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## Impact Of Maternal Deprivation on Adolescents' Psychosocial Development in the Buea Municipality, South West Region of Cameroon

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### ABSTRACT

The impact of maternal deprivation on adolescents' psychosocial development in the Buea municipality, South West region. The objectives of this study were: to find out how maternal divorce influences on the psychosocial development of adolescents, to investigate how maternal death influenced the psychosocial development of adolescents and to identify the influence of maternal illness on the psychosocial development of adolescents. This study made use of the survey research design and the simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample of 50 students for the study. The questionnaire was used for data collection. Data was analyzed using the percentage and thematically. The findings revealed that 72% of the respondents supported the fact that when the mother is divorced it brings about indiscipline, truancy, promiscuity and aggressiveness, 62% of the respondents supported that maternal death brought about promiscuity, truancy and waywardness in adolescents and 62% of the respondents supported that maternal illness brought about negative impacts on the psychosocial development of adolescents. The study recommended that childcare activists and practitioners work towards creating a society where adolescents are very involved and not just mere victims of circumstances beyond their control and to find good therapeutic interventions to assist adolescents who are have been deprived from maternal care.

### KEYWORDS

Adolescent, Deprivation, Psychosocial, Development, Maternal



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## Introduction/Literature review

Psychosocial development in the terms of Erik Erickson refers to the various stages through which an individual develops a social identity of himself while interacting with his environment which helps him define himself, develop his values, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions aimed at helping him or her live a stable and adjusted development. Thus, psychosocial development encompasses the sum of psychological and socio-cultural elements which fashion the identity of a person and in turns helps him to conform himself to the standards of the society.

It can further be viewed upon as the sum total of the cognitive, social and emotional changes which occurs in individuals as they mature and interact with their environment. Understanding the impact of maternal deprivation on psychosocial development is crucial for several reasons:

Firstly, psychosocial development is a key aspect of overall well-being and plays a significant role in determining an individual's success and happiness in life it encompasses various factors such as emotional stability, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, and overall mental health

Secondly, in the context of this study its worth retaining that psychosocial development plays a crucial role as it enables us to understand how maternal deprivation if not assessed and mitigated can greatly mar the psychosocial adjustment of these adolescents and bring about deviancy in their behaviors with observable patterns such as deviancy, truancy, promiscuity, addictions, delinquency and violence of all forms which may pose issues relating to emotional regulation, self-control, attachment to parental figures, respect of instituted authority, social acceptance of peers, social adaptation, social identification etc. Thirdly, psychosocial development in the context of this study can help us understand how maternal deprivation affects the adolescents' identity formation, self-esteem, relationships, values and well-being.

In sum, psychosocial development in line with this study shows us the interplay that exist between early child-mother attachment and personality development and adjustment and the risks to which adolescents may be exposed to in terms of their psychological adaptation if they happened to grow without their mothers which was evident amongst the adolescents of the Buea municipality.

Maternal deprivation is a term that refers to the lack of warm, intimate and continuous relationship between an infant and his or her mother (or primary caregiver) in the early stages of life. According to John Bowlby, the founder of the theory of attachment, maternal deprivation can have significant and irreversible effects on the mental health and development of the child, such as anxiety, depression, aggression, delinquency, and personality disorders. In addition to that maternal deprivation is a form of child neglect that can have negative consequences for the adolescents' physical, emotional, and cognitive development. Maternal deprivation can also impair the adolescents' ability to cope with the psychosocial crisis of identity Vs Role confusion which is the main task of this stage.

Maternal deprivation can have negative effects on the adolescents' or child's physical, cognitive, emotional and social development, especially during the sensitive periods of early childhood and adolescence. Psychosocial development looks at the process of forming one's personality and social skills through the interaction between one's individual needs and the needs or demands of society. The causality between these two variables resides in the fact that maternal deprivation can impair the adolescent's ability to achieve a positive identity and to form healthy relationships with others. Maternal deprivation can also increase the risk of internalizing and externalizing problems such as depression, anxiety, aggression, and delinquency. Thus, portraying how maternal deprivation brings about significant impediments in the psychosocial development of adolescents.

