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Marital Conflict, Divorce and Single Parenthood as Predictors of Adolescents' Antisocial Behaviour in Ibadan

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Author's contribution

Author RAA did the work in its entirety.

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ABSTRACT

Manifestation of antisocial behaviour among adolescents in secondary schools in Nigeria is escalating day by day, threatening the peace and security of the society. It has been speculated in many quarters that the menace of unstable families is likely to be the cause. Hence, this study investigated the predictive effects of marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood on antisocial behaviours among secondary school adolescents in Ibadan. Three hundred adolescents were randomly selected from Ibadan metropolis. Three research questions were raised, and the Crime Behaviour Factor Battery was used to collect data. The result revealed that marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood correlated positively and significantly, and they jointly contributed a total of 74.8% in the total variance of adolescents' antisocial behaviours. Also, single parenthood had the highest relative contribution as revealed by the Beta weight (.887), followed by divorce (.280) and lastly, marital conflict (.272). It was recommended that intervention programmes should be put in place that will facilitate family adjustment, family stability and family cohesion that can forestall the incidence of marital breakdown and separation, especially for the sake of the young ones so as to reduce the rate of incidence of antisocial behaviours among the adolescents.

Keywords: *Marital conflict; divorce; single parenthood; antisocial behavior.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rate of increase in antisocial behaviour in the society is alarming [1,2,3]. Antisocial behaviours resulting in series of crime appears to be a constant source of social concern. Escalating levels of insecurity, fear of violence, the threat of public disorder, rioting, household burglary, children out of control, new forms of terrorism, football hooliganism, mindless vandals and a growth in all manner of antisocial behaviours are but a few of the enduring images that characterize a society that is apparently drifting further and further into lawlessness [4,3]. Specifically in Nigeria, incidence of violence and law breaking of all kinds are common; alcoholism, drug abuse, smoking, suicide and others such as rape, cultism, prostitution, kidnapping, ritual killings and all antisocial behaviours are traceable to families which lack cohesion, unstable and separated family background [5,6,7,8].

Antisocial behaviour is the umbrella term used for any negative behaviour as far as the context of a society is concerned. According to [9] there is no precise definition of anti-social behaviour. Broadly, it is acting in a way that causes or is likely to cause alarm or distress to others. [10] defined it as that kind of behaviour that lacks consideration for others and may cause damage to the society, whether intentional or through negligence. [11] defined anti-social behavior as such behaviours that deviate significantly from established social norms. [12] conceptualized anti-social behavior as the behavior characterized by overall lack of adherence to the social mores and standard that allows members of the society to co-exist peaceably. Furthermore, anti-social behaviour is described as disruptive acts characterized by covert and overt hostility and intentional aggression toward others. It exists along a severity continuum and includes repeated violations of social rules, deviant of authority and of the right of others [13,14]. The name anti-social behaviour is labelled as such because it is contrary to prevailing norms for social conduct. This kind of behaviour encompass a large spectrum of action such as murder, rape, use of illegal substance, cruelty, violence, scam, theft, arson, vandalism; as well as activities that members of society find objectionable even when they are legal, such as drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, lying, intimidating, manipulation, drug and alcohol abuse [15,16,17].

A particular behaviour is not acceptable or it is antisocial if any of these three criteria are seen: If the behaviour does not allow a person to function effectively with others as member of society, if the behavior does not permit the person to meet his or her own needs and if the behaviour has a negative effect on the well-being of others [6]. This research focuses on all kinds of behaviour that could be termed antisocial.

Adolescents are the youngsters usually between the age of 12 and 21, and mostly found in the secondary schools as far as Nigeria context is concerned [18]. A larger percentage of Nigerian adolescents have been described as vagabonds based on the incessant manifestation of antisocial behaviour [8,7]. Consequently, a keen observation of what is happening in Nigeria today seem to indicate that a contagious spread of the behaviour among in-school adolescents despite the fact that its manifestation could hinder their ability to concentrate in classroom teaching and learning situation and prevent them from developing required functional competencies for academic success. This could have grave consequences across their developmental lifespan. Thus, antisocial behaviour among in-school adolescents have lately become a significant concern for teachers, parents, psychologists and society in general due to the negative consequences these behaviour have on the teaching-learning process [19,20]. Involvement of adolescents in antisocial behaviour is totally inimical to the sustainable development and survival of this nation because the society relies heavily on these young ones for the leadership of tomorrow.

