyed (corresponding to 336 children live in incomplete families), we continued to use CBCL test to find out the rate of 3 groups of children: (I) Living in incomplete families but don't have psychological trauma; (II) Living in incomplete families, having boundary state between psychological trauma and non - psychological trauma; (III) Living in incomplete families, having psychological trauma.

Experiment 2 – Distinguish the children having psychological trauma due to many different reasons with the children suffering it because of living in incomplete families

The questionnaire was designed to find out the psychological traumatic expressions of children in incomplete families.

The items in questionnaire includes: Firstly, carrying out the second filtering to distinguish the children having psychological trauma (due to many different reasons) with the children having it because of living in incomplete families. Secondly, finding out the psychological traumatic expressions of children in incomplete families: (1) via their awareness of family and society; (2) via their emotions, feelings about family and society; (3) via their behavior with family and society.

Group (III) continued to be filtered to determine which factors cause children's psychological trauma (Because of living in incomplete families or another reason or mixing). The filtering results required keeping only children who have psychological trauma because of incomplete families or mixing reasons (one of them is incomplete families). This is the official usage data of the research to determine the level and the signs of children' psychological trauma in incomplete families.

Data analysis

SPSS for Windows version 20.0 was used to process the collected data, supporting for data analysis as well as ensuring maximum quantitative requirements and objectivity in the research process. The tables below represented how we analyze the results: for Experiment 1, table 2 showed how to filter the children with psychological trauma, table 3 showed how to score the level of the psychological trauma and table 4 showed how to score the psychological trauma expression of children; for Experiment 2, table 5 showed how to redeem the level of psychological trauma of children living in the incomplete family.

Table 2. How to score filtering results about children's psychological trauma

Results	Mean (M)
No psychological trauma	≤ 0.50
Boundary state	$0.51 \leq M < 1.50$
Have psychological trauma	≥ 1.50

Table 3. How to score the level of psychological trauma of children

Level	Mean (M)
Low	$1.50 \leq M < 1.63$
Medium	$1.63 \leq M < 1.88$
High	≥ 1.88

Table 4. How to score the psychological traumatic expression of children

Expression	Mean (M)
Low	< 1.63
Medium	$1.63 \leq M < 1.88$
High	≥ 1.88

Table 5. How to redeem points of the level of psychological trauma of children in the incomplete family

Level	Mean (M)
Never	$1 < M \leq 1,8$
Rarely	$1,8 < M \leq 2,6$
Normal	$2,6 < M \leq 3,4$
Often	$3,4 < M \leq 4,2$
Very often	$4,2 < M \leq 5$

Results

Experiment 1 – The proportion of children who live in incomplete families suffering psychological trauma

The filtering results of children's psychological trauma - research in incomplete families were determined by the evaluation table of 336 corresponding parents by answering 112 items of CBCL scale.

Table 6. Results of screening of children's psychological trauma - research in incomplete families via evaluation table of parents are tested by CBCL

The screening research of children's psychological trauma - research in incomplete families	F	%
Don't have psychological trauma	180	53.57
Boundary state	102	30.35
Have psychological trauma	54	16.07
Total	336	100

Table 6 showed 180/336 (53.57%) students “Don't have psychological trauma”, 102/336 (30.35%) students at the “Boundary state” and students “Have psychological trauma” with 54/336 (16.07%) through the evaluation table of 336 corresponding parents by answering 112 questions of CBCL test. The total number of children having psychological trauma at the “Boundary state” and “Have psychological trauma” from the screening results was 156/336 (46.42%), nearly a quarter of the research samples.

Experiment 2 - The filtering results of children's psychological trauma in incomplete families

The results in table 7 show that there were 54/336 children who live in incomplete families belonged to the “Have psychological trauma” group. 54 children continued to be surveyed through groups of causes of psychological trauma (except by living in incomplete families). If the child confirms that the 7 groups of these causes “never” or “rarely” happen, it means that the child's psychological trauma is caused by living in incomplete families. By contrast, if the child experiences at least one cause of 7 groups at the “often” or “very often” level, it is necessary to continue examining to determine the cause of psychological trauma.

