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# INFLUENCE OF FAMILY STRUCTURES AND PARENTAL EDUCATION ON THE PSYCHOSOCIAL ADJUSTMENTS OF ADOLESCENTS IN EBONYI STATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

*This study investigated the Influence of Family Structures and Parental Education on the Psychosocial Adjustment of Adolescents in Ebonyi State secondary schools. To guide the study, six research questions were formulated; while six null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha levels. The design adopted for the study was descriptive survey. Senior Secondary 2 students in the 143 government owned secondary schools in Ebonyi South and Central Zones of the State, constituted the population. The sample size was 600 (240 males, 360 females) drawn using multistage and simple random sampling technique from 23 co-educational schools, male and female secondary schools in Ebonyi South and Central Zones. The instrument used for data collection was a Questionnaire in two sections, A and B. Section A was patterned to elicit student's background information, while Section B was the instrument titled Adolescents Psychosocial Adjustment Questionnaire (APAQ) which was adapted from Nwikpo's (2015) instrument. The Adolescent Psychosocial Adjustment Questionnaire (APAQ) was validated by three experts: two in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation, both in the Department of Educational Foundations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State; while the third expert was from the Department of Psychological Foundations, Abia State University Uturu, Abia State. The reliability of the instrument was analysed using Cronbach Alpha statistics, which yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.89. Data collected were analysed using mean to answer research questions, and ANOVA to test hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level. The major findings were that family structures and parental educational attainments influence significantly the psychosocial adjustment mean scores of male and female adolescents in Ebonyi State secondary schools. It was recommended among others that teachers, school councillors and psychologists, should sieve out adolescents with psychosocial adjustment problems in their classes and give them closer attention and supervision.*

**Keywords**: Family Structures**,** Parental Education, Adolescents and Psychosocial Adjustment.

## Introduction

Secondary education is made up of students whose age, range from 11 to 20 years. Students, especially those in senior secondary two, are those whose sexual organs are fully developed that they are clearly distinguished as sexual beings (Mish, 2007). It is these categories of students that are referred to as adolescents.

Adolescents are males and females that are characterised by active physical, psychological, emotional and social changes that are associated with many challenges that influence behaviour. In the school therefore, these adolescents strive to perform excellently in their academic tasks; but when their target is not being achieved, they get worried and frustrated, and may perceive such failure to have originated from their family background factors.

Ibia (2006) had defined family as a group of related kinds linked by blood and marriage which occupy a common household that is characterized by economic co-operation and solidarity. The author further stated that family as a cohesive unit, should provide economic, social and psychological security to all its members so as to enable the children reason, feel and behave well both at home and in the school. Besides, family should teach children certain basic attitudes, give them moral training, inculcate values and encourage in them spirit of industry. All these attributes associated with the family, help to contribute towards equipping and encouraging learning

as well as good adjustment of children at home and in the school.

Adjustment of students during adolescence is an object of primary concern among stake holders in education. Nnachi (2003) had viewed adjustment as the ability of an individual to adapt to the existing changes in the environment. Apparently, adolescents adjust in order to actualise their needs and aspiration within and outside the school setting. Researchers like Mahmood and Iqbal (2015), Abdullah, Elias, Mahyddiu and Uli (2009), Nurmi, Aunola and Samela-Aros (2009) and Nnachi (2007) variously asserted that students may be well adjusted or maladjusted. Well adjusted adolescents according to Abdulla et al (2009) are those that obtain good grades, pass their exams, interact and associate well with their peers and eventually graduate from school. Nurmi et al (2009) added that well adjusted adolescents value what they learn, get positively involved in classroom activities and score higher grades than poorly adjusted adolescents.

Nnachi (2007); Agulanna (2014); SalmoraAros (2009); Raju and Rahamtuca (2007) all asserted that adolescents may be maladjusted. Rahamtucca et al (2007) viewed maladjusted adolescents as students with low grades, perform poorly academically, have problem behaviour, lack educational goals, and are likely to drop out of school. Adjustment affect not only the social, but also the psychological aspect of adolescents both at homes and in the school. Hence, psychosocial adjustment of adolescents is of great importance to education enterprise.

