Family Variables and Social Adjustment of Secondary School Students in Ikom Education Zone of Cross River State

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to determine family variables and social adjustment of secondary school students in Ikom Education Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of this study, two null hypotheses were generated to direct the study. The literature review was done according to the variables under study ex-post Facto research design was adopted. A sample of six hundred and two (602) respondents was selected for the study which was done through simple sampling technique and data was collected through a questionnaire. Independent t-test was the statistical analysis technique adopted to test the hypotheses under study. The results of the analysis revealed that, single parenting (male/female) and family type significantly influence social adjustment of secondary school students. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended that Parents should set clear standards for their children, monitor limit that they set, and also allow children to develop autonomy.

Keywords: Social adjustment, Family variable, Single parenting, Family type

Introduction

Social adjustment is an effort made by a person to cope with the demands or challenges of a new environment. It includes the individual's involvement in social activities and satisfaction with various aspects of experiences. In the process of social adjustment, the individual tries to behave in accordance with the norms, ethics, and values that will enhance his survival, and meeting the social expectations of the environment. Different individuals have different social adjustment abilities. When individuals are able to adjust effectively in a new environment, it enhances their optimal performances physically and intellectually.

In the school, parental control of students ceases, and the student is confronted with both new freedom and challenges. The school is a new environment that can trigger different reactions among students. The student now needs to reconstruct his/her personal relations in a new environment, and often causes some form of distress. Poor social adjustment of students with school life can make learning and general school experiences uninteresting for students. It is not enough for students to have passed through the primary school and seemingly declare parental intendance, there are still some tasks of effective adjustment to social and challenges through the secondary school. Positive and effective social adjustment of students is an important factor to effective learning and outcome of students.

Students have different ways and abilities of dealing with school challenges. Some deal with adjustment problems constructively, while some feel overwhelmed and find school life difficult. Students are confronted with new personal and interpersonal challenges that include the need to establish new relationships, develop, study skills and so on, and still cope with already established relationship with parents, former peers and so on (Renshaw, 2013).

When students find themselves in the school, it can reduce contact and social support from former friends and family members. Difficulties in dealing with the challenges may lead to poor academic performance and increased anxiety. Students who are adequately adjusted become more prepared socially, emotionally, and academically. But those that are not adequately adjusted are ill-equipped socially, emotionally and perhaps academically.

Parenting adolescents for social adjustment is more difficult than previous years. The availability of technological and sociological changes that have occurred in many Nigerian homes, have afforded the child the opportunity of gaining knowledge and experience from the more advanced Western world. Adolescents are exposed to activities and information from people that challenge their person, family standards and values (Bornstein & Bradley, 2003). These changes have brought great benefits and problems, in the family forms, structures, parenting styles and children's responses to issues. Experts increasingly describe the pressure on contemporary families as frustrating, demanding and confusing.

Parenting adolescents for social adjustment has become one of the most challenging tasks of raising children. Adolescents are faced with problems of insecurity, inferiority, frustration and dejection. Compounding adolescents are other factors such as societal pressure and aspiration, well meaning friends and relatives, and conflicting theories presented in books and magazines, on television, videos, computer and satellite communication system in many homes. Dinkmeyer and Mckay (2007) affirm that many parents enjoy their children's infancy and childhood but find their adolescence years a time of conflict.

Another contending issue is the increase in the number of families in which both parents work at the same time, the number of one-parent families as a result of an increasing divorce rate. With working parents, the time spent with their children is being squeezed and the quality of care is of concern to many (Crounter & Booth, 2004). The way parents use their time with their adolescents, the various child care arrangement in relation to home care arrangement influence children's social and intellectual growth as well as the resultant effect of the child being without supervision for hours everyday after school.