Table 7. Screening results of the causes of children's psychological trauma

	Content	Level					Mean	Ranking
		Never	Rarely	Normal	Often	Very often		
Traffic accident	1. Had a traffic accident	52	1	1	0	0	1,27	10
	2. Witnessed loved ones having traffic accident	45	5	4	0	0	1,67	7
	3. Witnessed a stranger having traffic accident	38	10	6	0	0	1,79	5
Other accidents (electric shock, serious falls, drowning, etc.)	4. Had an accident	46	4	3	1	0	1,75	6
	5. Witnessed loved ones having accident	45	2	3	4	0	1,84	4
	6. Witnessed a stranger having accident	34	15	4	1	0	1,67	7
Natural disasters (floods, droughts, etc.)	7. Have suffered from natural disasters	54	0	0	0	0	1	12
	8. Witnessed loved ones suffering from natural disasters	53	1	0	0	0	1,24	11
	9. Witnessed a stranger suffering from natural disasters	54	0	0	0	0	1	12
Violence (physical, mental)	10. Be abused	40	5	5	6	2	2,11	2
	11. Witnessed loved ones being abused	34	8	5	5	2	2,34	1
	12. Witnessed a stranger being abused	45	5	2	2	0	1,4	8
Sexual abuse	13. Be sexual abused	49	2	2	1	0	1,38	9
	14. Witnessed loved ones being sexual abused	53	1	0	0	0	1,24	11
	15. Witnessed a strange being sexual abused	53	1	0	0	0	1,24	11
Losing love one	16. Suffered from losing loved ones	40	7	6	1	0	1,94	3
Another serious event that can haunt and dream about	17. Please specify:	0	0	0	0	0		
Total							1,56	

The filtering results of children's psychological trauma living in incomplete families have the mean of 1.56, which is at the level "never". This result proves that the children's psychological trauma did not result from the 7 groups of reasons mentioned. In particular: The first place is the "Witnessed loved ones being abused" with the mean of 2.34 and the second place is "Be abused" with the mean of 2.11 (at the level "rarely"). At the third place is "Suffered from losing loved ones" with the mean of 1.94 (at the level "rarely"). Other items have the means fluctuating from 1.84 to 1.0 is "Witnessed love one had accident" (M=1.84); "Witnessed a stranger has traffic accident" (M=1.79); "Had an accident" (M=1.75); "Witnessed a stranger has accident" (M=1.67); "Witnessed a stranger being abused" (M=1.40); "Be sexual abused" (M=1.38); "Had a traffic accident" (M=1.27); "Witnessed love one suffering from natural disasters", "Witnessed loved ones being sexual abused" and "Witnessed love one being sexual abused" (M=1.24). Finally, "Suffered from natural disasters" and "Witnessed a stranger suffering from natural disasters" (M=1.00). These two causes are often uncommon and have the means at "never" but in fact there were still some children who experienced these cases which caused obsessions and disorders in their psychological life.

From another perspective, the table above shows that in 54 children with psychological trauma, there are some notable cases at the "often" and "very often" levels as follows:

- 1 case had an accident.
- 4 cases witnessed loved ones having accident.
- 1 case witnessed a stranger having accident.
- 8 cases were abused.
- 7 cases witnessed loved ones being abused.
- 2 cases witnessed a stranger being abused.
- 1 case was sexual abused.
- 1 case suffered from losing loved ones.

There were 25 cases of 15 children (some children have many cases) had psychological trauma. This result demonstrated that among 54 children having psychological trauma, there were 39/54 children having psychological trauma caused by the incomplete family factor. The remaining 15/54 children need being researched further to determine if their psychological trauma is really caused by a combination of 7 causes above or complex, including the cause of incomplete families. The results of this study are shown in the following table:

Table 8. The results of in-depth filtering of the causes of children 's psychological trauma in incomplete families

Content	F	%
The expression was chosen as "Often" or "Very often" in Table 6 which made me often obsessed and I often dreamed about it. - The fact that my parents divorced or that I only have mother did not make me obsessed or dream about it.	5	33.33
The fact that my parents are divorced or that I only have mother made me obsessed and I often dream about it - The expression chosen as "Often" or "Very often" in Table 6 does not make me obsessed or dream about it.	6	40.0
The expression was chosen as "Often" or "Very often" in Table 6 which made me often obsessed and I often dreamed about it - The fact that my parents divorced or that I only have my mother made me obsessed or dream about it.	4	26.67
Total	15	100

The data in table 8 reflected 15 children surveyed:

- There were 5/15 children (33.33%) suffering from psychological trauma because of the causes in 7 groups in Table 7.
- There were 6/15 children (40%) admitting having encountered the factors in 7 groups in Table 7.
- There were 4/15 children (26.67%) encountered the factors in 7 groups in Table 7.

