International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Educational Development
Volume 2 - Issue 6 | November - December 2026 | www.ijamred.com
ISSN: 3107-6513

Difficulties faced by the children of working Parents pursuing Higher Secondary Education in Tenkasi District: A Qualitative Assessment

M. Sandhoshima*& S.Lenin**
M.Ed Student*,Assistant Professor**
Department of Education, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli
Sandhoshimamuthalagu97@gmail.com, leninengedu@gmail.com

I.ABSTRACT

Higher secondary education (Classes XI and XII) is a decisive stage in a student's academic and personal life, because the choices made here shape entry into higher education and careers. In an increasing number of families, both parents work, often long hours or away from home, and adolescents are left to manage study, household responsibilities and emotional needs with limited direct supervision. This study explores the difficulties faced by children of working parents who are pursuing higher secondary education in Tenkasi district, Tamil Nadu. A descriptive research design with a qualitative approach was adopted. Data were collected through unstructured interviews and focus group discussions with [number] higher secondary students and [number] parents and teachers, selected through purposive sampling, a form of non-probability sampling. The study examines academic, emotional, social and household difficulties, and the coping strategies used by the students. Based on the findings, the researchers offer practical suggestions for parents, schools and policymakers to support these students.

Keywords: Parental absence, Academic difficulties, Household responsibilities.

II. INTRODUCTION

The family is the first and most influential institution in a child's development. Parents provide care, guidance, discipline, motivation and a sense of security, all of which affect how well a child performs at school. Over the last few decades, rising living costs, women's growing participation in the workforce and migration for employment have made dual-earner families common in India, including semi-urban and rural districts such as Tenkasi.

Parental employment brings clear benefits, such as better income, access to quality schooling and improved living standards. However, it can also reduce the time parents are able to spend on supervising homework, attending school meetings, listening to their children and offering emotional support. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model explains that a child's development is shaped by interactions between the home, the school and the wider community, so a weakening of the home link can influence the child's overall adjustment.

At the higher secondary stage, students face heavy syllabus demands, public examinations, career decisions and the emotional changes of adolescence. When parents are absent for long periods, students may take on household duties, care for younger siblings, depend on private tuition, or turn to peers and mobile phones for company. Epstein (1995) emphasises that school, family and community partnerships are central to student success, and Coleman (1988) argues that the social capital available in the family, in the form of time, attention and trust, is an important resource for educational attainment.

Tenkasi district, with its mix of agricultural, small-industry, plantation and urban households, offers a useful setting to understand how parental work patterns affect higher secondary students. The functional aspects of these challenges can be understood best from regional studies.

ISSN: 3107-6513

III.NEED OF THE STUDY

Most research on working parents focuses on young children and day-care arrangements, while adolescents in Classes XI and XII receive much less attention. These students are assumed to be mature enough to manage on their own, yet this is the stage at which guidance is most needed. In Tenkasi district, parents work as agricultural laborers, factory and plantation workers, government and private employees, and migrant workers, and many students return from school to an empty home.

Understanding the difficulties of these students can help parents balance work and family responsibilities, help teachers and counsellors identify students who need support, and help policymakers design guidance programs, hostel and study-support facilities. The study aims to provide insights that can improve the academic performance, emotional well-being and future prospects of children of working parents.

IV.METHODOLOGY

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are,

1. To study the academic difficulties faced by higher secondary students of working parents.
2. To study the emotional and social difficulties faced by higher secondary students.
3. To study the household and time-management responsibilities of higher secondary students.
4. To study the coping strategies used by the students and the support provided by parents and teachers.

V.RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is descriptive research with a qualitative approach. After each interview and group discussion, the responses were recorded by the researcher and later organized into themes.

VI.PARTICIPANTS

The study was conducted in Tenkasi district. Data were collected in one phase. In this phase, students of Classes XI and XII, whose parents are both employed or in which the single parent is employed, were selected through purposive sampling from government and private higher secondary schools.

VII.DATA COLLECTION

The researcher used an unstructured interview schedule. Two separate schedules were developed, one for students and one for parents and teachers, in consultation with experts in education and guidance. The face validity of the tool was checked by experts. The questions were framed on the basis of a review of existing literature on parental employment and adolescent education. Focused group discussions with students lasted few hours .

The researcher used an interview schedule developed on the basis of a review of literature on parental employment and adolescent education. The schedule was organised under four dimensions (social, emotional, moral and cognitive), each with seven questions, and its face validity was checked by experts. Each interview lasted about [15 to 30] minutes.

a. Core Interview Questions

	Student Interview
1)	Which of your parents work, and what are their working hours?
2)	Who will be at home when you return from school?
3)	Who helps you with homework and exam preparation?
4)	What household responsibilities do you handle?
5)	Do you feel lonely, stressed or anxious about your studies?
6)	How do you spend your free time, including mobile phone and social media use?
7)	What support would help you most from your parents and school?