Parenting, however, involves more than hard work, effort and self-discipline. An added benefit is the ability to have fun with each other, to enjoy being part of a happy family (Vanpelt, 2004). Hence family togetherness breeds peace and understanding. Baumrind (2007) believes that parents should be neither punitive nor aloof. Rather, they should develop rules for their children and be affectionate towards them. There should be a cordial relationship between adolescents, and parents, staff and administration, and participation in social and religious activities should be encouraged. If parents and adolescents can adjust positively to the above situation, they should be able to live at peace and harmony in their homes, school and society successfully.

According to Mussen, Conger & Kungan, (2001), families are confronted by challenges of continuous adaptations and adjustment to parenting of children, that is commensurate to the demands of contemporary times. The home as the child's first environment after birth goes a long way to nurture and modify genetic endowments and behaviours. The child's behaviour may also be a product of his environment over which he had no control.

Similarly, Digiulo (2005) demands from parents a caring process which ensures the adolescents' protection from avoidable illness, harms, accident, abuse (sexual harassment, drunkenness, and unwanted pregnancy). It further demands a degree of parental control over the child, and an adequate knowledge of physical, emotional and social needs necessary for behavioural and social adjustment of adolescents to achieve societal values and responsibilities. With these demands, Nigerian parents need to readdress their parenting styles and their new orientation in pursuance of money, which has become the ultimate in many families, and to return to their children the love, care, attention and unity that exist before in the family.

However, beyond the process of genetic imprint over which couples have no control, the rest of the task of mediation of a course of successful formation, development and adjustment of adolescents revolve on the parents. They lay the foundation for successful personality development to the growing person (Arene, 2001). Therefore, successful management of adolescent constitutes a challenge which must be accomplished for successful development to adulthood. The adolescent thinks himself no more a child in the true sense, and yet not an adult, in the real sense.

In normal circumstances, child rearing and up bringing is a function of both parents (i.e. husband and wife). This seems to be in line with the popular saying that "it takes two to tango." However, where one of the two is not playing any expected key role in child upbringing due to some extraneous circumstances, be they man-made, natural causes, or socio-economic reasons, the product of that union, the child, is bound to experience some negative feelings in and around him or her and such negative feelings may affect the child psychologically, socially, economically, academically and otherwise throughout life.

Adolescents form the bulk of the student population in secondary schools. The above claim has universal application in Nigeria as elsewhere in the world. But there is a growing concern about this crop of scholars as studies have shown a growing trend in them, which indicates that their psycho-social and emotional needs are getting wider by the day; and this tends to be impacting negatively on their overall academic performance in school. Though adolescent, according to Oluwatosin et al (2011) "is usually a time of both excitement and troubles and can thus be a confusing time, it is vital that, parents, education planners, guidance/counselors and policy formulators understand why they may be excited, confused, receptive, aggressive and unfriendly at certain periods of their growing up.

It has become more imperative to conduct more researches on why these adolescents are maladjusted in behaviour and in their relationship with fellow adolescent, other members of the society, and to ascertain why they have problems with their self-concept. It is also

imperative to find out why they cannot adjust from the situation they found themselves, or cope emotionally.

In recent times, there have been a series of complaints from parents, teachers, annual reports of social welfare office, administrators and the general public about the behaviour of adolescents and their social adjustment. The adolescent behaviour pattern is formed by a transaction of the past, present, and future anticipation in accordance with the social setting. The child's behaviour may also be a product of his environment over which he had no control. Specially, social adjustment is influenced by lack of communication and family decisions (parenting style) that include unclear expectation of behaviour, inconsistent or lax discipline, lack of bonding and caring, conflict between parents, or caregivers, and low expectations for the child's success. Hence free communication is difficult if parents are consistently critical, dictatorial and dogmatic.

