



Marital Conflicts on Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the influence of marital conflict on academic performance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. The study discussed extensively on the causes and effects of marital conflicts on Secondary School Students and the possible ways to avert this ugly trend in marriages in our society. Employing a descriptive survey design, the population of the study comprised one thousand nine hundred and fifty-four (1,954) students and 35 teachers in twenty-five (25) secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. The sample size comprised one hundred and ninety-five (195) students representing a proportionate 10% obtained through the simple random sampling technique from secondary schools in Port Harcourt and 35 teachers used as a census. A 15-item instrument titled influence of marital conflicts on academic performance of secondary school students questionnaire (IMCAPSSSQ) was used for data collection. The questionnaire was structured using the four-point Likert rating scale response pattern of Very High Extent (VHE) = 4 points, High Extent (HE) = 3 points, Low Extent (LE) = 2 points, and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1 point. The researcher employed face validity method carried out by the researcher's supervisor and two experts in the Department of educational foundations, Rivers State University and established a reliability of the questionnaire through the test-retest technique. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Statistics was used to arrive at a reliability index of 0.80. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions while the z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study found among others that teachers and students agreed that parental violence, parental socio-economic status, and parental separation contributed to students' poor academic performance to a high extent. The study recommended among others that; parents/guardians who are experiencing conflicts in their families should consider counselling options as soon as possible to avoid negative effects on their children.

Keywords: Marriage, Conflicts, Marital Conflicts, Academic Performance.

INTRODUCTION

Education, defined as the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits can be done through storytelling, discussion, teaching, training and directed research. Education can take place in formal, non-formal or informal setting. This is because education is any experience that has a forward formative effect on thinking as well as reasoning. To become a better and more rounded and complete person, there is need for Total Education. Total education is designed, to produce more mature, well-integrated individuals, who can realize their potential on all levels: physical, intellectual, and spiritual.

In Africa children are treated differently – they are left to ‘society’ to learn who they are; they are not usually provided with the best environments to figure out themselves. Education, like charity, begins at home. Education beginning at home means children and all stakeholders involved in the lives of the children must be in their best place socially, emotionally, and financially for their children.

Marriage, also called matrimony or wedlock, is a culturally recognized union between two people that establishes rights and obligations between them, as well as between them and their children, and between them and their in-laws, (Dana, 2011). Marital relationship plays a very important role in determining the academic performance of a child in school. Majoribank (2003) in their study found that, Parents in a stable home provide a more intellectually stimulating environment than parents, who are separated, as this stimulates both the nature and cognitive development of the child.

A conflict-riddled marriage may be associated with low achievement in children because witnessing conflicts between parents heightens the level of stress in children and keep them from focusing on school work (Hurlock, 2011). Conflicts are forms of disagreement among groups or individuals characterized by antagonism and hostility. On the other hand, marital conflict is not just a difference of opinion rather; it arises mostly due to lack of understanding between couples (Margolin, 2007). Marital conflict is associated with heated quarrels, violence, and separation and in extreme cases divorce.

Academic performance is an active demonstration that assesses students learning, such as presentation, musical and dramatic performances. Academic performance has been defined and explained by several authors, according to Narad and Abdullah (2016), academic performance is the knowledge gained which is assessed by marks, by a teacher and/or educational goals set by students and teachers to be achieved over a specific period. Exposure to marital conflict might influence students directly or indirectly through its effect on their academics. It would appear, then, that broken homes may present a very serious danger to the emotional, personality, and mental adjustment of the young adolescent.

The effect of marital conflict on children has fast become a central point for both discussions and research among Social Scientists. According to Banjo (2000) the home influences the child at the most impressionable time of his life, at a time when his mind is most receptive it provides the first impression on it. It is in the home that a child learns his earliest lessons in obedience, politeness, and consideration for others. If the home and the schoolwork in the same direction towards the best development of the child, the result will be excellent, but if the school pulls in one direction while the home in another, the child’s true development is bound to be handicapped. It is then true that, a conflict-riddled family or broken home cannot be conducive for the smooth learning of the child, because the home will only succeed in pulling down what the child has learnt in school because of lack of reinforcement from the home.

