

THE INFLUENCE OF MARITAL INSTABILITY ON STUDENTS' SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT

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ABSTRACT: *Marital instability has impacted the development as well as the social functioning of a number of children in Nigeria. This study therefore examined the influences of marital instability on students' school adjustment in Benin metropolis, Edo State. The descriptive research survey was adopted for this study. A random sample size of 462 secondary school students was selected using the stepwise random method. The findings revealed that students from broken homes have difficulty adjusting to their schooling due to their school class or level, which showed least score with mean value of 2.85, followed by parental level of education mean value of 2.87, parental socio-economic status, with highest mean value of 3.12 and students gender with p value of .114 of marital instability. It is recommended that crucial consideration is needed by helping professional, such as social workers, teachers, guidance counselors, family counselors and child protection networks to promote the academic functioning of students of separated or divorced parents.*

KEYWORDS: Marital instability, school adjustment, parental socio-economic status, level of education

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a basic institution in every society designed by God as a social agreement between two individuals to become husband and wife (Becker, 2002; Uka, Obidoa & Uzoechina, 2013). It is an institution that gives legitimacy to sexual relationship and reproduction for legitimate children (Ryan & Powelson, 2010). Marriage involves joining in in matrimony two individuals of different gender to become one flesh as husband and wife, given the need for companionship, procreation, continuing and sustaining family ties (Gbenda & Akume, 2002; Abane, 2003; Bumpass, 2009). Nevertheless, marital instability in the present day society is of huge concern as it is associated with separation, divorce and widowhood (Omoniyi-Oyafunke, Falola & Salau, 2014). According to Uka, et al., (2013), marriage is a legalizing of a special relationship between a man and woman to which the society gives approval; and it places partners under legal and

social obligations to themselves and the society. Although the concepts of marriage and family are often used synonymously, they are not same but have distinct meanings. The term family is defined as any two people who are related to each other (Sarker, 2007). To Onwuasoanya (2006) the family is the household and those who live in one house, and a network of persons such as the couple, their offspring and kin intimately held together by a bond of social and kinship relationship.

The significance of the family devoid of instability is recognized by researches locally and worldwide (Becker, 2002; Sarker, 2007; Uka et al., 2013; Omoniyi-Oyafunke et al., 2014). This is because the family without instability grows and is one where positive relationship is promoted and sustained. As a consequence, Sarker (2007) refers to marital instability as the interpersonal association and interaction within the marital relationship. Moreover, Lesmin and Sarker (2008) defined marital instability as the process whereby marriages breakdown through separation, desertion or divorce. Hence, the increasing incidence of marital disharmony such as the occurrence of divorce shows that there is marital instability in a number of families in the Nigerian context (Ezennay, 2006). Marital instability occurs as an attempt of one individual or partner to checkmate the behaviour and anticipations of the other (Uka et al., 2013). This threatens the household stability as well as the well-being of the children, as it often impacts on their academic adjustment and achievement. A number of people in the contemporary society believe that the educational system has failed, but evidently, the schooling system has not failed but rather it is the partnership that has failed, with schools taking on the responsibility that families, communities once assumed (Castro-Martin & Bumpass, 2009). The family stability often has a marked influence on the student's motivation for learning and on her to cope with academics. The home environment is a strong pointer to the academic adjustment and achievement of children. This is because a number of children's academic potentials are now confronted with increasing difficulties as a result of parental marital instability (Sarker, 2007). The contact between the parent, teachers and students makes a lot of impact on the academic performance of the students. So those who do not regularly attend lectures because of lack of proper monitoring by the parents could experience challenges adjusting academically (Bumpass, 2009). Parents are thereby faced with the problem of enriching their home environment so as to establish a positive effect on the student's academic performance in schools (Castro-Martin & Bumpass, 2009).

Marital Instability and Students Schooling Adjustment

School adjustment has been constructed historically in terms of children's academic progress or achievement (Birch & Ladd, 2007). This implies the process of adapting to the role of being a student and to various aspects of the school environment. In addition, adjustment involves not only children's progress and achievement but also their attitudes toward school, anxieties, loneliness, social support, and academic motivation (Reher, 2008). This is because interpersonal relationship is likely to affect children's academic motivation. Connell and Wellborn (2014) contend that involvement, or the quality of a student's relationship with the parents is a powerful motivator for academic adjustment. Ryan and Powelson (2010) note that school learning can be

traumatic for children who are from unstable homes, as they lack the basic motivation needed from both parents to perform brilliantly in school. Some of the factors influencing marital instability (Omoniyi-Oyafunke et al., 2014) include; parental socio-economic status, educational level, gender and educational class level of the children.