ISSN: 3107-6513

b. Dimension	Areas covered by the questions
Social	What the student does after school, how often and with whom the day is shared, who looks after the student, feeling left out, household duties, social support, role of friends
Emotional	Feelings when parents are away, how emotions are handled, sources of motivation, pressure before examinations, who gives emotional support
Moral	Handling visitors or strangers at the door, peer influence, behaviour and discipline, family time and guidance, handling disturbing friends or calls
Cognitive	Difficulty in homework, help with doubts, time management, difficulties in school and at home, expectations from teachers and parents, sources of help

VIII.DATA ANALYSIS

The responses were read repeatedly, coded, and grouped into themes within each dimension, following the steps of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The number of students giving a similar response is shown as n out of 7. Because the sample is small, the counts only describe this group and are not generalised.

IX.FINDINGS

Seven of the higher secondary students had adapted to their parents' absence and were self-reliant, but they described real difficulties in time, loneliness, academic help and distraction.

a. Social Dimension

Theme	Findings	Student(s)
Routine after school	All seven students first relaxed with television, mobile phone, snacks or play, and then turned to study. Example: "Freshen up, study till 8, have dinner and sleep."	All seven (quote: S7)
Sharing the day with parents	Four students shared the day with their parents daily or often. The others shared only on examination days or when something important happened.	S4, S5 (among those sharing only occasionally)
Household chores and homework	Four students did household chores before studying and moved the remaining homework to the next morning. Two students had no chores.	Chores: S2, S3, S4, S5. No chores: S1, S7
Social support	Six students felt they had enough social support. Two felt less important or left out. Example: "When friends share about their parents, I feel less important due to lack of confidence."	S5 (quote); S6 (felt this during functions and family gatherings)
Social value and friendship	One student said, "I lack social value, I find it difficult to mingle in society." Another mentioned a lack of friendship.	S1; S6
Influence of friends	Friends were double-edged: "Most friends help, some friends affect." The disturbing friends were described as fighting, annoying and talking all the time.	S3

ISSN: **3107-6513**

The students' time after school is organised around rest, chores and study, with little room for family conversation on weekdays. The presence of grandparents, an aunt or a sister clearly cushioned the absence of parents. This agrees with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) view that development depends on several linked settings, so strong support in one setting (the extended family) can partly offset weakness in another. Coleman (1988) similarly describes the time and attention of adults in the family as social capital for children.

b. Emotional Dimension

Theme	Findings	Student(s)
Negative feelings	Three students described negative feelings. Examples: "Lonely and tired. We have to do all by ourselves" (S7); "We have to take the responsibility of home, help grandparents... boring and isolated" (S3); "Will feel missing... will cry and feel relaxed" (S6).	S7, S3, S6
Adaptation	Four students said they had adapted. Examples: "Got used to it, no feelings" (S5); "I balance very well in my home without their presence" (S2).	S5, S2 (quoted among the four)
Emotional support and confiding	Most did not confide in their parents; they managed emotions themselves or turned to a sister, grandparents or friends. One student said the mother gives emotional assistance.	S1 (mother gives emotional assistance)
Sources of motivation	All seven named something that motivates them: personal ambition ("I want to become a doctor, so before MBBS these don't have a big impact"), their parents' hard work ("seeing my parents' hardship motivates me"; "I should become like them"), the family's standard of living, class rank, or friends who study well.	All seven. Ambition: S5. Parents' hard work: S2, S3. Standard of living: S7. Class rank: S4. Friends who study well: S6
Sources of stress	Stress came mainly from unfinished work, examinations themselves, and difficult subjects such as biology and mathematics.	Unfinished work: S6. Examinations: S3. Biology: S5. Mathematics: S7

The students show emotional resilience, but it is partly the result of getting used to the situation, and the loneliness of some of them should not be overlooked. Their motivation matches Bandura's (1997) idea that confidence and clear goals strengthen persistence. Steinberg (2001) notes that warm and involved parent-adolescent relationships support adolescent well-being, which is why even resilient students may value more time with their parents.

ISSN: 3107-6513

c. **Moral Dimension**

Theme	Findings	Student(s)
Handling visitors when alone	Five students used safe strategies with visitors: saying nobody is at home ("I will say nobody is at home"), telling the person to come later ("I don't know you, come later"), calling mother, or sending the person away at the doorstep.	Nobody at home: S2. Come later: S3. Calling mother: S4, S6. Sending away at doorstep: S5
Reaction to strangers	One student felt "awkward" when a stranger came. Another had not faced such a situation.	S7 (awkward); S1 (not faced)
Peer influence	Peer influence was low. Only one student said friends sometimes take the student out, while describing the usual situation as mostly responsible.	S3
Guidance on conduct and study	Guidance came in short windows: Sundays and holidays, the morning before the father leaves for work, result days, and evening talk and play.	Sundays and holidays: S1, S4. Morning before father leaves: S6. Result days: S5. Evening talk and play: S7
Handling disturbances from friends	Students handled disturbances on their own by asking friends to call later, ending the conversation and distancing the friendship, or staying away from irritating friends.	Asking friends to call later: S2, S3, S4. Ending conversation and distancing: S5. Staying away: S7
Pressure on friends	One student noted creating pressure for friends by asking doubts and homework.	S1

