MARITAL CONFLICT, DIVORCE AND SINGLE PARENTHOOD AS PREDICTORS OF ADOLESCENTS’ ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN IBADAN

Abstract

Manifestation of antisocial behaviour among the adolescents in secondary schools in Nigeria is escalating day by day, threatening the peace and security of the society. It has been speculated in many quarters that the menace of unstable families is likely to be the cause. Hence, this study investigated the predictive effects of marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood on antisocial behaviours among secondary school adolescents in Ibadan. Three hundred adolescents were randomly selected from Ibadan metropolis. Three research questions were raised, and the Crime Behaviour Factor Battery was used to collect data. The result revealed that marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood correlated positively and significantly, and they jointly contributed a total of 74.8% to the total variance of adolescents’ antisocial behaviours. Also, single parenthood has the highest relative contribution as revealed by the Beta weight (.88), followed by divorce (.280 ), and lastly, marital conflict (.272). It was recommended that intervention programmes should be put in place that will facilitate family adjustment, family stability and family cohesion that can forestall the incidence of marital breakdown and separation, especially for the sake of the young ones so as to reduce the rate of incidence of antisocial behaviours among the adolescents.

Key words: Marital conflict, Divorce, Single parenthood, Antisocial behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

The rate of increase in antisocial behavior in the society is alarming (Loeber, 1990; Animasahun, 2004; 2011). Antisocial behaviours resulting in series of crime appears to be a constant source of social concern. Escalating levels of insecurity, fear of violence, the threat of public disorder, rioting, household burglary, children out of control, new forms of terrorism, football hooliganism, mindless vandals and a growth in all manner of antisocial behaviours are but a few of the enduring images that characterize a society that is apparently drifting further and further into lawlessness (Amato, 2004; Animasahun, 2011). Specifically, in Nigeria, incidence of violence and
law breaking of all kinds are common; alcoholism, drug abuse, smoking, suicide and others such as rape, cultism, prostitution, kidnapping, ritual killings and all antisocial behaviours are traceable to families which lack cohesion, unstable, and broken family background (Ary, Duncan, Duncan & Hops, 1999; Nwankwo, 2006).

Antisocial behavior is the umbrella term used for any negative behaviour as far as the context of a society is concerned. According to Adviser guide (2011) there is no precise definition of anti-social behavior. Broadly, it is acting in a way that causes or is likely to cause alarm or distress to others. Berger (2003) defined it as that kind of behavior that lacks consideration for others and may cause damage to the society, whether intentional or through negligence. Adoption.com (2011) defined anti-social behavior as actions that deviate significantly from established social norms; and behavior that fits within this definition will vary to some degree, based on the social environment in which the person lives. Kayne (2011) conceptualized anti-social behavior as the behavior characterized by overall lack of adherence to the social mores and standard that allows members of the society to co-exist peaceably.

Furthermore, anti-social behavior is described as disruptive acts characterized by covert and overt hostility and intentional aggression toward others. It exists along a severity continuum and includes repeated violations of social rules, deviant of authority and of the right of others. (Encyclopedia of children health, 2011; Farlex, 2011). The name anti-social behavior is labelled as such because it is contrary to prevailing norms for social conduct. This kind of behavior encompass a large spectrum of action such as murder, rape, use of illegal substance, cruelty, violence, scam, theft, arson, vandalism; as well as activities that members of society find objectionable even when they are legal, such as drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, lying, intimidating, manipulation, drug and alcohol abuse (Reid, 2002; Walker, 2004; Berger, 2005; Wikipedia- the free encyclopedia, 2011).

A particular behavior is not acceptable or it is antisocial if any of these three criteria are seen: If the behavior does not allow a person to function effectively with others as member of society, if the behavior does not permit the person to meet his or her own needs and if the behavior has a negative effect on the well-being of others (Nwakwo, 2006). This research focuses on all kinds of behavior that could be termed antisocial.

Conflict is one of the most studied and discussed subjects in the area of family communication. In fact, some authors suggest that conflict has been emphasized to an extent that it has eclipsed positive aspects of marital and family interaction (Cherlin et-
al, 1991). Obviously, many families face difficult struggles that are often quite volatile and troubling. Conflict theories emphasize that conflicts are ubiquitous and inherent (Furstenberg & Kiernan, 2001), especially given the interdependence and emotional involvement of close relationships (Emery & Forehand, 1994), and families in particular (Capaldi & Patterson, 1991).

Marital conflict, mostly against women, is the most pervasive, yet, least recognized human rights abuse in the world. It is also a profound social problem, sapping women’s energy, compromising their physical health, and eroding their self-esteem (Rodgers & Pryor, 1998). Worldwide, information on the amount of conflict in families shows that it is not a rare phenomenon. Conflict, of course, represents a rather extreme example of the failure of supportiveness. It is found in every kind of family, and it can reach extreme levels. For example, family fights are one of the most frequent reasons for police calls. In fact, marital conflict is one of the leading causes of death among women and is the most common cause of non-fatal injury (Garmezy, 1986).

