

**EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON YOUTHS CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR:
A CASE STUDY OF URUAN, ITU AND NSIT ATAI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA,
AKWA IBOM**

By

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to explain if youths' criminal behaviour is a product of divorce. It employed both qualitative and quantitative research approach and adopted descriptive survey research with a combination of primary and secondary sources of information. The sampled size schools adopted in this study was ten (10) schools and the questionnaires were administered to Ninety-eight (98) respondents, which represents 10% of the total population of the schools in Nsit Atai Local Government Area. In each school, the respondents were drawn from each stratum of head teacher, teachers and students. The study discovered that divorce has influence on social development and has resulted in youths' criminal behaviour. Also, some children affected by divorce have poor performance in school leading to criminal behaviour. The study recommended among others guidance and counselling to help youths understand and adjust accordingly to avoid adverse effects of their parents' divorce. Also, youths exhibiting adverse negative social behaviour should be rehabilitated with necessary therapy either by individual or by parents to help young people cope with the changes.

Keywords: Divorce, Youths, Criminal Behaviour, Nsit Atai Local Government Area

Introduction

Divorce is becoming a common event in the lives of many people. It is now easier to dissolve marriage, and less stigma is attached to divorced people. However, for many, divorce remains a negative and traumatic experience. Not only does the divorcing couple suffer, but the children are affected as well. In the past, concern has been focused on the problems of the parents, but lately there has been a growing interest in the effects of divorce on children and youths.

The issue of divorce generally is one of the most common environmental causes of stress experienced by children. The effect of parent's divorce on their children's social development is an important area of academic enquiry. Consequences of a divorce for children are mostly that they have to move to a different home and sometimes to a different school and they will not see or be with both parents at the same time anymore. In most cases, they will live with their mothers and they will see their father much less. Berlin (2004) puts it 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. Neither does single parenthood guarantee that children will not succeed; many, if not most, children who grow up in a single-parent household do succeed."

Research on divorce and separation of attachment figures has yielded conflicting results. It is often reported that children of divorce have trouble adapting to different stages of their lives because of their experience with broken or detached attachment bonds. These children are said to have no accurate template for successful relationships to replicate in their lives (Ainsworth, 1977). Other research boasted results that children of divorce adapt to life's situations and relationships within normal ranges when compared to their peers (Summers, Forehand, Armistead, & Tannenbaum, 1998). Taking this into account, these researchers looked to peer relations, socioeconomic status, general distress, or poor parenting skills to explain the appearance of troublesome behavior or poor grades. The study of all aspects of divorce and attachment is important to how parents, psychologists and teachers approach and understand children of divorced families in order to help them reach their full potential as adults.

Clarke-Stewart, McCartney, Booth, Owen, & Vandell (2000) refer to various national studies when stating that poor school performance, low self-esteem, behavior problems, distress and adjustment difficulties are associated with divorce. In adolescents from divorced families they noted more instances of delinquent behavior, early sex activity and continued academic issues. From the moment an individual is born they are being conditioned to the norms of society. They learn gender roles through their interactions with their parents and observations of gender specific characteristics. Interaction and observations are the same methods of communication through which criminals learn their deviance. Criminal behavior, Differential Association theory argues, is more prevalent in individuals who associate and interact with individuals who exhibit criminal mind sets and behaviors. The theory also believes that the behaviors of an individual are influenced and shaped by other individuals they associate with. The primary reference group is that of the nuclear family, which the individual lives and grows up with. It is believed that these interactions formulate the individuals understanding of societal norms and values. It is then assumed that if the individual is capable of learning what is acceptable in society, they are also capable of learning what is considered unacceptable. Criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons in a process of communication. When criminal behavior is learned, the learning includes (a) techniques of committing the crime, which are sometimes very complicated, sometimes simple; (b) the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes. Differential association predicts that an individual will choose the criminal path when the balance of definitions for law-breaking exceeds those for law-abiding. This tendency will be reinforced if social association provides active people in the person's life. Earlier in life the individual comes under the influence of those of high status within that group, the more likely the individual to follow in their footsteps. This does not deny that there may be practical motives for crime. If a person feels hungry but has no money, the temptation to steal will become present. But, the use of "needs" and "values" is equivocal. To a greater or lesser extent, both non-criminal and criminal individuals are motivated by the need for money and social gain. This study then seeks to assess the effect of divorced families on the youths and it's relationship with their criminal behaviour.

Statement of Problem

Recent research shows that even after one controls for a range of family background differences, children who grow up living in an intact household with both biological parents present seem to do better, on average, on a wide range of social indicators than do children who grow up in a single-parent household (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). For example, they are less likely to drop out of school, become a teen parent, be arrested, and be unemployed. While single

parenthood is not the main nor the sole cause of children's increased likelihood of engaging in one of these detrimental behaviors, it is one contributing factor (Amato, 2000). Put another way, equalizing income and opportunity do improve the life outcomes of children growing up in single-parent households, but children raised in two-parent families still have an advantage. The researcher is interested in finding out if divorce of parents is really related to youths' criminal behaviour.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the relationship between divorce and criminal behaviour of youths in Uruan local government area. The specific objectives are as stated:

- i. To evaluate the effect of divorce on youths criminal behaviour.
- ii. To find out the influence of intact families on control of youths criminal behaviour.