Psychosocial Adjustment as viewed by Nwikpo (2015), is the combine influence of Psychological factors and social environment on the social and mental well being of adolescents and their ability to function. The researcher of this study conceived psychosocial adjustment, as those psychological and social variables that work co-operatively to help students fit into learning situations. While psychological aspect involve variables such as self esteem, self efficacy, self image and optimism; the social aspect involve variable such as social status, social relations and interpersonal relationship. Researchers like Obi (2016); Ekeh (2011) and Johnson (2003) variously enumerated the indices of psychosocial adjustment of adolescents to include depressed mood, academic and social competence, adolescents' family and educational attainment of parents. Therefore, this study investigated the influence of family structures and parental educational status on psychosocial adjustment of male and female adolescents in Ebonyi State.

Family Structures according to Frazier (2003), is the interactions between parents and their children: whether biological or step parent, living within one house hold with their children. The researcher of this work viewed family structures as the make-up of family unit, where father, mother, child/children and other family members interact among themselves. To this end, the researcher of this work was interested in examining intact, single and step parent family structures as these are the ones typically found in villages and communities in Ebonyi State.

Intact family structure is one which allows the biological parents to live together with their children in the same household. In intact family according to Alika, Edosa and Ogboro (2012), parents ensure that their children grow up being healthy mentally, physically, socially, psychologically and morally. Adolescents, who are raised in intact families with strong unity, tend to reason well, interact properly with peers in school, behave well and then work assiduously towards actualizing their academic goals. Despite the importance that may be attached to intact families, changing societal values, economic down turns and westernization have affected marriage institutions, thereby giving rise to large number of broken or single parent homes.

Single parent family structure as conceive by Salami and Alowode (2000), is a situation in which one of the individuals involved in the conception of a child/children, becomes responsible for the upbringing of the child in the home without the presence of the other. Simon and Johnson (2006) asserted that adolescents in single parent homes are less monitored, treated with more hostility and may experience harsh punishment. The author added that adolescents of this family structure are generally faced with challenges of

inadequate financial resources and lowered family status. Single parenting, may be caused by death, divorce or marital conflict. However, single father or mother who divorced, may decide to remarry; as such, giving rise to step parent family structure.

Step-parent family is another family structure that can influence the psychosocial adjustment of adolescents in schools. Nnachi (2011), opined that step parent family exists where either the biological father or mother died, divorced or remarried; leaving the children to be reared by the new husband or wife. The researcher of this study conceived step parent family, as a family condition, where a man or a woman lives in the same household with his/her new spouse together with the children from their previous relationships. The author of this work observed that step parenting was once an intact family structure. It is because of death, divorce, marital infidelity or constant marital conflict that made one of the spouses to remarry. The adolescents' wellbeing from step parent families apparently depends on the type of parent cohabiting with children from their previous relationship. Beside, parents from different family structures may have attained one educational level or the other which may help them to directly involve themselves in ensuring that their children in schools are well adjusted socially and psychologically, hence parental educational status, as variable that can influence the psychosocial adjustment of adolescents in Ebonyi State.

Carter (2006), viewed parental education, as a program, support services and resources that parents or caregivers received, which enabled them increase their capacity and confidence to raise children that are mentally healthy in school. The researcher of this work defined parental education as the highest educational qualification attained by parents. Practically, Nwikpo (2015), categorization of parents' education was adapted by the researcher to include parents who are very highly educated, highly educated, middle educated, low educated and very low educated. Apparently, parents of these educational attainments respectively possessed Ph.D/Masters, HND/OND, NCE, SSCE and FSLC as their highest educational qualifications. Accordingly, the categorisation made in this present study was five; and they are represented with VHE (very highly educated) HE (highly educated) ME (moderately educated), LE (low educated) and VLE (very low educated). However, what gave rise to this study was to ascertain whether these highest educational qualifications obtained by parents from different family structures can impact on the psychosocial adjustment of male and female adolescents in Ebonyi State secondary school.

The problem of this study was due to the perceived manifestation of adolescent's maladjusted behaviour which could be a pivot for their educational underachievement in school. The researcher therefore wants to ascertain whether the student's family background factors and their parental educational attainments could be the cause of this student's perceived problems in school.

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of family structures and parental educational attainment on the psychosocial adjustment of male and female adolescents. Specifically, the study sought to find out the following:

1. The psychosocial adjustment mean score of adolescents from intact, single and step parent families.
2. The psychosocial adjustment means score of adolescents whose parents have different educational attainments.

The research questions which the researcher posed to guide the study were:

1. What are the mean psychosocial adjustment score of adolescents from intact, single and step parent families?
2. What are the mean psychosocial adjustment score of adolescents whose parents have different educational attainments?

The hypotheses formulated by the researcher to guide the study at 0.05 alpha levels were as follows:

1. The psychosocial adjustment mean scores of adolescents do not differ significantly as a result of their family structures.
2. The psychosocial adjustment mean scores of adolescents do not differ

significantly as a result of the educational attainment of parents.