1. As Ezewu et al (2000) have noted, if the child from broken home fails to make necessary adjustment at school, he becomes mal-adjusted and this might make him resort to any of these causes of action:
2. He may attempt to change the situation violently and as a student he would see both teachers and seniors as threat to his existence in the school and would attack them.

3. He may turn his mind to other things, to forget his failure to adjust to the situation as a student and develop hatred for participation in any school activity.
4. He may decide to avoid the unfavourable situation by refusing to go to school or become a truant.

Children that grow up in a broken home are unlikely to develop their academic potentials to the fullest while children brought up in a stabilized and organized home are more likely to develop to a full fledged human beings, being able to discover their academic and other attributes leading to success in life endeavours. According to Odolo (1983), a child from broken home may lead to feelings of insecurity that continues throughout his childhood to adolescence.

In a broken home where a child is left with only the father, the man is likely to be unable to bring up the child well for school and church or stay at home constantly to guide the child through his academics. There is the tendency for the father to trust the child's welfare to school. However, the school is the next solution or alternative to the calm peaceful atmosphere and above parental love that the home gives to the child.

Parental conflict places youths at risk for difficulties in academic achievement (Unger, et. al .2000). High levels of parental conflict and family discord may relate to lower motivation by parents to be involved with their adolescents in schools related activities. It is commonly believed that divorce has a negative impact on children's cognitive performance. Deficits of cognitive performance have been found when children in divorced or father- absent families are compared with children from intact families particularly in quantitative performance (Allison, and Furstenberg, 1989). But the findings are rather mixed and depend on a variety of factors such as gender and age of the child, length of time since the divorce and the type of cognitive skills are tested.

In addition to the study, students from intact families are well taken care of. Their school fees are timely paid; their uniforms, reading and writing materials are never lacking which goes a long way in boosting their confidence and earn them fewer worries as regards their academics. While students from broken homes brood and engage in ill thoughts that cause distractions from school, the students from intact family are busy concentrating on their academics which in turn boost their performance.

According to Zinsmeister (1996), remarrying of parents can add to, rather than subtract from, the stress of a child. Divorce makes children unsafe, uncertain of the future or makes children feel that the future is bleak, and they become helpless because they fear that something bad could happen to them (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2003). Some children perform better in school as an attempt to shut out problems at home (Lansky, 2000). In contrast, other children may intentionally allow grades to slip to gain attention from both parents (Richmond, 1998). Children living with newly divorced parents are more likely to be late for school and are less likely to have some help in their homework (Hetherington, 2002). Amato (2001) conducted a quantitative meta-analysis to bring order to find the relationship between divorce and academic achievement.

Teachers may have pessimistic views concerning children from single-parent families. In some cases, teachers might have negative attitude towards one-parent children and react to their behaviour issues in a negative way. Teachers may also perceive children's intellectual ability in stereotypical ways as well, and teachers may also expect less from children who have encountered a parental divorce (Stedman et al. in Hargreaves, 1999). According to Hetherington cited in Hargreaves, (1991), children may experience mood changes, anger, and frustration while at school and children from divorced parents may be more disorderly in class, have less proficiency in study habits, and be absent minded more frequently than children from two-parent families. Amato in Hargreaves, (1991) suggested that children in one-parent families may have more household tasks and responsibilities adding to their stress level than children from two - parent families.

Marriage is an intimate union and equal partnership between a man and a woman who derives affection from each other. Conflict, an inevitable fact of life, refers to the opposing ideas and actions

of different entities which results in an antagonistic state or the disagreement between people due to perceived incompatible goals. As couples progress deeper into their relationships, it is inevitable that opinions and feelings may differ. Conflict becomes destructive when individuals' "weapons" are turned against each other instead of the problem.

Marital conflicts are natural because individuals are unique with different temperaments, tastes, habits, likes and dislikes. Temperament is a fundamental disposition of the soul, which manifests itself whenever an impression is made upon the mind and is part of the features of one's personality that are present at birth and have a genetic or biological basis. The four main temperaments are choleric, sanguine, melancholic, and phlegmatic.

Infidelity among either couple is another cause of marital conflict. Infidelity refers to a breach of the expectation of sexual exclusivity. Infidelity can comprise of several activities including having an affair, extramarital relationship, cheating, sexual intercourse, oral sex, kissing, fondling, and emotional connections that are beyond friendships. Disclosure of infidelity by a partner may cause feelings of deep pain, hurt, anger and resentment to the non-offending partner and feelings of guilt, shame, and loss in the involved partner.