The current behavioural pattern in the family and society has affected the length of hours of interactions between children and parents. Parents, who are expected to be good models for personality excellence, have become more interested in self pursuit to the detriment of their parenting role. Hence, individual difference exists in physical appearance, temperament, intelligence, abilities and aptitudes. This has thrown adolescents into many antisocial practices such as; stealing, disobedience, disrespect for elders, lying, aggression, cheating, cultism, gangsterism, armed robbery, prostitution, ritual killing, kidnapping, get rich quick syndrome forgery and impersonation, falsification of school report sent to parents, public assault, pervasive feelings of inadequacy, timidity, rape, shyness, absenteeism, truancy, drop out among others. The incidence of these behavioural misconducts, are alarming. It tends to indicate that such behaviours have become embedded in our system, and remained features of life for the contemporary Nigerian adolescent.

Single parenting is growing in an alarming rate the world over. There are several causes or reasons why single parenting is assuming this unprecedented rate. The reasons include both natural and man-made factors. The natural factors may include death of one of the spouses, incompatibility of the couple, natural disasters that may have destroyed the couple's means of livelihood, such that one of the two may opt to live with her parents or a close family relative that is not agreeable to the other partner. It could also be as a result of economic down turn due to loss of job or phenomenal loss of business to fire, windstorm or floods. When any of these seemingly happens to a family, stress and hardship may set in; squabbles may become a reoccurring decimal in the family to an extent that one of the couples may decide to take separation or outright divorce as an escape route.

One of the aforementioned cases would give rise to single parenthood, which in turn gives rise to some form of maladjustment. The maladjustment may result from lack of dual parental love and affection, and this tends to have a debilitating influence on the psychological nature of the children in these families. Generally speaking, "a child deprived of affection exhibits social and intellectual disorder, which results in maladjustment" Denga (2005: 59). If the case of single parenting is male, the implication may be grave, such that "mothering deficiency manifests in emotional disorders, physical and intellectual retardation, aggressiveness, vandalism and other basic needs of delinquency". Children who lack affection and other basic needs, especially, mothering affection, according to the author, "grow into delinquencies, exhibiting behaviours such as …truancy, bulling, cheating, and laziness".

Bornstain (1985) sees the key function of the child's family, as raising the young person in a healthy manner as possible. The parental role, according to him, is to provide the child with safe, secure, nurturing, loving as well as support the child's environment, one that allows the offspring to have a happy and healthy youth life, in order to acquire experience that allows the youth to develop in knowledge, value, attitude and behaviour, necessary to

become an adult making a productive contribution to self, family, community and the larger society.

The implication is that whatever a parent does legitimately in order to fulfill these duties, or roles, is what is summarized as parenting and usually requires the mother or father, providing all, or most of the physical, psychological, emotional and socio-economic needs, in the process of raising the child within a given family. The psychological needs of the child are many and could vary as emerging situations present themselves. He (child) may require new experiences, affection and may require the parent(s) to allow him or her space to assume responsibility.

Benedek (1956) seems to support the above assertion as he opines, "one of the parenting responsibilities is to provide their children with activities which lead to their having new experience. Parenting involves aiding children to explore, experiment with things and experiencing the world around them.

Principally, children need this space to experiment and acquire new experiences because life within their environment, become boring if there are no new activities for them to experiment, more so that the child is full of energy that needs to be expended. But, in allowing the children such space, parents need to plan their activities to avoid them taking expensive risks that could endanger their lives.

Expressing his views on the essence of showing affection, Denga (2005) asserts that children as well as adults want to be loved. The primary affection, for children, he noted comes from their parents, especially mothers and siblings, later on, the peer group, teachers and members of the community. But the snag or pitfall to the involvement of teachers in showing affection to the child hinges on the inability of the teacher to show significant level of affection to 30 or more children entrusted into his or her care. Denga's conclusion on this matter is that "the major responsibility for affection rests with the parents". A child deprived of parental affection, according to Denga, exhibits social and intellectual disorder which results in maladjustment. He asserts further that mothering deficiency manifests in emotional disorders, physical and intellectual retardation, aggressiveness, vandalism and other forms of delinquency. Children who lack affection and other basic needs of life grow into delinquents-exhibiting behaviours such as stealing, imaginative lying, rudeness, truancy, bullying, cheating, laziness, gang-fighting, impudence and indiscipline generally.