However, the past two decades witnessed crime ranging from stealing to major robbery and killing perpetrated by the teens. There has been increasing concern of the police and the general public on the seriousness of adolescents' crime and conduct problem [21,22,23].

Violent behavior among adolescents may well be in the characteristics of adolescents. [24] discusses the characteristics of the adolescents as follows; they prefer interaction with peers, participate in real life situation, pre-occupied with self, have a strong force for approval, understand their personal abilities and challenge the authority of adults. [23] said that the brain of the adolescent is related to his behaviour. To explain this, he said that his studies have shown that the human brain does not finish maturing until about age 25, and before then, adolescent prefrontal cortex is not fully developed. According to him, this section of the brain is responsible for complex thinking and central impulses as well as maladjusted behavior accordingly. These findings suggest that adolescents do not biologically have the ability to control impulses, anticipate consequences and make fully reasoned decisions.

The type of home from which each adolescent came contribute immensely to the incidence of violent behaviour, and what is happening in each home among parents are factors that can be considered alongside with the antisocial behaviour of adolescents. Many researchers agree that the foundation of adolescent violence is rooted in the kind of home the adolescent is brought up [25,26,21,27]. The basis for good behavioural orientation and good adolescent attitude development is founded on positive parenting. [21] stated that the parents should be blamed and be made to take responsibility for the misfortune that befalls the adolescents. The incidence of parental separation may result in adolescents' embarrassment, depression [28,29] and even make them miss school, perform poorly academically and participate in various antisocial behavior [30,28,22].

Conflict is one of the most studied and discussed subjects in the area of family communication. In fact, some authors suggest that conflict has been emphasized to an extent that it has eclipsed positive aspects of marital and family interaction [31]. Many families face difficult struggles that are often quite volatile and troubling. Conflict theories emphasize that conflicts are ubiquitous and inherent [32], especially given the interdependence and emotional involvement of close relationships [33] and families in particular [34].

Marital conflict is a phenomenon that destabilizes the couple, disrupt their joy and mostly felt by women yet, least recognized human rights abuse in the world. It is also a profound social problem, sapping women's energy, compromising their physical health, and eroding their self-esteem [35]. Worldwide, information on the amount of conflict in families shows that it is not a rare phenomenon. Conflict of course, represents a rather extreme example of the failure of supportiveness. It is found in every kind of family, and it can reach extreme levels. For example, family fights are one of the most frequent reasons for police calls [3]. In fact, marital conflict is one of the leading causes of death among women and is the most common cause of non-fatal injury [36].

[37] Observed that, conflict between parents frequently affects their young children. Adolescents who witness marital violence face increased risk for such emotional and behavioural problems as anxiety, depression, poor school attendance, performance, low self-esteem, disobedience, nightmares and physical health complaints. However, [38] stressed the point that, such victims also are more likely to act aggressively during childhood and adolescence. In the same vein, [34] further observed that adolescents who witness

violence between their parents often develop many of the same behavioural and psychological problems as adolescents who are themselves abused. [39] stressed that adolescents who are severely neglected due to marital conflict or divorce may experience a drop in intelligence and increased risk of depression and suicide. As young individuals, they tend to be hyperactive, easily distracted, and unpopular with their peers [22]. As adolescents and adults, they are more likely to abuse drugs or alcohol and to become involved in juvenile delinquency and violent crime [40,41,39]. High incidence of antisocial behaviour has been found among offspring of separated homes in secondary schools in Nigeria [42,43,44,45,3].

Parental divorce is a stressful experience for children at any age and consequently, most of their children exhibit maladjusted behaviours [46,3]. Adolescence represents a crucial stage in the developmental process. Not only may a parental divorce during this period in adolescents' lives hamper their development, it has also been found in various studies that possible problems of a parental divorce earlier in adolescents' lives may emerge later on [47].

Studies consistently report that parental separation negatively affects both internalizing and externalizing problem behavior of children and adolescents [48,3]. Adolescents of divorced parents often score lower than their peers of continuously intact families. The strongest effects are found in the areas of psychological adjustment, self-concept, behaviour/conduct, educational achievement and social relations [46,4]. An adolescent from a single parenthood home suffers seriously from paternal or maternal care and discipline; hence, he/she is highly vulnerable to the incidence of maladjusted behaviour as a result of incessant negative influence of the peers [3].

