



THE EFFECT OF DIVORCE ON THE WELLBEING OF YOUNG ADULTS

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Abstract

Qualitative research design utilizing focus group discussion was adopted for this case study aimed at understanding the effect of divorce on the wellbeing of young adults. Six participants were selected utilizing snowball sampling technique. A tape recorder was used in recording the conversations, field notes were also taken. Data were transcribed and analyzed utilizing content analysis using NVivo software in order to answer the research questions. Findings of the study revealed that divorce has significant effect on adolescents' well-being with emphasis on social, emotional and intellectual well-being. In relation to social wellbeing, three major themes were found "detachment, difficulty in making and keeping friends and poor socialization skills". Furthermore, three major themes were also found as the effect of divorce on emotional well-being among adolescents', "worry, anger and sadness". Finally, "poor academic performance", was identified as the effect of divorce on young adult intellectual well-being. Thus, the researchers concludes that divorce have significant effect on young adults wellbeing. Therefore the researchers recommended that psychologists, religious leaders and marriage counsellors should counsel intending couples before and after marriage to enable them overcome possible marital challenges that can lead to divorce. Couples should be psycho-educated on the effect of divorce on their children.

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Introduction

Most children experience difficulties as the result of their parents' divorce. Cases of separation and divorce are on the increase globally. In most cases, children from divorce families end up growing up under step-fathers, step- mothers or their father or mother (single parenthood) or with their grandparents which also has its own negative effect on the children. This serves as motivation for this study. The institution of marriage is faced with increased cases of unsettled differences that have led to increased rates of divorce cases (Reiter, Hjorleifsson, Breidablik & Meland, 2013). Mirror (2003) defined divorce as the complete dissolution or break up of marriage through legal means.

Divorce is a social wound, considering its huge emotional shock on adults and their children (Mucaj & Xeka, 2015). Newman and Newman (2015) reported that divorce affects the social wellbeing of adolescents. Thirty percent of adolescents from divorced homes have serious issues with social relationships (Amato, 2012). More social fear was found among adolescents whose parents are separated compared to those living together with their parents (Obeid, Al-Karaki, Haddad, Sacre, Soufia, Hallit, Salameh, & Hallit, 2021). Contrarily, Adofo, and Etsey, (2021) did not find significant difference in social adaptability among adolescents from divorce families. Esere, Idowu, and Onuegbu (2012) found that over one-third children in post-divorce family in Cross River state were intensely unhappy and dissatisfied with their lives. Issues that affects emotional wellbeing of children from divorce families includes; dealing with step parents, feeling unwanted by the parent that files for divorce, issues of child custody, visitation and support matters (Strong, DeVault, & Cohen, 2016).

Significant deficit in academic performance was found among children in divorce families (Mulholland, Watt, Philpott, & Sarlin, 1991). Children from divorce families, irrespective of their age, may experience decline in their academic performance; their grades may slip, (Komay, 2021). Njeru (2017) discovered significant positive correlation between parental divorce and emotional and social wellbeing among adolescents. According to Garriga and Pennoni (2020), temporary separation of parents has significant negative effects on young children.

Under the irretrievable breakdown of marriage theory, divorce is considered as the situation that occurs in marriage when couples refuse to live with each other and refuse to work towards reconciliation. The breakdown of marriage in this context is defined as such that marriage is broken down completely and there is no possibility for couples to live together again as husband and wife (Diwan, 2005). While communication theory of divorce posit that problem often start when couples misinterpret another's communication due to a lack of information or as the result of a pre-existing filter stemming from previous experiences that leads them to understand communication in a way that was not intended (Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 2011). Factors that cause divorce include improper marriage formation, wrong reason for marrying each other, lack of initial interest in spouse, inadequate dating before marriage, lack of adequate marriage preparation, unaware of partner selection and forced marriage (Varzaneh, Esmaily, Farahbakhsh, & Borjali, 2016).

Marital unhappiness is reported among young adults from divorced families also they are likely to divorce compare to those from intact families (Amato, 1996). Barret and Turner (2005) reported that individuals that experience parental discord and divorce experience marital instabilities in their own families. Furthermore, Frisco, Muller and Frank, (2007) discovered that prevalence of emotional, behavioral, interpersonal and academic difficulty is higher in children from divorce families compared to those from intact families. Divorce is strictly parents' decision, but it affects the children in different ways. Therefore, the problem investigated in this study is to establish how divorce affects the well-being of young adults from divorce

families. Thus, the study aims at understanding the effect of divorce on the social, emotional and intellectual well-being of young adults. The following research questions were answered in this study;

1. Does divorce affect the social well-being of young adults?
2. Would divorce affect the emotional well-being of young adults?
3. Does divorce affect the intellectual well-being of young adults?

