

## **Family Environment and Self-Esteem as Predictors of Psychological Adjustment of Secondary School Students from Divorced Homes in Cross River State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** *This study considered family environment (family cohesion, family conflict) and self-esteem as predictors of psychological adjustment of secondary school adolescents from divorced home in Cross River State. The study employed survey research design. A sample of 128 SS11 students was selected using simple and stratified random sampling techniques. Three research questions were asked to guide the study. Three research instruments: Family Environment Scale (FES), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and Psychological Adjustment Questionnaire (PAQ) were used to gather data for the study. The result revealed that positive family cohesion, support and lower rates of family conflict were significant predictor of psychological adjustment in the sample studied. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that families should reduce conflict and increase cohesion as this may have positive effect on the psychological adjustment of the adolescents.*

**Keywords:** *Adolescent, Family Environment, Self- Esteem, Divorced home, Cross River State.*

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### **I. Introduction**

The family is the most important primary group in society. It is the simplest and the most elementary form of society, it is the most basic of all social grouping and first most immediate social environment to which a child is exposed. It is an outstanding primary group because, it is in the family the child develops his basic attitude through training and teaching. Each child is born into a family which composes parents and possible others and because the children's lives are centred initially within their families, the family environment becomes the primary agent of socialization. The family environment involves the circumstances and social climate conditions within families (Rao, 2012). Since each family is made up of different individuals in a different setting, each family environment is unique. The type of family environment a child is born into sets the limit for life's adjustment (Isangedighi, 2011). It also provides the basis for one's ability to function during different activities. In this study, divorced home or family is one in which the marriage between parents has been terminated as a result of some disagreements between the spouses.

Divorce is the dissolution of bond of matrimony between married couples. It is the cancellation or reorganization of the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage which can either be done legally (as in court or church) and customarily. Meyer (2016) defined divorce as a legal action between married people to end their marriage relationship before the death of either spouse. According to Emery (2013), divorce is the formal legal or socially sanctioned termination of marriage. It is seen by Rappaport (2013) as the end result of a marital dysfunction, discord that has been developing for some time. Since child and each family are obviously unique with different strengths and weakness parents and a variety of psychological outcomes are associated with parental divorce that leads to vulnerability in some adolescents (Strohschein, 2005). Yonmin, (2001) found out that adolescents who experienced their parents' divorce or separation exhibit more academic, psychological, behavioural and drug related problems than children whose families remained intact. Barry, (2003) added that girls are mostly affected by these problems. The deleterious effect of divorce on children's' psychosocial wellbeing has been found by Potter, (2010) to be an important factor in poor math and reading scores. It was also observed that those adolescents are less likely to complete secondary school than adolescents raised in intact families (Evan, Kelly & Wanner 2001).

Parental divorce has been found to affect adolescent's physical health and longevity. They have increased risks at tobacco-related, alcohol-related, and sex-related sites (Kari, Hemminiki & Bowang, 2006), they experience a wide range of emotional reactions including sadness (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001), anger and loneliness, depression, anxiety, heightened worry, lower life satisfaction, suicide (Lizardi, Thompson, Keye and Hasin 2010; Fuller- Thompson and Dalton, 2010), lower self-esteem and self-confidence fear yearning, rejection, conflicting loyalties and a sense of fault for their parents' problem. Therefore, the nature of

adolescents' family environment has a very strong effect on their cognitive and behavioural development and it continues to be of a crucial importance throughout adolescence and adulthood.

The assessment of family environment according to Bjornberg and Nicholson, (2007) is usually based on dimensions such as cohesion, support, conflict and hierarchy. Cohesion is the emotional bond that connects family members, meaning the level of affection, friendship and intimacy shared. Support is the perception of the maternal and emotional support received from the family in the face of challenges and problems, it can also be the presence of close, caring and accepting relationship between an adolescent and his or her caregiver (Barrow, Schuckit, Lucht, John and Frewyberger, 2002). Conflict involves a set of negative feelings among individuals which can create stress, hostility, criticism, aggression with the family. It then, follows that an adolescent who experienced a normal, supportive and well integrated home, school, life carries them over into all his other associations and smaller wholesomeness of attitude. (McBride-Chang, 2001). While Moos and Moos,(2002) concluded that adolescents living in supportive and organized families, happy harmonious parental marriage experiences, were more likely to have self-confidence, social competence, lower anxiety, show fewer psychological health symptoms and higher wellbeing than those from divorced or marital distressed families. Psychological adjustment is the behavioural processes by which human beings maintain equilibrium among their various needs or between their needs and the obstacle of the environment. Psychological adjustment can be determined by asking the person about his feeling, attitude, and cognitive, behavioural characteristics because only he according to Petersen (2005) can subjectively assess the degree of adjustment and satisfaction experiences.

