

INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL CONFLICT ON BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS OF ADOLESCENTS AS EXPRESSED BY UNDERGRADUATES OF UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

The risk of parental conflict on children is usually traumatic and devastating. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating the influence of parental conflict on behaviour problems of adolescents as expressed by undergraduates of university of Ilorin, Nigeria. The descriptive survey research design was employed for this study. The population of this study comprised all undergraduates of university of Ilorin while the target population consisted of students selected from the faculties of Education, Agriculture and Management Sciences. The simple random and proportional sampling technique was used to select 250 students from these faculties. A questionnaire designed by the researchers was used for the collection of data. The questionnaire was validated by experts in the department of Counsellor Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained; yielded a co-efficient $R=0.67$. The data collected was analysed using mean and t-test at 0.05 alpha level. The findings indicated that low self-esteem, use of abusive language, lack of concentration in school, loneliness, truancy, bullying and frequent lying are the behaviour problems manifested in adolescents experiencing parental conflict. The findings also showed that there were no significant differences in the expression of Undergraduates of University of Ilorin, Nigeria on the influence of parental conflict on behaviour problems based on gender and age. This study, therefore, recommended that couples experiencing marital conflict are encouraged to visit counsellors for guidance and to provide effective conflict resolution and management strategies, in order to minimize the consequences on children.

Keywords: Parent, Conflict, Behaviour Problems, Consequences and Adolescents

Introduction

Conflict is inevitable in all interpersonal relationships. Conflict connotes disagreement and quarrel. It can be defined as the escalation of a disagreement, which is a common prerequisite and it is characterized by the existence of destructive behaviour in which the people involved are actively trying to damage one another. It can also be defined as lack of peace in the environment, which implies clash of interest. Conflict in a family therefore, refers to a situation whereby the smooth interaction and relationship among members of a family is disrupted. This can be between the parents, among the parents and the children. Conflict in a family is usually characterized with emotional upset, feelings of anxiety, anger and can be heightened by abusive languages and hostile actions. Conflict in a family could arise as a result of lack of trust, inadequate communication, history of infidelity, lack of respect, joblessness and idleness.

Family is a very important agent of socialization. Parental disposition plays a vital role in determining who the children are and how the children would behave. Amir (2017) viewed that the behavioural, emotional and physical outcomes of children largely depends on parents. Cohesive families are characterized by a smooth atmosphere of support and understanding. According to Barthassat (2014), parental conflict is regarded as a disagreement that results into lesser interaction of the parent; this can be frequent, explosive, intense, unresolved and harmful. Parental conflicts occur because of the presence of strong negative emotions, misperceptions or stereotypes, poor communication or miscommunication, or repetitive negative behaviours. Its negative impact is on members who witness such violence or abuse between parents.

Parental attitudes have a strong impact not only on family relationships but also on the attitudes and behaviour of children. Parents have different ideas, opinions, values and priorities which cause disputes among them. Sarrazin and Cyr (2007) remarked that when parents are in conflict, children are greatly affected.

Parental conflicts usually lead to children's maladjustment and confusion which consequently results in negative effects on social, cognitive, educational and psychological functions (Cummings & Davies, 2002). Harold and Sellers (2018) reported that children experiencing parental conflict are at the risk of mental health problems and future psychiatric disorder. Sturge-Apple, Skibo and Davies (2012) added that the impact of parental conflict on children is usually traumatic and devastating. It is characterized with significant distress and psychological problems. Rivett, Howarth and Harold(2006) opined that children brought up in households exposed to acute or chronic economic strain, inter-parental conflict and violence have been shown to experience a variety of negative psychological outcomes, including increased anxiety, depression, aggression, hostility and anti-social behaviour. Adults raised in families where parental conflict exist frequently report difficulties in forming and maintaining intimate relationships, maintaining positive self-esteem, and trusting others. They fear a loss of control, and deny their feelings and reality (Coohey, Renner, Hua, Zhang & Whitney, 2011).

According to Nielsen (2017), parental conflict is not uncommon. How often the parent fight, how intense, angry or hurtful they are and how long such conflicts last are all factors in the child's adjustment (Goek-Morey, Cummings & Papp, 2007). Conflict may have different forms; verbal attacks, physical abuse, emotional abuse, nagging, argument, disagreement, physical abuse, damaging of properties. Conflict tends to escalate by one parent wanting to pursue the misunderstanding through yelling and nagging, trivial issues remain unresolved for lengthy days, creating tension and affecting children's mental health; such erodes good relationships. Children are fully aware of their parental battles even behind closed doors. Children highly tuned to their parent's emotional state of mind during cries. They understand when there is conflict and recognized it if it has been resolved. Such conflict has a profound effect on the children, causing many problems, such as behaviour and academic difficulties.

