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# INFLUENCE OF MARITAL DISCORD, SEPARATION AND DIVORCE ON POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

By

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## Abstract

The study investigated the influence of marital discord, parental separation and divorce on the academic performance of undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan. A total of 400 students were randomly selected from 8 Faculties on the basis of convenience and availability. All participants' present Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) stands at 2.5 and below, which is a clear manifestation of poor academic performance. The participants responded to a validated questionnaire on parental marital discord, separation and divorce.

Four research hypotheses were generated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that significant difference exists between the academic performance of students from undisrupted homes and their counterparts from disrupted homes,  $t(398) = 5.824, P < 0.05$ . The mean of the academic performance of students from undisrupted homes (56.18) is taken to be better than the mean for those from disrupted homes (52.93). Also, significant relationship exists between academic performance and parental marital discord ( $r = -0.109$ ), academic performance and parental separation ( $r = -0.198$ ), and finally, academic performance and parental divorce ( $r = -0.226$ ).

It was therefore recommended that married individuals should endeavour to stay together for the sake of their children academic pursuits. Couples should be trained in acquisition of marital conflicts skills. Openness to each other, forgiveness, understanding and ability for couples to clothe themselves with love are all recommended.

## Introduction

Over the years, the investigation of the factors that influence academic performance of students have attracted the interest and concern of teachers, counsellors, psychologists, researchers and school administrators in Nigeria. This is because of the public outcries concerning the low standard of education in the country (Imoge, 2002). The declining quality of education in the country and the breeding of graduates with little technical expertise has resulted in serious setback to the industrial

development of the nation. Different factors are capable of influencing the academic performance of university students. Such factors may be the student's internal state (intelligence, state of health, motivation, anxiety etc) and their environment (unavailability of suitable learning environment, in adequate educational infrastructure like textbooks and well-equipped laboratories) (Entwisle, Alexander, & Horsey (1997). Reviewed literature indicated that there is an awareness of the importance of the home environment or family on student's academic performance (Sun & Li, 2002). The home has a great influence on the student's psychological, emotional, social and economical state (Sandefur & Wells, 1999). In the view of Ajila and Olutayo (2007), the state of the home affects the individual since the parent is the first socializing agent in the life of the individual, hence, the family background and context of a child affect his or her reaction to life situation as well as his level of performance.

Although the school is responsible for the experiences that shape the individual's life during the school period, yet parents and the individual's experiences at home play a tremendous role in building the personality of the child and making the child what he or she is. Thus, Ichado (2008) concluded that the environment from where the student comes greatly influences his performance at school.

Researchers and policy makers alike have become increasingly interested in the ways in which families shape students' performance in school. Factors such as family structures, parental involvement in students schooling and the characteristics of the literacy environment at the home front have been shown to benefit academic outcomes across the years of pre-primary, secondary and university schooling level. Numerous studies have documented that children from broken homes have significantly worse outcomes in school. The arising questions therefore are: Do marital discord, separation and divorce have an immediate impact on children's grade or do the effects appear later in schooling, if at all? Does the conflict that precedes divorce affect student's performance or is the actual separation or divorce the primary influence? Is the turmoil of marital dissolution reflected in a concurrent decline in academic performance? This is what the research is going to give answers to.

Developing a clearer picture of whether marital disruptions have an impact on student's success in school is an important step in understanding the interplay between two arenas of children's development: family and school. The differential scholastic achievement of students in Nigeria has been and is still a source of concern and research interest to educators, government and parents. The impact of marital discord on children progress in school has in particular become a major policy issue and a major focus of research because success or failure in school has

enduring consequences for the quality of life that people have, the kind of jobs they do, who they marry and how much they learn.

Poor academic performance according to Bakare, (1994) is the performance that falls below the desired standard. Aremu and Sokan, (2003), further described it as the performance that is adjudged by the examinee and significant others around the child as falling below an expected standard. Aremu (2000) stressed that academic failure is not only frustrating to students and their parents, its effects are equally gravely on the society in terms of dearth of manpower in all spheres of the economic and politics. The consequence of the prevalence of poor academic performance to the society is that it leads to underdevelopment at all levels. The essence of education is to advance but when people perform poorly, their dreams and hopes are shattered, there would not be freedom from poverty and diseases, there would be increase in ignorance, political instability and crime. Economically, poor academic performance spells doom for any society; if academic malfunctioning is rampant, then underdevelopment becomes perennial. Also, the individual student suffers a serious setback because students desire success and when this happens there is a consequence of satisfaction for one's ambition. On the other hand, when an individual fails, his or her ego is affected and it is a critical crush experience on the child. It can make him lose confidence in him or herself inferiority sets in, social and emotional life are affected, and of course his or her entire personality.