Supporting ourselves on John Bowlby's framework on attachment, Mary Ainsworth's works and Harry Harlow's theory we can vividly realise the negative effects that abrupt maternal separation can cause in a developing child or adolescent. The results of their studies clearly demonstrated to us that infants who did not receive adequate maternal care, support and concern were less adjusted and emotionally stable than those who had previously obtained such motherly care. In the findings of Bowlby, we here note "maternal deprivation in the child's early life caused permanent emotional damage. He diagnosed this as a condition and called it Affectionless Psychopathy. (Bowlby, 1944; Harry 1950;1960;, Ainsworth, 1960;1970)

According to Bowlby, this condition involves a lack of emotional development, characterized by a lack of concern for others, lack of guilt and inability to form meaningful and lasting relationships. Deprivation can be avoided if there is good emotional care after separation. There are implications arising from Bowlby's work. As he believed the mother to be the most central care giver and that this care should be given on a continuous basis and an obvious implication is that mothers should be present and if they can't be someone should be put at the disposal of the child in order to help the latter not to realize the absence of the real mother ( Bowlby,1944). He alongside Ainsworth, Harlow and other scholars who have accorded great importance to attachment in parents-infants have demonstrated to sufficiency that adolescents or children who have been deprived from their mothers for reasons of death, illness or divorce or whatever were at risk of developing mental health problems, lower self-esteem, poorer social skills and depict an impaired emotional regulation. Bowlby, 1944; Harry 1950;1960;, Ainsworth, 1960;1970)

It's critical for us to emphasize that this study was conducted within the town of Buea, cosmopolitan city located at the heart of the FAKO division and headquarter of the south west region marked by a diversity of social activities, educational institutions, training centers, economic activities and administrative, touristic and recreational purposes which has given the city the status of the town of legendary hospitality. This beautiful arena within which the town has constructed itself doesn't in anyway disregard or dispel or disqualify the fact that it's a town marked by its odds and goods. The city has lately been marked by a violent political and social unrest which has raged the locality for over 7 years today, keeping the inhabitants of this town and of other localities and head quarters of the two English speaking regions in untold pains, trauma, economic paralysis, phobia and the perpetual quest for a "safe heaven". At the mercy of these conflicts, killings and exactions committed by the perpetrators are vulnerable adolescents and their families who for many of them have lost their mothers, motherly figures and other significant others in their families. As a consequence of this sudden and unpredicted change in the course of their lives, many of them found themselves joining the gang of armed fighters in the camp of rebel, dropping out of school, embracing criminality, hard drugs, prostitution and all sorts of negative ills of the society as a mechanism to fill that gap from the loss of their mother.

More so another contributing factor which in the majority of the time brought about the problem of maternal deprivation amongst adolescents within the Buea municipality was a result of the fact that we observed and got through our interviews that many of these adolescents got separated from their mothers because of divorce and ill health and as a result of that they were seriously affected since their mothers were mainly the ones taking good care of them, counselling them, coaching them in line with their studies and seeing to that they should be happy; but when came about this painful scenario, most of these adolescents got separated from them and left at their mercy; no wonder we obtained the results which we obtained from our research instrument which showed to sufficiency that maternal deprivation has grave negative consequences on the psychosocial adjustment of the adolescents of our study.

In sum, a number of factors contributed to the accentuation of maternal deprivation amongst these adolescents, amongst which included: political climate, the influence of some social variables like family stability, economic situation, etc which all acted as a breeding ground for maternal deprivation to crop in giving room to all sorts of negative impediments and negative behavioural patterns in these adolescents leading to problems in the adaptation to social life, educational life and family life.

### **Statement of the problem**

However, the actual situation reveals that some adolescents in the Buea municipality experience maternal deprivation, either due to the absence or inadequate presence of a mother figure. This deprivation may arise from various factors such as maternal abandonment, divorce, or maternal health issues. The lack of maternal care during this crucial period can potentially have detrimental effects on the psychosocial development of these adolescents who cannot confidently go through their studies and achieve their academic goals, affecting areas such as self-confidence, identity formation, interpersonal relationships, and emotional well-being.

In an ideal situation, adolescents in the Buea municipality would benefit from a nurturing and supportive maternal presence during their critical developmental stages. Maternal care and involvement are crucial for fostering healthy psychosocial development among adolescents, enabling them to develop positive self-esteem, emotional regulation skills, social competence, and overall well-being.