Denga (2005) talks about child development in relationship to acquiring positive psychological acumen, that "development psychology is mainly concerned with physical development, motor development, perceptual (perception) development, including cognitive, personality, emotional and social-moral development. To him, a healthy physical development influences intellectual development and the entire personality of the child, which are consequent upon the child's environment and heredity. A conductive environment promotes a healthy physical and intellectual development, while a non-stimulating environment retards total development. In Denga's view, parents, guardians and others charged with child upbringing must try to provide a stimulating environment for children. Without waiting for the prompting of a soothsayer, it is the sole responsibility of parents, guardians to provide the needed stimulating environment for the child or children to develop all round.

Lisa Belkin (2015) said the rise in single fatherhood is attributable to an increase in both the rate of divorce and non-marital births, since 2002, both of which have contributed to an increase in the number of single parents of both sexes. Peer Research reports on why the number of single Father (Dad) has jumped in the U.S, tends to agree with Kathleen O Brien (2013), as she asserts, it is also a reflection of the changing role of fathers in general. They are arguably, where women were a decade ago in their awareness that they a different life

work equation, but are not yet what theirs should be. They also want a different relationship for their children than their own fathers were expected to have.

Contributing to the rise of the single dad, Caroline Kitchener (2014) said, "A rising divorce rate over the half-century, along with the increasing frequency of parents never marrying at all, and the growing societal acceptance of fathers as primary "care-givers" is one noticeable reason. To her, "a century ago, this image of men left alone with children was horrifying enough to spur an anti- suffrage movement". She equally attributed the rise in single dad in the U.S. which has quasi- Universal application, "to the U.S Judicial system and its stifling standards for child custody cases" until recently, the averred, US courts would almost always rule "in the best interest of the child" (slang for, in favour of the mother).

Besides, Kitchner (2014) believes more fathers are starting to believe that they have something important to contribute to their children's lives "an absolute fact? Does it make them better parents? Kitchner (2014) tends to disagree. She asserts, "Single dads are more easily discouraged than single moms--- because men suffer from a lack of parental training. While women often grow up tucking theirs dolls into bed at night, young men are rarely conditioned to take care of someone else. This lack of experience can make single dads begin to think "whether they are really cut out for this after all." Pp58. Like all other forms of single parenting, male single parenting has its own attributes, though some are peculiar.

There are also able differences between single mother parenting and single father parenting. Gretehen Livingston (2011) in a study to ascertain and compare the rise in the single fathers in the United States, came up with findings that single fathers are more likely than single mothers to be living with a cohabiting partner. His findings however revealed that single fathers, on the average, have higher income than single mothers and are far less likely to be living at, or below the poverty line. He also asserts that single fathers are also somewhat less educated than single mothers, and they are older. In terms of percentage the author said 52% of single fathers are either separated, divorced, widowed or never married and are living without a cohabiting partner.

The research also shows that households headed by single fathers appear to be much better off financially when compared with those headed by single mothers, but much worse off than married fathers. In addition, Livingstone's (2011) research shows that the prevalence of single fatherhood is closely linked to educational level; the more education a father has, the less likely he is to head a single father household. In all these, how does single fatherhood affect the self-concept and social adjustment of adolescents in school, bearing in mind the findings that most single fathers are less educated and less financially endowed?

Denga and Denga (2007), writing on the psychological challenges of child parenting, assert that "some parents are simply not able to provide a stimulating intellectual environment for their children. Learning equipment, such as reading, writing and listening materials are not affordable to an extent that children without materials become depressed, frustrated and emotionally changed because of lack of class participation. This action, the authors assert, adds to the children depression.

The single parenthood, be it single male or single female parents, has its own effects on children. The reason as captured in Denga and Denga (2007) is because children learn what they grow up to see happening around them… children from single parenthood, due to divorce, separation, will be affected psychologically and socially.

