

Marital Breakdown and Socio-Emotional Development of Adolescents in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria

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Abstract

The incidence of marital breakdown is becoming alarming and taking its toll on the development of youths in Nigeria. This study investigated marital breakdown and socio-emotional development of adolescents in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State. Correlational research design was adopted for this study. An instrument which consisted of three sections, titled 'Marital Breakdown and Socio-emotional Development Questionnaire (MBSDQ)' was used to collect information from the respondents. The validity of the instrument was done by experts in the Departments of Psychology and Counsellor Education, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. The reliability of the same was established using test re-test reliability method and correlation coefficients of 0.71 respectively was obtained. The descriptive data were analyzed using mean while the hypothesis was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance. Result showed that the indices of marital breakdown is manifested in spouses having different ideas on issues, insulting each other, frequent fighting, and doing things separately among others. The indices of socio-emotional development (which is in this case is poor) are loneliness, depression, inability to accept feelings from others, feelings of hatred towards oneself, feelings of inferiority complex and feelings of hatred towards parents among others. There is a significant relationship between marital breakdown and socio-emotional development of adolescents. In line with the findings, it was recommended that couples should as much as possible tolerate each other, show that they like and care about each other and do their utmost to prevent marital breakdown.

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Introduction

The ability to handle life demands and challenges is based on the psychological foundation of early family experiences. Families are the resultant effect of marriage, which involves a man and a woman bonded together with love and sometimes under the law (Goldsmith, 2000). However, of all the environmental factors that influence a child's development, family seems to have the most significant impact. Family members are the first people that young children have regular contact with, and as patterns, interactions and relationships within the family unit develop, so does a child's understanding of himself, other people and the world around him. Within the society, one of the functions of marriage is bearing and rearing children. Parents identify certain values that are important for the development of their children and pass it to them (Debra, 2006). As children grow and their relationships with family members develop, they learn how to form friendships, manage and communicate emotions in a healthy way and as well as learning how to overcome obstacles and challenges in their lives. Making the time to do things together as a family promotes family cohesion, which enhances all round development in children and reduces children's risk of experiencing emotional distress which characterizes marital breakdown (Debra, 2006).

Marital breakdown refers to the severity of marital relationship of couples. It is a devastating experience that is capable of 'tearing couples apart'. Many marriages centre on love, commitment and happiness however, in the face of marital conflict, these seem to exist no more. Marital breakdown is a resultant effect of marital instability which could be characterized by unhappiness, anxiety and depression among couples. Marital breakdown is a breach of domestic aspiration (whereas divorce and dissolution of the marital relationship are the same), it could also lead to single parenthood. Marital breakdown could be traumatic, chaotic and invariably fill the

victims with confused emotions. There are also specific feelings, attitudes and dynamics associated with whether one is in the role of the initiator or the receiver of the marital dissolution (Oswalt, 2010).

The incidence of marital breakdown is increasing worldwide (Burns & Dunlop, 2002). The outcomes of parental divorce on adolescents could be long-term impacts such as poor psychological health, manifestation of unwanted behaviours and poor socio-economic qualities as well as, poor academic performance which could persist through adulthood (Dunlop, Burns & Berminghams, 2001). Marital breakdown has been known to affect everything concerning the marriage (Burns & Dunlop, 2002), moreover, as devastating as marital breakdown is to couples, it is more difficult for an adolescent child to handle either socially, emotionally or both, combined.

Adolescence is a period of life between the onset of puberty and the full commitment to an adult social life. Adolescents are usually between the ages 11 years to 21 years. Adolescence is the period of life for the formation of personal social identity. Adolescents must explore, test limits, become independent and develop a personal identity or sense of self (Adegoke, 2003). Different roles, behaviours and ideologies must be tried out by an adolescent for him to select an identity and adolescents continue to refine their self-image as they relate with others. Developmental tasks of adolescents is such that adolescents need to learn how to get along with friends of both sexes, accept own physical body and keep it healthy, become more self-reliant, make decisions about marriage and family life, and acquire a set of values to guide behavior among others (Goldsmith, 2000). As adolescents work to form their identities, there is the natural instinct for them to pull away from their parents, and the peer group becomes important rallying point in their stead (Shanahan, Mchale, Osgood & Crouter, 2007). Despite spending less time

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with their parents however, the type of relationship that adolescents have with their parents still plays a significant role in their socio-emotional development. There exists a negative relationship between marital breakdown and socio-emotional development of adolescents (Salami, 2008), this implies that the existence of marital breakdown brings about poor socio-emotional development of adolescents.