The incongruence between the ideal and actual situations highlights the problematic nature of this study. By examining the impact of maternal deprivation on adolescents' psychosocial development in the Buea municipality, it becomes essential to address this discrepancy and identify effective strategies to mitigate the adverse consequences faced by these adolescents.

### **Objectives of the study**

- Is to examine the influence that maternal divorce has on the psychosocial development of adolescents.
- Is to investigate how maternal death influences the psychosocial development of adolescents.
- Is to identify the influence of maternal illnesses on the psychosocial development of adolescents.

### **Justification of the study**

The reason for carrying out this study could include the following reasons amongst many others, they included:

Numerous scientific works and scholars have emphasized the critical role of maternal involvement in adolescents' psychosocial development. Bowlby (1969) proposed the attachment theory, which highlights the significance of secure attachment between infants and their primary caregivers for healthy development. Research by a study conducted by Ainsworth et al. (1978) showed that maternal deprivation can lead to long-term negative consequences on social and emotional development. Therefore, investigating the impact of maternal deprivation on adolescents' psychosocial development is crucial in understanding the potential risks and designing appropriate interventions.

Moreso, Cameroon is a diverse country with unique cultural norms and practices. Hence, examining maternal deprivation and its effect on adolescents' psychosocial development within the Buea municipality will provide insights into the specific context of this region. Scholars such as Nyarko et

al. (2019) emphasize the importance of considering cultural variations when studying developmental outcomes. By focusing on a specific geographic area, this study can contribute to the understanding of how cultural factors may interact with maternal deprivation to shape adolescents' psychosocial development in this region.

### **Scope of the study**

Geographically wise, the study was conducted specifically in the Buea Municipality, located in the South West Region of Cameroon aimed at capture the perceptions and of adolescents residing in this particular region and how maternal deprivation may impacted their psychosocial development.

Content wise, the study explored how maternal divorce, maternal death and maternal illnesses influenced on the psychosocial development of adolescents in the specific context of the Buea Municipality.

Methodologically wise, the study employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The questionnaire was utilized to collect quantitative data from a larger sample of adolescents, which further enabled statistical analyses to identify potential correlations between the variables of the study.

### **Area of the study**

Buea Municipality is known for its vibrant social activities, with various community events, gatherings, and recreational opportunities. These social activities provide adolescents with opportunities for socialization, networking, and forming peer relationships.

This Municipality has diverse economic activities, including agriculture, trade, services, and tourism. These economic activities may affect adolescents' psychosocial development, as some families may struggle with poverty, limited educational opportunities, or employment challenges due to the economic context.

This town is known for its rich religious landscape, with a mix of Christian denominations, traditional beliefs, and other religions. Religious activities play a significant role in the lives of many residents and may serve as a source of support, guidance, and community for adolescents helping those are victims of or experiencing maternal deprivation navigate their religious involvement, seeking solace, and coping mechanisms within the religious framework prevalent in the Buea Municipality.

The Buea Municipality is home to various ethnic groups, each with its distinct cultural practices, traditions, and celebrations. Cultural activities, such as music, dance, festivals, and ceremonies, contribute to the fabric of the community and shape adolescents' cultural identity and social integration and this helps adolescents who have suffered from maternal deprivation engage with their cultural heritage, participate in cultural activities, and connect to their community's traditions.

Furthermore, this municipality has education as a core pillar, with numerous schools, colleges, and the renowned University of Buea. Educational activities are vital for adolescents' intellectual growth, skill development, and future prospects; these institutions helped victims of maternal deprivation can identify positive outlets through which they can channel these effects and live an adjusted adolescent development.

## Population of the study

The target population consisted of adolescents residing in the Buea Municipality. The accessible population consisted of adolescents studying at the Bilingual grammar school Molyko and the government high school Buea town. Other schools may not have been considered due to practical constraints such as geographic location, time limitations, or other factors. The sample of the study was made up of respondents both male and females drawn from the classes of lower sixths arts, science and, form 4.

For this study, the researcher employed a simple random sampling technique to select the sample and for data collection. This sampling technique was used for the following reason: the technique provided an equal and unbiased opportunity for every member of the accessible population to be included in the study; allowing for the reduction of potential sampling bias, ensuring that the sample is representative of the broader population of adolescents in the Buea Municipality.

