

# Impact of Divorce on Academic Performance of Senior Secondary Students in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State

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## Abstract

The study was designed to look at the impact of divorce on academic performance of senior secondary students in ilorin metropolis kwara state. The study adopted a survey method of research. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used for the study. Six senior secondary schools were randomly selected from the lists of senior secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis. 20 students from divorced families were randomly chosen from each school, making total number of 120 students as a subject sample out of 170 target population of the students from divorced homes. The questionnaire was tagged Students of Divorce Family Questionnaire (SDFQ) and academic performance tests tagged (EMT). English Language and Mathematics Test [EMT] were conducted for SS1 and SS2 participating students. The 10-item questions were set for both English Language and Mathematics. The finding indicates that there is significant negative correlation between student of divorce and academic performance. The finding also shows significant age difference among students of divorce based on academic performance. It was recommended that government should provide rehabilitative programme for the students of divorced family in schools so that they can adjust in their academic performance.

## INTRODUCTION

Divorce is legal dissolution of marriage bond. Once the couple decides to divorce, they are free to remarry again. In Nigeria, there has been the increase in the rate of divorce. There are two factors influencing the rising divorce rates in the Nigeria. The first factor is both men and women are relying less on one another for economic survival. As women gain status in their work place or on their businesses, they often want to stand on their own and prefer to control their lives' affair which enabling them to be less dependent on their husbands, the heads of household. Women who are gainfully employed and self-sufficient may be more willing to dissolve a marriage because they are not perceived as a financially dependent spouse. Financial stability allows for the female head of household to have more flexibility to exit a broken marriage. Secondly, when both male and female parents gain political status in the society, one seems to be superior over the other due to political gain. They seem not have chance to look after the family, especially the female ones which more likelihood be the victims of divorce. According to Hargreaves (1991), student's resilience in a one-parent household is believed to be a significant indication of success in other areas of their lives, including academics. Similar to a domino effect, students under emotional heartache and stress at home often have emotions that interfere with concentration during the school day. Poor school performance often agitates the parent and the dominos continue to fall as the student loses self-confidence and experiences decreased performance in school. Students may have a difficult time concentrating on school work from divorce-related stress occurring at home. Students may face unique challenges of completing homework assignments when organizing their homework, backpack, and paperwork between multiple homes.

According to Smith (1999), some students are flexible and adapt well to change largely due to implementing effective coping strategies, while other students may react in the opposite way. Students may lose confidence, blame themselves for the break-up, and see their parent's separation or divorce in a complicated way. The range of feelings that a student may encounter include: disbelief and denial, sadness, loss, loneliness, depression, anger, anxiety, fear, relief, and hope. Response to these feelings often results in different levels of intensity (Smith, 1999). While some students may experience mild anxiety and sadness, others may feel more intense emotions. Smith (1999) also found that students' reaction to their parent's divorce varies based on the student's age.

Carlson and Hines (cited in Dykeman, 2003) determined that parents can help make a smooth transition for their children during a divorce. Parents can present a reliable and cooperative parenting style when providing their children with discipline and behaviour expectations. Putting the child in the middle and asking them to "spy" on the other parent or report back information regarding dating, finances, and life styles may hurt the student trying to cope with life in two different residences. Students tend to be more resilient when their parents offer strategies such as joint-parenting, similar discipline styles and not competing for child-loyalty with gifts and presents. Hargreaves (1991) documented behavioural issues and emotional problems exhibited by students proceeding their parents' separation or divorce. Parents may also have different expectations and rules for their child presenting inconsistencies which may confuse the child. Research suggests that a child's adaption to successful transition depends on each parent maintaining a healthy relationship between one another and with the

child (Hargreaves, 1991). Wilkinson (cited in Hargreaves, 1991) reported children's stressors throughout divorce may include disorganized daily routines, change in parenting style, reduced family income, parental conflict, limited resources, and parental accessibility. Families can usually maintain and adapt to the short-term changes of divorce in a two- to three-year span.

According to Hertherington et al. (cited in Hargreaves, 1991), students display problems during a variety of stages of family deterioration including times during this alteration period, either before parental separation, or directly subsequent to a parental separation. Students will sometimes experience delayed stress responses occurring years after a divorce in a form of post-traumatic stress (Hargreaves, 1991).

