

Full Length Research Paper

The psycho-social effect of parental separation and divorce on adolescents: Implications for counselling in Surulere Local Government Area of Lagos State

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The study examines the psycho-social effect of parental separation or divorces on adolescents and its implications for counselling. A descriptive research survey was used while stratified random sampling technique was adopted in selecting the population sample. The sample population used is 120 adolescent students randomly drawn from twelve secondary schools in Surulere local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria. The students responded to a well structured questionnaire which generated data for testing the hypotheses using the simple percentage and chi-square statistical method. The results of psycho-social effect of parental separation or divorce on adolescents include the poor academic performance, social development, interpersonal relation and pitiable emotional stability manifestations. A five point recommendations to reduce and eradicate divorce and separation of parents are made. Government, communities, courts, and religious organization should work jointly to ensure that all married couples as well as singles have access to child centred and affordable counselling services.

Key words: Psycho-social, parental separation, divorce, adolescents, counselling and local government.

INTRODUCTION

When God created humans he made it possible for production of offspring by the coming together of a man and woman through marriage. Marriage is a social institution for union of a man and his wife in body and soul (Olayinka, 1990). People view the concept of marriage from various perspectives. Some people view it as a contract which is as a result of legal consequences. The lady's bride price is refunded, if the termination is adjudged to be the fault of the wife or when there is a breach of contract. Marriage is also seen as a game you get into at any time and you get out of at the least loss of interest. Christian marriages do not agree with these views mentioned above. The Christians assert that marriage is not a contract and should not be terminated or separated at the least lost of interest. Marriage to them

has a deeper and different meaning. The catechism of the Catholic Church defines marriage as a matrimonial covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole life. It is by its nature ordered towards the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring. The chief function of marriage is to provide a forum for affection and emotional security from one generation to another. In the marriage union, man and woman develop the full sense of togetherness, belonging, responsibility and interdependence (Olayinka, 1987). Makinde (2004a) asserts that the function of marriage is to provide happiness, security, cultural growth, and development of a sense of responsibility for enhancing continuity and societal perpetuation. Marriage is seen as a permanent

union of a man and woman done freely, founded on love and designed for companionship, procreation and proper upbringing of the children. It can only be lawfully dissolved by death. Divorce is usually perceived as the solution to difficult marital relationships irrespective of the repercussion on the couple, children, adolescents and society at large. Divorce is one of the most stressful life events a person can experience regardless of whether one sought the divorce or was unprepared for the divorce. When adolescents are involved the stressful event is even more complex. Makinde (2007b) describes adolescence as that period in every individual's life which lies between the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. According to Gesell (1945) adolescence is that rebelliousness period of uncertainty; a period of absolute confusion and a period of storm and stress for the teenager.

The dictionary simply describes it as 'The period following the onset of puberty during which a young person develops from a child into an adult'. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry describes adolescence as one of the most dynamic stages of human growth and development; and is second only to infancy in the rate of developmental changes that take place.

It is therefore a stage that requires special care, attention, love understanding and patience for the young adult. The home and the family play a great role in the development of the adolescents. Parents should monitor their children and provide them with a good nurture and discipline. The stressful nature of a divorce experience increases the adolescent's chances of experiencing a wide variety of mental health problems, including aggression, elevated anxiety, high rates of substance abuse and low self-esteem.

Statement of the problem

Divorce is a common phenomenon which has attracted global attention. Government and non-governmental organizations have played vital roles in the elimination of this menace because of the psychological and social problems which make the adolescents to exhibit strange and unguided behaviours.

For obvious reasons children see divorce as very traumatic experience. It affects them in all ramifications. Divorce impacts the youngster's behaviour in the school environment, peer group and even in the society at large. The family structure is altered and thus affected. Many divorces are emotional and can even draw the children into the conflict between the parents. Adolescents facing problems of family dissolution have more difficult time with academic and social expectations at schools, among peers and the society than children from conflict free families. The emotional aspect of divorce which affects adolescents includes the feelings of anxiety, depression,

inferiority complex, guilt and sometimes aggression. Parental interaction has a better effect on adolescents than the divorce. In other words, the negative outcome of divorce may increase pre-existing differences in the family unit prior to the divorce itself.