Method

Design

Qualitative research design was adopted for this case study, utilizing focus group discussion in order to ascertain how divorce affects the well-being of young adults from divorced families. Only young adults between ages 18 – 20 that their parents are divorced for the past two years and above were included in this case study. While those whose parents were divorced less than two years and were less than 18 years or 21 years and above were excluded from the study.

Participants

Data was collected among young adults in Pankshin Local Government area of Plateau state, Nigeria. Participants were selected utilizing snowball sampling technique. Six young adults (three males and three females) between the ages of 18-20 years participated in this case study. Participant A's parents' divorced for 10 years, participant B and C's parents' were divorced for 5years each. Participant's D, E and F's parents were divorced for the past 4years, 2years and 8years respectively.

Instrument of Data Collection

Focus Group Discussion

Participants responded to open ended questions generated by the researchers during the focus group discussion. Each participant had equal opportunity to participate and contributed during the focus group discussion.

Ethical Consideration

Only participants that consent to participate in the study were included. The study posed no harm and or danger to participants; however, they were informed that it may cause feelings of anger considering that they would be reminded about their parents' decision to divorce. The aim and nature of the study was explained to participants', they were also informed that a tape recorder would be used to record discussion in order not to miss any vital information .Confidentiality was assured to participants that information provided would be used for research purpose only; and shall not in any way reveal their identity.

Procedure

Two young adult participants (a male and female) from divorce families assisted the researchers in recruiting other participants that participated in this study. Only six (three males and three females) participants met the inclusion criteria. Before commencement of the focus group discussion (FGD) on the meeting day, participants were told that their participation was voluntary. The focus group discussion lasted for the period of eighty minutes. The six participants, who were undergraduate students, were arranged in a round sitting position for the discussion. Participants were given approximately three minutes per question each to answer and elaborate on the following sub topics; social, emotional and intellectual well-being as it relates to divorce. One of the researchers moderate the discussion while two research assistants help in taking notes and recording the FGD. The field notes and the information recorded were transcribed, coded and analysed.

Method of Data Analysis

Data generated from the focus group discussion was audio-taped and transcribed online by otter.ai website, before coding the data and subsequently running data analysis utilizing NVivo software version 10. Content analysis was selected as the statistical tool for analyzing the qualitative data in order to determine the presence of themes, and key words with respect to the three (3) research questions in the study. As such the analysis was based on the effect of divorce on the social, emotional, and intellectual well-being of young adults.

Result

Data collected from the FGD were analyzed utilizing content analysis. The results are presented below.

Analysis of research questions

Research question One

Responses from the study participants revealed three major themes in terms of the effect of divorce on young adult's social well-being. These were *detachment*, *difficulty in making and keeping friends*, and *poor socialization skills*.

Detachment

The findings from common responses revealed that young adult participants that experienced the divorce of their parents were detached from others in their environment. This is attested to by statements such as “...and they notice I was detached...” and “I hardly can keep a male friend for long...” Other statements include “...I changed my school and move to a different environment entirely after the divorce...”

Difficulty in making and keeping Friends

The results also showed that the participants had problems of difficulty with making and maintaining friends in school. The following common statements points to this: “... I have few friends then in school” “I don't keep too many friends especially in school that's the kind of person I am” “I only have two female friends and we are still together...” “Yes, it affected my relationship with my friends” and “It affected my relationship with friends especially those from the opposite sex”

Poor socialization Skills

The result also revealed that common responses indicated that participants had poor socialization skills as responses pointed to some level of difficulty with socialising with others in terms of interaction with family members, and displaying feelings of helplessness. The following statements attest to these: “... because we don't interact with each other as we use to, we are on our own...” and “...became fed up with life and mostly helpless...”

Research question Two

The overall findings from the study participants regarding the effect of divorce on emotional well-being revealed the following themes: *Worry*, *anger*, and *sadness*.

Worry

The findings revealed that participants were generally worried as an after effect of the divorce experience of parents. Statements such as “Then after the divorce I was worried...” and “... and worried about it when I was told...” points to the level of worry expressed by participants. More so, participants indicated that the emotional state of a parent influenced their state of worry, as indicated by common statement such as “... am only worried because she is not happy and her happiness matters to me”

Anger

Results revealed that anger was another emotional state that participants had, as statements indicated that they were angry as attested to by statements such as “*I felt a lot of things, but mostly angry...*” and this state of anger resulted to some participants indicating that they were easily irritated as point to by statements such as “*... I easily get irritated...*”

Sadness

Findings showed that participants felt bad and unhappy about their parents’ divorce. The following statements attest to this: “*I felt very bad and I wonder why this is happening to me*” and “*I was unhappy at first...*”

