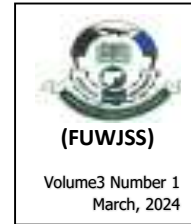


**DIVORCE AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN
KEFFI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA,
NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Divorce is a global psychological and social phenomenon that has adversely affected the lives and behaviours of children and adolescents. In specific terms, divorce negatively impacts on children's mental and physical health, as well as their academic and social development. Divorce may result in children having low self-esteem and more likely engaging in criminal behaviour. This study adopts the social learning theory as the theoretical lens of analyzing issues in this study. The study employs the descriptive cross-sectional research design which involved a multistage random sampling technique through which 400 respondents were drawn from the population of 142,900 persons. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to test the study's hypotheses. Results of the study revealed that divorce has significant effect on the social and mental health of children in Keffi Local Government Area of Nassarawa State, Nigeria. The study concludes that the effects of divorce on child development manifest in forms of affected children having difficulties in forming healthy relationships, exhibition of low self-esteem and feelings of insecurity, increased behavioural problems such as aggression, disobedience, and hyperactivity, increased risk of substance abuse, feelings of abandonment and rejection, fear of the future and uncertainty about what life will be like, poor academic performance. The study recommends that town halls meetings should be organized by the government in conjunction with the religious leaders in order to enlighten both the

community leaders and couples on the dire consequences of divorce on parents, their children and the society at large.

Keywords: Divorce, low self-esteem, child development, Keffi, Nasarawa State

Introduction

Divorce is a common phenomenon which has attracted global attention. Government and non- governmental organizations have played vivacious roles in the riddance of this challenge because of its psychological and social problems which make adolescents to exhibit strange and unguided behaviors (Santrock, 2014). Divorce is likened to a “semi-hell” to the divorcees, their children and the society (Omeje, 2000; Epstein 2002). Globally, divorce is a common phenomenon but still represent a major life stressor for the individuals involved, with potentially strong negative effects for the mental and physical health of all members of the family. Divorce simply connotes the legal dissolution of a marriage, a male divorcee is called divorcee’ while a female divorcee is called divorcee’. Divorce is also referred to as dissolution or separation of a marriage by judgment of a court or accepted by custom.

Okoh (2004), asserted that marriage is an institution which guarantees the procreation, care and education of the young, the stability of the family, and the continuity of the human race depends on marriage as an institution which is culturally and socially recognized. Njerem (2005), noted that for desired goals to be achieved in marriage there is need for harmony, reciprocity, cohesion, fidelity, high degree of stability and unconditional love between couples. He noted that love and understanding are the twin pillars of marital bliss and stability and that marital bliss often eludes the couple that enter into marriage with covered or frown faces and dishonest intention. When the unfavorable conditions in marriage or marital instability set in, the aforementioned virtues are lacking. Hall and Hoffin (2005), revealed that this is manifested in forms of conflict, violence, mistrust, constant bickering, neglect and marital distress. They noted that such situation may lead to separation, divorce or marital disintegration. Mgbodile (2000), unveiled that to go into marriage expecting a never-ending honeymoon is to experience the disappointment of a child dreaming of a never-ending flow of chocolate creams. When the unfavorable conditions as mentioned above set in, the result may be divorce. Divorce according to Hornby (2001), is the legal ending of a marriage. Mirror (2003), defined divorce as the complete break up or dissolution of marriage

through legal means. Divorce is the only ceremony that marks the official end of marriage, just like a wedding ceremony marks the official beginning of the same marriage.

Ehigie and Aigbokhan (2014), reiterated that the issue of divorce in Nigeria is one of the most common social problem of imbalance and stress experienced by children in their developmental process. In Nigeria, there has been the increase in the rate of divorce. There are two factors influencing the rising divorce rates in Nigeria. The first factor is both men and women who are relying less on one another for economic survival. As women gain status in their work place or in their businesses, they often want to stand on their own and prefer to control their lives' affair which enabling them to be less dependent on their husbands. Women who are gainfully employed and self-sufficient may be more willing to dissolve a marriage because they are not perceived as financially dependent spouse. The second factor is gender roles, as traditional gender roles have become more fluid with women increasingly taking on more responsibilities outside of the home, this can create tension and conflict within marriages. The effect of parent's divorce on their child development is an important area of academic enquiry.