Coffman and Roark (1992) observed that, conflict between parents frequently affects their young children. Children who witness marital violence face increased risk for such emotional and behavioural problems as anxiety, depression, poor school attendance, performance, low self-esteem, disobedience, nightmares and physical health complaints. However, Mufson et al (1993) stressed the point that, such children also are more likely to act aggressively during childhood and adolescence. In the same vein, Capaldi and Patterson (1991) further observed that children who witness violence between their parents often develop many of the same behavioural and psychological problems as children who are themselves abused.

Kendall and Dobson (1993) stressed that children who are severely neglected due to marital conflict or divorce may experience a drop in intelligence and increased risk of depression and suicide. As young children, they tend to be hyperactive, easily distracted, and unpopular with their peers. As adolescents and adults, they are more likely to abuse drugs or alcohol and to become involved in juvenile delinquency and violent crime (Barclay, 1994; Brackney & Karabenick, 1995; Kendall & Dobson, 1993). High incidence of antisocial behaviour has been found among children of broken homes in secondary schools in Nigeria (Salami, 2004; Sotonade, 1997; Asinibare & Olayou, 1997; Okwilagwe, 2001; Animasahun, 2011).

Parental divorce is a stressful experience for children at any age and consequently, most of their children exhibit maladjusted behaviours (Amato & Keith, 2001; Animasahun, 2011). Adolescence represents a crucial stage in the developmental process. Not only may a parental divorce during this period in adolescents’ lives hamper their development, it has also been found in various studies that possible problems of a parental divorce earlier in adolescents’ lives may emerge later on (Aro & Palosaari, 1992).
Studies consistently report that parental separation negatively affects both internalizing and externalizing problem behavior of children and adolescents (Amato, 2000; 2004; Animasahun, 2011). Children of divorce parents often score lower than their peers of continuously intact families. The strongest effects are found in the areas of psychological adjustment, self-concept, behavior/conduct, educational achievement, and social relations (Amato & Keith, 2001; Amato, 2004).

Compared to children who grew up in continuously intact families, offspring from divorced parents are often found to have lower psychological well-being (Amato, 2004); have more emotional problems such as depression (Aseltine, 1996; Animasahun, 2011); have more negative self-image (Amato & Keith, 2001); perform less well at school (Aseltine, 1996); exhibit more delinquent and aggressive behavior (Emery, 1999); have a higher risk for substance use (Flewelling & Bauman, 1990) and they also have more problematic relationships and early sexual intercourse (Emery, 1999; Flewelling & Bauman, 1990).

Studies have shown that before parental divorce, children and adolescents suffer due to high levels of marital discord, ineffective and inconsistent parenting, diminished parental wellbeing, and reduced parent-child affection (Demo & Cox, 2000; Rodgers and Pryor, 1998). For parents and children, the most difficult and stressful phase of the divorce process is usually the period leading to and immediately following parental separation and divorce (Animasahun, 2011). Substantial research evidence shows that, on average, children who have experienced parental divorce score somewhat lower than children in first-marriage families on measures of social development, emotional well-being, self-concept, academic performance, educational attainment, and physical health (Amato, 2000; Furstenberg & Kiernan, 2001), have negative self image and low self esteem (Lotz & Lee, 1999); and are also prone to various forms of antisocial behaviours (Hetherington, Stanley-Hagan & Anderson, 2000; Hartas, 2000).

This study, therefore, intend to find out the predictive effects of marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood on antisocial behaviours among in-school adolescents in Ibadan.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What is the pattern of relationship among marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood on adolescents’ antisocial behaviours?
2. What is the joint effect of marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood on adolescents’ antisocial behaviour?
3. What are the relative effects of marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood on adolescents’ antisocial behaviour?
METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to examine the predictive effects of marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood on in-school adolescents’ antisocial behaviour in Ibadan metropolis.

Participants

The participants for this study were school going adolescents (between ages 14-20 years) who were randomly selected from ten schools within Ibadan metropolis through multistage stratified sampling technique. A total of 300 participants were used for the study.

Instruments

The main instrument used for this study was the section 1 (Crime behavior rating scale) of the Crime Behaviour Factor Battery (Animasahun, 2007). It is divided into 2 sections (A and B). Section A is on Personal/Demographic information such as the adolescent’s sex, age, school, class, father’s and mother’s occupation, family type: Intact home, Parents currently experiencing marital conflict, Parents already divorced, and Living in single parent home etc. Section B contains 33 items of crime behavior rating scale developed on 5-point Likert format. It has a Crombach alpha of 0.95 and a Guttman split half reliability of 0.82.