Purpose of the study

The following are the objectives of this study,

1. To determine the relationship between parental separation and academic performance of the adolescents.
2. To investigate the relationship between parental separation and the social relationship of the adolescents.
3. To access the relationship between parental separation and adolescents interpersonal relationship.
4. To know the relationship in the emotional stability manifested and the gender socio-relationship of an adolescents who come from separated home and those from families that are intact.

Hypotheses

Three null hypotheses are formulated and tested in this study.

1. There is no significant relationship between parental separation and academic performance of the adolescents.
2. There is no significant relationship between parental separation and the adolescents' social development.
3. There is no significant difference in the emotional stability manifested by adolescents from separated and stable homes.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Meaning of adolescence

Hesell (1995) described adolescence as the period of rebellion and uncertainty for the young adult. He further stated that it is a period of absolute confusion, storm and stress. Erikson (1968) depicts adolescence as the period of ego. Ego is that aspect of personality which deals with reality; a period of finding oneself or a period of self definition. It is a period of identity crises when the question "Who am I" is usually asked. Piaget (1950), on the other hand, refers to adolescence as a period of transition from concrete to formal operation. It is a period when the individual thinks beyond the present and forms theories about everything; delighting specifically in considerations of that which is not.

In Nigerian context, Makinde (2007) refers to adolescence as that period in every individual's life which marks the end of infancy and the beginning of maturity.

Akintoye (1985) portrays adolescence as that period of accelerated growth between childhood and adulthood. It is also referred as periods of heightened social awareness, formal cognitive operations and a stage when the individual can reproduce his or her kind. Olayinka (1987) posited that adolescents constitute a very significant population on whom the future development of the society depends. Bakare (1983) described adolescence as a period of intensive love affairs, increase sensitivity, high interest in the opposite sex and the right time to know the consequences of friendship. To Okafor (2000), adolescence is that stage when the memory and imagination of the individual are very sharp.

Concepts of separation and divorce

Separation is a legal agreement by which husband and wife choose not live together. Separation is the removal of children from the care-giver(s) to whom they are attached. Separation frees parents from the burden of child rearing (Caye, 1996). Separation and -divorce have both positive and negative effects. The separation limits can be established for parental behaviour and the child will get the message that the society will protect him or her even if the parent will not. Divorce is a legal way of dissolving a marriage between two people. This separation is a family as well as a personal crisis. Aprons et al. (1987) described it as a process that entails psychological risks as well as opportunity for the development of the stakeholders. They further stated that the process unfolds in distinct stages that are characterized by qualitative differences of themes and of degree of coping. Separation and divorce are associated with heart rending emotions, unspeakable sadness, depression, anxiety and much more. It leads to the creation of two households rather than one, with consequent increased cost and all parties involved suffer these effects.

Types of separation and divorce

Cayer (1996) identify several types of divorce as follows:

(A) No –faulty divorce:- It exists when a marriage partner does not need to show that the other marriage partner did or was at fault to obtain a divorce. The reason for this includes incompatibility, irreconcilable differences and irremediable breakdown of the marriage. No-fault divorce is usually preceded by a separation or deemed separation for 12 months and the divorce applicable can be made by both parties jointly.

(B) At fault divorce:-it is a common way of breaking a marriage. A fault divorce occurs when one party is blamed by the other and viewed as causing the divorce.

Traditionally, couples were not just able to divorce

whenever they wanted to. One party to the marriage must have done something that warranted the other wanting to end the marital union. The distribution of property and will allow an immediate divorce in states where there is a waiting period required for no fault divorce.

(C) Summary divorce: A summary or simple divorce available in some jurisdictions is used when spouse meet certain eligibility requirement or can agree on key issues before hand.