It is apparent to note that children who grow in a two-parent home tend to do better than those of divorce parent as also seen in the words of Berlin (2004), that children who grow up in an intact two-parent family with both biological parents present do better on a wide range of outcomes than children who grow up in a single-parent family. Furthermore, the result of divorce may endangers child development vis-a-vis the society at large. It may apparently disorients the thought processes of the child and consequently promotes anti-social behaviors that overtime could results in social instability and breakdown of law and order. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to address divorce and its effects on child development in Keffi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

The Phenomenon of Divorce in Human Society

Divorce can have both physical and mental effects on children. "The health consequences of divorce are also well documented, showing the detrimental effects of divorce on both somatic and mental health with the divorced experiencing higher levels of depression, stress, and fear, as well as lower levels of self-esteem (Bracke, 2010). The physical and mental toll of a divorce is astounding. "Compared to the married or cohabiting, the divorced visit professional health care providers like general practitioners, specialists, and psychiatrists more often, and are also hospitalized more often" (Bracke, 2010). In thinking about how divorce affects adults, it is

important to remember that when divorced adults are hospitalized and seeking medical care that this has an effect on their children as well. Molepo (2012), asserted that teachers perceive younger children from divorced parents to be more likely to have emotional and behavioral challenges than those from intact families. As Baxter (2011), opined that it is not surprising that the elevated risk of adjustment problems affect children whose parents are divorced. Van Dolen (2013) also stated that, experiencing parental divorce during childhood is associated with increased likelihood of being subjected to child abuse and/or witnessing violence. Apparently, when parents go through a divorce, the children can become witness to what it brings about in their parents, and sometimes even unknowingly get in the middle of it.

Children who get caught up in their parents' divorce are likely to suffer greater stresses than those who do not become involved. When compared to those from intact families, children of divorced parents show poorer outcomes in multiple domains (Lucas, 2013). A parents' choice to divorce brings on a slew of issues for the children. "While parental divorce may bring about relief from exposure to very frequent and intense conflict between parents, it also tends to create a range of other disruptions (Baxter, 2011). A study carried out by van Dolen (2013), revealed that higher levels of misbehavior and aggression, higher risk of committing suicide, less competence, more under-controlled behavior, and poorer academic performance and reduced likelihood of participating in tertiary education are linked to children from divorced homes.

Baxter (2011), further asserted that these disruptions, may lead substantial increases in financial difficulties and associated deprivations, changes in housing and school, enhanced parental distress and/or diminished quality of parenting, and substantially reduced time or even total loss of contact with one parent and consequently can be very distressing for the social development of the child. Baxter (2011), explained further that children of divorce suffer more emotional and social problems than those of intact families. Mullins (2012) claimed that children of divorced parents experience greater problems in that, the personal, social, and economic consequences of marital disruption tend to grossly impede on the psyche motor state of the child and this may impede on their learning ability. Amato (2004), carried out a study on mother and father relation to young adults and the result of this study showed that a close relationship with the parents influence 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 inter-generational exchange well after the children became adults.

Booth and Amato (2001), unveiled that 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.

Generally, divorce affects societal development because when children from broken families fill the society, they definitely will not represent good rather, there will be different deviant behaviors scattered around in the society and this would negate social development. Divorce has significantly impacted on society more than the individuals who choose to end their marriages. (Jennifer Kieswetter, 2012). Divorce changes the economic and social status of the society (Lucas, 2007). The more families get divorced, the more society suffers underdevelopment and high level of dubious activities and indiscipline.

Theoretical Framework: Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory also known as the social cognitive theory was founded by Albert Bandura in the year 1963 and further detailed in 1977. He integrated two theories; cognitive learning theory which states that learning is influenced by psychological factors and behavioral learning theory where learning is a factor of responses to the environmental stimuli. Social Learning Theory (including imitation/environmental modeling processes) are the primary focus of attention. Bandura emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others (Bandura, 1977). Most human behavior is learned through modeling and from observing others, gives one an idea of how new behaviors are performed. Similarly, social learning theory emphasizes the importance of role models, focusing on parents as the initial and primary reinforces of child behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Much of the research adopting this perspective centers on parent-child similarities, analyzing the transmission of response patterns and the inhibitory or dis-inhibitory effect of parental models. The presence of the both sex parents is assumed to be crucial in order for the child to learn appropriate sex-typed behavior and grow to what society deems appropriate (Edwards, 1987).

