

## Perceived Impact of Divorce and Geographical Separation of Couples on Bullying Behaviour of In- School Adolescents in Nigeria

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### Abstract

There has been increasing incidence of violent behavior among adolescents the world over and Nigeria in particular. How to contend with violence in Nigerian schools is one of the greatest challenges facing the present administration in Nigeria. It is against this background that the researcher took interest to conduct study on some of its probable predictors. This may help in providing prevention and remediation strategies. This study investigated the perceived impact of divorce and geographical separation of couples on bullying behavior of in-school adolescents. Survey design carried Expo facto was adopted. 368 in -school adolescents who fell under divorce and geographically separated couples constituted the sample. Two research instruments namely: Parents Habitation Questionnaire (**PHQ**) and Bullying Behavior Questionnaire (**BBQ**) were used for the collection of data. Binomial test of proportion and average **Mode value** were used to answer the research questions while t-test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.01 level of significance. Among the major findings is that divorce is strongly perceived to be affecting bullying behavior of in-school adolescents. Therefore, the results of this study would be beneficial to parents, teachers and policy makers in education. Parents and teachers would be enabled through the results of this study to access information on appropriate intervention strategies to adopt for the prevention and management of adolescents' bullying behavior. Attempt to decrease the incidence of peer-bullying through policy and practice would help to create a conducive school learning environment. Among the recommendations is that parents should spend more quality time with their children.

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**Keywords:** divorce, bullying, geographically separated couples, deviant behavior, adolescent

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### INTRODUCTION

The school has always been recognized as the institution for the transfer of knowledge and culture to the future generation. It is a dynamic human system dedicated to nurturing of mutual growth and understanding between children and adult (Aluede, 2011). For teachers effort not to be wasted, and for learners to change along with the education objectives, some factors that affect teaching and learning which include: age, home and social effects, heredity, violence in school including peer-bullying need to be addressed. This study focuses on bullying behavior of in-school adolescents.

The increasing incidence of bullying behavior among adolescents/youths the world over and Nigeria inclusive is both alarming and shocking. Government agencies and school authorities are beginning to recognize that bullying is no more a simple harmless childhood behavior or part of growing-up because of its devastating effects on victims, schools parents and society at large. For instance, Abramowitz, and Leary (1999) made a convincing case for the negative social, academic and psychological impacts school bullying has on learners. According to him, an exposure to bullying by peer has been found to be related to increased school dropout rate, lower self-esteem, fewer friends and declining grades

Bullying has been a topic of much attention both in Nigeria and other countries of the world. Government agencies and school authorities are beginning to recognize that it is no more a simple harmless childhood behaviour or part of growing up because of its devastating effects on victims, school, parents and society at large (Aluede, 2006 & Aluede, 2011)

Bullies are seldom unable to develop and maintain positive relationship. Olweus (2001a) also pointed out that bullying may have harmful effect on bullied, the effect can last long into the future and they include: depression, low self esteem truancy, poor grades, suicide thoughts and psychological fears.

Because of these devastating effects of bullying on victims and school environment in general, government agencies and school authorities all over the world are beginning to devise programmes that geared towards decreasing the incidence of bullying. For instance, the national bullying prevention campaign: exploring the nature and prevention of bullying, Child Health Bureau (U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 2007) has initiated programmes and policies to reduce bullying among the youth. In addition, several States in USA have passed legislations and created practice guidelines that pertain to school responsibility in the prevention of bullying and school violence. To the best of the

researcher's knowledge, no concerted effort has been made by either the government or non-governmental organization to institute policies or intervention programmes towards curbing or reducing the incidence of bullying in Nigeria school system, hence the need for the present study.

Psychologists are of the view that the best way to finding solution to a problem begins with tracing the root or source of the problem and tackling the problem from the root. They noted that socialization of the child beings at home and the nature of parenting and home climate are directly associated with behaviour of children in that home. Therefore the present study tries to find out the perceived impact of divorced couples and geographically separated couples on bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents.

Bullying can be commonly defined as harming others by physical attack or by hurting other's feelings through words, actions or social exclusion (Asogwa,2003). Aluede (2011) views bullying as a form of aggression, a form of social interaction in which a more powerful individual (the bully) exhibits aggressive behaviour intended to cause harm to the less dominant individual. Bullying at school is associated with a host of negative outcomes. School climate and bullying are negatively related to one another. On the other hand school climate can improve as a result of bullying prevention programme (Arowole. 2003)

Divorce is another variable of this study. Hornby (2004) defines divorce as a legal ending of marriage. According to Asogwa (2003), divorce is viewed as complete breaking up or dissolution of marriage through legal means. Marriage break-up (divorce) appears to be on the increase in Nigeria. Available literature reviewed by researcher (Asogwa, 2003 and Aroh, 2007) confirmed this stance and attributed it to global waves of globalization or borrowed culture. One does not know the impact of the increase wave of divorce on deviant behaviour viz a vis bullying habit of in-school adolescents. The present study aims at establishing this empirically.