Parental conflicts predispose children to behaviour problems that are unhealthy and risky (Borst, 2015; Goldberg & Carlson, 2014). Behaviour problems are at-risk characters that hinder social relations, communications, learning of a child and causing harm to them, their families, their peers and other adults. It manifests as truants and displays tendency to violence. Behaviour problems prevent the child from using his current skills and also prevent the child from acquiring new ones. Tendency to harm is also seen in children with behaviour problems, they are prone to harm themselves or others close to them and this poses a serious danger. They also have the tendency to manifest moderate to severe mental health issues, including possible depression, worry, sadness, anxiety and suicidal thoughts (Brock & Kochanska, 2016; Harold & Sellers, 2018).

As a result of parental conflict, some children become addicted to smoking, alcohol, and/or drugs, especially if parents or friends have done the same. Some of these children bully or harass others, or become victims of dangerous settings. A good number of these children grow up in denial regarding the severity of the family's situation and have mixed feelings of love and hate towards certain family members. Some end up becoming sex offenders, possibly including pedophilia. Most of these children, as they grow up, have difficulties in forming healthy relationships within their peer group, usually due to shyness or a personality disorder. They tend to spend great amount of time alone watching television, playing video games, surfing the internet, listening to music, and other activities which lack interpersonal and social interactions. Most of them often feel angry, anxious, depressed, isolated from others, or unlovable and may have speech disorders related to emotional abuse (Harkness & Lumley, 2008). They have a general mistrust of other people or even have psychotic disorder and become juvenile delinquents, easily turning to a life of

crime; with or without dropping out of school, and possibly enlisting as gang members as well. They have low self-esteem or a poor self-image with difficulty expressing emotions (Amir, 2017) and struggle academically at school or their academic performance declines unexpectedly, among others.

Statement of the Problem

Parent is the fundamental or the building block which a child is made up of. Parental personality determines significantly the way of life of children. It influences the well-being as well as the crises faced by the children. Parental conflicts make the children vulnerable to truancy, violence, maladjustment, indiscipline, aggressiveness, academic problems and other behavioural problems. Absconding from schools, bullying, lateness, learning disorder and shyness are aftermath of parental conflict. Parental conflicts prevent good intra and inter personal relationships. It develops poor parent, siblings and peer relationship. It causes disturbances and hostility in the future relationship. Children experiencing parental conflict tend to experience higher levels of internalizing symptoms and externalizing problems, such as, emotional imbalance and poor social interaction. Based on the aforementioned, this study aimed at investigating influence of parental conflict on behaviour problems of adolescents as expressed by undergraduates of university of Ilorin, Nigeria.

Research Question

1. What are the influences of parental conflict on behaviour problems as expressed by undergraduates of university of Ilorin, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the expression of undergraduates of university of Ilorin on the influence of parental conflict on behaviour problems based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the expression of undergraduates of university of Ilorin on the influence of parental conflict on behaviour problems based on age.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was used for this study. The population of this study comprised all undergraduates of university of Ilorin while the target population consisted of student selected from three faculties which are Education, Agriculture and Management Sciences. The proportional sampling technique was used to select 250 students in the ratio 100:70:80 across the selected faculties respectively. The simple random sampling technique was adopted to select the respondents for the study. A questionnaire designed by the researchers was used for the collection of data for this study. The questionnaire had two sections; section A elicited information on the demographic characteristics of respondents and section B showed the items on influence of parental conflict on behaviour problems. The questionnaire was structured on a four point Likert-type scale of Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points) and Strongly Disagree (1 point). The criterion mean is $4+3+2+1/4=2.50$.

The type of validity employed for this study is content validity. In order to ensure the content validity of the questionnaire, copies of the questionnaire were given to five lecturers in the department of counsellor Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. Corrections and adjustments were made based on their suggestions in the final draft of the questionnaire. The test-retest reliability was used by the researchers for the conduct of this study. 20 copies of the questionnaire were given to undergraduates who were not part of the respondents used for this study at two different times at an interval of four weeks. The two sets of scores were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) and a reliability coefficient of 0.67 was obtained. The researchers administered the copies of the questionnaire on the respondents and were retrieved accordingly for analysis. The data collected was analyzed using the descriptive and inferential statistics. The research question was answered using mean while the hypotheses formulated were tested using t-test at 0.05 alpha level.