Hypotheses

- i. There is no significant relationship between divorce and youths' criminal behaviour
- ii. There is no significant influence of intact families on control of youths' criminal behaviour.

Significance of the study

The research will be significant to the parents since they will be in a position to know the underlying behaviour on the youths (young adults) as a result of divorce.

The study will also enlighten parents on the pivotal role played by parents living together in the socialization of their children and at different levels. They will therefore be more aware of the effects and therefore avoid such instances where possible.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effect of divorce on youths

Youths from divorced families are also twice as likely to receive psychological help at some point during or after the divorce and are twice as likely to drop out of school (Tein et. al, 2004). According to Tein et. al (2004), there are four factors that can make these statistics more likely. These include the child's relationship with their residential parent, the extent of conflict between parents, the families' economic standing, and the frequency of contact with the non-residential parent.

The youths face many challenges and changes after the divorce as well. Literature shows that youths perceived themselves as more mature due to the responsibilities they take on. Parents will turn to the child for emotional support and disclose personal concerns about parenting or financial issues, in turn the adolescent feels older and mature (Buchanan et al, 1991). Kenyon et al, (2007) also found similar results. Adolescents that take on more responsibilities after divorce tend to perceive themselves as more mature. Responsibilities are not necessarily forced upon the youths but are taken on due to less family members in the house.

The impact the divorce has on the relationship of youths after divorce also depends on a couple of factors. Youths from divorced families can still recall shock, unhappiness, loneliness and anger brought on by the divorce. Most scholars have concluded that divorce is a "life transforming" experience for youth into adulthood. Adolescents are affected by divorce, and due to this impact may change their way of thinking about marriage, divorce and future relationships.

Relationships later in life are affected from divorced and non-divorced families. Individuals that come from divorced families tend to have lower marital satisfaction, more marital discord, thoughts of divorce and are more likely to get a divorce. Kobak (1999) also found similar results including hesitancy toward commitment, lower satisfaction in relationships, poorer interpersonal skills, earlier involvement in relationships and greater acceptance of divorce.

Leghninger (1996) in his study found out that children/adolescents of divorced families tend to have negative views towards marriage, leading to a higher cohabitation rate. Matsueda (1988) found that youths whose parents were divorced stayed in relationships longer than those with married parents. Copen et. al (2012) conducted a study of college students from divorced families. From that study, seventy-three percent of students reported that they felt they would be a different person if their parents would have stayed together. Fifty percent of students reported that they worried about events such as graduations and weddings where both parents would have to be present. Forty-eight percent of students reported that their childhood was harder than most and forty percent wished they grew up in an intact family. Individuals who come from divorced families tend to have concerns in later relationships. They seem to be more fearful of marriage, in turn having less favorable expectations. Waite (2000) also found that due to this fear many reported no desire to marry, and felt their chances of having a long term relationship would be greater than in a marriage.

Attitudes toward divorce also tend to change in individuals who come from non-intact families as compared to intact families. When discussing divorce, individuals from divorced families are going to be more open to the idea of it when they report being unhappy in their relationships (Amato & DeBoer, 2001). There are a couple of different attitudes that seem to be common among individuals from non-intact families.

One of the attitudes that is shown in a couple of different studies is the level of trust in their partners (Shinn, 2002). Trust can be broken at the beginning of divorce when attachment between parents is lost due to circumstances. The loss of trust in their parents may make the individual trust their partners less or other relational partners less (Shinn, 2002). Amato and Keith (1991) concluded after their own assessment that children of highly conflicted families who are not divorced fare worse over time than children with divorced parents. This shows that distance from an attachment figure may be better than living in a troubled environment. Many of the young men and women interviewed showed signs of becoming depressed or frenetic. Some throw themselves into sexual affairs or immerse themselves in work in a way of dealing with their losses. Many showed fear and lack of commitment for fear of losing their loved ones or being hurt.

Divorce permanently weakens families and the relationships that exist between children and their parents. It leads to diminished social competence, caustic conflict management methods, early loss of virginity by teens and reduced sense of femininity and masculinity for teens and adolescents. The adoption of diverse strategies that endeavor to mitigate against divorce harmful effects on youths should be adopted so as to place focus on the amelioration of this negative phenomena. The incorporation of a mediator to assist conflicting parties through helping them to identify burning issues would help to reduce misunderstandings thereby clarify priorities and expel emotions thereby possibly exploring new areas of compromise which can lead to possible solutions to inherent problems. This approach is ideal in that it emphasizes the need for cooperative decision-making among parents as well as their children. The process of mediation encourages parents to place their children priorities first during the entire process of

divorce. Through this process, parents are given the opportunity to develop communication as well as problem solving skills needed to facilitate triumphant co-parenting after divorce thereby reducing on adverse effects to affected children and teens (Tein, Sandler, MacKinnon, & Wolchik, 2004).