Domestic violence also plays significance role in marital disputes. The cycle of violence that often repeats from one generation to the next puts marriage under threat from the outset. Violence and the abuse of power are evident in all types of families with many men viewing their partners and children as their property. More evidence on social media attests to the fact that violence is a major contributor to the breakdown in relationships.

Communication is key. It is a huge piece of a relationship. It suddenly occurred recently that couple satisfaction must correlate with the amount of time and effort they put in with their communication. This does not mean you need to spend every second together, but the time you do share should always be quality time that counts. As well as how much they put into themselves to be a better person for the marriage. In marriage, communication is usually of a great standard, but at times there are brief arguments, simply because the couple has not spoken about it when suddenly there's time pressure to decide.

While there are many reasons why couples lose interest in sexual intimacy or struggle with physical affection, it is important for spouses to find ways to keep their sex life fresh and fulfilling. Sex may seem like a small piece of the marriage puzzle, but it is rare to have a healthy relationship without it. It is hard to want to have it when you feel emotionally detached, but it is hard to feel emotionally attached without physical intimacy. To get past a dry spell, couples need to identify problem areas in their marriages and work through them to become physically comfortable with each other.

A good marriage can be as simple as removing unnecessary distractions, slowing down, and spending time with the one we love most. Couples need to talk about everything. You must learn to communicate effectively with your spouse. Have those deeper conversations that need to be heard. Although marriages do not seem to last very long these days, this does not have to be your marriage. You should commit to doing everything you can to make your marriage healthy. It is not as hard as it seems. It is more about doing what works for your relationship to continue to grow consistency.

Have more sex! But make sure you are "making love". There is a difference. Sex keeps the relationship alive in many ways. The intimacy is great for your health. Healthy couples should be having sex at least once or twice per week or more. Have the "money talk". This is a conversation many like to avoid because things can get complicated when it comes to money. Some call it "the root of evil". However, work through any financial issues through communication so you can have a happy marriage. When you can completely be yourself and have open and honest communication in your marriage is when you and your spouse will be the happiest. You will know when the relationship is there. Hopefully, you can keep your marriage together so the two of you can live happily ever after!

This signals the impact of conflict in marriage and academic success of children. It will therefore be imperative that the aforementioned factors are tackled to ensure a serene learning and living environment for the growing child. These problems necessitated the need for a study on the Influence of Marital Conflict on the Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of marital conflicts on academic performance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To investigate the extent to which parental violence influenced secondary school students' academic performance in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.
2. To examine the extent to which parental socio-economic status influenced students' academic performance in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Research Questions

To guide this study, the following research questions were raised:

1. To what extent has parental violence influenced secondary school student's academic performance in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State?
2. To what extent has parental socio-economic status influenced the academic performance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

Ho₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of teachers and students on the extent to which parental violence can influence the academic performance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of teachers and students on the extent to which parental socio-economic status can influence the academic performance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design with a population one thousand nine hundred and fifty-four (1,954) senior secondary school students and thirty-five (35) teachers in twenty-five (25) secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. The sample size for the study comprised one hundred and ninety-five (195) students and thirty-five (35) teachers in twenty-five (25) secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State. The one hundred and ninety-five (195) representing a proportionate 10% of the sample size from secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis was obtained using a simple random sampling, while the thirty-five (35) teachers were used as a census. A validated 15-item questionnaire titled "Influence of Marital Conflict on Academic Performance of Secondary School Students Questionnaire (IMCAPSSSQ)" developed by the researcher was used for data collection. The A validated 15-item questionnaire titled, "Influence of Marital Conflict on Academic Performance of Secondary School Students Questionnaire (IMCAPSSSQ) developed by the was used for data collection. The questionnaire was structured using the 4-point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE) = 4points, High Extent (HE) = 3points, Low Extent (LE) = 2points, and Very Low Extent (VHE) = 1point. The reliability of the instrument was established through test-retest technique. The responses were collated and analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient PPMC statistics that yielded a reliability index of 0.80. Two hundred and thirty (230) copies of questionnaire (195 copies for students and 35 copies teachers) to the respondents. Out of 230 copies of questionnaire administered, only 229 copies (Students 194 and Teachers 35) were correctly filled and retrieved, representing 99% retrieval rate.