Of great concern to this work is to investigate the relationship between family environment (cohesion and support), self-esteem of secondary school adolescent from divorced home and psychological adjustment.

Family environment has been shown by various researchers to influence adolescents' psychological adjustment, problem solving strategies as well as self-confidence and ability to clear goals. Research work carried out by Sharma, (2015) to find the effect of family climate on emotional-social adjustment of school students showed that there is significant difference between emotional adjustment of students due to highly satisfactory family and highly dissatisfactory climate. Deepshikba and Bhanot (2011) conducted a research on the role of family environment on socio-emotional adjustment of adolescent girls in rural area of Eastern Utta Pradesh using one hundred adolescent girls of group between 12-18years. The finding revealed that all the eight family environment factors used such as cohesion, expressiveness, conflict, acceptance, caring, independence, active recreational orientation, organization and control together showed significant role in socio-emotional adjustment of adolescent.

Barby-Mullin & Murdock (2005) investigation on the influence of family environment factors on self-acceptance and psychological adjustment among adolescents with one hundred and two aged 15 to 19 year participants showed that family variables did not predict significantly of variance but general family functioning accounted for significant amount of variance in psychological adjustment. Meyerson, Long, Miranda and Marx (2002) research work on the influence of childhood sexual abuse, physical abuse, family environment and gender on the psychological adjustment of adolescents revealed that physically abused and sexually abused female adolescents perceived their family environment as more conflictual and less cohesive than females without physical or sexual abuse A research work by Heydaren and Danesh (2015) on the relationship of family emotional climate, personal-social adjustment and achievement motivation with academic achievement and motivation among third grade high school male students in Ahvaz revealed a positive correlation between family emotional climate, personal social adjustment. Sbicago, and Dell'Aglio(2012) carried a research study on quality of family relationship and psychological adjustment in adolescent showed that family environment (Cohesion, support and low conflict) was significant predictor of psychological adjustment. Result finding by Phillippe and Vallerand, (2007) on the research work to examine the impact of actually environment on motivation and psychological adjustment, revealed that environment, motivation, home environment predicted psychological adjustment.

Johnson, Lavoie and Mahoney (2001) studied that decreased family cohesion and increased inter-parental conflict can advertently provide family environment that are associated with increased feeling of loneliness which may be associated with problems in adolescents' social interaction. Adolescent psychological adjustment and satisfaction was significantly related to level of perceived conflict in the family. Research has consistently shown that higher levels of perceived parental support are associated with lower levels of adolescent delinquency, aggression or other adjustment problems (Uberg, Goldstein, Toro 2005). The study on the evaluation of the effect of conflict between parents and adolescents feeling of being cut in the middle by Amato and Afifi, (2006) showed that if the parents relationship was conflicted both before and after divorce and If children witnessed a conflicted relationship between their parents, they were likely to experience distress.

Self-esteem is considered as the base of other self-view (self-concept, self-efficacy). Self-esteem is defined as the complication of feeling about one self that guides behaviour, influences attitude and drives motivation (Dedmond, 2011). It reflects a person's overall subjective emotional evaluation of his own worth.

Hewitt (2009) posited that it encompasses beliefs about oneself (e.g. I am competent, I am worthy) as well as emotional states such as triumph, despair, pride and shame. Barrow (2011) explained that self-esteem is the ability to cope with life's challenges, the feeling of being worth and deserving and the right to enjoy the product of hard work. Self-esteem consists of a set of feelings about self-worth (Zimmerman and Cleary, 2005). Hence it reflects the evaluation of personal competence it is a crucial important factor in the development process of teens since the adolescence is a period in life with rapid changes that affect self-esteem, shifting expectation, changing roles and complex relationships (Block, and Richard 2011).