Furthermore, the harsh economic situation in Nigeria over the past three decades has posed serious financial problem to many families. This present situation has affected the family set-up which demands husband and wife to be gainfully employed and to earn income, in order to provide the increased needs of family members due to globalization and advance in technology. The present phenomenon tends to make couples to live in different locations in a bid to defend their classifications (occupations). This brings the researcher to another major variable of the study, that is, geographical separation of couples.

Geographical separation of couples in this paper refers to physical separation of husband from his wife and vice versa (Aroh, 2007). This may be because of economic or socio-political factor, such as employment or business enterprise. Even couples who are self-employed sometimes have a need to travel from one part of the world to another, away from family house for months or years. Couples are disconnected frequently when this happens. One does not know the degree of impact of such physical disconnection from home on the development of behaviour of children from such homes, hence the need for the present study: which seeks to find out the perceived impact of divorce of couples and geographical separation of couples on bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents.

### Research Methods

The study adopted survey design ( Ex-post-facto ) which explores the perceived impact of divorced couples and geographically separated couple on bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents. The population of the study was made up of all the junior secondary school II (JSSII) students in the two States of Southern Nigeria, namely: Abia and Akwa Ibom states. According to the statistics obtained from the state school management board of both states, there was a total of 3396 JSS2 students spread across 228 Junior secondary schools in Abia State and 2, 225 JSS2 students spread across the 227 junior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

A total of 368 JSS2 students from divorced and geographically separated couples constituted the sample. Simple random sampling technique was adopted in the selection of 100 junior secondary schools from each State. Also Parents Habitation Questionnaire (PHQ) was developed by researcher and used for identifying students of divorced couples and geographically separated couples. After collection of the completed PHQ items in Abia State, 128 students fell under geographically separated couples while 70 students fell under divorced couples totaling 198 students. Also in Akwa Ibom State, 125 students fell under geographically separated couples and 45 students fell under divorced couples totaling 170 students.

Bullying Behaviour Questionnaire (BBQ) which consists of 16 items was used to collect data from the participants. This questionnaire items was scaled on a four-point Likert scale of always = 4, sometimes = 3 rarely = 2 and never = 1. Data collected from the four-point Likert scale would first be reduced to two categories of "Always" and "Never" or "Strong" and "Weak" responses. Binomial test of proportion using Z-approximations and Mode value were used in answering the research questions while t-test was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.01 level of significance.

Four experts from the department of measurement and evaluation and psychological foundations validated the instruments. The instrument was also subjected to test-retest and reliability analysis and it yielded a reliability estimate of 0.64 which indicated that it was reliable.

**Two research questions guided the study:-**

1. Is divorce perceived to be affecting bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents?
2. Is geographical separation of couples perceived to be affecting bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents?

Null Hypothesis: Null hypothesis was tested at 0.01 level of significance

1. There is no significant difference between the bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents of divorced couples and bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents of geographically separated couples

**Result**

The data collected were statistically analyzed and presented below:

**Research Question 1**

- 1 To what extent is divorce perceived to be affecting bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents?

Table 1a: Mode analysis of impact of divorce of couples on bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents

Responses	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Average	Average (Arithmetic Mean)	Range (Mode)	Decision/Conclusion
Proportion/%	281 (76.4%)	44 (12.0%)	20 (5.4%)	23 (6.2%)	3.6	4	3	Always

(Based on Mode Values)

Table 1b: Binomial test of proportion using Z-approximations

		Category	N	Observed Prop.	Test Prop.	Asymp.sig (2-tailed)
To What Extent is Divorce perceived to be affecting Bullying behaviour	Group 1	Always	325	.88	.50	P=000 0.035 0.685 P<0.05 * P<0.01 **
	Group 2	Never	43	.12		
	Total		368	1.00		

\* = Significant

\*\* = Highly Significant

**CONCLUSION**

Observed proportion = 0.88; Test proportion =0.50.  
P<000; p<0.01; Test is Highly significant)  
There is a strong perception at 99% statistical assurance that divorce strongly affects the bullying behavior of in-school adolescents

Research Question 2  
Is geographical separation of couples perceived to be affecting bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents?.

Table 2a: Mode analysis of impact of geographical separation of couples on bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents

Responses	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Average	Average (Arithmetic Mean)	Range	Decision/Conclusion
Proportion/%	142 (38.6%)	132 (35.9%)	47 (12.8%)	47 (12.8%)	3.0	3.0	4	3

(Based on Moe Values)

**2b Binomial Test of proportion using Z-approximation**

		Category	N	Observed Prop.	Test prop.	Asymp.sig.(2-Tailed)
To what extent does geographical separation of couples perceived to be affecting your bullying behaviour2	Group 1	Always	274	.74	.50	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Group 2	Never	94	.26		
	Total		368	1.00		

**Conclusion**

Observed proportion= 0.74; Test proportion =0.50  
(p= 0.000;<0.01;Test is Highly significant)

There is a strong perception at 99% Statistical confidence that geographically separated couples strong affect the bulling of in- school adolescents.