This study is beneficial to teachers, students, school counsellors, psychologist, school administrators and future researchers. These educational stakeholders would be imbued with knowledge that can help them devise individualised instructions and counselling strategies that could help adolescents with psychosocial problems caused either by their family background factors or educational attainment of their parents.

**Research Method**

The study utilised descriptive survey. The sample size was 600 (240 males and 360 females) drawn using multistage sampling and simple random sampling technique. The population was the SS2 students in Ebonyi State secondary schools numbering 12091. Multistage sampling technique was used to draw the sample from 23 male schools, female schools and co=educational schools in the selected two, out of three zones that comprised the state. The instrument used for data collection was titled Adolescent Psychosocial Adjustment Questionnaire (APAQ). The questionnaire (APAQ) adapted from Nwikpo (2015) scale, was a thirty item questionnaire. The questionnaire used for the study, was divided into two sections: A and B. Section A was structured to elicit students' information such as gender, parents' highest qualification and student's family type. Section B was titled Adolescents' Psychosocial Adjustment Questionnaire (APAQ) which yielded the psychosocial adjustment scores of adolescents. It was structured on a four point scale of Very High Extent--4points, to Very Low Extent—1 point. The instrument was validated by three experts; its reliability was estimated using Cronbach Alpha statistics, which yielded an alpha co-efficient of 0.89. The researcher with his two assistants administered the copies of the questionnaires to the respondents in order to generate data that were analysed to get the result of this study. To that end, research questions were answered using mean; while the null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using ANOVA.

**Table 1: The Mean Psychosocial Adjustment Score of Adolescents from Different Family Structures.**

| Variables | N | Mean | SD | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Single parenting | 184 | 55.43 | 16.65 | |
| Step parenting | 91 | 59.93 | 11.76 | Highest score |
| Intact parents | 325 | 50.99 | 13.45 | |
| Total | 600 | 53.71 | 14.63 | |

Table 1 reveals that the students from step families have the highest mean psychosocial adjustment score of 59.93 more than the mean scores from other family structures. Suggestively, adolescents who are from step-parents families are psychosocially adjusted more than the adolescents from other family structures.

Table 2: **The Mean Psychosocial Adjustment Score of Adolescents Whose Parents have Different Levels of Educational Attainment.**

| Parental Edu. | N | Mean | SD | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| VLE | 177 | 43.64 | 8.32 | |
| LE | 116 | 45.46 | 9.29 | |
| ME | 151 | 55.03 | 7.73 | |
| LE | 135 | 65.80 | 9.08 | |
| VHE | 21 | 96.90 | 7.43 | Highest Score |
| Total | 600 | 53.71 | 14.63 | |

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Table 2 indicates that with mean score of 96.90, adolescents from very highly educated parents have the highest psychosocial adjustment mean score than those adolescents whose parents have other educational attainments. This suggests that adolescents whose parents are very highly educated are better adjusted psychosocially than others.

**Null Hypotheses 1:** The psychosocial adjustment means scores of adolescents from intact, single and step families does not differ significantly.

**Table 7**: **ANOVA Test of Comparison of Difference in the Psychosocial Adjustment Mean Scores of Adolescents from Intact, Single and Step Parents' Families.**

| Source of variation | SS | df | MS | Cal.F | P>0.05 | REM. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | 6466.866 | 2 | 3233.433 | 15.857 | 0.000 | S |
| Within Groups | 121734.674 | 597 | 203.911 | | | |
| Total | 128201.540 | 599 | | | | |

In table 7, it was observed that at 0.05 level of significance 2df numerator and 597 df denominator, the calculated F15.86 with P-value 0.000 is less than 0.05. The first null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Therefore, there is a significance difference in the mean psychosocial adjustment scores of adolescents from intact, single and step-parents family structures.

**Null Hypothesis 2:** There is no significance difference in the mean psychosocial adjustment scores of adolescents based on their parental educational attainments.

**TABLE 8: ANOVA on the mean Psychosocial Adjustment Scores of Adolescents based on their Parental Educational Attainments**

| Source of variation | SS | df | MS | Cal.F | P>0.05 | REM. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Between Groups | 85013.935 | 4 | 21253.484 | 292.811 | 0.000 | S |
| Within Groups | 43187.605 | 595 | 72.584 | | | |
| Total | 128201.540 | 599 | | | | |

Table 8 reveals that at 0.05 level of significance 4df numerator and 595 df denominator, the calculated F292.81 with P-value 0.000 is less than 0.05. The second null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Then, there is significance difference in the mean psychosocial adjustment scores of adolescents based on their parental educational attainments.