Results

Research Question 1: *What are the influences of parental conflict on behaviour problems as expressed by undergraduates of university of Ilorin, Nigeria?*

Table 1: Mean and Rank Order of Respondents on the Influence of Parental Conflict on Behaviour Problems as expressed by Undergraduates of University of Ilorin, Nigeria

S/N	Item	As far as I am concerned, because my parents usually engage in conflict, I exhibit the following:	Mean	Rank
1	11	low self-esteem	3.33	1 st
2	17	poor academic performance	3.30	2 nd
3	3	Depression	3.25	3 rd
4	2	Fear	3.24	4 rd
5	9	Frustration	3.20	5 th
6	10	Disobedience	3.18	6 th
7	12	Truancy	3.11	7 th
8	4	Bullying	3.10	8 th
9	6	use of abusive language	2.96	9 th
10	18	Loneliness	2.86	10 th
11	8	self-criticism	2.83	11 th
12	13	frequent lying	2.81	12 th
13	5	Disrespect	2.80	13 th
14	1	violent behaviour	2.74	14 th
15	7	poor-interpersonal relationship	2.69	15 th
16	15	lack of concentration in school	2.62	16 th
17	16	Hatred	2.57	17 th
18	19	feeling of insecurity	2.56	18 th
19	20	nonchalant attitude	2.53	19 th
20	14	Stealing	2.51	20 th

Table 1 presents the mean and rank order on influences of parental conflicts on behaviour problems as expressed by undergraduates of university of Ilorin, Nigeria. The table shows that all the 20 items have a mean value that is above the bench mark of 2.50. This implies that the items are agreed upon by the respondents as form of behaviour problems exhibited by undergraduates experiencing parental conflicts.

Hypotheses Testing

Two null hypotheses were formulated and tested for this study.

Hypothesis One: *There is no significant difference in the expression of undergraduates of university of Ilorin on the influence of parental conflicts on behaviour problems based on gender.*

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test of Respondents on Influence of Parental Conflict on Behaviour Problems as expressed by Undergraduates of University of Ilorin based on gender.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t	Critical. t	p-value	Decision
Male	116	45.97	11.050	248	0.92	1.96	.36	Accepted
Female	134	47.30	11.606					

Table 2 presents the calculated t-value of 0.92 which is less than the critical t-value of 1.96, with a corresponding p-value of .36 which is greater at 0.05 alpha level. This indicated that there was no significant difference in the expression of males and females undergraduates of University of Ilorin, Nigeria on the influence of parental conflict on behaviour problems.

Hypothesis Two: *There is no significant difference in the expression of undergraduates of university of Ilorin on the influence of parental conflicts on behaviour problems based on age*

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test of Respondents on the Influence of Parental Conflict on Behaviour Problems as expressed by Undergraduates of University of Ilorin based on age.

Age	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal. t	Crit. t	p-value	Decision
Below 15 years	92	46.00	11.462					
16 years and above	158	47.08	11.299	248	0.73	1.96	.47	Accepted

Table 3 presents the calculated t-value of 0.73 which is less than the critical t-value of 1.96, with a corresponding p-value of .47 which is greater at 0.05 alpha level. This implied that there was no significant difference in expression of undergraduates of University of Ilorin, Nigeria on the influence of parental conflict on behaviour problems based on age.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that parental conflicts have negative influence on undergraduates of University of Ilorin, Nigeria, thereby, making them exhibit various behaviour problems. The findings indicated that low self-esteem, use of abusive language, lack of concentration in school, loneliness, truancy, bullying and frequent lying are some of the behaviour problems manifested in children experiencing parental conflict. The finding of this study is in line with the study of Cummings and Davies (2002); Brock and Kochanska (2016), Amir (2017) which found that parental conflicts have negative outcomes on children. Children experiencing parental conflict usually manifest social and emotional trouble such as depression, anxiety, phobia and loneliness. The reason adduced for this finding is that an individual attitude is generally explained in terms of the genetic make-up and the environment in which the individual lives. The environment that is corrupt and not safe from conflict is likely to affect the children negatively.

The result of hypothesis one indicated that there was no significant difference on the influence of parental conflict on behaviour problems of adolescents on the basis of gender. This finding agreed with the findings of Goldberg and Carlson (2014) who found that both gender experience internal and external problems as a result of parental conflict. The reason adduced for this is that children whether male or female love to be like their parents; whatever is happening to their parents, they share from it.

The result of hypothesis two showed that there was no significant difference on the influence of parental conflict on behaviour problems of adolescents on the basis of age. This finding of this study is in tandem with Brock and Kochanska (2016) who found that the aftermath effects of parental conflict are felt at childhood, toddlerhood and adolescence periods. The reason for this is that the consequences of parental conflict could be felt at any stage in life. Parental conflict experienced cannot be easily forgotten, it might influence attitude of children in the future marital relationship.

Recommendations

This study recommended that:

1. Undergraduates should be given sensitization seminar on the management strategies to adopt in order to live optimally in a conflict based environment.
2. Counsellors should equip adolescents with appropriate social skills that can help to develop positive self-esteem and behavioural adjustment. This will assist them in improving interpersonal relationship.
3. Couples experiencing marital conflict are encouraged to visit counsellors for guidance and to provide effective conflict resolution and management strategies, in order to minimize the consequences on children.

4. Counsellors should organise regular awareness programme for the married and emphasis be given on the enormous impacts of parental conflicts on the children.

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