(D) Uncontested divorce refers to marriages that end up in divorce because the two parties are able to come to an agreement (either with or without lawyer or mediators) about the property, children and support issues. When the parties can agree and present the court with a fair and equitable agreement approval of the divorce is almost guaranteed. If the two parties cannot come to an agreement they may ask the court to decide how to split property and support issues with children among others.

(E) Collaborative divorce:- Here the parties negotiate an agreed resolution with the assistance of attorneys who are trained in the collaborative divorce process and often with the assistance of a neutral financial specialist and / divorce coach(es). The parties are empowered to make their own decisions based on their own needs and interest but with complete information and full professional support. Once the collaborative divorce starts the lawyers are disqualified from representing the parties in a contested legal proceeding should the collaborative law processes end prematurely.

(F) Mediated divorce; involves a mediator facilitating the discussion between the husband and wife by assisting with communication and providing information and suggestions to help resolve their differences. At the end of the mediation process the separation parties have developed a tailored divorce agreement that can be submitted to the court.

MBA (1980) as reported in Omo-okie (2006) outlined some of the causes of divorce in the traditional marriage system to include the following:

1. Changing family function: Many things done by the family such as education and recreation have been taken over by outside agencies.
2. Casual marriages: This brings about hasty marriages and quick divorce.
3. Job for women: Women are no longer dependent on men for their livelihood and they feel more free to leave when difficulties arise in the marriage.
4. Decline in moral and religious sanctions: The Roman Catholic Church is still opposed to divorce, but most others have taken a liberal view towards it.
5. The philosophy of happiness: The main goals of marriage are personal satisfaction and happiness when these goals are not met the marriage is dissolved and new mates are sought.
6. More permissive divorce laws: Divorce is so para-

mount that couples do not seek to heal or restore their broken relationships but rather they take the easy way out which is “divorce” or separation. Divorce on demand is now readily available with relatively little expenses.

All the factors mentioned above bring about unhappiness which consequently tend to failed marriages and eventually to permanent separation and divorce of the couples.

Consequences of separation and divorce

The devastating consequences of divorce include,

1. Changes in the life style and tradition of the family.
2. Changes in the economic and financial status of the family.
3. The children’s psychology, social and educational development is affected adversely.
4. The couple faces so many challenges varying from insecurity; depression; emotional and psychological trauma among others.

Effect of divorce on the parent – child relationships

Amato (1994) studied mother and father relation to young adults and the result of this study indicated that a close relationship with the parents influences the young adults’ happiness, life, satisfaction, distress and self esteem. Relationship between divorced parents and their children continues to be characterized by low levels of contact, affection and intergenerational exchange well after the children became adults. Booth and Amato (2001) and Grief (1997) found that adult children from custodial father families perceive higher relationship quality with their mother- custody families. The clinical manifestation of divorce in children depends on many variables including child’s age, family, psycho-social functioning, the parents’ ability in the midst of their own anger loss and discomfort to focus on their child’s feelings and needs.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design is used for this study. The target population for this study is 120 students drawn from a population of 12000 students spread across 10 public schools in the Surulere Local Government Area of Lagos State in Nigeria out of 30 schools. The subject of the study consisted of Senior Secondary School two (SS2) public school students drawn, using stratified random sampling.

The instrument is a 25- item questionnaire used for this study after it had been pretested on the Stadium Senior Grammar School Onitolo and corrected for consistency. The 4 likert scale instrument which is good for getting the opinion of the adolescents was used. Section A of the questionnaire is about the personal information of the students while sections B,C,D, and E are made up of 25 items with five questions each for all the sections relating to parental separation and its effects on the adolescents.

RESULTS

The analysis of data using the characteristic of the respondents, the chi-square for the stated hypothesis revealed the following:

HYPOTHESIS 1: There will be no significant relationship between parental separation / divorce and academic performance of the adolescents.

Table 1 depicts the frequency of response by the respondents. Strongly agreed was the most popular likert item with the highest respondents 121(12.2%), while the strongly disagreed was the least with 77(12.8%) respondents.

Table 2 represents the addition of the strongly agreed and agreed which amounted to 233 respondents and 278, for the strongly disagreed and the disagreed respectively.