**Discussion of Findings**

The data in the tables revealed that the psychosocial adjustment mean scores of adolescents from step-parent was the highest, compared with those from other family structures in Ebonyi State Secondary Schools. The findings showed that the psychosocial adjustment of adolescents differed significantly as a result of their family structures. The findings aligned with that of Seltzert and Bianchi (2008) which revealed that remarried custodial parent may cause the parent to become involved in their children's educational life especially when the custodial parent is the biological parent of the children. Similarly, remarried non-custodial parents were likely to spend more time with their step children whom they live with, than their biological children from their previous relationships. When such occurs, the children would be at advantage as their needs would always be provided to ensure that they are

psychosocially adjusted. The author concluded that adolescents from step-parents family are somewhat psychosocially adjusted than adolescents from other family types. The finding is suggestive that since step parenting may arise due to serious conflict among couples, the remarried couples tend to avoid conflict as much as possible and would not want their family to fail again. This idea therefore, will motivate them to work hard in their relationship in order to ensure that their children are better adjusted psychosocially in school.

However, the research findings of Falci (2006) contrasted with the present findings. The author had observed that adolescents from intact families tend to exhibit better emotional and mental wellbeing and were less likely to exhibit behavioural problems which could impact on their poor academic performance. The difference in the findings could be as a result of the cultural differences in the area where the research was conducted.

The findings revealed that adolescents from very highly educated parents have the highest psychosocial adjustment mean scores than those from parents with other educational attainments in Ebonyi State secondary schools. The result of the findings showed that the psychosocial adjustment mean scores of adolescents differed significantly from adolescents whose parents have different levels educational attainments. Apparently, the result is suggestive that adolescent whose parents are very highly educated were better adjusted in school than their counterparts whose parents have other educational attainment status. This result aligned with the research findings of Johnson (2003) which observed that adolescents whose parents are very highly educated have greater regards for learning, have more positive attitude towards learning, have stronger work orientation and make use of strong and effective learning strategies than students whose parents acquire lower educational attainment status.

However, the findings of Donna (2009), differed from this present findings. Donna had observed that parents who have attained different levels of education but experience high family conflict, disrupts both the family and the psychosocial adjustment of students in school. The author had concluded that there was no statistical difference in the academic and behavioural competence of children whose parents have attained different levels of education.

The findings revealed that male and female adolescents from step families and male and female adolescents from very highly educated parents have the highest psychosocial adjustment scores than those from other family structures as well as those from parents with other educational attainments. The findings also showed that the psychosocial adjustment scores of male and female adolescents differed significantly as a result of their family structures and educational attainment levels of their parents. This study was in agreement with the findings of Selzert and Bianchi (2008) which observed a significant difference in the psychosocial adjustment scores of male and female adolescents from different family structures. The author pointed out that girls tend to have more difficulty getting along with step parent more than boys especially with step mothers. Contrarily, the boys appeared to be emotionally balanced more than girls especially with single father household.

Another finding of this present study is that the psychosocial adjustment of male and female adolescents differed as a result of their parental educational attainments. This present finding was in line with the College Board Research (2002) which showed that Psychosocial Adjustment Mean Scores (PAMS) was strongly linked to parental educational attainments. This further showed that the difference in the PAMS of male and female students indicates the different educational qualifications earned by parents whose wards were found in the school.

**Conclusion**

From the analysis and discussion of findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

Adolescents from step-parent families have the highest psychosocial adjustment scores more than adolescents from other family structures in Ebonyi State secondary schools;

Adolescents from very highly educated parents have the highest psychosocial adjustment scores more than adolescents whose parents have other educational attainment status;

Male and female adolescents in schools could be better adjusted or maladjusted depending on the family make-up of such adolescents and the educational attainments of their parents.

Family Structures and educational attainments of parents are related to psychosocial adjustment mean scores of adolescents which has been a strong influence on adolescents' cognitive, affective and behavioural components.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings and the implication of the study, the following recommendations emerged:

Teachers should employ individualised instructional strategies in classrooms so that adolescents, who have challenges in their homes, would be identified and considered.

Parents should endeavour to give their male and female adolescents qualitative education instead of exposing them to early farming activities and early marriage.

Government should give low educated parents special assistance by engaging them into adult education programs so as to imbued in them the required skills that would assist them contribute towards socializing their wards.

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