Procedure of Administration

Five Local Government areas were randomly selected out of 11 Local Government areas in Ibadan metropolis. Two public secondary schools were randomly selected on the basis of balloting from each Local Government areas. The researcher procured the approval of the principals of the various schools used for the survey. Students in the senior classes who have been identified to have been involved in any kind of antisocial behaviours and also screened by the class teachers and found to have come from unstable homes balloted for the needed number in each of the ten secondary schools. At last, only 30 students who have consented to participate were randomly selected from each school. Hence, a total of 300 students participated in the exercise. The questionnaires were personally given out to the participants and collected from them by the researcher after they have duly responded to them.
Data Analysis

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to find the relationships among the variables, while Multiple regression analysis was used to find out the combined and relative contributions of the three independent variables (marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood) to the prediction of adolescents’ antisocial behaviours.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of the findings in the tables below:

Research Question 1: What pattern of relationship exists between Marital Conflict, Divorce and Single Parenthood on one hand, and Antisocial behavior on the other. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics Correlation matrix table showing relationships among the Variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Dev.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antisocial behavior</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>49.98</td>
<td>12.46</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital conflict</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>122.78</td>
<td>23.13</td>
<td>.599*</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>16.37</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>.510*</td>
<td>.271*</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parenthood</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>67.50</td>
<td>15.39</td>
<td>.875*</td>
<td>.267*</td>
<td>.223*</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 gives the description of measures of association among the variables in this study. The scores indicate significant relationship among the variables (marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood). As observed from the table, the intercorrelation results shows that marital conflict divorce and single parenthood correlated positively with
adolescents’ antisocial behaviour (r = .599, p < 0.05; r = .510, p <0.05 and r = .875, p < 0.05) respectively.

Research Question 2: What is the joint contribution of Marital conflict, Divorce and Single parenthood to the prediction of Adolescents’ antisocial behavior? The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Multiple Regression summary table showing the joint contribution of the independent variables to the prediction of adolescents’ antisocial behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean square</th>
<th>F-Ratio</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>35695.414</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11898.417</td>
<td>324.74</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>&lt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>10713.503</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>36.194</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46408.917</td>
<td>299</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Going by the result presented in Table 2, the three independent variables made a joint contribution of 76.7% to the prediction of adolescents’ antisocial behaviour as revealed by the value of the Adjusted R2. The Multiple Regression values are: R = 0.877, R2 = 0.769, Adj. R2 = 0.767 and Std error estimated = 6.016. The result of the multiple regression analysis produced an F-ratio (3/296) = 324.74, p < 0.05.

Research Question 3: What are the relative contributions of marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood to the prediction of adolescents’ antisocial behaviour? The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Relative contributions of the Independent Variables to the criterion measure.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Conflict</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.272</td>
<td>3.397</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>&lt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>0.194</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>.280</td>
<td>3.988</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>&lt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parenthood</td>
<td>0.719</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.887</td>
<td>21.72</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>&lt;.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table above, it is evident that single parenthood has the most relative contribution to adolescent’s antisocial behavior as evident by the Beta weight (.887), followed by divorce (.280) and lastly, marital conflict (.272).

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

Results obtained from research questions 1 in the study indicate that independent variables have significant predictive effect on adolescents’ antisocial behaviour. This finding is supported by Coffman & Roark (1992), Rodgers and Pryor (1998), Amato (2000) and Animasahun (2011) that children of conflict-oriented families are more than twice as likely as other children to engage in antisocial behaviours.

Results from research questions 2 in the study reveal that the three independent variables (marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood) have significant joint contribution to the prediction of adolescents’ antisocial behaviours, whereby they jointly contributed 76.7% of the total variance for adolescents’ antisocial behaviours.

This corroborates the earlier finding of Kendall and Dobson (1993) and Rodgers and Pryor (1998) that adolescents from broken homes are always involved in juvenile delinquency and violent crime.

Results from research question 3 shows that single parenthood is hazardous in the training of the adolescents. The absence of the father, who is often regarded as a disciplinarian predisposes adolescents to antisocial behavior. Also, the absence of maternal care in certain cases makes the adolescent takes advice or instructions from every Dick and Harry, which often leads to unintentional negative behaviours. This finding upholds the earlier findings of Aseltine (1996), Amato (2004) and Animasahun (2011) that single parenthood is a deadly blow on the training of the adolescents.

**Implication of the Findings**
This study has established that found out that the period of adolescence is very important to the development of an individual. Any laxity on the part of the parents in assisting and guiding the adolescent may result in antisocial behaviours. This is more prominent in unsettled homes characterised by marital conflict, divorce and single parenthood.

It is therefore recommended that intervention programmes should be put in place that will facilitate family adjustment, family stability and family cohesion that can forestall the incidence of marital breakdown and separation, especially for the sake of the young ones so as to reduce the rate of incidence of antisocial behaviours among the adolescents.

REFERENCES


Kendall, P.C. and Dobson, K.S. 1993. On the nature of cognition and its role in antisocial” (pp. 3-17) in K.S.