Data collected were analyzed using the mean and standard deviation statistics to answer the research

questions while Z- test statistics was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Decisions were based on the mean of the boundary limits of 4 responses pattern of VHE, HE, LE, and VLE. Any value from 3.50 - 4.00 is regarded VHE, any value from 2.50 – 3.49 is regarded as HE, any value from 1.50 – 2.49 is regarded as LE, and any value from 0.50 – 1.49 is regarded as VLE. A null hypothesis is accepted if the calculated Z – value is less than the critical Z – value of 1.96 and rejected if the calculated Z- value is greater than the critical Z-value of 1.96.

The data on table 5 showed that the z-test statistics calculated and used in testing the hypothesis stood at 0.98 while the critical z-value stood at 1.96, using 227 as degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated z-value is greater than the critical z-value, hypothesis therefore, was accepted by the researcher.

RESULTS

The results obtained in this study after data analysis were presented and analyzed below:

Research Question: *To what extent can parental violence influence the academic performance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State?*

Table 1: Extent to which parental violence has influenced the academic performance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State?

S/N	Items	TEACHERS (N =35)		Remarks	Students (N = 195)		Decision
		X _T	SD _T		X _L	SD _L	
1	I am usually unable to complete my Extent schoolwork since my parents separated.	3.29	0.89	High	2.93	1.03	High Extent
2	I am not able to concentrate in Extent school due to my parent’s separation the disharmony between my parents.	2.94	1.08	High	2.70	1.05	High Extent
3	The instability in my family affects Extent my punctuality	3.03	1.04	High	2.57	1.08	High Extent
4	I find it very difficult to read for my exams Extent as the conflict between my parents affect me.	2.91	1.07	High	2.57	1.08	High Extent
5	I feel lonely and isolated in school most of Extent most of the times	3.20	0.90	High	2.56	1.08	High Extent
Grand Mean and SD		3.07	1.00		2.66	1.06	

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The data on table 1 revealed that item 1-5 have mean values that fell within the range of high extent. Therefore, with a grand mean of 3.07 for teachers and 2.66 for students, it was evident that both teachers and students agreed that parental violence to a high extent has influenced secondary school students’ academic performance in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Research Question 2: *To what extent can parental socio-economic status influence the academic performance of the secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State?*

Table 2: Extent to which parental socio-economic status has influenced the academic performance of secondary school students in Port Metropolis, Rivers State.

S/N	Items	TEACHERS (N =35)		Re marks	Students (N = 195)		
		X _T	SD _T		X _L	SD _L	Remarks
6	Low income in unstable homes Extent affect children's school adjustment.	2.77	1.00	High	2.87	0.98	High Extent
7	Since my parents quarrelled and separated, Extent I am not able to buy my required books.	2.89	1.08	High	2.71	1.13	High Extent
8	Payment of my school fees is now delayed because Extent I now stay with my mother as my father deserted her.	2.97	1.07	High	2.65	1.12	High Extent
9	I am unable to have all my school requirements, as my Extent mother do not have enough income to provide for them.	2.94	1.03	High	2.59	1.11	High Extent
10	Cost of living is affecting my family greatly and I find Extent it very difficult to concentrate with my schoolwork.	2.83	1.04	High	2.64	1.19	High Extent
Grand Mean & SD		2.88	1.04		2.69	1.11	

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The data on table 2 revealed that item 6-10 have mean values that fell within the range of high extent. Therefore, with a grand mean of 2.88 for teachers and 2.69 for students, it was evident that both teachers and students agreed that parental socio-economic status to a high extent has influenced secondary school students' academic performance in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Table 3: Z-test Analysis of Difference in responses of teachers and Students on Influence of Parental Violence on Academic Performance of Students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	DF	Level of Significance	z-Cal.	z-Crit.	Decision
Teachers	35	3.07	1.00	227	0.05	2.21	±1.96	H ₀₁
Students	195	2.66	1.06					Rejected

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The data on table 4 showed that the z-test statistics calculated and used in testing the hypothesis stood at 2.21 while the critical z-value stood at 1.96, using 227 as degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated z-value is greater than the critical z-value, hypothesis therefore, was

rejected by the researcher.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean responses between teachers and students on the extent to which parental socio-economic status has influence the academic performance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Table 4: Z-test Analysis of Difference in responses of Teachers and Students on Influence of Parental socio-economic status on Academic Performance of Students in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State.