Since χ^2 calculated as 1.54 is less than χ^2 and is 3.84 at 5% level of significance, we therefore; accept the full hypothesis which says that; There is no significant relationship between parental Separation and academic performance of an adolescent (Tables 3-4). This means that, adolescents from broken homes do not perform better than children of intact families.

HYPOTHESIS II: There will be no significant relationship between parental separation and social development of an adolescent.

Table 5 depicts the responses for the likert items. Agree attracted the highest responder (210) and strongly disagree was the least with 101 respondents.

Table 6 shows the observed frequency of 315 for the strongly agreed and the agreed, while that of the disagreed and the strongly agreed are 285 respondents. Since χ^2 calculated as 0.30 is less than χ^2 and tabulated as 3.84 at 5% level of significance; we therefore accept the null hypothesis which says that; there is no significant relationship between parental Separation\divorce and the social development of an adolescents (Tables 7-8). Adolescents from broken homes are always violent and the poor upbringing of children by parents increases the rate of child abuse in the society.

HYPOTHESIS III: There will be no significant relationship between parental separation and the adolescent interpersonal relationship.

Table 9 reflects frequency of response of the student to the questions between parental separation/divorce and adolescent interpersonal relationship. It shows that agree attracted the highest respondents (221) and strongly agreed had the least (67) responders.

Since χ^2 calculated as 1.64 is less than χ^2 and tabulated as 3.84 at 5% level of significance, we

Table1. Frequency of response of the student to the questions.

Item no	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
Item 1	24	58	31	07	120
Item 2	30	56	31	03	120
Item 3	34	35	35	16	120
Item 4	24	29	49	18	120
Item 5	09	23	55	33	120
Total	121(29.2)	201(33.5)	201	77(12.8)	600

Table 2. The observed frequency.

Respondent	SA	A	Total SA/A	SD	D	Total
Students	121	201	322	077	201	278
Total	121	201	322	077	201	278

Table 3. The contingency table for the expected frequency.

Respondent	SA/A	SD/D	Total
Students	64	56	120
Total	64	56	120

E= $\frac{GT}{N}$ Where GT = Grand Total N; N = No of Items; E = Expected Frequency; Therefore E = $\frac{120}{2} = 60$.

Table 4. Contingency table for chi- square X^2 .

	O	E	(O-E)	(O-E) ²	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
SA/A	64	60	4	16	0.27
SD/D	56	60	-4	16	0.27
Total	120	-			1.54

Total =120; $X^2 c=1.54$; D.f = N-1; X^2 calculated =1.5; X^2 tabulated = X^2_{11} 0.05 \approx 3.84146; \approx 3.84.

Table 5. Frequency of response of the student to the questions.

Item no	SA	A	D	SD	Total
Item 1	34	48	27	12	120
Item 2	12	35	47	17	120
Item 3	25	33	37	21	120
Item 4	18	50	34	26	120
Item 5	12	44	39	25	120
Total	105	210	184	101	600

Table 6. The observed frequency.

Respondent	SA	A	Total SA/A	SD	D	Total SA/D
Students	105	210	315	101	184	285
Total	105	210	315	101	184	285

Table 7. The contingency table for the expected frequency.

Respondent	SA/A	SD/D	Total
Students	63	57	120
Total	63	57	120

E= $\frac{GT}{N}$ Where GT = Grand Total. N = No of items; E = Expected frequency. Therefore E = $\frac{120}{2} = 60$.

Table 8. Contingency table for chi- square X^2 .

	O	E	[O-E]	[O-E] ²	$\frac{[O-E]^2}{E}$
SA/A	63	60	3	9	0.15
SD/D	57	60	-3	9	0.15
Total	120				0.30

Total =120; $X^2 c = 0.30$; D.F =N-1; 2-1. X^2 calculated = 0.30; X^2 tabulated = X^2_{11} 0.05 \approx 3.84146; \approx 3.84.

Table 9. Frequency of response of the student to the questions.