Socio-emotional development of adolescents refers to social and emotional skills (life coping skills) and other personality attributes acquired by an individual as s/he is transiting from childhood to an adolescent. It involves adolescent's ability to comport self, handle problematic situations and emotional distress. Adolescents who develop good socio-emotional well-being are able to relate well with peers, have positive self-image, progress towards actualization of academic goals and have ability to make sound decisions. Warm and healthy parent-child relationship which is a result of stable home front, have been associated with the development of positive social-emotional characteristics (behaviours) in the adolescents. Rushena, Prior, Samson and Smart (2005) submitted that when a solid and positive relationship exists between parents, the adolescents are more likely to feel free in exploring identity options. However, where the relationship between parents is not supportive, adolescents are usually emotionally destabilized (Kelly, 2001). The adolescent is more likely to feel less confident in forming a separate, personal identity. Unfortunately, the behaviour of the adolescent is most likely to be guided by cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, emotional stability, peer influence, religious beliefs and the relationship that exists between parents (Burns & Dunlop, 2002). Marital breakdown can introduce social and emotional stress into the life of an adolescent and can leave fewer resources for the all-round development of the adolescent. Marital breakdown (or divorce) has been established to leave an adolescent with a sense of insecurity (Okafor, 2000). However, all groups

of adolescents who have to cope with marital breakdown (divorce) have been shown to manifest high level of stress and agitation than those who do not grow up with divorced parents (Kelly, 2001).

The adolescent child may be socially and emotionally impaired. S/he might be hostile towards the parent that is assumed to cause the breakdown. Moreover, hostility turned inward might cause depression in the adolescent. In the perception of Burns and Dunlop (2002), adolescents fear being isolated and lonely, feel parents is leaving them, feel hurried to achieve independence, feel in competition with parents, and worry about their own future love and marriage. They are usually pre-occupied with the survival of relationships, and tend to experience chronic fatigue and difficulty concentrating. In the same vein, Okafor (2000) concluded that adolescents who are from broken homes usually exhibit poor social development with peers and they may end up as miscreant, political thugs or armed robbers in the society (especially where they are left without anybody bothering about their well-being).

Marital breakdown is most common in the USA, where 67% percent of all second marriages breakdown, making many children to come from broken homes. In England, 71% of marital breakdown occurs in first marriages, and it is saddening that 42% of marriages broke down in 2006. Worse still, over 30% of all marriages that were involved, had at least one child aged below 16 who is an adolescent (Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2008). The case of marital breakdown is not different in Nigeria because of urbanization and industrialization.

Many couples in broken homes remarry in Nigeria as well as in other parts of the world and about 50% of those who remarry are already parents. The result is the creation of blended families (Adegoke, 2010) which have serious impact on the socio-emotional development of the children especially adolescents. It has been estimated that a fourth of American children will live

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with a stepparent before reaching the age 18. It was estimated that by the year 2020, stepparents are expected to outnumber traditional families (Booth & Amato, 2001; Adegoke, 2003).

It is particularly worrisome that marital breakdown could take its toll on the socio-emotional development of adolescents in which, many of these adolescents would express anger and hostility towards parents, siblings, teachers and peers. According to Cherling and Funstanberg (2000), school performance and self esteem are also not likely to be exempted; many of them could develop aggression, feeling of guilt and inferiority complex among peers. It is against this background that this study investigated the relationship between marital breakdown and socio-emotional development of adolescents in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria.

Research Questions

Based on the introduction, the following questions were asked.

1. What are the indices of marital breakdown as expressed by adolescents in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria?
2. What are the indices of poor socio-emotional development as expressed by adolescents in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between marital breakdown and socio-emotional development of adolescents in Ibadan Metropolis.

Methodology

The study investigated the relationship between marital breakdown and socio-emotional development of adolescents in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria. The descriptive survey method of the correlational type was adopted to establish the relationship between the variables.