Children's educational influenced are highly connected to their socio-economic background (Evans, Harkness & Oritz, 2004; Akanbi, 2014). Along with children's personal ability with school work, given the unstable home environment, the economic status of their parents plays a huge role in their own to schooling functioning. Families that are unstable sometimes experience insufficient income as the available parent may to work longer hours to earn their more income (Sclafani, 2008). This leaves less time for them to spend overseeing their children's learning process. There is also, typically, more conflict in homes of lower income parents because there are more tension caused by stress within the family. Abu and Kolawale (2012) argue that parents who expressed more conflict at home fail to provide a regular supervision for their children, resulting in poorer school adjustment and performance. It is not always true that lower-income parents are neglectful parents, but one can slip into that label given some extreme pressure.

Not only are children's education influenced by parental socio-economic context, Sarigiani (2008) indicates that parental educational level has been found to be significantly related to the learning adjustment of children from volatile home type, in times of marital instability. Research shows that educated parents have much easier time preparing their children for school compared to parents with little or no educational background, even during times of marital instability (Abane, 2003). The education that children receive is very much dependent on the education that their parents received, as the literacy of the parents with unstable marriages is likely affect the education of their children (Reher, 2008). The role of gender in the course of daily parent-child interaction and children's academic adjustment has received little attention in the Nigerian context. Nonetheless, Lesmin and Sarker (2008) found out that there is differential vulnerability for boys and girls in schooling adjustment throughout academic pursuit due to marital instability. Boys exhibited more externalizing problems and less competence than girls during pre-adolescence (Akanbi, 2014). While, Howell, Portes and Brown (2007) found out that adolescent boys exhibit more problems in schooling adjustment than girls at the time of parental divorce. Majoribanks (2003) indicates that both male and female adolescents from divorced families' exhibit higher rates of conduct disorder, which affect their academic.

Students schooling level or class, which can either, be; primary, secondary or tertiary has also been correlated with children's school adjustment due to parental marital instability. Research posits that student's schooling level or their class level has a remarkable effect on them when faced with family instability (Omoniyi-Oyafunke et al., 2014). Ezennay (2006) indicates that children that are in lower classes tend to have more adjustment problem with their academics when faced with family instability. This could be because such children are very young and are close to their parents and with marital disharmony or instability, they experience crisis, particularly when not nurtured by their mother. Akanbi (2014) asserts that children in higher

classes, when their parents experience marital instability, specifically the senior secondary classes faces greater adjustment problems, given that they are in their adolescent stage, as such, they experience more tolerance problems.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to determine the effects of marital instability on children academic adjustment. The specific objectives include;

1. To determine whether marital instability influence the adjustment of male student the female.
2. To ascertain whether parental socio-economic status influence students school adjustment.
3. To find out whether parental level of education influence students school adjustment.
4. To ascertain whether marital instability has more influence on students in junior classes than those in senior classes.

Research Questions

1. Does marital instability influence students' school adjustment?
2. Does parental socio-economic status influence students' school adjustment?
3. Does parental level of education influence students' level of school adjustment?
4. Do children classes determine their level of adjustment to school?

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between male and female adjustment to instability.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey design is adopted for this study. The data for this study was collected using the structured questionnaire titled "Marital instability and students school adjustment questionnaire" (MISSAQ). The population of this study consist of all secondary school students aged 11 to 16 years in JSS 1 -3 and SSS 1-3 in Ovia North East and Egor Local Government Areas, Edo State. A random sample size of 462 secondary school students was selected using the stepwise random method. Six secondary schools in the population were randomly selected and 77 students were thus selected from each of the selected schools. A structured questionnaire with Section A requesting demographic information and section B consist of a twenty five items of a four point Likert type scale, with four items each on marital instability, school adjustment, parental socio-economic status, parental level of education, gender of student and students' school class or level. The instrument was validated by three experts and an internal consistency reliability of 0.90. Coefficient was obtained using the Cronbach alpha method. The researcher administered the instrument with the help of school teachers. The data collected were subjected to descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation as well as the t-test statistic at an alpha level of 0.05, as presented in the tables below.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS**Research Question 1:** Does marital instability influence students' school adjustment?**Table 1: Marital instability and school adjustment.**