One-third of school age students in Ilorin metropolis experience changes in family dynamics that show up in the school setting. Indicators such as depression, decline in academic achievement, poor attendance, loss of confidence, and disorganization may signal adjustment issues pertaining to divorce in a student's home. School counsellors are key players in helping children with personal issues, social needs, and academic success. Knowing human developmental stages, emotional needs during separation and divorce, and strategies to support children who are dealing with feelings pertaining to divorce are critical to the role of school counsellors. The problem therefore becomes this: how can school counsellors recognize warning signs for children struggling with divorcing parents and help children whose parents are going through separation and divorce?

Various theories of child development suggest that children younger than age five or six are particularly vulnerable to the effects of parental separation. The disruption of attachment relations, combined with the child's limited cognitive abilities to understand divorce, is central to this vulnerability. But analysing studies that assess students of different ages at a single point in time confounds children's age at the time of divorce with the amount of time elapsed since the divorce, both of which could account for the results. Children showed greater adjustment with increasing age (e.g., birth to age five, age six to ten, age eleven to sixteen), with the youngest age group being the most severely affected by divorce. Importantly, however, age differences were statistically significant on only one of the nineteen measures used. In sum, robust age-at-separation effects, such as gender effects, have not been empirically demonstrated. Clinical observations, however, show those students' concerns resulting from parental separation and how they express their concerns do vary with age.

### **Objectives of the Study.**

1. To determine the impact of divorce on academic performance of students
2. To find the age difference in students of divorce.
3. To determine the gender difference in students of divorce.

### **Research Design.**

This study adopted a survey method of research that is, aimed at collecting data for the purpose of interesting and knowing the effects of divorce on the academic performance of secondary school students.

### **Population and Sample.**

The population of this study were drawn from senior secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis. The students to be used were drawn from Senior Secondary School I and Senior Secondary School II. Students from divorced families were used for the study.

Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used for the study. Six senior secondary schools were randomly selected from the lists of senior secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis. Purposive sampling was used to select the students from divorced families out of total population of the students from the selected secondary schools, while 20 students from divorced families were randomly chosen from each school, making total number of 120 students as a subject sample out of 170 target population of the students from divorced homes. Therefore, according to Morgan and Krejcie (1971) when number of population is 170, the samples to be selected will be 120 from the given population.

### **Instrumentation.**

The instruments used for the study were questionnaire and tests on English Language and Mathematics. The questionnaire was designed by researcher to seek information from the students of divorced families. The bio data of students was required, including the age of respondents, class and gender. Test was used to measure academic performance of students of divorced families. The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A measured students demographic data, while section B contained a number of questions designed to measure the impact of divorce on students' academic performance. The questionnaire was tagged Students of Divorce Family Questionnaire (SDFQ) and academic performance tests tagged (EMT). English Language and Mathematics Test [EMT] were conducted for SS1 and SS2 participating students. The 10-item questions were set for both English Language and Mathematics. The questionnaire was constructed by the researcher considering the research questions and hypotheses raised for the study. Each column will be provided with question items to give the best

feeling of the respondent on the 4 point likert scale i.e. strongly agreed, agreed, strongly disagreed, and disagreed. The scale will be scored as follows: strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1.

**Procedure for Data Collection.**

In each selected schools and classes, permission was taken from head/class teachers to randomly select the names of the students that would represent the population of study from the class register. In all, a total of 126 copies of questionnaire were administered to students in the six selected schools. The scores of students were provided in line with students randomly selected to fill the questionnaire. The instruments were distributed with assistant of the members of staff of the schools, who will be trained on questionnaires distribution and test administration. The data collection exercise lasted for 2-3 days. After the completion, the researcher collected back questionnaires for the analysis.

**Analysis.**

Data obtained from administered questionnaires as well as mean scores of students’ performance in the EMT were analysed using t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The .05 level of significance was used in rejecting or retaining the 3 hypotheses

**Results**

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship between student of divorce and academic performance.

**Table1:** Pearson of relationship between student of divorce and academic performance

Variables	N	Mean	SD	DF	Pearson r	P
SDQ	126	54.3095	5.83707	124	-.304**	.001
Academic Performance	126	2.2143	1.14268			

Table1 shows significant negative correlation between student of divorce and academic performance  $r=-.304$ ;  $p=.001$ . Therefore, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between student of divorce and academic performance is rejected.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant age difference between students of divorce.