Psychologically he noted, one parent is missing, especially where they were two but due to incompatibilities in the marriage, one parent has to leave. The love and care of the mother/father is gone except for occasional times of visiting,

Edet (2007), asserted that adjustments of children who have lost a parent by death or divorce, exhibit significantly more personality problems such as shyness, anxiety and other inhibited behavior. While children who have lost a parent by divorce show, significantly,

more conduct problems. The said research has shown that children from divorced families have significantly higher rate of delinquency than children from widowed and married families.

Denga and Denga (2007), assert that "women, whose husbands maltreated them, by battering and sending them away from their matrimonial homes… usually end up in their mother's abode, because if children of the battered mother take sides with her, the father vehemently drives them away with their mother, so far as the man does not receive support from the children even when he is wrong, they are out to face rejection, neglect and abandonment". This trend, according to them, "brings untold hardship on children and their mothers, who may not be financially strong but are now to cater for the total upbringing of the children". Denga and Denga (2007) said, "in case of death of the husband, some cultures expect the bereaved woman to bring all that her husband left for sharing by the family members. In many cases, the woman is driven away empty handed with no dime to cater for the children and her. pp73."

The behavior of the child, which influences his/her self concept and social adjustment, in the long run, is "the product of the environment… sometimes, the prevailing social, economic and cultural circumstances exert a negative impact on the child and change him/her from good to bad" (Denga & Denga, 2007, pp 84)

Thus, when the adolescent's self concept and social adjustment have rejection at the foundation, a female single parent, needs to work extra hard to erase from his or her psyche, some anti-social behaviours like aggression and hostility, which according to Denga and Denga (2007), "is strongly related to frustration and other aspects of psychoanalytic theory."

In effect, female single parenting, by all standards, is not adequate parenting. Inadequate parenting, as postulated by Denga and Denga (2007), "breeds unproductive and undesirable citizens, who often turn out to be criminals. Pp 62"

As children grow, they gradually develop affection for their parents. While the males gravitate to their mother's affection and attention, the females gravitate to their fathers for attention and affection.

Methodology

The research design opted for this study is ex-post facto design. This design was preferred over all other designs because it deals with research issues that have already taken place in the environment long before the time the researcher carried out the study. The population of this study consisted of twenty-five secondary schools and students in the 5 Local Government Areas of cross River State in the 2016/2017 academic session. From the State Secondary Education Board (SEB, 2017) there were 76 secondary grammar schools manned by the SEB. Also, these schools housed a total of 112,153 students (55,646 males and 56,507 females). The stratified random sampling procedure was adopted in selecting the representative samples of schools and respondents to participate in the study. Six hundred and twenty SS-II students formed the representative sample of students for this study. Family Structure and Social Adjustment Questionnaire (FSSAQ) was the instrument used for data collection. The instrument was given to two experts in the tests, measurement and evaluation unit of Educational Foundations for validation and reliability analyses. Test-retest reliability co-efficient method was used to determine the reliability estimate of the instrument. After the administration, coefficient of internal consistency was obtained and the index was found to be 0.79 this value was high enough to be considered good for a research instrument.

Presentation of the results

In this section each hypothesis is re-stated, and the result of data analysis carried out to test it is presented. Each hypothesis of the study was tested at .05 level of significance.

Hypothesis one

There is no significant influence of single parenting (male/female) on the social adjustment of secondary school students. The independent variable is single parenting (male/female; while the dependent variable is social adjustment of secondary school students. Independent t-test analysis was adopted to test this hypothesis. The result is presented in Table 1 below:

Single parenting	N	X	SD	t-value
Male	346	34.42	3.69	
				-3.380*
Female	256	35.33	2.57	

Table 1: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of single parenting (male/female) on the social adjustment of secondary school students (N=602)
*Significant at. 05level, critical t=1.96, df= 600.

The result in Table 1 revealed that the calculated t-value of -3.380 is higher than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 600 of degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis that there is no significant influence of single parenting (male/female) on the social adjustment of secondary school students was rejected. This implies that there is a significant influence of single parenting (male/female) on the social adjustment of secondary school students.