Studies on self-esteem have shown that the way in which individuals perceive themselves have influence on the adolescent social, academic and emotional development (Ferro and Boyle, 2014) In a study by Goodman and Pickens (2001) has shown that those children of divorced parents are unlikely to return to normal state and that the effect of divorce and family break up has long lasting effect on their self-esteem. Zeigler-Hill and Wallace (2012) research study on self-esteem, instability and psychological adjustment, they examined across three studies using undergraduate participants. Unstable self-esteem level was found to moderate the association between self-esteem and psychological adjustment. In the research study conducted by Mahmoudi (2010) using one hundred students indicated that home environment, parental divorce and self-esteem had positive influence over emotional adjustment of the student. High levels of cohesion and low levels of family conflict have been found with high self-esteem in adolescents (Dennis, Basanez and Farahmand, 2010). So, the level of self-esteem one has depends on the ability to feel capable and have a sense of value about oneself.

### **Statement of the problem**

Divorce is becoming a common issue in our society. Many children are experiencing their parents fighting and later divorcing (Amato and Cheadle, 2008). This can be stressful and challenging to the affected adolescents, this is due to the fact that parental divorce is not only accompanied by psychological and emotional distress on the adolescents but it puts adolescents at a high risk of social, behavioural and psychological and academic, health problems and the adolescents may blame themselves for the conflict, leading to feeling of guilt and also may affect the way they view themselves. This situation has become a source of concern to education stakeholders, school administrators, teachers, parents, government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) because the adolescents are the future leaders of tomorrow, so any negative occurrences in their lives will definitely affect their future development, progress and may hamper national development.

Seminars, workshops, conferences have been organized by various bodies, posters pasted at strategic places to sensitize the public, parents on the devastating effect of divorce on the lives of adolescents. The churches are not left out in the campaign but the problem still persists. The researcher has observed that the studies testing family environment variables (cohesion and support), self-esteem in predicting psychological adjustment are still scarce in Nigeria and particularly in Cross River State, this study wants to bridge the gap by adding to the existing literature if any. Hence, this study to investigate family environment and self-esteem as predictors of psychology adjustment of adolescents from divorced homes in Cross River State.

### **Purpose of the study**

Specifically, the study investigated

1. The relationship between the independent variables, family environment (cohesion and conflict), self-esteem and the psychological adjustment of adolescents from divorced home.
2. The combined predictive impact of family environment (cohesion and support) and self-esteem on psychological adjustment of adolescents from divorced home.
3. The relative predictive impact of family cohesion, family conflict and self-esteem on the psychological adjustment of adolescents from divorced home?

### **Research questions**

The following were stated to guide the study

1. What is the relationship between the independent variables (family cohesion, family conflict and self-esteem) and the dependent variable (psychological adjustment of adolescents from divorced home)?
2. What is the combined predictive impact of family environment and self-esteem on the psychological adjustment of adolescents from divorced home?
3. What is the relative predictive impact of family cohesion, family conflict and self-esteem on the psychological adjustment of adolescent from divorced home?

## **II. Methodology**

The design for the study was a descriptive survey design to examine family environment and self-esteem as predictors of psychological adjustment of adolescents from divorced homes. The population of the study consist of all SSII students from divorced homes in Calabar Education Zone. Although this population

runs several thousands, only 128 students from selected public secondary schools through stratified and simple random sampling techniques constituted the sample. SS11 students were selected based on the fact that the students have enough experience to respond objectively to the research instrument. The stratification was also done to assist the researcher to determine precisely the feelings of the students.

The instrument used in this study were Rosenberg adapted and modified Self-esteem Scale (.73) and self-structured family Environment Scale(.82)and Psychological Adjustment Scales(.75) compressed into 4 sections, A, B, C and D. The structured ones were developed in consultation with three experts in the department of Educational foundations, University of Calabar. The instruments were pilot tested on 30 students who were not part of the study. Section "A" consists of the personal data of the adolescent such as sex, age. Section "B" comprised 10-items on family environment with four point Likert types of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).The items were used to investigate family environment of adolescents from divorced homes.

Section "C" consist of 10-items with four point Likert type scale of strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, which was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). It assessed a person's overall evaluation of his worthiness as human being. Section "D" which is the psychological adjustment scale has 10-item scale with four point Likert type scales of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

The researchers with the help of their colleagues who served as research assistants administered the questionnaires to the respondents in the selected schools. Prior to the day of administration of the instrument in the selected schools, the school counsellor and class teachers in each of the sampled school furnished the researcher with the names of students from divorced homes but the questionnaires were administered to all the sampled students. Later the questionnaires were separated into divorced home and non-divorced home for the purpose of analysis. The questionnaires were collected immediately after completion. This facilitated the return rate of 100%.