S/ N	Items	Mean	Std. D	Decision
1	I am usually unable to complete my school homework since my parents separated	2.63	0.85	Accepted
2	I am not able to concentrated in school because I think of the disharmony between my parents	2.60	0.82	Accepted
3	The instability in my family affects my regularity at school	2.85	0.59	Accepted
4	I find it difficult to read for my exams as the conflict between my parents borders me always	3.07	0.70	Accepted
	Marital instability and school adjustment	2.78	0.64	Accepted

N=466

Test mean = 2.5

Table 1 shows a calculated mean value of 2.78 and a standard deviation of 0.64 with a test value of 2.5, the mean value is higher than the test value, so, marital instability influences school adjustment of students. Meaning, the more unstable homes are the less adjustment to school the children.

Research Question 2: Does parental level of education influence students' school adjustment?**Table 2: Influence of parental socio-economic status on students' school adjustment**

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. D	Decision
1	Low income in unstable homes affect children's school adjustment	3.3	0.1	Accepted
2	Since my parents quarreled and separated, I am not able to buy my required books	3.0	0.9	Accepted
3	Payment of my school fee is now delayed because I now stay with my mother as my father deserted her	3.1	0.9	Accepted
4	I am unable to have all my schooling needs, as my mother do not have enough income to provide for my schooling cost	3.1	0.9	Accepted
	Parental socio-economic status	3.12	0.70	Accepted

N=466

Test mean =2.5

Table 2 above reveals a calculated mean value of 3.12 and a standard deviation of 0.70, with a test value of 2.5, the mean is higher than the test value which invariably means that parental socio-economic background have an effect on students school adjustment.

Research Question 3: Does parental level of education influence students' school adjustment?

Table 3: Influence of parental level of education on students' school adjustment

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. D	Decision
1	My parent who I live with is not educated and he is not able to help with my homework	2.7	0.77	Accepted
2	I have challenges passing my exams because my mother is not concerned about my school work	3.2	0.95	Accepted
3	My mother who is a trader is more focused on her trade than my schooling	2.7	0.66	Accepted
4	Although my parents are not educated they still supervise me to concentrate on my school work	3.3	0.11	Accepted
	Parental level of education	2.87	0.62	Accepted

N=466 Test mean 2.5

Table 3 shows a calculated mean value of 2.87 and a standard deviation of 0.62, with a test value of 2.5, the mean is higher than the test value, so parental literacy/education affect students adjustment to school. Meaning that the less educated parents are, the more difficult it is for students to be able to adjust to their academics when faced with instability from their homes.

Research Question 4: Does students' class level determine their adjustment to school?

Table 4: Influence of students class level on their adjustment to school

S/N	Item	Mean	Std. D	Decision
1.	The class a student belong to may help him/her cope with schooling in spite of parental disharmony	2.9	0.8	Accepted
2.	I am in junior class and I am able to adjust with my schooling even though my parents are separated.	2.7	0.7	Accepted
3.	I am in senior class and I am able to cope well with my schooling even though my parents are separated.	3.0	0.7	Accepted
4.	My ability to do well in school despite my instability in my family does not depend on the class I am.	2.8	0.1	Accepted
	Students schooling class/level	2.85	0.5	Accepted

N =466 Test mean = 2.5

Table 4 reveals that a calculated mean value of 2.85 and standard deviation of 0.5, with a test value of 2.5, the mean value is higher than the test value, so, students schooling class/level have an effect on school adjustment. This implies that the lower the classes that the students are, the more difficult it is for them to adjust to their academic.

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in the adjustment of males and females in school due to marital instability.

Table 5: T-test of independent sample of school adjustment of male and female due to marital instability

Sex	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig (2-tailed)
Male	57	11.40	2.078	1.595	.114
Female	43	10.81	1.435		

$\alpha = 0.5$

Table 5 shows a t value of 1.595 and a p value of .114. Testing at alpha level of 0.5, the p value is greater than the alpha level. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference in the adjustment of males and females in schools due to marital instability, is retained.