Hypothesis two

There is no significant influence of family type influence on social adjustment of secondary school students. The independent variable is family type (intact and single); while the dependent variable is social adjustment of secondary school students. Independent t-test analysis was adopted to test this hypothesis. The result is presented in Table 2 below:

Family type	N	X	SD	t-value
Intact	363	34.51	3.66	
				-2.762*
Single	259	35.26	2.59	

TABLE 2: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of family type influence on social adjustment of secondary school students **(N=602)**
*significant at. 05 level, critical t=1.96, df= 600.

The result in Table 2 revealed that the calculated t-values of-2.762 is higher than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 600 of degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis that there is no significant influence of family type influence on social adjustment of secondary school students was accepted. This implies that there is a significant influence of family type influence on social adjustment of secondary school students.

Discussion of Findings

This section is primarily concerned with the discussion of findings that emerged from the results of the analysis. The discussion is presented according to the variables of the study. The result of this hypothesis indicated that there is a significant influence of single parenting (male/female) on social adjustment of secondary school students. The findings of this hypothesis is contrary to the view of Wallerstein (1980) who observed that there are some women who see baby as status symbol, or as something of their own to hold and to love. To such women, it does not matter whether they are having such a baby out of wedlock. The negative effect is that such women, may be forced to make tough agonizing choices, to an extent of grappling with economic problems, emotional despair, loneliness and the stresses of rearing a child without a mate,

Several reasons have been advanced to explain why the single-parenting phenomenon is thriving. They include infertility, which may compel a female or male parent to adopt children, separation, due to incompatibility or childlessness, death of one of the spouse, the inability of the male spouse to live to marital expectation.

Nwachukwu (2007) also noted that children from single parent homes are more hostile, hyperactive and aggressive in nature. Many of the problems that single parents have are similar as those for two parents' family, but these problems seem more difficult to bear or manage when the home is being tutored by only one person.

The result of the second hypothesis showed that there is a significant influence of family type influence on social adjustment of secondary school students. The findings are in line with the view of Denga & Denga (2007) who while defining parenting in general term, said parenting is the activity which involves bringing up and looking after a child or children. This process, the authors assert, maybe carried out by biological or blood parents, or a parent in the case of single parents. The process may also involve surrogate parents (step –parents or special care-givers) who are not the real parents but are acting in loco parentis (in lieu of the biological or blood parents). Single relative parenting falls in the world of in loco parenting.

The environment of a single relative parent in the education of the child cannot be compared with biological parents (be they single biological parents) environment. The end product is the overall negative impact on the child or children which are ingredients for low self esteem, low self concept and social adjustment of adolescents in school. A combination of all these, can pre dispose the child to abuse, rejection and become tonics for

imbibing anti-social behaviours like truancy in school, gang fighting, cultism, stealing, prostitution and other forms of emotional instability.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the results and findings of the study, the following conclusions were reached.

Single parenting (male/female) and family type significantly influence social adjustment of secondary school students. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Parents should set clear standards for their children, monitor and limit what they set, and also allow children to develop autonomy.
2. Parents should be neither punitive nor aloof. Rather they should develop rules for their children and be affectionate with them. There should be cordial relationship between adolescents, and parents, staff and administration, participation in social and religious activities should be encouraged.
3. Parents should learn to accept, guide and be concerned over their children's needs to avoid academic, health and social problems. Parents and children should learn to maintain a cordial relationship and interaction to avoid family conflict and problem of the child's social interaction with others in school and society.
4. Parenting attention should be centered on organized abilities, needs, interest and desires. So that they can be expressed in a social context. This will enable the child to associate freely with others outside the home. Parents in this parenting styles or models should accept the child or individual with no personal regards of what the individual really is. This helps the child to develop a sense of self-belongingness, self esteem and independence because of the give-and-take, nature of the democratic parenting style. This is the most recommended style of parenting by child rearing experts.

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