## Description of the research instrument

A questionnaire was used to collect data relevant to the study and made use of a four-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was used in this study because questionnaires are relatively easy to administer and distribute to a large number of participants, making them a practical choice when dealing with larger sample sizes, they allow for standardized data collection, ensuring that each participant responds to the same set of questions; thereby minimizing potential biases and ensures that responses can be reliably compared across participants.

The instrument was made up of the following sections: Section A - Demographic Section: This section aimed at collecting demographic information about the participants, such as age, gender, educational level, and any other relevant background details.

Section B - Maternal Divorce and Psychosocial Development: This section Contained four specific Likert scale questions related to the participants' opinions on the maternal divorce and psychosocial development of adolescents.

Section C - Maternal Death and Psychosocial Development: This section investigates the effects of maternal death on adolescents' psychosocial development. It included four specific questions that assessed participants' opinions in relation to this objective.

Section D - Maternal Illness and Adolescents' Psychosocial Development: This section examined the influence of maternal illness on adolescents' psychosocial development and comprised four specific Likert scale questions that aim to assess participants' opinions concerning the impacts of maternal illness on psychosocial development.

The research questionnaire was administered by self-administration. Upon the validation of the instrument by the researcher's supervisor, the administration issued the researcher an authorization letter permitting him to go to the field.

Upon arrival at the field, the researcher first of all met the administrators present in those institutions to be aware of his presence and what his purpose of coming there was and what he intended to achieve within a particular time interval. This was accepted upon the presentation of the authorization letter from the university by the researcher. The researcher had to introduce himself to the respondents and tell them what the study was out to achieve and when this was done the researcher assisted by

some school administrators, administered the questionnaires to the students. The instrument was administered and the responses collected.

The methods that the researcher used to ensure that the instrument had both face, content, and construct validity etc. were done so by making sure the research items in the instrument reflected the problem both in content from what they were out to test or measure and in what they could likely produce as results and in face the way they were constructed, how the item looked like.

To ensure the validity of the instrument and its reliability, after it was constructed the instrument was brought to the supervisor and senior academics in order for them to look through it and assess its validity at all levels; this went a long way in who assisting the researcher in ensuring that scientific considerations were respected in so far as the development, administration and analysis of the instrument was concerned..

In order to ensure the reliability of the research instrument the researcher endeavored to carry out a pilot study as a sample of the research instrument by administering it to sample population which was not a true representative of the study.

### **Participants and sample**

The participants constituting the sample of this study were made up of 50 students within the classes of form 4, lower sixths arts, lower sixths science. Their demographic characteristics were highlighted as shown below:

The participants comprised both male and female adolescents. It is important to note the distribution of males and females within the sample size to understand any potential gender-related differences in terms of psychosocial development and experiences related to maternal deprivation. The participants were drawn from three different educational levels: Form 4, Lower Sixth Arts, and Lower Sixth Science. Furthermore, the selected participants fell within the age range of 12 to 16. Analyzing the distribution of participants across different age brackets provides insight into potential variations in psychosocial development based on age

### **Data analysis**

The study was purely a qualitative study, and made use of the knowledge of descriptive statistics making use of bar charts, and frequency distribution table and the usage of the percentage.

### **Ethical considerations**

When the researcher arrived the various institutions, he went straight ahead to the administrators and made them to understand the reason why he was there and which institution sent him there to carry out the research on presentation of an authorization letter. This prevented the violation of the rules of the institutions.

Before properly getting the respondents involve in the study, the researcher first of all ensured that consent was given by the students to participate in the study, by telling them what the study was all about.

To ensure confidentiality, the researcher had to make the respondents understand the purpose of the information that was to be collect at the end of the research and that the information was strictly for educational purposes.

The researcher strove as much as possible to ensure that the participants were not hurt either physically, emotionally or even psychological in the process of responding to the research instrument.