Item no	SA	A	D	SD	Total
Item 1	21	38	51	10	120
Item 2	22	53	35	10	120
Item 3	24	44	40	12	120
Item 4	20	55	30	15	120
Item 5	27	51	42	20	120
Total	114	221	198	67	600

Table10. The observed frequency.

Respondent	SA	A	Total SA/A	SD	D	Total SD/D
Students	114	221	335	067	198	265
Total	114	221	335	067	198	265

Table 11. The contingency table for the expected frequency.

Respondent	SA/A	SD/D	Total
Student	67	53	120
Total	67	53	120

$E = \frac{GT}{N}$ where GT=Grand total N; N= No of items; E=Expected frequency. Therefore, $E = \frac{120}{2} = 60$.

Table 12. Contingency table for chi-square X^2 .

	O	E	[O-E]	[O-E] ²	$\frac{[O-E]^2}{E}$
SA/A	67	60	7	49	0.82
SD/D	53	60	-7	49	0.82
Total	120				1.64

Total = 120; $X^2_c = 0.64$; D.F =N-1;2-1=1; X^2 calculated = 1.64; X^2 tabulated = $X^2_{11} 0.05 \approx 3.84146$; ≈ 3.84 .

therefore accept the Null hypothesis which says that; there is no significant relationship between parental Separation and adolescents interpersonal relationship (Tables 10 to 12). Adolescents from broken homes always feel and see themselves as inferiors among their peers from intact family.

DISCUSSION

In hypothesis one it was found that there was no significant relation between parental separation and academic performance of an adolescent from broken homes do not do better than children of intact families.

This finding is supported by Forehand (1991), Greaves (1991) and Buchanan et al. (1991) that adolescent from broken homes perform very low in their academic. This is because most adolescents from this home cannot afford to pay for extra curriculum activities; they lose concentration in the class and they rarely involve in class activities.

In hypothesis two it was also found that there was no significant relationship between parental separation and the adolescents' social behaviour because adolescents from broken homes are always violent and the poor upbringing of children by parents increases the rate of child abuse in the society.

The above finding is supported by Chase-Lansdale and, Hetherington (1990), Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), Hammer (1999) and Brown (1999) that adolescents who are experiencing the divorce of their parents usually exhibit poor social development with their peers and they often end up as miscreant, political thugs and armed robbers in the society.

Hypothesis three stated that; there was no significant relationship between parental separation and adolescents' interpersonal relationship because adolescents from broken homes always feel and see themselves as inferior among their peers from intact family.

The statement above is supported by Wallerstein (2000) and Booth et al. (1994) that adolescents from broken homes are often afraid of going into relationships and they cannot initiate and keep good interpersonal relationship.

Conclusion

This paper examined the psycho- social effect of parental separation or divorces on adolescents and its implications for counselling. A descriptive research survey was used while stratified random sampling technique was adopted for selecting the population sample. The respondents answered a well structured questionnaire which generated data for testing the hypotheses, using the simple percentage and chi- square statistical method.

As a result of the findings, it is concluded that the psycho-social effect of parental separation or divorce on adolescents includes poor academic performance, social development, interpersonal relation and pitiable emotional stability manifestations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the finding of this research.

1. School counsellors should see themselves as parents and guides to the students. Some level of cardinality and friendliness should exist between them and the students so that the students will be free to confide in them.
2. Government; community organization courts and religions organizations should work together to ensure that all unhappily married couples have access to counselling that is both affordable and child cantered.
3. There should be affective relationship and marriage skill classes. Healthy parenting invariably begins with emotional healthy parents. Encourage people to establish effective relationships; classes of relationship and marriage skills should be incorporated into high school curricular and be a requirement for graduation.
4. Sequel to the influence of family on adolescents' social and interpersonal relationships, divorce and conflicts in the home could be avoided by strengthening and improving the quality of family life.
5. Family casework should be taken with every seriousness as this could help to ameliorate the adverse effects of divorce on the family. Casework should include educating the marriageable age about the great task of marriage life.

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