There is a substantial body of research linking both family structure and changes in family structure particularly through marital discord, separation and divorce with poor academic outcomes. Several studies show that students who grow up in a single-parent household or whose parents are separated have worse outcomes at many points in their educational trajectories (Pribesh & Downey, 1999a&b; Entwisle, Alexander & Horsey, 1997). McInahan and Sandefur (1994) specifically found that children who grow up in a single parent family have significantly lower test scores and grades and are more likely to leave school before graduating, and attend school less frequently while enrolled. Changes in family structure via divorce or separation have also been shown to negatively affect children's educational achievement across various points in the education trajectories. In general, students who experience a divorce have lower educational attainment compared with their peers who experience no divorce (Sandefur & Well, 1999). Using data from the national educational longitudinal study, Pribesh and Downey (1999a&b) found that students whose parents divorced during the student's high school years had substantially lower scores on standardized reading in Mathematics assessment than those whose family structure remained stable over the interval.



Marital discord, separation and divorce have posed a great threat to the society as a whole. The initial conception was that marital discord, separation and divorce is common among the illiterate or semi- educated couples but nowadays what we notice is that the so-called enlightened and educated people experience this. Everyday on radio news and newspapers we hear and read of marriage dissolutions. Apart from the prevalence of marital disruption, each year in the University of Ibadan a good number of students are advised to withdraw from the school or from the faculty due to the fact that they were unable to meet up with the required units as set by the university. The permanence of this ugly incidence will continue to affect the future life of our potential leaders of tomorrow.

Marriage is a sacred institution that has captured the researcher's attention and became increasingly concerned with the adverse effects it has on the society. Everyday on radio news and newspapers we hear and read of marriage dissolutions. The permanence of this ugly incidence will continue to affect the future life of our potential leaders of tomorrow. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to consider these three factors namely; marital discord, separation, divorce, and its effect on poor academic performance of undergraduate student of the University of Ibadan. It will also give attention to this question; is the turmoil of marital discord, separation and divorce reflected in the concurrent decline in academic performance? What are the various factors that have brought about these problems in the family?

Marital discord, according to Amato (2006) is defined as the inability to talk about differences in the marital relationship and come to an agreement about how these differences would be managed. Common differences may include areas such as finances, value, sex, childrearing e .t. c. This inability to discuss and manage these differences commonly is expressed in two major ways: either overt hostility such as arguing, put downs, physical violence, etc. or emotional withdrawal via spending less and less time together, throwing oneself into work; affairs, etc. Either type of marital discord can have a huge negative impact on developing children. One of the most terrifying things to a child is the possibility that their parents may break up. In the heat of marital discord, many people fail to recognize the intense fear engendered in their children. Below is a list of common sources of marital stress and conflict;

Money Problems: Most couples argue over bills, debt, spending, and other financial issues. Children: discipline, choice of school, decision on courses etc; Sex: Frequency, quantity, quality, and infidelity are all common sources of stress and disharmony in a marriage; Household Responsibilities: Many couples argue over equitable distribution of

household work and how to do it; Friends: Not all friends are helpful to relationships some of them are toxic and stressors to happy homes; Irritating Habits: Many people are married to someone who has one or more habits they find undesirable. Like a marriage partner who snores, who has a bad eating habit, who drinks excessively and so on; Extended family: In-laws, siblings, children and stepchildren can all create stress within a marriage; Expectations: We all go into marriage with certain expectations. Most of the time, marriage is the opposite of what we expected. We romanticize marriage and become disillusioned once those romantic expectations are not met. Unmet expectations are a major source of conflict in marriages; Personality Conflicts: Partners with incompatible personality endowments are often at loggerheads especially where understanding and considerations are lacking (Alexander & Horsey, 1997; Furstenberg, 1999; Amato & Keith, 1999; Martins, 2006).