### Presentation of findings

**Table 1: Objective one: to examine the influence of maternal divorce on the psychosocial development of adolescents.**

Maternal divorce	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	36	72%
Disagree	14	28%
Total	50	100%

The findings of this study revealed that 72% of the respondents agreed to the fact that maternal divorce has negative effects on the psychosocial development of adolescents in the Buea municipality bringing about aggressiveness, indiscipline, truancy and promiscuity. From these results we realize the significant impact that maternal divorce has on the psychosocial development of adolescents as in most cases it makes the adolescent to be aggressive, promiscuous, undisciplined and truant, hence influencing development negatively. This is supported by John Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation; he believed that the relationship between the infant and its mother during the first five years of life was most crucial to socialization. He believed that disruption of this primary relationship could lead to a higher incidence of juvenile delinquency, emotional difficulties, and antisocial behavior and patterns of affectionless psychopathology. Also, breaking the maternal bond with the child during the early stages of its life is likely to have serious effects on its intellectual, social and emotional development. (Bowlby, 1944).

**Table 2 objective two: to investigate how maternal death influence the psychosocial development of adolescents**

Maternal death	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	31	62%
Disagree	19	38%
Total	50	100%

The findings of this study revealed that 62% of the respondents agreed to the fact that maternal divorce has negative effects on the psychosocial development of adolescents in the Buea municipality bringing about aggressiveness, indiscipline, emotional problems, truancy and promiscuity. These findings were in line with studies conducted by Michael Rutter (1981), as he says that the loss of or damage to form an attachment with the mother will show evidence of anti-social behavior, affectionless psychopathology, and disorders of language, intellectual development and physical growth. Thus, when the mothers are deceased, it goes a long way to prevent the adolescent from forming an attachment with the mother and these results to emotional and psychological trauma which in turn affects the psychosocial development of adolescents. Furthermore, losing a mother usually has prolong effects on many aspects of development of an adolescent, most especially emotional well-being being the most affected and the adolescent's social well-being. They found that adolescents experiencing a death in their life become more withdrawn from their family, friends, school work, jobs and extra-curricular activities. (Coyne and Ohmstede, 2012).

**Table 3: Objective three: To investigate the influence of maternal illnesses on psychosocial development of adolescents.**

Maternal Illness	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	31	62%
Disagree	19	38%
Total	50	100%

The findings of this study revealed that 62% of the respondents agreed to the fact that maternal illnesses had negative effects on the psychosocial development of adolescents in the Buea municipality bringing about aggressiveness, indiscipline, emotional problems, truancy and promiscuity whereas 38% of the respondents disagreed with that fact. These results were in line with studies conducted by Engel & Chris(2014) that when mothers were suffering from maternal diseases e.g. depression , it predicted more negative behaviors in terms of socialization skills and patterns of interaction in the society, smaller achievement gains in relation to school performance as the mother is the central figure within the home who helps in greatly motivating and encouraging the adolescent to work hard and perform better at school, and increased school absences as most of the times their mothers are not in good health to follow them up in order to ensure that they go to school and attend their classes effectively.

The psychology glossary further supports these results by saying that for optimum mental health a child needs to form a deep emotional bond with their mother or mother substitute early in life (starting at the time of birth). When this doesn't occur because of the health condition of the mother, the child is at risk of developing severe mental and/or physical ailments. Thus, the health of the mother is very important in the upbringing of an adolescent, the inability to form that attachment with this figure due to the prior condition will produce adverse or negative patterns in the psychosocial development of the adolescent such as depression, aggression, truancy, psychopathology, indiscipline etc.

### Conclusion

It is crystal clear with the findings collected and the discussions arrived at from this study, indeed illustrated that maternal deprivation was a serious problem that affected adolescents within the Buea municipality. The study was very important because it revealed the negative effects of maternal deprivation on the psychosocial development of adolescents. Hence maternal deprivation brings about negative outcomes on the psychosocial adjustment of an adolescent such as aggression, truancy, promiscuity and indiscipline

### Recommendations

- Parents and families could make sure that they handle their problems maturely and that if the mother is absent, the step mother or relatives should show equal love to the adolescent.
- The government could put forward laws that will protect and ensure the rights of adolescents to be with their mothers even in post-divorce and to try to counsel parents on the risks of divorce on adolescents' development.
- The community should not be neutral but through its traditional stakeholders and elders should assist adolescents living in families where the mother is death, divorced or sick and cannot take care of them, and to caution others not to reject or mock at them.

### Conflicts of Interests

The others declare that there are no conflicts of interests with regards to this work.

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