**Table2:** ANOVA of age difference among student of divorce based on academic performance.

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	453.159	2	226.579	7.323	.001
Within Groups	3805.770	123	30.941		
Total	4258.929	125			

Table2 shows significant age difference among students of divorce based on academic performance.  $F= (2,123) =7.323$ ;  $P= .001$ . Therefore, the hypothesis which says there is no significant age difference among student of divorce based on academic performance stands rejected.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant gender difference between student of divorce and academic performance based on gender

**Table3:** t-test of gender difference between students of divorce

Gender	N	Mean	SD	DF	t	sig
Male	55	54.6364	5.60543	124	.552	.582
Female	71	54.0563	6.03771			

Table 3 shows no significant difference between student of divorce and gender  $t=.552$ ;  $p=.582$ . Therefore, the hypothesis which says there is no significant difference between student of divorce and gender is retained.

**Discussion**

The study aimed at investigating the impact of divorce on academic performance of senior secondary students in ilorin metropolis, kwara state.

Research hypothesis seeks to investigate significant relationship between student of divorce and academic performance. The finding indicates that there is significant negative correlation between student of divorce and academic performance. The result shows that the divorce did not impact on academic performance. The finding disagrees with Carlson (cited in Dykeman, 2003) found students who have experienced a recent divorce in their family have more difficulty academically at school than students from intact families

Research hypothesis seeks to the significant age difference among students of divorce based on academic performance is rejected. According to Dacey and Travers (cited in Dykeman, 2003), there are many contributing factors that impact students who have experienced divorce: the age and gender of the student at the time of the separation, the level of collaboration among the divorced or separated parents, and the intensity of conflict within the family. All of these factors may influence the mental health of the student, and additionally may influence the student's academics. Poor attendance, decline in grades, and inability to concentrate are often warning signs that may show up in the classroom (Dykeman, 2003).

When students experience the trauma of divorce, their emotional state may impact interactions with their classmates. Students may wish to have alone-time to reflect and think about life at home. Other students may choose one or two close friends with whom they can identify and with whom they trust to talk to about the divorce. The level of motivation, focus, and emotion may be an indicator in how they are reacting to the divorce that is influencing their lives (Hargreaves, 1991).

Students of divorced parents may also see a change in academic success. According to Hargreaves (1991), students adjust more effectively, learn successfully, and misbehave least when home and school are both consistent, predictable and proactive in meeting the student's needs. A significant predictor of the student's academic success is continuing a consistent, cooperative, and beneficial relationship with both parents. Some one-parent families can also put students at risk for academic difficulty. Students who struggle in the classroom may encounter themes related to grieving over their parents' separation, concern about financial problems at home, or living in stressful or emotionally tense households.

According to Wallerstein and Corbin (cited in Dykeman, 2003), when students experience divorce, they may also experience a significant impact upon their school performance.

According to Spruijtetal. (cited in VanderValk et al., 2005), girls tend to Internalize their emotions, whereas boys tend to act out emotions through externalized problem behaviour. Most children are impacted by divorce in a variety of ways; however, particular age groups may suffer from specific reactions. One-third of divorces occur when students are under the age of five. This is the age group with the most difficulty verbalizing feelings. When a baby is mirroring their parents' laughter or smiles, it is possible that babies can mimic similar sadness and anxiety when their parents feel those emotions also (Smith, 1999).

During middle childhood, both boys and girls may find it challenging to focus in school because of the stressors at home. Forgetting assignments, leaving homework at the other parents' home, or daydreaming in school contribute to lack-of-focus in the classroom. Permission slips may go unsigned or are lost in the movement from half a week in one household and the remainder of the week with the other parent. It is a big responsibility to keep track of homework, paperwork, and assignments at this age with a family in transition.

Students are generally a high-risk group during a family divorce. Teenagers are susceptible because they mourn as students; however, they are beginning to gain an understanding of the adult world and sometimes are conflicted in how they should show their emotions (Smith, 1999). Smith (1999) explained there are many feelings teens have in reaction to divorce.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation.**

It is important to remember that as divorce rates continue to increase so does the likelihood that students of divorced parents may have a greater risk of adjusting in areas of educational performance. Students feel the impact of divorce as it carries over into the classroom. Students from divorced families show decreased functioning in academic performance and display oppositional behaviour, or signs of anxiety and depression. These students lack the ability to concentrate in class; declining attendance and willingness to participate in class indicate students are having difficult time adjusting to a transition in family dynamics. It is therefore recommended that

1. The government should provide rehabilitative programme for the students of divorced family in schools so that they can adjust in their academic performance.
2. The schools should give proper attention to these students in order to know more other challenges they face.

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