Research question Three

The findings with regards to the effect of divorce on intellectual well-being of adolescents revealed that the major effect was a *drop in academic performance in school*. This is indicated by statements such as “*I used to be an above the average student in my secondary school time, but this whole divorce thing affected me and my performance dropped*”, “*I had to repeat my class because I was not performing well...*” and “*Well, it affected my performance in school then and I had to repeat my class*”

Discussion

This case study investigated the effect of divorce on young adult’s well-being. Findings revealed that the social well-being of adolescents from divorced families is affected. Three major themes found were, *detachment, difficulty in making and keeping friends* and *poor socialization skills*. The findings from common responses based on detachment revealed that adolescent that experienced the divorce of their parents were detached from others in their environment. This is attested to by statements such as “*...and they notice I was detached...*” and “*I hardly can keep a male friend for long...*” Other statements include “*...I changed my school and move to a different environment entirely after the divorce...*”

Furthermore, based on the findings “*... Difficulty in making and keeping of Friends,*” revealed that participants had problems of difficulty with making and maintaining friends in school. The following common statements points to this: “*... I have few friends then in school*” “*I don’t keep too many friends especially in school that’s the kind of person I am*” “*I only have two female friends and we are still together...*” “*Yes, it affected my relationship with my friends*” and “*It affected my relationship with friends especially those from the opposite sex*”.

The result based on *poor socialization skills* revealed that common responses indicated that participants had poor socialization skills as responses pointed to some level of difficulty with socialising with others in terms of interaction with family members, and displaying feelings of helplessness. The following statements attest to these: “*... because we don’t interact with each other as we use to, we are on our own...*” and “*...became fed up with life and mostly helpless...*” Similarly, Newman and Newman (2015) reported that divorce affects the social wellbeing of adolescents. Also, Obeid, et al (2021) reported that more social fear was found among adolescents whose parents are separated compared to those living together with their parents.

Findings based on effect of divorce on emotional well-being of adolescents’ revealed the following key themes, *worry, anger, and sadness*. The findings revealed that participants were generally worried as an after effect of the divorce experience of parents. Statements such as “*Then after the divorce I was worried...*” and “*... and worried about it when I was told...*” points to the level of worry expressed by participants. More so, participants indicated that the emotional state of a parent influenced their state of worry, as indicated by common statement such as “*... am only worried because she is not happy and her*

happiness matters to me". Similarly, Strong, et al (2016) discovered that, as parents' divorce, there are many issues that arise that could affect the emotional well-being of adolescents from such families such as issues of dealing with step parents, feeling unwanted by the parent that files for divorce, issues of child custody, visitation and support matters among other issues.

Findings of this present study also revealed that *anger* was another emotional state that participants had, as statements indicated that they were angry as attested to by statements such as "*I felt a lot of things, but mostly angry...*" and this state of anger resulted to some participants indicating that they were easily irritated as point to by statements such as "... *I easily get irritated...*"

Sadness was the third theme found under effect of divorce on emotional well-being of adolescents. Participants felt bad and unhappy about their parents' divorce. The following statements attest to this: "*I felt very bad and I wonder why this is happening to me*" and "*I was unhappy at first...*" in line with this finding, Esere, et al (2012), found that over one-third children in post-divorce family in Cross River State Nigeria were intensely unhappy and dissatisfied with their lives. Seventeen percent of this number felt rejected and unloved by their mothers, and thirty-nine percent felt rejected and unloved by their fathers.

Finally, findings of this study revealed that divorce affect the intellectual well-being of adolescents from divorce families. The major effect was *a drop in academic performance in school*. This is indicated by statements such as "*I used to be an above the average student in my secondary school time, but this whole divorce thing affected me and my performance dropped*", "*I had to repeat my class because I was not performing well...*" and "*Well, it affected my performance in school then and I had to repeat my class*". Deficit in academic performance was found among children in divorce families (Mulholland, et al 1991).

Conclusion

Findings of this case study revealed three major themes, *detachment, difficulty in making and keeping friends and poor socialization skills* were identified as effects of divorce on adolescents' social well-being. In relation to effect of divorce on emotional well-being of adolescents, three major themes were also found, *worry, anger and sadness*. Finally content analysis of the effect of divorce on adolescents' intellectual well-being revealed that there is a major *drop in academic performance in school*. Thus, the researcher concludes that divorce significantly affect young adults from divorce families. The main limitation of the study was difficulty in getting adequate participants to participate in the study. Therefore the researchers recommend that more participants should be included in the focus group and in-depth interview should also be conducted in similar study in the future. Furthermore, psychologists, religious leaders and marriage counsellors should counsel intending couples before and after marriage on possible causes of divorce and how to overcome such. Also, couples should be psycho-educated on the effect of divorce on their children. There is need for setting up of special centres for counselling and psycho-educating children from divorce families on how to improve their well-being and quality of life.

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