This study therefore, investigated the influence of marital discord, separation and divorce on poor academic performance of undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan. In order to have a clearer representation of the population, students will be drawn from various levels of study in the university.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a descriptive survey method. The population for this study consisted of all undergraduate students of University of Ibadan. However, the sample of the study was drawn using 8 faculties namely: Faculty of science, Education, Art, Social-Science, Agric Technology, Law and Veterinary medicine. Several students from the 8 randomly selected Faculties were used for the study, but only those whose current Cumulative Grade Point Average( CGPA) stands at 2.5 and below were finally selected from the pool. This was taken to be a manifestation of poor academic performance. Hence, 50 students of such were selected from each Faculties so as to obtain a sample that appears to be the representative of the population under study. This made a total of 400 students that participated in the study. It was believed that the sample would definitely produce students who are products of intact homes, marital discord, parental separation and divorce homes.

The study made use of a questionnaire having 4 sections (A-D). Section A contains the demographic information which include personal data as well as statement of the current CGPA, and the specific type of home from where the students came.. Sections B,C, and D are Marital Discord scale, Parental Separation scale and Parental Divorce scale

0.79 and  $D=0.82$ . The Questionnaires were administered on 400 samples of the University of Ibadan students. In analyzing the data, T-test and Pearson product moment correlation were used.

## Results and Discussion

### Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference between the academic performance of students from disrupted homes and students from undisrupted homes.

Table 1: T-test summary showing significant difference between the academic performance of students from disrupted and undisrupted homes

Variable	Home status	N	Mean	Std.dev	t	Df	sig	P
Academic performance	Undisrupted	251	56.18	20.29	5.824	398	.000	Sig
	Disrupted	149	52.93	20.96				

Table 1 shows that there was significant difference in the academic performance of students from disrupted and those from undisrupted homes;  $t(398) = 5.824$ ,  $P < .05$ . The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The table further revealed that students from undisrupted home shows better performance than those from disrupted homes (see mean distribution in table 1).

### Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between marital discord and academic performance of students.

Table 2: Pearson correlation showing significant relationship between marital discord and academic performance

Variables	N	Mean	Std.dev	r	Df	Sig	P
Academic performance	400	51.84	20.53	-0.109	398	.029	sig
Marital discord	400	44.84	17.56				

Table 2 shows that there was significant negative relationship between marital discord and academic performance of students;  $r(398) = -0.109$ ,  $P < .05$ . The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This implies that marital discord negatively influence academic performance of students.

### Hypothesis Three

There is no significant relationship between parental separation and academic performance of students.

Table 3: Pearson correlation showing significant relationship between parental separation and academic performance

Variables	N	Mean	Std.dev	r	Df	Sig	P
Academic performance	400	51.84	20.53	-0.198	398	.019	sig
Parental separation	400	42.66	15.37				

Table 3 shows that there was significant negative relationship between parental separation and academic performance of students;  $r(398) = -0.198$ ,  $P < .05$ . The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This implies that parental separation negatively influence academic performance of students.

### Hypothesis Four

There is no significant relationship between parental divorce and academic performance of students.

Table 4: Pearson correlation showing significant relationship between parental divorce and academic performance

Variables	N	Mean	Std.dev	r	Df	Sig	P
Academic performance	400	51.84	20.53	-0.226	398	.016	sig
Parental divorce	400	42.62	13.65				

Table 4 shows that there was significant negative relationship between parental divorce and academic performance of students;  $r(398) = -0.226$ ,  $P < .05$ . The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This implies that parental divorce negatively influence academic performance of students.

In discussing the first hypotheses which states that there is no significant difference in the academic performance of students from disrupted and those from undisrupted homes, the result indicated that there was significant difference. Table 1 further revealed that students from undisrupted home shows better performance than those from disrupted homes thus the null hypotheses was therefore rejected.

The result is in line with the findings and conclusion of Azewunwa, (1995), Sandefur and Well, (1999), Ajila and Olutayo, (2007) as well as Ichado,(2008) that there is a significant difference between students from single family and those from two parent family in terms of attitude to examination malpractices, attitude to studies and academic performance. This attitude could be explained by the fact that life in a single parent family can be traumatizing and children brought up in such family structure often suffer some emotional problems such as lack of warmth, love and disciplinary problem which may hinder their academic performance.