DISCUSSION

This study found that marital instability influences students schooling adjustment given parental socio-economic status, parental level of education, gender of student and school class or level as indicated by research participants. The finding of this current study appears to be in agreement with previous research findings (Omoniyi-Oyafunke et al., 2014), indicative that low school adjustment of student often occur due to the influences of marital instability, as a number of children's academic potentials are now confronted with increasing difficulties (Sarker, 2007), which places them at risk of poor academic achievement. This finding is also in consonant with the work of Castro-Martin and Bumpass (2009) that marital disharmony is a strong indicator to the academic adjustment and achievement of children because they usually have a strong bond with the nuclear family, most especially the parents and when there is an alteration in this relationship, it does affect the children's schooling (Ryan & Powelson, 2010).

The finding revealed that the socio-economic status of the parents due to family uncertainty impacts on students' school adjustment. This finding is consistent with Evans, Harkness and Ortiz (2004) and Akanbi (2014) that children's educational influenced are highly connected to their socio-economic background. Similarly, Abu and Kolawale (2012) confirm that parents who expressed marital conflict fail to provide a regular supervision for their children, resulting in poor school adjustment and performance. This is indicative of the influence of the marital instability on students' academics, which is a reason for their susceptibility to poor learning outcome. The study also found out the literacy level of a divorced or separated parents influences their children's schooling adjustment. This is supported by the findings of Reher (2008), which recognized parental level of education given marital break-up as one of the influences on students' academic adjustment well-being. This is thus in line with Sarigiani (2008) that parental

educational level has been found to be significantly related to the learning adjustment of children from volatile home type, in times of marital instability.

Furthermore, this study reveals that the gender of students from parents with marital instability and their schooling adjustment as indicated by participants has a close link. The indication is that the male children of parents with marital disharmony often experienced poor academic functioning. The finding therefore agrees with research Lesmin and Sarker (2008) that there is no differential vulnerability for boys than girls in schooling adjustment throughout academic pursuit due to marital instability. This is also confirmed by Majoribanks (2003) that both male and female adolescents from divorced families' exhibit higher rates of conduct disorder, which affect their academic. Moreover, this study also found out that school class or level of children from broken homes influences their schooling adjustment. This thus, agrees with the findings of Akanbi (2014) that student's schooling level or their class level has a remarkable effect on them when faced with family instability. This finding is in agreement with the study of Ezennay (2006) that children that are in lower classes tend to have more adjustment problem to their academics when faced with family instability.

Based on the findings of this study, all the impacts retained may well clarify the influences of marital instability on students' school adjustment in Benin City, Nigeria. Students schooling adjustment are influenced due to marital instability with the mean value of 2.78. In addition, students from broken homes have difficulty adjusting to their schooling due to students' school class or level, which showed least score with mean value of 2.85, followed by parental level of education mean value of 2.87, parental socio-economic status, with mean value of 3.12 and students gender with p value of .114 of marital instability. This analysis further illustrates that given marital instability, students whose parents are of low socio-economic status showed highest influence in scores suggesting that marital instability plays a significant role in impacting on the academic adjustment of students. Hence the influence of marital instability was not restricted to any specific factor, somewhat predominant in all factors, but with slight variation.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the influences of marital instability on students' school adjustment in Egor and Ovia North-East Local Government Areas, Edo State, Nigeria. All the variables in the research were tested and it was ascertained that there is a link between marital instability and students schooling outcomes, given the analyzed data using the descriptive and t-test statistics. Moreover, the findings of this study revealed that students of separated or divorced parents experience difficulty coping with their schooling, due to parental socio-economic status, parental level of education, gender of students and school class or level. The reason is that most of them could not adjust with their academics smoothly as there was insufficient income to meet schooling cost, no proper supervision of their school work and participation, the younger students had more challenges coping with studies and the class level significantly impacted on their schooling. A number of the research participants also attested that students of the divorced

parents are likely to experience poor academic achievement than the students whose parents experienced no instability. A considerable investigation of the impacts of marital instability on children necessitates a convincingly influences on students schooling adjustment given the actuality of phenomenon on children's academic functioning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested that:

- There is the need for crucial consideration for government, policy makers, helping professional, such as social workers, teachers, guidance counselors, marriage counselors, child protection network, family welfare agencies, the government; and the public to promote the academic functioning of students of separated or divorced parents.
- Social workers working with children and family should organize education seminars and sensitization on the impacts of marital instability on children in particle their schooling adjustment.
- Partners with marital issues should contact social workers and other family counsellors for guidance with effective resolution and management strategies
- School tutors should refer students with academic challenges due to parental disharmony to school social workers, guidance counselors and other helping professions.
- Students from separated or divorced parents whose have difficulty with schooling adjustment should be linked with school social workers and guidance counsellors for assistance.

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