The respondents for this study were 400 in-school adolescents that were identified to be from broken homes/marriages and that were in the Senior Secondary Classes. These adolescents were chosen from selected secondary schools in five Local Government Areas of Ibadan Metropolis- Ibadan North, Ibadan-North West, Ibadan-South West, Ibadan-North East and Ibadan South using Purposive and Simple Random Sampling Techniques.

A Researcher-designed questionnaire titled Marital Breakdown and Socio-emotional Development Questionnaire (MBSDQ) was used to collect information from the respondents. The instrument have three sections; A, B and C. Section A sought the demographic data of the respondents while sections B and C contained 15 negatively worded items each which are meant to elicit information on marital breakdown and socio-economic development of adolescents. The two sections were scored using four point Likert type rating scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Disagree (3) and Strongly Disagree (4). The result was interpreted using mean score 2.5. The validity of the instrument was done by experts in the Departments of Psychology and Counsellor Education, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. These experts affirmed that the instrument is valid for use. The reliability of the instrument was established using test-retest reliability method, by administering the instrument twice at an interval of four weeks on 40 in-schools adolescents selected from secondary schools in Akinyele Local Government Area, who did not take part in the study. The two scores yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.78 which indicated that the instrument is reliable for use.

The instrument was administered by the researchers with the help of trained research assistants. A total of 480 questionnaire forms were administered out of which 400 were properly filled; and this figure was eventually utilized for purpose of data analysis and hypothesis testing. The data were collected, coded and processed. Using Statistical Package for Social Sciences

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(SPSS) version 17.0 statistical software, frequency counts and t-test statistical tools were used to analyze the data.

Results

This section presents the results.

Research Question One: *What are the indices of marital breakdown as expressed by adolescents in Oyo State?*

Table 1. Ranking of Marital Breakdown as Expressed by Adolescents in Oyo State

Items	I observe the following between my parents:	Mean	Rank
1	continuous argument	3.83	1st
5	frequent fighting	3.73	2nd
9	they usually insult themselves	3.58	3rd
2	they usually have different ideas	3.38	3rd
6	one of them is overbearing	3.28	5th
10	they do things separately	3.13	6th
13	they do not talk to each other in the house	3.06	7th
3	avoiding each other	2.94	8th
7	they compete with each on almost all issues	2.83	9th
11	they are not comfortable being together	2.68	10th
15	they do not respect each other	2.61	11th
14	they prefer to confide in others than in themselves	2.61	11th
4	lack of likeness for each other	2.49	13th
8	they do no joke together	2.27	14th
12	they do not trust each other	2.16	15th

The table shows the mean and ranking of marital breakdown as expressed by adolescents in Oyo State. Item 1 ('continuous argument') ranked first with mean score 3.83. Item 5 ('frequent fighting') ranked second with mean score 3.73. Ranked 15th is item 12 ('they do not trust each other') with mean score 2.16. Twelve of the fifteen items have mean scores above the normative 2.5 threshold; therefore, the indices of marital breakdown as expressed by adolescents from broken marriages in Oyo State are continuous argument between couples, insulting each

other, frequent fighting, having different ideas on issues, overbearing nature of one of the spouses, and doing things separately among others.

Research Question Two: *What are the indices of poor socio-emotional development as expressed by adolescents in Oyo State?*

Table 2. Mean and Ranking of Poor Socio-Emotional Development as Expressed by Adolescents in Oyo State

Items	I have been experiencing:	Mean	Rank
1	loneliness	3.76	1st
5	depression	3.68	2nd
2	feelings of guilt	3.65	3rd
6	restlessness	3.57	4th
9	poor progress in my school work	3.57	4th
3	feelings of inferiority complex	3.54	6th
10	inability to take decisions on issues	3.46	7th
4	feelings of hatred towards my parents	3.43	8th
7	irritability	3.43	9th
11	lack of interest in family	3.36	10th
13	inability to accept feelings from others	3.35	11th
8	inability to handle stress	3.25	12th
15	feelings of hatred towards myself	3.25	12th
14	inability to concentrate on issues bothering me	3.25	12th
12	inability to express my feelings to others	3.17	15th

The table showed the mean and ranking of socio-emotional development as expressed by adolescents in Oyo State. Item 1 ('loneliness') ranked first with mean score 3.76. Item 5 ('depression') ranked second with mean score 3.68. Ranked 15th is item 12 ('inability to express my feelings to others') with mean score 3.17. All the items have mean scores above the normative 2.5 threshold; therefore, adolescents from broken marriages in Oyo State reflected poor socio-emotional development in form of loneliness, depression, inability to handle stress, inability to accept feelings from others, feelings of hatred towards oneself, restlessness, and feelings of hatred towards parents among others.