Compared to adolescents who grew up in continuously intact families, offspring from divorced parents are often found to have lower psychological well-being [4]; have more emotional problems such as depression [49,3]; have more negative self-image [46]; perform less well at school [49]; exhibit more delinquent and aggressive behaviour [50]; have a higher risk for substance use [51] and they also have more problematic relationships and early sexual intercourse [51].

Studies have shown that before parental divorce, children and adolescents suffer due to high levels of marital discord, ineffective and inconsistent parenting, diminished parental wellbeing, and reduced parent-child affection [52,35]. For parents and adolescents, the most difficult and stressful phase of the divorce process is usually the period leading to and immediately following parental separation and divorce [3]. Substantial research evidence shows that, on average, individuals who have experienced parental divorce score somewhat lower than children in first-marriage families on measures of social development, emotional well-being, self-concept, academic performance, educational attainment, and physical health [48,32], have negative self image and low self esteem [53] and are also prone to various forms of antisocial behaviours [54,55].

This study, therefore, intends to find out the predictive effects of marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood on antisocial behaviours among in-school adolescents in Ibadan.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- I What is the pattern of relationship among marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood on adolescents' antisocial behaviours?

- II What is the joint effect of marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood on adolescents' antisocial behaviour?
- III What are the relative effects of marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood on adolescents' antisocial behaviour?

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to examine the predictive effects of marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood on in-school adolescents' antisocial behaviour in Ibadan metropolis.

3.2 Participants

The participants for this study were school going adolescents (between ages 14-20 years) with a mean of 16.4, who were randomly selected from ten schools within Ibadan metropolis through multistage stratified sampling technique. A total of 300 participants were used for the study. This comprised 197 males (65.7%) and 103 females (34.3%).

3.3 Instrument

The main instrument used for this study was the section 1 (Crime behavior rating scale) of the Crime Behaviour Factor Battery [56]. It is divided into 2 sections (A and B). Section A is on Personal/ Demographic information such as the adolescent's sex, age, school, class, father's and mother's occupation, family type: Intact home, Parents currently experiencing marital conflict, Parents already divorced and Living in single parent home etc. Section B contains 33 items of crime behavior rating scale developed on 5-point Likert format. Typical examples of items include: 1. My behaviour often goes contrary to the acceptable norms 2. I take revenge on anybody that offends me; 3. I have my own kinds of drugs that keep me going 4. God or no God, I live my life the way I want. 5. I have sometimes been arrested for a crime. It has a Cronbach alpha of 0.95 and a Guttman split half reliability of 0.82.

3.4 Procedure of Administration

Five Local Government areas were randomly selected out of 11 Local Government areas in Ibadan metropolis. Two public secondary schools were randomly selected on the basis of balloting from each Local Government areas. The researcher procured the approval of the principals of the various schools used for the survey. Students in the senior classes who have been identified to have been involved in any kind of antisocial behaviours and also screened by the class teachers and found to have come from unstable homes balloted for the needed number in each of the ten secondary schools. At last, only 30 students who have consented to participate were randomly selected from each school. Hence, a total of 300 students participated in the exercise. The questionnaires were personally given out to the participants and collected from them by the researcher after they have duly responded to them.

3.5 Data Analysis

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to find the relationships among the variables, while Multiple regression analysis (standard and regular or ordinary least square regression) was used to find out the combined and relative contributions of the three independent variables (marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood) to the prediction of adolescents' antisocial behaviours.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the findings in the tables below:

Research Question 1:

What pattern of relationship exists between Marital Conflict, Divorce and Single Parenthood on one hand and Antisocial behavior on the other. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and Correlation matrix table showing relationships among the Variables

Variables	N	Mean	Std Dev.	1	2	3	4
Antisocial behavior	300	49.98	12.46	1.000			
Marital conflict	300	122.78	23.13	.599*	1.000		
Divorce	300	16.37	4.46	.510*	.271*	1.000	
Single parenthood	300	67.50	15.39	.875*	.267*	.223*	1.000

Table 1 gives the description of measures of association among the variables in this study. The scores indicate significant relationship among the variables (marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood). As observed from the table, the intercorrelation results show that marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood correlated positively with adolescents' antisocial behaviour ($r = .599, p < 0.05$; $r = .510, p < 0.05$ and $r = .875, p < 0.05$) respectively.