It follows that departures from the nuclear family norm become problematic for the child's development, especially for adolescents, in as much as this represents a crucial stage in the developmental process. Accordingly, where there is a father or mother absence, the effects of institutionalization, and a host of "deficiencies" in maturation, such as those having to do with cognitive development, achievement, moral learning, and

conformity becomes a challenge to this effect, this theory posits that divorce greatly impact negatively on child development in society.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a cross sectional survey design. This is because it enabled the researcher to obtain useful data in a short period of time from a sample as well as generalization of research result to the entire population of the study. To fully capture the issues in this research work, a methodological triangulation of both primary and secondary methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation were considered. Which provide deeper understanding on Divorce and its effects on child development in Keffi LGA of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The population of this study comprised all the occupants of the study universe. A multistage sampling technique was adopted. Cluster sampling technique was used to divide the study area into ten (10) clusters based on the existing political wards within the local government area. Each of the political wards was fairly represented in the study. To establish a just representation, the population distribution of each of the wards was carried out to draw proportional sample out of the 400 samples drawn for the study through Taro Yamane formula from the total population of 142,900 based on population projection of 2022. Pearson product-moment correlation as an inferential statistical tool was adopted to determine the strength of the association/effect that existed between the independent and dependent variables. These statistical tool was used because it dealt with two variable's analysis. A total number of 400 copies of questionnaire were distributed. However, only 376 copies of the questionnaire were completed and returned. Therefore, the analysis was based on the 376 respondents.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Data for this study was collected from respondents with diverse socio-demographic characteristics. Data on table 4.1 indicated that 54.3% of the respondents were males while 45.7% of the respondents were females. The findings showed that more males participated more in the study. Data on the ages of the respondents showed that 12.5% of the respondents were within the ages of 18-20 years, 22.9% respondents were within the ages of 21-25 years of age, 11.4% respondents were within the ages of 26-30 years old of age, 38.8% respondents were within the category of 31-35 years old, 9.6% of the respondents were within the ages of 36-40 years old, 2.4% respondents were within the ages of 41-45 and 2.4% respondents were within the ages of 46 years old. The findings here showed that majority of the respondents were youth from the ages of 31-35 years. Data on the

educational qualification of the respondents revealed that, 56.1% respondents had o-level education, 11.2% of the respondents had diploma/NCE, 27.1% respondents had first degree.

On the basis of marital status, 45.7% respondents were single while 54.3% of the respondents were married. The findings here showed that majority of the respondents were married. 59.9% were Christians, while 44.1% of the respondents were Muslim. Data on the occupational level indicated 32.7% as traders, 21.3% as applicants, 19.7% as civil servants and 26.3% as farmers respectively. The socio-demographic information is presented in the table below:

Table 4.1 Distribution of Respondents by their Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Variable		Frequency (N=376)	Percentage (100%)
Sex	Male	204	54.3
	Female	172	45.7
Age	18-20	47	12.5
	21-25	86	22.9
	26-30	43	11.4
	31-35	146	38.8
	36-40	36	9.6
	41-45	9	2.4
	46 and above	9	2.4
Education	O.Level	211	56.1
	NCE/Diploma	42	11.2
	First degree	102	27.1
	Masters/Phd	21	6.6
Marital Status	Single	172	45.7
	Married	204	54.3
Religion	Christianity	210	55.9

	Muslim	166	44.1
Occupation	Trading	123	32.7
	Applicant	80	21.3
	Civil servant	74	19.7
	Farming	99	26.3

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Divorce and its Effects on Child Development

This section of the study examined divorce and its effects on child development. The cutoff point of the mean was 3.50. Therefore, the mean value of 3.50 above indicated acceptance why 2.50 indicated rejection. It was revealed that children will have difficulties in forming healthy relationships. This was confirmed by the mean scores or 4.22 and standard deviation of .873, Delinquency in adolescence and adulthood, means=4.22; Lower self-esteem and feelings of insecurity with the mean score=3.98 and standard deviation=.609; Increased behavioural problems such as aggression, disobedience, and hyperactivity, mean score=3.74 and standard deviation .830, Increased risk of substance abuse, mean=3.74 and standard deviation of .830; Feelings of abandonment and rejection/fear of the future and uncertainty about what life will be like with the mean score=3.74 and standard deviation of .830; Poor academic performance with the mean score=3.74 and standard deviation=.849. The findings were presented in the table below:

Table 4.2: Mean Rating on how Divorce Affect Child Development in Keffi LGA of Nasarawa State

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	X	STD
Increased behavioural problems such as aggression, disobedience, and hyperactivity	251(62.75)	109(27.25)	1(0.25)	21(5.25)	18(4.5)	3.74	.830
Increased anxiety and depression	269(67.25)	114(28.5)	-	10(2.5)	3(0.75)	4.29	.751
Lower self-esteem and feelings of insecurity	178(44.5)	193(48.25)	3(0.75)	21(5.25)	5(1.25)	3.98	.609
Difficulties in forming healthy relationships	203(50.75)	158(39.5)	4(1)	27(6.75)	8(2)	4.22	.873
Increased risk of substance abuse	251(62.75)	109(27.25)	1(0.25)	21(5.25)	18(4.5)	3.74	.830

Delinquency in adolescence and adulthood	162(40.5)	197(49.25)	3(0.75)	23(5.75)	15(3.75)	4.22	.873
Poor academic performance	209(52.25)	113(33.3)	2(0.5)	45(11.25)	31(7.75)	2.45	.849
Feelings of abandonment and rejection/fear of the future and uncertainty about what life will be like	251(62.75)	109(27.25)	1(0.25)	21(5.25)	18(4.5)	3.74	.830

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Based on the findings on the Table above, results showed that all the indicators of divorce were accepted with the mean scores of above the cutoff point of 3.50 and the standard deviation ranged from 0.608 and 0.873. This indicated that, the standard deviation were close to one in order to show how close the variables were to each other.