The table below is the filtering results of children 's psychological trauma after being filtering many times with the desire to determine the most objective rate of children with psychological trauma in incomplete families:

Table 9. Filtering results of children's psychological trauma in incomplete families

Filtering results	F	%
Don't have psychological trauma	180	53.57
Boundary state	102	30.36
Psychological trauma		
Due to the only reason is the incomplete families	45	13.39
Due to the many reasons, including incomplete families	4	1.19
Due to the other reasons	5	1.49
Total	336	100%

Results in Table 9 showed that:

- There were 180/336 students (53.57%) without psychological trauma.
- 102/336 students (30.36%) at boundary state.
- Finally, "Psychological trauma - research in incomplete families" with 54/336 students (16.07%). They were included in the in-depth study, screening through many stages to determine the exact causes of their learning centers with specific data as follows:

- + 45/54 students (13.39%) stated that the only reason for psychological trauma is due to living in the incomplete families.

- + 4/54 students (1.19%) stated that psychological trauma "Due to the many reasons, including incomplete families".

- + 5/54 students (1.49%) stated that psychological trauma "Due to the other reasons".

The filtering results of children's psychological trauma in the incomplete families show that there were 49/336 children living in the incomplete families with psychological trauma caused by incomplete families. This figure reached 14.58% across the survey sample. 49 children were also the number that we continued using to find out the level and symptoms of children's psychological trauma.

The Level of psychological trauma of children in incomplete families

Table 10. Level of psychological trauma of children in incomplete families

Level	F	%
Low	17	34.69
Medium	28	57.14
High	4	8.16
Total	49	100

Results of Table 10 showed the level of children' psychological trauma in incomplete families is at "Medium" with 28/49 students (57.14%). At the second place is psychological trauma in incomplete families at "Low" with 17/49 (34.69%) and it is notable that 4/49 students (8.16%) are at the "High" level.

Discussion

Previous researches determined 8 factors may cause psychological trauma in children (Liu, Kurita, Guo, Miyake, Ze & Cao, 1999; Van der Kolk, 2003; Castro, 2016; Stien & Kendall, 2014), include:

Group 1: Psychological trauma caused by incomplete families (divorced parents, single mothers, orphans).

Group 2: Psychological trauma caused by traffic accidents.

Group 3: Psychological trauma caused by other accidents (electric shock, serious falls, drowning, etc.).

Group 4: Psychological trauma caused by natural disasters (floods, droughts, etc.).

Group 5: Psychological trauma caused by violence.

Group 6: Psychological trauma caused by sexual abuse.

Group 7: Psychological trauma caused by losing loved ones.

Group 8: Psychological trauma caused by other serious events that can make children obsessed or dream about it.

We inherit this view when conducting research on the psychological trauma of children in an incomplete family. Particularly for factor 1, we use it for in-depth filtering.

As can be seen in the 7 groups of causes that were surveyed, the domestic violence is considered as a notable problem that is likely to cause psychological trauma to children. This result is similar to the research of Cook and colleagues on the impact of domestic violence which can lead to many psychological traumas in young children like depression, ADHD, OCD, anxiety disorders, sleep disorders, communication disorders, separation anxiety disorders (Cook et al., 2017). This data can also be seen as the prospect of subsequent studies on children' psychological trauma for violence or witnessing violence (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; McDonalidet al., 2016). The death of parents marked an emotional and psychological turning point in the life of a human being (Stikkelbroek, Bodden, Reitz, Vollebergh & van Baar, 2016; Gutiérrez, Menendez, Jiang, Hernandez, Miller & Rosengren, 2019). For children and adolescents, losing a parent can be a chronic non-healing wound (Abrams, 2013). It is clear that events related to family members can lead to depression, loss, even obsession in children causing psychological trauma (Linh, 2014; Gorman & Arnold, 2017). The same as the perspective of author Mash and Barkley (2014) all events taking place in life affect a certain extent

(positive or negative) to the psychology of children, especially children are raised in families whom lack of safety and love from parents. These are the most representative issue that makes families incomplete. It is possible that the root agent leads to psychological trauma of the child that the school counselor or psychotherapist should pay attention to and focus on understanding when counseling for these clients.

