

Psychosocial Problems of Adolescents from Divorced Homes: Implications for Counselling

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Abstract

This paper focused on the psychosocial issues adolescents face as a result of divorce. Thus the paper gives a brief explanation of the general causes of family divorce ranging from negligence, incompatibility among others not only in Nigeria as a developing nation but even among the developed nations of the world. The paper exposes the negative effects of divorce on the quality of life of family members such as poor nutrition or malnutrition and its effects on family cyclical brokenness as weakened parent-adolescent relationships and suggests ways of ameliorating the problem. Among the suggestions made that School counsellors should see themselves as parents and guides to the adolescents involve. Some level of cordiality and friendliness should exist between them and the adolescents so that the adolescents will be free to confide in them.

Keywords: Psychosocial problems, Adolescents, divorced, counselling Implications

Introduction

Marriage is a social institution for union of a man and his wife in body and soul (Bakare, 1983). People view the concept of marriage from various perspectives. Some people view it as a contract which is as a result of legal consequences. The lady's bride price is refunded, if the termination is adjudged to be the fault of the wife or when there is a breach of contract. Divorce, generally perceived, means the break up or discontinuity in marriage arising from couple's inability to resolve their intolerable incompatibilities. Divorce is the final termination of marital

union, thus putting to an end the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage and dissolving bonds that hitherto bind couple together. This, though not the answer to family instability, divorce is a social problem (Booth & Amato 2001).

Marriage and divorce are both common experiences. Married couple expects a healthy life. Healthy marriage is good for couple's mental and physical health. It is also good for children; children grow up to be mentally, physically, educationally and socially balanced. However, divorce often shatters the peace and harmony in the family (Bakare, 1983). Divorce is typically a painful process for all concerned. It takes time for parties involved to regain psychological equilibrium (Farber, Primavera, & Felner, (1983). While the adults may regain, the children continue to suffer one form of maladjustment or the other. Post-divorce hostility between adults, in addition to directly harming kids, is a sure indicator that the emotional split is incomplete. Like every major life change, divorce is stressful affecting finances, living arrangements, household jobs, schedules and more (Bakare, 1983).

Causes of Divorce

Causes of divorce in Nigeria will be centered on variables such as negligence, sexual harassment, incompatibility, psychological problems, social problems, addictive behaviour, economic problems, opposition and absence of consensual decision making, intra dyad running down and health problems as outlined by Mezieobi, (2007). The paper, even though has a Nigerian perspective, the problems are universal in contemporary global community (Olayinka, 1990).

Effects of Divorce on the Quality of Life of Family Members

No matter how divorce is viewed, the fact is that it exerts some influence on the quality of life of family members. As Edinyang, (2012) rightly explained that all family conflicts diminish the quality of life. Physical and emotional difficulties may result from serious family conflict. There is also an extra problem of adjusting to a broken home. Children academic performance in school is negatively affected. A child from a single parent home cannot perform as well academically as others from a two-parent family (Grych, & Fincham, 1992). Aside the above effects on the quality of life of the people, it has been observed that several kinds of deviant behaviour such as stealing, drug abuse, bullying and rape have been associated with divorced families. Individuals who came from broken homes tend to have a variety of difficulties that can be referred to as maladjustment, antisocial behaviour, interpersonal problems and self-esteem problems (Grych, & Fincham, 1992; United State Bureau., 1999).

Other negative effects of divorce on the quality of life of the Nigerian family according to Mezieobi (2007: 74) includes:

Poor nutrition or malnutrition;

Higher incidence of illness and poor medical attention;

Substandard living and withdrawal from social participation;

Having low self esteem or image and adolescent may quit schooling or drop out of school;

Engendering disrespect for the family head and generating regular conflict between husband and wife;

Make children of the family loose respect and loyalty to their parents;

The boys in the family may take to the streets as street or area boys with possibility of becoming maladjusted and the girls in the family may opt for sex sell - making themselves, available to any man for paid sexual relationship for a chicken change;

Inability to undertake full parenting responsibilities and loss of parental discipline and control;

The woman in anger robbing the husband of convivial bliss or withholding sexual interaction with the husband;

Frictions in the family beclouding understanding, creativity, right or positive thinking; family members resorting to going cap in hand begging for alms.