Research Question 2:

What is the joint contribution of marital conflict, Divorce and Single parenthood to the prediction of Adolescents' antisocial behavior? The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Multiple Regression summary table showing the joint contribution of the independent variables to the prediction of adolescents' antisocial behavior

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F-Ratio	Sig	P
Regression	35695.414	3	11898.417	324.74	0.000	<.05
Residual	10713.503	296	36.194			
Total	46408.917	299				

R = 0.877
R² = 0.769
Adj. R² = 0.767
Std. Error = 6.016

Going by the result presented in Table 2, the three independent variables made a joint contribution of 76.7% to the prediction of adolescents' antisocial behaviour as revealed by the value of the Adjusted R². The Multiple Regression values are: R =0.877, R² =0.769, Adj. R² =0.767 and Std error estimated =6.016. The result of the multiple regression analysis produced an F-ratio (3/296) = 324.74, p<0.05.

Research Question 3:

What are the relative contributions of marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood to the prediction of adolescents' antisocial behaviour? The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Relative contributions of the Independent Variables to the criterion measure

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig	P
Marital Conflict	0.231	.068	.272	3.397	.000	<.05
Divorce	0.194	.059	.280	3.988	.000	<.05
Single Parenthood	0.719	.033	.887	21.72	.000	<.05

From the table above, it is evident that single parenthood has the most relative contribution to adolescent' antisocial behaviour as evident by the Beta weight (.887), followed by divorce (.280) and lastly, marital conflict (.272).

4.1 Discussion

Results obtained from research question 1 in the study indicated that independent variables have significant positive correlations with adolescents' antisocial behaviour. That finding was supported by [37,35,48,3] that adolescents of conflict-oriented families were more than twice as likely as other adolescents to engage in antisocial behaviours. This might be due to the fact that in the process of disharmony between the father and mother the offsprings are neglected and subjected to emotional abuse. They are tossed to and fro as a result of conflicting instructions from significant others around them. Hence, they are easily lured into antisocial behaviours or they deliberately engage in such in protest to the unfriendly atmosphere at home.

Results from research question 2 in the study revealed that the three independent variables (marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood) had significant joint contribution to the prediction of adolescents' antisocial behaviours, whereby they jointly contributed 76.7% of the total variance for adolescents' antisocial behaviours. That corroborated the earlier finding of [39 and 35] that adolescents from separated homes were always involved in juvenile delinquency and violent crime.

Results from research question 3 showed that single parenthood was hazardous in the training of the adolescents. The absence of the father, who was often regarded as a disciplinarian predisposed adolescents to antisocial behaviour. Also, the absence of maternal care in certain cases made the adolescents took advice or instructions from anybody around them, which often led to unintentional negative behaviours. That finding upheld the earlier findings of [49,4,3] that single parenthood was a deadly blow on the training of the adolescents.

4.1.1 Implication of the findings

The study has implications for parents. Parenting is a special responsibility given to matured individuals by the Creator to replenish the earth. Parents are therefore expected to play their roles as expected. Therefore, individuals who intend to go into marriage and procreate children must know that they also have the responsibility of nurturing such children to adulthood. Hence, they must develop the spirit of agape love, endurance, perseverance, forbearance, forgiveness, tolerance and resilience to stay in the marriage to the end no matter the odds, at least, for the sake of the children.

4.1.2 Limitation

The study is limited in the selection of participants. Increase in the number of participants cutting across various socio- economic status, tribes, ethnic origin, cultural orientations as well as among the educated and illiterates would ensure better result and generalization. Also, the study is just a survey which may be limited in generalization. Future researchers are encouraged to investigate the issue of antisocial behaviour experimentally by using certain intervention strategies to remediate the behaviour. Also, the findings of the study tend towards establishing a sort of causal relationship rather than prediction which is outside correlational studies because there are other causes of antisocial behaviours as well as marital conflict. Finally, the suggested intervention strategies were not discussed in details due to the limited scope of the paper.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has established that the period of adolescence is very important to the development of an individual. Any laxity on the part of the parents in assisting and guiding the adolescent may result in antisocial behaviours. This is more prominent in unsettled homes characterised by marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood.

6. RECOMMENDATION

It is therefore recommended that intervention programmes should be put in place to checkmate family chaos. Such intervention strategies include: Self management technique, Bibliotherapy, Assertiveness skills training, Marital communication skills, Stress inoculation training, Cognitive behavioural therapy, Play therapy, Rational Emotive behaviour therapy etc. These may perhaps facilitate family adjustment, family stability and family cohesion that can forestall the incidence of marital breakdown and separation, especially for the sake of the young ones so as to reduce the rate of incidence of antisocial behaviours among the adolescents.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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