The results of in-depth research on child' psychological trauma in 7 groups of reasons show the cause was not incomplete family factor. Although they are living in incomplete families and have psychological trauma, but the cause of this problem didn't come from incomplete families. A survey in the United States about family developmental milestones and histories, families with only a father, or only a mother, or a frequent absence of a parent, often goes to centers, hospitals for medical and mental health tests. Research showed that unpleasant experiences in childhood are not only extremely common but also have deep impacts on many different aspects in the psychological life of children. For example, children living with parents who are addicted to alcohol or domestic violence rarely have a safe childhood. Their symptoms tend to spread out and be complex including depression, various medical conditions, and a range of aggressive and self-destructive behaviors (Van der Kolk, 2017). This is not an object of the research, but it is a prospect for many other researches on psychological trauma in the future, from an intensive perspective and towards humanity.

Natural disaster, accidents and mourning were not the incomplete family main factor. However, the children were obsessed with or dreaming about them. The fact that their parents got divorced or they only lived with mother made them obsessed and often dream about them (Bowman, 1999; Klett-Davies, 2016; Crouse, 2017). Thus, 6/15 children in this group also had psychological trauma which was caused by the incomplete families and this belonged to the subject of research. This finding is similar to that of Putnam's study *The Crisis of American Children 's Dreams*, many children were obsessed and dreamt about the fact that their loved ones abandon them, or the family separation, the death of a loved one (Putnam, 2016). This means that 4/15 children with psychological trauma in this group are children with psychological trauma due to complex causes, both having a combination of incomplete families and other causes (Anderson, 2014). A similar case appears in Simmons' study, when a child is separated from their family after a divorce from their parents, they often feel lonely, have no motivation in life, or have symptoms of heart attack, headache, shortness of breath and often appear images, sounds are not real around themselves (Simmons, 2011). This group is also considered to include the subject of research.

In the study of the authors La Vigne, Davies and Brazzell (2008) children often show short-term responses to deal with their loss that can lead to emotional challenges and long-term behavior, such as depression, school problems, delinquency and drug use. When their bond with parents is strong, children will adjust to life better than not having or living away from their parents, and show less problematic behaviors. This finding proves that the children's psychological trauma caused by incomplete families strongly affected the emotional, cognitive and behavioral life of the child. These were cases in which psychological trauma seriously affected their lives and the school counselors need to identify and support them immediately. The stress in father - mother relationship and father, mother - children in the family after divorce with the long-term effects of troubled and broken marriage led to severe worries about the love and commitment that many children encounter in their future relationships (Wallerstein, 2005). Based on A. Maslow's Theory of Needs, when the safety needs of children are not guaranteed, children do not feel safe in their own nurturing environment and therefore children are not able to be satisfied higher needs such as the need for love - belonging, the need to respect - self-esteem. This makes children lose balance and find it difficult to deal with mental health problems (Kaur, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary for the education force, especially the school counselors to promptly work out the solutions to reduce psychological trauma of children living in the incomplete families to ensure the balanced development of children.

Conclusion

There were nearly a quarter of research samples, having psychological trauma when they lived in incomplete families. The filtering results of children 's psychological trauma in incomplete families shows that up to 14.58% of children with psychological trauma were caused by the incomplete families, not by other factors such as: having suffered from traffic accidents or other accidents (electric shock, serious falls, drowning etc.), having encountered natural disasters, violence. Regarding the level of psychological trauma, the total number of children with high vulnerability accounted for higher than 60%, this is an alarming number.

Psychological trauma of children results from the main cause which is the incomplete families and then from other factors such as the living environment and the pressure of public opinion and community. Therefore, it is necessary to have appropriate measures to identify/filter (for school counselors and support (education force) to create a favorable and good living-school environment so that children do not have to face many negative pressure and emotions and minimize the effect of psychological trauma on children.

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