Pearson r was used to examine divorce and its effects on child development in Keffi LGA of Nasarwa State, Nigeria. Result effect of (0.011, 0.038, 0.035, 0.001, 0.055) indicated a significant influence at 0.01 and 0.05 level. This implied that divorce significantly influences child development in Keffi local government area of Nasarawa State. Following from the above, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate was accepted and it states that “Divorce has significant effect on child development in Keffi LGA of Nasara State”.

Table 4.3: Pearson correlation between Divorce and Child Development in Keffi LGA of Nasarawa State

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Divorce and Child Development	1							
Increased behavioural problems such as aggression, disobedience, and hyperactivity	.134**	1						
Increased anxiety and depression	.011**	.102	1					
Lower self-esteem and feelings of insecurity	-.008	.452*	.158**	1				
Difficulties in forming healthy relationships	-.071	.107*	.005	.247**	1			
Increased risk of substance abuse	.038	.141**	.079	.390**	.305**	1		

Delinquency in adolescence and adulthood	.035	.045	-.010	.019	.031	.064	1		
Poor academic performance	.001	.033	-.169**	.004	-.045	.155**	.016	1	
Feelings of abandonment and rejection/fear of the future and uncertainty about what life will be like	.055	.112*	-.077	-.046	-.041	.124*	.000	.522**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The findings showed that divorce influences child development negatively.

Based on the result of the findings, the study showed that divorce has significant effect on child development in Keffi LGA of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. These findings are in consonant with the view of Molepo (2012), who asserted that teachers perceive younger children from divorced parents to be more likely to have emotional and behavioral challenges than those from intact families. As Baxter (2011), opined that it is not surprising that the elevated risk of adjustment problems affect children whose parents are divorced. Van Dolen (2013), also stated that experiencing parental divorce during childhood is associated with increased likelihood of being subjected to child abuse and/or witnessing violence. Apparently, when parents go through a divorce, the children can become witness to what it brings about in their parents, and sometimes even unknowingly get in the middle of it.

Children who get caught up in their parents' divorce are likely to suffer greater stresses than those who do not become involved. When compared to those from intact families, children of divorced parents show poorer outcomes in multiple domains (Lucas, 2013). A parents' choice to divorce brings on a slew of issues for the children. "While parental divorce may bring about relief from exposure to very frequent and intense conflict between parents, it also tends to create a range of other disruptions (Baxter, 2011). A study carried out by van Dolen (2013), revealed that higher levels of misbehavior and aggression, higher risk of committing suicide, less competence, more under-controlled behavior, and poorer academic performance and reduced likelihood of participating in tertiary education are linked to children from divorced homes.

Baxter (2011) further asserted that these disruptions, may lead to substantial increases in financial difficulties and associated deprivations, changes in housing and school, enhanced parental distress and/or diminished quality of parenting, and substantially reduced time or even

total loss of contact with one parent and consequently can be very distressing for the social development of the child. Baxter (2011), explained further that children of divorce suffer more emotional and social problems than those of intact families. Mullins (2012), claimed that children of divorced parents experience greater problems in that, the personal, social, and economic consequences of marital disruption tend to grossly impede on the psyche motor state of the child and this may impede on their learning ability.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has been able to examine the relationship between divorce and child development in Keffi local government area of Nasarawa State. Based on the findings of the study, it can be deduced that divorce has a significant effect on child development. The effects of divorce on child development as discovered from the study indicate that children will have difficulties in forming healthy relationships, exhibition of lower self-esteem and feelings of insecurity, increased behavioural problems such as aggression, disobedience, and hyperactivity, increased risk of substance abuse, feelings of abandonment and rejection/fear of the future and uncertainty about what life will be like, and Poor academic performance.

Findings from the study revealed that divorce has negative influence on child development. Based on the aforesaid, town halls meetings should be organized by the government in conjunction with the religious leaders in order to enlighten both the community leaders and couples on the dire consequences of divorce on the actors, their children and the society at large. In addition to that, there should be public awareness campaign on the promotion of child right act both at the local government and community level. Federal, state and local government authorities should review marriage ordinance act in order to take care of the key issues that triggers divorce in the society.

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