Data collected were analysed for the three research questions using multiple regression to find the combined and relative contribution of the independent variables (cohesion, conflict, self-esteem) to the prediction of psychological adjustment of adolescents from divorced homes. The differences in the family environment, self-esteem and psychological adjustment were analysed using multi regression statistical technique a

### **Presentation of results**

#### **Research question one**

What relationship exists among the independent variables (family cohesion, family conflict and self esteem) and the dependent variable (psychological adjustment of adolescents from divorced home)? The inter-correlation coefficient among the variables is presented in Table 1.

**TABLE 1: Descriptive statistics and Inter-correlation among the variables (N=128)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Psychological adjustment of students from divorced home	19.48	5.30	1.000			
Family cohesion	20.07	5.10	.635*	1.000		
Family conflict	29.59	4.07	-.480*	-.402*	1.000	
Self esteem	21.97	3.70	.455	.291*	-.235	1.000

\*Significant at .05 level of significance. R = .447.

The result in Table 1 showed that the mean score obtained among the subject as regards to their family cohesion was 20.07 which is less than the mean score of 29.59 obtained as regards to their family conflict and the mean is also less than the mean score of 21.97 obtained as regards their self esteem. The mean score obtained as regards their psychological adjustment was 19.48. This implies that the students from divorced homes are having serious family conflicts which have affected their family cohesion and their self esteem and this make them not to adjust well psychologically when considered with the reference mean of 25. The result in the table further showed that the inter-correlation among the variables revealed that significant relationship exist between the independent and dependent variables: family cohesion ( $r=0.635, p<0.05$ ); family conflict ( $r=-0.480, p<0.05$ ) and self esteem( $r=0.455, p<0.05$ ).

#### **Research question two**

What is the combined predictive impact of family environmental and self esteem on the psychological adjustment of students from divorced home? The composite contribution of all the independent variables on psychological adjustment of students from divorced home was check as stated in Table 2.

**TABLE 2: Multiple Regression Analysis showing the combined predictive impact of family cohesion, family conflict and self esteem on psychological adjustment of students from divorced home**

Multiple R	=	0.726			
Multiple R <sup>2</sup>	=	0.527			
Multiple R <sup>2</sup> (Adjusted)	=	0.516			
Standard Error of Estimation	=	3.6892			
<b>Source of variance</b>		<b>Sum of square</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean square</b>	<b>F-ratio</b> <b>p-level</b>
Regression		1882.301	3	627.434	46.101*    .000
Residual		1687.629	124	13.610	
Total		3569.930	127		

\*Significant at .05 level; R = .477; R square = .200

The result in Table 2 shows that the analysis of variance of the multiple regression data yielded an F-ratio value which was statistically significant at .05 level of significance;  $F_{(3, 124)} = 46.101$ . This result indicates that when the independent variables when taken together, they significantly predicted psychological adjustment of students from divorced home. The combined contributions of the independent variables to psychological adjustment of students from divorced home produced a coefficient of multiple regression (R) of 0.726 and an adjusted multiple R-square (R<sup>2</sup>) of 0.516. The adjusted multiple R-square (R<sup>2</sup>) of 0.516 implies that when the independent variables were taken together, they accounted for 51.6% of the total variance in psychological adjustment of students from divorced home

### Research question three

What is the relative predictive impact of family cohesion, family conflict and self esteem on the psychological adjustment of students from divorced home? To find out the relative contributions of each of the independent variables to the psychological adjustment of students from divorced home, a test of regression weight was carried out. The result is presented in Table 3.

**TABLE 3: Test of regression weights for contributions of each of the variables on students' academic performance in Mathematics**

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p-level	P
(Constant)	10.291	4.014		2.564	.012	< .05
Family cohesion	.484	.072	.465	6.730	.000	< .05
Family conflict	-.301	.089	-.231	-3.393	.001	< .05
Self esteem	.381	.093	.265	4.076	.000	< .05

**Dependent variable:** Psychological adjustment of students from divorced home

Table 3 shows the standardised regression weights (beta), t-ratio and probability level for each of the variables. As presented, the standardised regression weights (**Beta**) obtained for the independent variables are 0.465, -0.231 and 0.265 for family cohesion, family conflict and self esteem respectively in the predicting psychological adjustment of students from divorced home. In terms of magnitude of the contribution: Family cohesion contributed most to the prediction of psychological adjustment of students from divorced home followed by self esteem and lastly family conflict.