Aside these, the family inmates also experience some socio-psychological difficulties. These according to Mezieobi (2007: 75) include:

Alienation, loneliness, depression, disillusionment, adjustment problems, dependent behaviour of overprotected children.

The children lose the essential ingredients required for father/mother-child relationship essential for their proper personality development such as co-operation, support, affection, security, guidance, achievement motivation, parental care.

Reduction in the frequency of the marital sex and its associated extra marital sex may lead to the contraction of infections and deadly sexual diseases.

Inadequate or absence of free flow of communication or enforced family communication breakdown which engender, among other things, unvoiced feelings of displeasure, insensitivity to each other's feelings, aggravated resentment, all of which culminate in active-aggressive fighting as shouting, hitting out or passive fighting such as leaving the room, sulking or staying silent.

Displaced aggressive behaviour occasioned by absence of communication in the home or the family.

Labeling a family negatively for its public nuisance value in its pronounced family instability. Remarriage in some cases

Children divided parental loyalties, maladjustment and indulgence in delinquent acts.

Absence of opportunities to remarry may lead to post marital sex, promiscuity for sexual gratification and its resultant illegitimate children with maladaptive problems and psychosomatic ailments.

Effects on the Family: Cyclical Brokenness

Weakened Parent-Adolescents Relationships

Amato (1994) studied When parents divorce each other, another sort of divorce occurs between the parents and their adolescent. The primary effect of divorce (and of the parental conflict that precedes the divorce) is a decline in the relationship between parent and child. Immediately after a divorce, most parents have two sets of problems: their adjustment to their own intrapsychic conflicts and to their role as a divorced parent. The stress of divorce damages the parent-adolescent relationship for as many as the support they receive from home is rated much lower by adolescent of divorced parents than by adolescent from intact homes. Booth and Amato (2001) found that adolescent from custodial father families perceive higher relationship quality with their mother- custody families. The clinical manifestation of divorce in adolescent depends on many variables including child's age, family, psycho-social functioning, the parents' ability in the midst of their own anger loss and discomfort to focus on their child's feelings and needs. According to Wallerstein & Kelly (1980) adolescent of divorced mothers have poorer and less stimulating home environments. Furthermore, divorced mothers, despite their best intentions, are less able than married mothers to give emotional support to their adolescent (Johnson, 1996). Divorce also causes a slight decline in adolescent's trust of their mothers when parental divorce occurs between birth and age four; however, after controlling for the quality of the parent- adolescent relationship, this effect all but disappears (Jekielek, 1996). Compared with continuously-married mothers, divorced mothers tend to be less affectionate and communicative with their adolescent, and to discipline them more harshly and more inconsistently, especially during the first year following the divorce (Amato, 1993). Healy, Malley, & Stewart (1990) says divorce leads to a decline in the frequency and quality of father- adolescent contact and relationships, and it becomes difficult for nonresidential parents, 90 percent of whom are fathers, to maintain close ties with their adolescent. For example, adolescent spend significantly more nights with their mother than their father (Amato, 1991).

Divorce negatively affects grandparent/ adolescent relationships (Hetherington, & Camara, 1988). Paternal grandparents frequently cease to see their grandchildren

as their grandchildren's contact with their own father, the grandparents' son, diminishes.

Adolescent's View of Divorce

Regardless of age, adolescent of divorce deeply resent the strains and difficulties which arise in long-held family celebrations, traditions, daily rituals, and special times, and rate these changes as major losses. Grown adolescent continue to see their parents' divorce very differently than do the parents. (Bishop, & Ingersoll 1989).