Respondents	N	X	SD	DF	Level of Significance	z-Cal.	z-Crit.	Decision
Teachers	35	2.88	1.04	227	0.05	0.98	±1.96	HO1
Students	195	2.69	1.11					Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2020.

The data on table 5 showed that the z-test statistics calculated and used in testing the hypothesis stood at 0.98 while the critical z-value stood at 1.96, using 227 as degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated z-value is greater than the critical z-value, hypothesis therefore, was accepted by the researcher

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Results from Table 3 produced 2.21 z-test analysis of difference in responses between teachers and students on influence of parental violence on academic performance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. This implied that there is significant difference in their mean responses on the extent to which parental violence has influenced academic performance of students in Port Harcourt Metropolis in Rivers State. Results in Table 1 revealed that parental violence has caused students to be unable to complete their schoolwork following the separation of parents; reduced their level of concentration because of the thought of disharmony between parents; caused irregularity in school due to constant quarrels/arguments between parents; find it very difficult to read for exams which has also affected their studies because of the conflict between parents; and feel lonely and isolated in school.

These findings are in agreement with Nam (2014) who averred that the family is generally regarded as a major social institution and a locus of much of a person's social activity. According to Marclock (2000) who stated that the family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and production. It includes adult of both sexes at least two who maintain a socially approved relationship with one or more children or adopted of the sexually co-habiting adults. The family has the recognized functions of procreation, education, and socialization of a child's formative years. The family is responsible for the care, protection of that child; it lays the foundation upon which this is achieved.

Results from table 4 produced 0.98 z-test analysis of difference in responses between teachers and students on influence of parental socio-economic status on academic performance of Secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis in Rivers State. This implied that there is no significant difference in their mean responses on the extent to which parental socio-economic status influenced academic performance of secondary school students in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State.

Results from Table 2 revealed that parental socio-economic status has affected children's school adjustment; parents are unable to buy required books and reading materials to meet up class work; caused students to be unable to meet up with school requirements due to hardship; and loss of concentration and reduced cost of living due to constant quarrels and arguments. These findings are in agreement with Majorobank (2000) who opined that the control for socio-economic status of children from married families with few brothers and sisters are superior in cognitive development to children from broken homes. They found that Parents in a stable home provide a more intellectually stimulating environment

than parents, who are separated, as this stimulates both the nature and cognitive development of the child.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the effect of marital conflicts on the academic performance of students in secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State, Nigeria. The results of the findings indicated that children of divorced/separated homes are prone to drug addiction, armed robbery, prostitution, cultism, and other forms of criminal activities. The reason is that most of them tend to be deviants or non-conformist by the fact that there was no body to monitor them and control their unruly behaviours. Meanwhile, it was also discovered that children from divorced/separated homes tend to go wayward, naughty, unruly and rebellious. Furthermore, the study also established that children who grow up in a single parent family are more used for trafficking, rituals and house helps than the children who grow up in an intact family. Majority of the respondents also agreed that children of the divorced parents are likely to face rejection; suffering and economic hardship and those of them that find themselves in unstable homes tend to be aggressive in nature and are more likely to be fostered out than the children whose parents are not divorced. A convincing assessment of the impact of marital instability on children status therefore requires a credibly exogenous determinant of marital instability. The findings from this study demand urgent attention by all concerned, including counselling psychologists, marriage counsellors, religious leaders, married couples and the entire public. This is because the study has revealed and confirmed the reality of marriage instability. Prevention they say is better than cure. Therefore, the results from this study should be of paramount interest and concern to marriage counsellors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following were recommended by the researcher.

1. The community members including teachers, neighbours and all children lovers should make it their responsibility for all the children regardless of them being their biological parents or guidance, have a violent free environment.
2. Schools at all levels should have ineffective/efficient guidance and counselling unit to help children from broken homes.
3. Parents should be made to stand up to their responsibilities by making provision for adequate school materials for their wards.

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