However it should be noted that this situation might not always be true in all cases since there are some children in single parent family structures who still perform academically better than their counterpart (Ajila & Olutayo 2007). This situation may however be attributed to other factors inherent in the personality of the child. Whatever the result, parental separation and divorce tend to affect youths who are the subject of this study. The second hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between marital discord and academic performance of students. The result indicates that there was significant negative relationship between marital discord and academic performance of students. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This implies that marital discord negatively influence academic performance of students. (see table 2) This result, no doubt agrees with the observation made by Temples & Hills (2009) that during the pre-divorce years, most parents experience marital discord. This discord is characterized with a high level of frustration and hostility between parents. The resulting stress and tension disrupt the household and children's academic and social development. The stress of marital conflict can cause parents to become more inconsistent and ineffective in parenting, and may reduce responsibility to children's emotional needs, academic needs and signals, diminishing the quality of the emotional relationships and attachments between parents and children (Stevenson-Hinde, 2009).The level of parental discord is one of the strongest predictors of children's adjustment in school. This is a better predictor of adjustment than separation and divorce per se . Exposure to longer-term parental conflict has been consistently shown in clinical studies to be a chronic stress for children, leading over time to the development of dysfunctional behavioral patterns in the child (Cummings & Jourils, 2009). Greater frequency of marital conflict is associated with greater childhood difficulties

High levels of marital conflict are more closely related to children's scholastic performance. Research shows that children of high conflict divorcing families are often pre-occupied with surviving in the emotionally volatile climate of their divided family, they are confused about their loyalties

and unsure of what is true. This state of mind is one of acute anxiety for the child, whose capacities for everyday learning, thinking, interacting and playing can be sorely diminished by their internal struggles (Johnston, 1997). The content of parents' arguments is an important variable - children are more distressed when the fight is about them (Amato & Keith, 1999). Children from high conflict marital situations are especially vulnerable to excessive aggression, defiance, delinquency, poor relationships with parents and poor peer skills (Azewunwa, 1995).

The third hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between parental separation and academic performance of students. However, the result showed that there was significant negative relationship between parental separation and academic performance of students. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This implies that parental separation negatively influence academic performance of students (see table3). One area where the effects of separation can be more obvious is in a child's education. Sometimes a student's marks may drop or they may begin acting out in class. In fact any change of behavior can signify that a child is having difficulty coping with the breakdown of a parent's marriage. For this reason, communication between school and home is vital. This result is not surprising because researchers like Cherlin (1992) and Dawson (1991) came about such findings.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between parental divorce and academic performance of students. According to the result of this finding, there was a significant negative relationship between parental divorce and academic performance of students this implies that parental divorce negatively influence academic performance of students. The impact of parental divorce and subsequent father absence in the wake of this event has long been thought to affect children quite negatively. For instance, parental divorce and father loss has been associated with difficulties in school adjustment, Social Adjustment (Amato, 1993) and personal adjustment. Many of the effects of divorce upon the child include depression, isolations, social inadequacy, mental health issues and academic status decreases. In another study by Mc Lanahan and Sandefur (1994) lower achievement of children in single parent families was associated with disruption in the family resulting in fewer resources, less time and energy. A study conducted in 1991 suggests that out of 13,000 people, the children that come from a divorced family tended to have poor academic performance and displayed more behavior problems. Some American couples suggest the divorce may be a way to solve their problems quickly and perhaps, more easily, rather than taking the time to work things out through counseling and other alternatives. When divorce occurs it does not just happen between those that are married, everyone in relation to the divorcee is affected. Ichado

(2008). Research shows that children (male and female) of high conflict divorcing families are often pre-occupied with surviving in the emotionally volatile climate of their divided family; they are confused about their loyalties and unsure of what is true. This state of mind is one of acute anxiety for the child, whose capacities for everyday learning, thinking, interacting and playing can be sorely diminished by their internal struggles (Ichado, 2008; Animasahun, 2010).

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study it is hereby recommended that at different for a couples should be encouraged to avoid separation and divorce. Also, they should manage marital conflicts at home so that this will not degenerate to separation and divorce.

For the couples, when argument gets out of hand they should leave each other alone for about an hour or two to cool down. When both partners have calmed down, they can attempt to discuss it reasonably and fairly. Once both partners have calmed down considerably, they should face each other and try to talk things over evenly. It may be useful to have a full and open discussion about the problem and understand each other's point of view. Couples should undergo training in listening skills to be able to listen carefully to what each other has to say and try their best to understand each other's concerns and they should accept one's fault. Mutual understanding of each other's needs, concerns and problems is of paramount importance. Finally, since myriads of problems abound in marriage, couples should do all that they can in avoiding all sources of marital disruption and reduce the effect it might have on children. This the couple can do by clothing themselves with love.

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