Adolescent's Weakened Ability to Handle Conflict

Divorce diminishes adolescent's capacity to handle conflict (Brown, 1993,). The difference between marriages that remain intact and those that end in divorce lies primarily in the couple's ability to handle marital conflict and move towards agreement. Parental modeling clearly diminishes many adolescent's capacity for stable marriage later in life, though some adolescent may react by doubling their efforts to ensure stability For instance, compared to students from intact families, college students from divorced families use violence more frequently to resolve conflict and are more likely to be aggressive and physically violent with their friends, male or female. In their own marriages, adolescent of divorced parents are more likely to be unhappy, to escalate conflict, to communicate less, to argue frequently, and to shout or to physically assault their spouse when arguing. Thus, the likelihood of divorce is transmitted across generations (Amato, 1988).

Adolescent's Early Departure from Home

Adolescent of divorced parents move away from their families of origin in greater proportions and earlier than do adolescent of intact marriages due to low levels of family cohesion and harmony (Cochran, & Vitz. 1983 Dumas, & Péron. 1992). The greater the unhappiness in their parents' marriage, the earlier adolescent leave home to get married, cohabit, or live on their own. Some adolescent who experience marital disruption in adolescence may leave home "at such young ages that it resembles running away from home. Furthermore, compared with adolescent living in intact, two-parent families, runaway adolescent with stepparents are only 70 percent as likely to return home Stepchildren are over 20 percent more likely to leave home earlier.

General Attitudes toward Marriage

Adolescent raised in divorced families have less positive attitudes towards marriage, and more positive attitudes towards divorce (Margulies, & Luchow, 1992). This negative attitude about marriage leads to decreased commitment to romantic relationships, which in turn is related to lower relationship quality (Ellis, 1990).

Effects on Religious Practice: Diminished Faithfulness

Following a divorce, adolescent are more likely to abandon their faith, and they may be less traditional themselves, with a parental model differing from a lifelong commitment to marriage (Magid, & Oborn, 1986). Adult offspring raised in stepfamilies are less religious (especially compared to those raised in happy married homes) (Fineman, 1989). Furthermore, abandoning religious practice deprives adolescent of its beneficial effects in a host of areas: marital stability, sexual restraint, education, income, crime, addictions, physical and mental health, and general happiness (Makinde, 2004).

Effects on Government: Increased Crime, Abuse, and Use of Drugs

Robert Sampson (then professor of sociology at the University of Chicago) reported, after studying 171 cities in the United States with populations over 100,000, that the divorce rate predicted the robbery rate of any given area, regardless of its economic and racial composition. In these communities, he found that lower divorce rates indicated higher formal and informal social controls (such as the supervision of adolescent) and lower crime rates. In 1994, it was reported in Wisconsin that the incarceration rate of juvenile delinquents was 12 times higher among adolescent of divorced parents than among adolescent of married parents. In a British longitudinal study of males aged eight to 32, David P. Farrington, professor of criminology at Cambridge University, found experiencing parental divorce before age 10 to be a major predictor of adolescent delinquency and adult criminality.

Adolescents from divorced families (particularly those in divorced single-father families) display more antisocial and violent behavior than adolescents in biologically intact families (Zill, Morrison, & Coiro 1993). An Australian parliamentary review of the literature found that divorce increases the likelihood that adolescent will feel hostility and rejection. Adolescent of divorced parents are significantly more likely than adolescent of intact married families to be delinquent by age 15, regardless of when the divorce took place (Mechanic & Hansell, 1989). A 1985 study that tracked one thousand families with children

ages six to 18 for six years found that adolescent living in intact married families exhibited the least delinquency, while adolescent with stepfathers were more likely to exhibit the most disruptive behavior. (In this study, the behavior of single-parent children fell between that of children of intact and stepfather families). Parental divorce contributes to what some studies term “externalizing behaviors,” which include weapon carrying, fighting, substance abuse, and binge drinking (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992).