Ho: There is no significant difference between the bullying behaviour of in –school adolescent of divorce couples and bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents of geographically separated couples.

Table 3: t- test for equality of means of bullying behaviour among in-school adolescents of divorced couples and geographically separated couples.

Parents Marital State	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Mean Deviation	T	Df	Sig. (2-Tailed)	Decision
Divorced Homes Bullying behaviour	116	3.4805	0.66872	0.22411	2.848	366	0.005	<b>P=0.005 P&lt;0.01 Test is Highly Significant</b>
Geographically Separated home	252	3.2563	0.71574					

(t=2.848; p=0.005; p<0.01; Test is Highly Significant)

**Conclusion**

The bullying behaviour or trait among in –school adolescents of divorced couples is significantly higher than those among in –school adolescents of geographically separated couples.. (t=2.848; p =0.005; p< 0.01)

**DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

In the discussion of research findings, the approach adopted is to discuss the three major findings that emerged from this research study.

There is strong perception that divorce always affects the bullying behaviour of in- school adolescents. Table 1a shows that 325 out of 368 respondents agreed that divorce always impacts on bullying behaviour of in- school adolescents with a **mode** of 4 and **mean** of 3.6. Table 1b showed that the observed proportion of those that agreed that divorce always affect the bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents stood at .88 or 88 percent indicating a very strong impact.

The above finding is in line with Aroh (2001) and Arowole(2003) who investigated on the impact of family violence and separation of couples on bullying behaviour of youths and reported that greater percentage of bullies came from families with very tense home climate and divorced couples

Oleweus (2001a) reported that incidences of peer-bullying among 12 -18 years old students had risen in the United State of America from 5% -in 1991- to 7% in 1999 as a result of high wave of divorce.

Secondly there is also strong perception at 99% statistical assurance that geographical separation of couples strongly affects the bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents. Table 2 a and 2b clearly reveal that geographical separation of couples affects the bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents. The total agreed responses stood at 274 out of 368 responses, representing 74 percent. The mean is 3.0 while mode is 4. Equally, the observed proportion using Z-approximation is .74 which indicates that there is strong perception at 99% statistical assurance that

geographical separation of couples is perceived to impact on bullying behaviour of in- school adolescents

Socialization of a child is a joint responsibility of both parents and where one parent undertakes the bulk of the tasks most of the time due to geographical separation of couples, effective monitoring of children, consistency in punishment and wholesome parenting may be lacking. This situation may result in breeding children with deviant behaviour of which bullying behaviour is one of them.

The above finding corroborates with the findings of Asogwa(2003) and Aluede(2006). They found that family mechanisms, for examples, single parenthood, tense home climate, and poor parent- adolescent communication were positively associated with adolescent’s aggressive behaviour.

Thirdly and lastly, testing the null hypothesis: there is no significant difference between the bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents from divorce couples and bullying behaviour of in-school adolescents from geographical separated couples.

The result in table 3 shows that bullying behaviour from in-school adolescents of divorced couples are higher than that bullying behaviour of in- school adolescents from geographically separated couples. On table 3, t = 2.848 showing that the test is highly significant and the null hypothesis is rejected. The above finding is in line with Aluede(2011) who reported that incidences of violent and aggressive behaviour among adolescent had risen sharply between 2006 and 2009 as a result of high increase in the rate of divorce. Furthermore, the researcher views divorce as a more serious condition than geographical separation of couples. Divorce is a legal termination of marriage. Divorce couples may no longer have common interest in respect of their children’s upbringing after legal termination of their marriage. On the other hand, geographical separation occurs due to the need for one to defend his or her own classification. The marriage of geographically separated coupled is still alive or intact and couples in such condition continually interact with one

another (especially now that there are cell phones) to run their family affairs

### CONCLUSION

The result of this study confirms that there is strong perception at 99% statistical assurance that divorce of couples strongly impact on bullying behaviour of in-school adolescence. Also, there is strong perception that geographical separation of couple strongly impact of bullying behaviour of in school adolescents. On relative impact of divorced and geographical separated couples on bullying behaviour of in –school adolescents, result reveals that bullying behaviour (trait) of in school adolescents of divorced couples is higher than bullying behavior of in-school adolescents of geographically separated couples.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:-

1. Married couples should be encouraged to live together so as to provide adequate parenting to their children as most deviant behaviour (bullying inclusive) are associated with unfavorable family psychological climate
2. Parents should spend more quality time with their children, providing favourable home climate to enable their children to develop appropriate behaviour pattern. They should reinforced family rules for bullying and positive reward for appropriate behaviour. It is therefore imperative to include parents in any bullying intervention measures organized by government and education authority
3. Western and global waves of globalization are seen to be contributing to the destabilization of marriage institutions in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Nigeria government should therefore strengthen the marriage laws in a bid to lessen the easy break-up syndrome bedeviling marriages in our contemporary society.
4. Teachers and parents should be made to understand that bullying is dangerous and should not be seen as part of childhood development or growing up. The reason is because bullying traumatizes millions of students each year and under mines the fabric of school life for many more.

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