The students reported discipline and independent judgement, but their safety depends on their own rules rather than on adult supervision. Pettit et al. (1997) found that the risks of after-school arrangements depend largely on parental monitoring and supervision, which makes simple routines such as calling a parent when a stranger comes valuable.

d. **Cognitive Dimension**

Theme	Findings	Student(s)
Academic difficulties	Academic difficulties were mostly about time and about help at home. Examples: "When teachers give so much homework, due to lack of time, will feel difficult to finish it" (S6); "No one to help at home will be difficult" (S7); "Parents will be busy, so will feel difficult and refer to the internet" (S5).	S6, S7, S5

ISSN: 3107-6513

Theme	Findings	Student(s)
Study schedule	Six students used a fixed schedule, a time table, or a morning and evening split.	Six students (not individually named)
Sources of help for doubts	Five students relied on the internet, mobile phone or ChatGPT ("I refer to Google and ChatGPT"). Two relied on friends, one on a sister, and one on teachers.	Internet and ChatGPT example: S1
Mother's academic support	S1's mother is a teacher who clears mathematics doubts, but S1 still said, "I want my mom to be with me while preparing for exams."	S1
Self-reliance	One student said, "No guidance needed, I'll study myself."	S4
Expectations from parents	Students wanted time and presence ("Spend time with me and help me do assignments"; "Parents should speak and help us relax") or a schedule.	Time and help with assignments: S7. Speak and help relax: S5. Schedule: S6
Expectations from teachers	Students wanted kindness, clear explanation and fairness ("No partiality and treat everyone equally"). One student said that when teachers do not explain difficult questions, exam preparation becomes hard.	Fairness quote: S5. Difficult questions not explained: S6

The students' planning, goal-setting and use of resources reflect self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2002), which is a strength. However, their parents' expectations and presence seem to matter more to them than direct homework help. This is in line with meta-analyses that found parental aspirations and academic socialisation to be more strongly related to achievement than home supervision or homework help (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009). The heavy use of internet and AI tools for doubts also means that teachers' explanations in school carry extra weight for these students.

X.LIMITATIONS

The study is based on a small sample of students, and the responses are self-reported. Some students may have given positive answers (for example, "I'm perfect myself"), so the difficulties may be under-reported. The findings describe these students and should not be generalised to all of Tenkasi district.

XI.SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Parents should set aside protected daily time, even 15 to 20 minutes, to talk with their children and, in the examination months, to be present while they prepare.
- Parents should tell their children clearly that they expect them to study and that they are available, since expectations and presence matter to the students.
- Schools should provide study hours, remedial classes and library access after school for students who return to an empty home.
- Teachers should explain difficult questions fully, treat all students equally, and avoid homework loads that cannot be finished in the time available.
- Schools should hold parent-teacher meetings at times convenient for working parents and share progress by phone or message.

ISSN: **3107-6513**

- Counsellors should be appointed in higher secondary schools and should reach out to students who feel lonely, left out or low in confidence.
- Students should be trained in time management, stress management, safe handling of visitors and calls, and the responsible use of the internet and AI tools for study.
- Parents and schools should guide students in choosing friends and in handling distracting peers.
- The government and local bodies should strengthen evening study centres and guidance programmes in rural and semi-urban parts of Tenkasi district.

XII.CONCLUSION

The study shows that higher secondary students of working parents in Tenkasi district are largely self-reliant and motivated, and many are supported by grandparents, an aunt, siblings and friends. Their main difficulties are loneliness and tiredness for some, limited time because of chores and homework, little subject help at home, distracting peers, unease with strangers at the door, and a wish for their parents' time during examination preparation. Parental employment is necessary for the family's well-being, so the aim is not to discourage it, but to reduce its negative effects on the child. When parents, teachers and counsellors share responsibility for these students, the strengths they already show can be turned into better learning and well-being.

XIII.REFERENCES

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W. H. Freeman.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.

Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology, 94*(Supplement), S95–S120.

Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(9), 701–712.

Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review, 13*(1), 1–22.

Hill, N. E., & Tyson, D. F. (2009). Parental involvement in middle school: A meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promote achievement. *Developmental Psychology, 45*(3), 740–763.

Pettit, G. S., Laird, R. D., Bates, J. E., & Dodge, K. A. (1997). Patterns of after-school care in middle childhood: Risk factors and developmental outcomes. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 43*(3), 515–538.

Steinberg, L. (2001). We know some things: Parent–adolescent relationships in retrospect and prospect. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 11*(1), 1–19.

Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory Into Practice, 41*(2), 64–70.