Implications for counseling

Reducing the negative effects of divorce on adolescent is often a complex task for parents and social service professionals. Since, as discussed previously, divorce affects adolescent in a variety of ways, steps to reduce the negative impacts of divorce may need to be multi-faceted and specifically tailored to the needs and life circumstances of the particular adolescent. The more severely adolescent are affected, the more intense the intervention which is required, with some adolescent needing attention from trained psychologists or counsellors. Other adolescent may receive help from family or peers, or in their local environment. This paper suggest key way of reducing the negative impacts of divorce on adolescent, such as making use of support groups/therapeutic programs outside the immediate family.

Once a divorce has occurred, adolescent require support in order to minimise the negative effects they may experience. This can be informal support by family, peers or the educational system, or more formal therapeutic programs which are run by professional counsellors. Peers can play an important role in providing support, particularly those who have undergone similar experiences. Furthermore, intra-familial and extra-familial support networks can play an important role in reducing a adolescent’s level of stress and assisting them in coping with the upheaval of marital disruption. Schreiber (1983) suggests that surroundings can be helpful in providing support. For example, it may help if the adolescent can keep his/her own room, home, day care, school, and neighbors. In this way, some of the established support systems are in place during the divorce process.

The educational system can help mitigate the negative effects of divorce in a variety of ways, including the provision of direct and indirect services as well as preventative services to adolescent. Direct service can be provided through individuals or by groups, using counsellors or group therapy (Grych, & Fincham, 1992). Indirect services can be offered by increasing the awareness of school personnel on how to identify and assist adolescent from divorced families. Preventative service would provide adolescent of divorce with curriculum changes and additional facilities to help them cope with divorce (Hutchison, 1989).

Grych and Fincham, (1992) conducted an extensive examination of various intervention programs, as well as a discussion of evaluations of these programs. According to this paper, most adolescent -focused interventions attempt to help adolescent by alleviating the negative feelings, misconceptions and practical problems they commonly experience following a divorce. The programs generally use a time-limited, small-group format (4 to 10 adolescents); tend to be based in schools; and, share similar goals and strategies. The groups are usually both educational and therapeutic in focus and have the following types of goals: to clarify confusing and upsetting divorce issues, to provide a supportive place for adolescent to work through difficult issues, to develop skills for coping with upsetting feelings and difficult family situations, and to improve parent-adolescent communication. Techniques employed often include role playing, use of audiovisual materials, storytelling, social problem-solving exercises, drawing, bibliotherapy, and the creation of a group newspaper or television show which focuses on divorce. Although adolescent -focused groups are quite widespread, there appear to have been few formal evaluations of the various programs. Of those evaluations that have been conducted, the results seem encouraging - the intervention programs appear to have some positive effects in areas such as self-esteem, depression, social skills, and some forms of behaviour.

Conclusion

The family as the cornerstone of the society is expected to provide stability, support and continuity to the world. Family conflicts are quite natural and inevitable and divorce is not always the last resort. Marriages could still workout even at the brink of collapse if couples learn to tolerate each others' incompatibilities. It is undoubtful that divorce diminishes the quality of life of family members. Both physical and emotional difficulties may arise from divorce with untold hardship on the adolescents.

Suggestions

The following suggestions are made based on this study.

School counsellors should see themselves as parents and guides to the adolescents involve. Some level of cordiality and friendliness should exist between them and the adolescents so that the adolescents will be free to confide in them.

Government; community organization courts and religious organizations should work together to ensure that all unhappily married couples have access to counselling that is both affordable and child cantered.

There should be affective relationship and marriage skill classes. Healthy parenting invariably begins with emotional healthy parents. Encourage people to

establish effective relationships; classes of relationship and marriage skills should be incorporated into high school curricular and be a requirement for graduation. Sequel to the influence of family on adolescents' social and interpersonal relationships, divorce and conflicts in the home could be avoided by strengthening and improving the quality of family life.

Family casework should be taken with, every seriousness as this could help to ameliorate the adverse effects of divorce on the family. Casework should include educating the marriageable age about the great task of marriage life.

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