## III. Discussion of findings

### Research question one

What relationship exists among the independent variables (family cohesion, family conflict and self esteem) and the dependent variable (psychological adjustment of adolescents from divorced home)? The result of the finding showed that significant relationship exist between the independent variables; .Family cohesion( $r=0.635$ ,  $p<0.05$ ); family conflict( $r=-0.480$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and self-esteem ( $r=0.455$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) on the dependent psychological adjustment. This means that students from divorced homes are having serious family conflicts which have affected their family cohesion and self-esteem and this make them not to adjust well psychologically when considered with the reference mean of 25. This finding is consistent with the finding of Sbicigo and Dell'Aglio 2012; Deepshikba and Bhanot 2011 who stated in their separate studies that family environment(family cohesion, family conflict), self-esteem have significant relationship with psychological adjustment. According to Akuto (2017) family structure plays an important role on children's adjustment because parents are probably the actors with the dearest undimensions interest in high level of their children adjustment (Levine, 2001). He went further to mention that marital instability brings about stress, tension, lack

of motivation, low self-esteem. Obviously this manifestation act negatively on the child adjustment to psychological, economic and social aspect of life.

#### **Research question two**

What is the combined predictive impact of family environment and self esteem on the psychological adjustment of adolescents from divorced home? The result finding revealed that when the independent variables family environment and self-esteem when taken together, significantly predicted psychological adjustment of student from divorced home. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Dennis, Basanez and Farahmand (2010) who mentioned that high level of cohesion and low level of family conflict were associated with high self-esteem while the adolescents from families with low family cohesiveness as a result of high family conflict, are often subjected to hardship, shame, dejection and the feeling of low self-esteem, all these may culminate to maladjustment.

#### **Research question three**

What is the relative predictive impact of family cohesion, family conflict and self esteem on the psychological adjustment of adolescents from divorced home? The result also showed that in terms of magnitude of the contribution: family cohesion contributed most to the prediction of psychological adjustment of adolescents from divorced home followed by self esteem and lastly family conflict. This implies that adolescents from cohesive families need to feel approved, accepted and loved by family members and this creates a feeling of self worth and confidence in personal capabilities and enable them feel for them to be psychological strong and balanced to face the challenges associated with parental divorce. Also, adolescents who internalize affirmative and uplifting messages from their parents acquire a strong basis from which they feel capable of setting and achieving goals. Thus family cohesion provides the students with love, approval and acceptance from family members through commitment, help and family support. It also captures the closeness of the affective relationships between family members(Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia and Scabini, 2006).This aspect of parent-child relationship has been associated with positive psychological adjustment(Davies, Cummings and Winter, 2006) Studies have also shown through observation and questionnaires that mothers who are more sensitive and engaging to their children during interactions and provide a more stimulating environment who are more skilled cognitively, socially and psychologically(Booth and Jernberg, 2010). Although mothers is critically important in predicting child outcomes, family system theory postulates that all members within thin a family influence each other overtime, and that these family relationships are especially important in understanding children's psychological adjustment.

### **IV. Conclusion**

The study has established that experiences of parental divorce can be very traumatic to adolescents and can exert devastating effect on their self esteem. Adolescents from divorced homes experience psychological, social, health and academic problems more than their counterparts in intact homes. Therefore, adolescents need conducive family environment for them to be psychologically strong and well adjusted.

### **V. Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations:

1. Parents should consider the consequences of divorce on social and psychological adjustment of their children especially in school before embarking on such issue.
2. Families should reduce conflict and increase cohesion as this might have positive effect on psychological adjustment of adolescents.
3. Family- centered practices aimed at reducing familial stress and interpersonal conflict within the family should be adopted.
4. Counselling for the affected adolescents can help to build up self esteem and personality problem.

#### **Psychological Interventions for adolescents from divorced homes**

Although divorce increases the risk for adjustment problem in children and adolescent, researchers have identified cognition and active coping style as protective factors that can moderate the risk associated with divorce for children (Kelly and Emery, 2003). These protective factors weaken the consistency of children's negative psychological or behavioural outcomes following parental divorce. Children using active coping style that involves problem solving and positive cognitive restructuring according to Sandler, Tein, Mehta, Wolchik and Ayers, (2000) demonstrated an increase in their feelings of confidence in their ability to cope and adjust to divorce more quickly. So, school counsellors should help them build protective factors by helping adolescents develop and learn coping styles linked to increased adjustment following divorce.

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