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed descriptive survey design. This involved using a survey design as a strategy for collecting and analyzing data to answer research questions, to gather information, summarize, present and interpret data for the purpose of classification.

Area of the study

The area for this study was Uruan Local Government area, Akwa Ibom State.

Population of the Study

The population for the study was 27 selected secondary schools, 55 primary schools and 16 pre-primary schools in Uruan and its environs including Nsit Atai. Total number of schools at different categories stood at 98 schools with an estimated population of 33,630.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Stratified Radom Sampling was used to select schools from which data were collected. The sample size was 10 schools which represented 10% of the total population of the schools in Nsit Atai.

Instrumentation

The main instrument used for the data collection was a questionnaire. The questionnaires were both closed to enhance uniformity and open ended to ensure maximum data was obtained.

Validation of the Instrument

The research used content validity to measure the degree to which data obtained from the research instrument would be meaningful and accurate.

Reliability of the Instrument

Test-retest method was used to test reliability of the instrument used. The test involves administering the same instrument to 10% of the target population.

Procedure for Data Collection

In each school the respondents were drawn from the school administration (Head teachers), Teachers and Students. From each stratum the study selected one head teacher, one teacher and one student. Where questionnaires were administered.

Method of Data Analysis

Results were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative data generated was subjected to the descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics include mean, standard deviations of each item and percentages of selected respondents. Statistics package for social sciences (SPSS) was used, to aid in the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Results

Hypothesis One

1. There is no significant influence of divorce on youths criminal behaviour.

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of the influence of divorce on youths' criminal behaviour.

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Strong desire to fix what their parents could not within their own adult lives	4.9784	0.7268
Desire to have stable families and relationships	4.8735	0.4356
A delayed reaction to an event	4.3459	0.7127
Fear to get into relationships	4.5423	0.3451
Exhibiting weird sexual behavior	4.1239	0.2982

The respondents agreed to a great extent on the statement that the young adults showed a strong desire to fix what their parents could not within their own adult lives with a Mean of 4.9784 and Standard Deviation of 0.7268. They also agreed to a great extent that the young adults had a desire to have stable families and relationships at a Mean 4.8735 and a Standard Deviation of 0.4356. They equally agreed to some extent that the youth from divorced families showed delayed reaction to an event at a Mean of 4.3459 and Standard Deviation of 0.7127 and they had a fear getting into relationships at a Mean of 4.5423 and Standard Deviation 0.3451. Some youths may exhibit weird sexual behavior due to the influence of divorce at a Mean of 4.1239 and Standard Deviation of 0.2982.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant influence of intact families on control of youths' criminal behaviour.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of the influence of intact families on minimising youths' criminal behaviour.

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Longer concentration period	3.5674	1.0456
Good performance in academics	4.7865	0.9864
Highly social	4.7634	0.2365
Are always happy	3.6789	0.8763
Have majority of their needs catered for	4.1768	0.1984
Have a friendly nature	4.0156	0.1247
High intelligence levels are realizable	4.3621	0.3254
Levels of anxiety are managed	4.1258	0.2154

When asked about the ways in which parents living together influenced his children's social development, the respondents agreed to a great extent that it had an impact. Specifically, it led to good performance in academics at a Mean of 4.7865 and Standard Deviation of 0.9864 and led to the children being highly social at a Mean of 4.7634 with a Standard Deviation of 0.2365. The respondents agreed to some extent that majority of their needs are catered for with parents living together at a Mean of 4.1768 and standard Deviation at 0.1984. The respondents also argued that the children were always happy at a Mean of 3.6789 and Standard Deviation of 0.8763 and social development of children living with parents to an extent made the children to have longer concentration period at a Mean of 3.5674 and Standard Deviation of 1.0456. The study found that children staying with their parents' realizable high intelligence levels at a mean of 4.3621 and Standard Deviation of 0.3254. Lastly, it was found that levels of anxiety are managed when parents live together with Children at a mean of 4.1258 and Standard Deviation of 0.2154.

Discussion of Findings

From the results in Table 1, respondents agreed that young adults were affected by divorce, as they showed a strong desire to fix what their parents could not within their own adult lives and majority had a strong desire to have stable families and relationships. On the flip side some of the young adults feared getting into relationships and commitment while others exhibited weird sexual behaviours that weren't acceptable by the society.

The results from Table 2 revealed that the parents who were living together equally influenced the social development of the children. This is evidenced by children being highly social beings and happy most of the time. Many of them had better and longer concentration periods making them perform well in their academics as majority of their needs are catered for by both parents.

Recommendations

The study found out that divorce has a great influence on the youths and the choices that they make. The study recommends guidance and counseling to help children understand and adjust to avoid adverse effects of their parents' divorce. Youths exhibiting adverse negative social behaviour should be rehabilitated with necessary therapy either by individual or by parents to help young people cope with the changes.

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