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Hypothesis One: *There is no significant relationship between marital breakdown and socio-emotional development of adolescents in Ibadan Metropolis.*

The null hypothesis was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 3. Regression Model Summary of Marital Breakdowns and Socio-Emotional Development of Adolescents

Model	Mean	SD	N	Cal. r	Crit. r
Marital Breakdown	0.544	12.893	400	0.399	0.195
Socio-Emotional Development	51.71	13.061	400		

*Significant, $p < 0.05$

The table showed a calculated r value of 0.399 and a critical r value of 0.195. Since the calculated value is greater than the critical value, the hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between marital breakdown and socio-emotional development of adolescents in Ibadan Metropolis is rejected.

Discussion

The indices of marital breakdown as expressed by adolescents from broken marriages in Oyo State are continuous argument between couples, having different ideas on issues, insulting each other, frequent fighting, overbearing nature of one of the spouses, lack of likeness for each other, not having trust in each other and doing things separately among others. This finding is in line with that of Debra (2006) who found that when couples find time to do things together, it promote family cohesion however, insulting each other, not having trust in each other, not joking together result in marital breakdown. The reason for this finding could be that marital breakdown causes severity in marital relationship; it is a scourge experience that has the tendency of 'tearing couples apart'

The indices of socio-emotional development as expressed by adolescents from broken marriages in Oyo State reflect poor socio-emotional development in form of loneliness, depression, inability to handle stress, inability to accept feelings from others, feelings of hatred towards oneself, feelings of inferiority complex, restlessness, and feelings of hatred towards parents among others. This finding is similar to that of Kelly (2001) whose study found that all groups of adolescents who have to cope with marital breakdown (divorce) have been shown to manifest high level of stress and agitation. Also, the finding corroborates that of Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley and Markman (2008) which showed that school performance and self-esteem of adolescents who are from broken homes, are likely to be affected negatively with many of them developing aggression, feeling of guilt and inferiority complex among peers. A possible reason for this finding is that the behaviour of the adolescent is most likely to be guided by their experience and knowledge of the relationship that exists between their parents. Once any of this is affected, it could lead to poor socio-emotional development of the adolescent which is characterized by unhappiness, hatred for parents, confusion, inferiority complex among peers etc.

The testing of the null hypothesis showed a significant relationship between marital breakdown and socio-emotional development of adolescents. This implies that marital breakdown leads to poor socio-emotional development of adolescents. This finding is not different from the findings of Adegoke (2003) which showed that marital breakdown have serious impact on the socio-emotional development of the children involved, especially adolescents. The reason for this finding could be that, of all the social factors that influence a child's socio-emotional development, the family which consists of the father and mother, seems to have the most significant impact. Also, family members are the first people that young

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children have regular contact with, whatever affects the home will definitely affect the adolescent either negatively or positively.

Conclusion

The indices of marital breakdown as expressed by adolescents from broken marriages in Oyo State are continuous argument between couples, having different ideas on issues, insulting each other, frequent fighting, and doing things separately among others. The indices of socio-emotional development as expressed by adolescents in Oyo State reflected poor socio-emotional inform of loneliness, depression, inability to handle stress, inability to accept feelings from others, feelings of hatred towards oneself, feelings of inferiority complex, restlessness, and feelings of hatred towards parents among others. There is a significant relationship between marital breakdown and socio-emotional development of adolescents.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made: Couples should as much as possible tolerate each other, show that they like and care about each other and prevent marital breakdown. Parents should create an enabling environment for their children to grow by demonstrating that they trust each other, avoiding continuous argument and incessant fighting, they should understand that whatever experience their children gather in the home will affect their socio-emotional development. Teachers should watch out for students who exhibit traits of poor socio-emotional development such as loneliness, aggression, inferiority complex and depression, these could be as a result of marital break down; such children should be referred to a professional counsellor. Counsellors should be a strong proponent of marital stability; all efforts must be put in place to help couples stay happily together.

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