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THE EFFECT OF DIVORCE ON THE PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS IN SOME SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE BUEA MUNICIPALITY

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Abstract

Divorce has become prevalent in Cameroon, especially among young couples in metropolitan cities. Despite this fact, very few studies have been conducted to evaluate the effect of divorce on the psychosocial development of adolescents in selected secondary schools in the Buea Municipality. The study had as objectives; (1) it seeks to examine the relationship between litigation divorce and the psychosocial development of adolescents in some selected secondary schools in the Buea Municipality, (2) to examine the relationship between mutual consent divorce and the psychosocial development of adolescents in some selected secondary schools in the Buea Municipality, (3) also, it seeks to examine the relationship between divorce due to irretrievable marital bonds and the psychosocial development of adolescents in some selected secondary schools in the Buea Municipality. The study made use of the qualitative research method, which also adopted the case study research design. It was conducted in the Buea Municipality, Fako Division, South West Region of Cameroon. The target population for the study was all adolescents from divorced homes. The accessible population consisted of 150 adolescents from some selected secondary schools in the Buea Municipality. The simple random sampling was employed to select 6 secondary schools used for this study. The purposive, non-probability sampling technique were then used to select the adolescent secondary school student participants. Data was collected using open ended questionnaires. The qualitative data obtained was analysed using the narrative analysis method. From the results of the study, divorce had impaired with adolescents' psychosocial development. It was recommended that parents should show their adolescent children more love and care as they are most affected by their decision to divorce. There is also a need for divorced parents to adopt a more authoritative parenting style as it takes a more child centered approach and would enable parents to understand their children's feelings, teach them how to regulate their feelings as well as encourages their children to be independent. More research should be conducted on the predisposing factors of parental divorce and separation among Cameroon's young families.

Keywords:

Divorce, Psychosocial Development, Adolescence.



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Introduction

Families are of paramount importance to the society because they are considered to be the basic unit of society. One of the primary functions of the family involves providing a framework for the production and reproduction of persons biologically and socially, (Schneider, David, 1984). The family in most societies and cultures begins with the union of a man and a woman in a union commonly referred to as Marriage. Marriage is defined differently and by separate entities based on cultural, religious and personal factors. According to Sheri Stritof, (2022) marriage is a formal union and a social and legal contract between two individuals that legally, economically, and emotional unites their lives. Olayinka, (1990) defined marriage as a social institution for the union of a man and his wife. This union usually has an expectation of a lifelong relationship, but this is not the case with some, as some are short lived, (Newman & Newman, 2015). The marriage institution in recent years has been facing increased cases of irreconcilable differences that have led to increased rates of divorce cases (Reiter, et al., 2013). Divorce otherwise known as marital dissolution refers to a choice of two people not to live together as husband and wife anymore, (Molepo, et al., 2012). It can be said to be a legal dissolution of a marriage by a court or other competent body, (Duke Law Journal, 1968).

Divorce in most instances does not only have an effect on the adults concerned but also on their children's lives too. Children are considered to be innocent by standers who happen to find themselves all caught up in adults issues. This research study centres on adolescent aged children. Adolescence is the cycle of life between the ages of 10 to 19 years (World Health Organization, 2008). Adolescence is a period of rapid development, finding ones self-shaping personal values and identifying ones vocational and social direction, (Okorodudu, 2003). Masten et al., (2006) consider adolescence as a window of opportunities to shaping either positive or negative trajectories. Ericson, (1968), Identified adolescence as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood, characterized by key developmental phases which brings with them many challenges.

Statement of the problem

Adolescent's developmental domain are intertwined and strongly influenced by their experiences and environment. Adolescents in society are expected to be of good moral conduct, disciplined, polite, respectful, God fearing, educational or knowledge seekers, and to be law abiding. In recent years, this has not been the case of what is been practiced or portrayed by adolescents in the Buea Municipality today. Adolescents in the Buea Municipality have been observed in recent years to exhibit some psychological and behavioural problems that disrupt not only their lives but also the lives of those around them. Problems such as, increased substance rate, depression, high crime rates, delinquency, sexual promiscuity, unwanted pregnancies, school dropouts have been on the rise. These problems or behaviours do not conform to the norms of the society, and either directly or indirectly touches the lives of others in the society either by personal contact with these adolescents or indirectly through heightened anxiety about the safety of our neighbourhoods. Researchers (Amato & Keith., 1991, Kelly & Emery, 2003), have attributed these practices exhibited by adolescents to be as a result of the prevalent increased rate of divorce, as divorce over the years has been a serious problem to the psychosocial development of adolescents from divorced homes as it affects their psychological, emotional, moral, social, and educational lives.

Objective of the paper

The key objective of this paper is to investigate the effect of divorce on the psychosocial development of adolescents in some selected secondary schools in the Buea Municipality.

Specific Research Objectives

- (1). It seeks to examine the relationship between litigation divorce and the psychosocial development of adolescents in some selected secondary schools in Buea Municipality.
- (2). Also, it seeks to examine the relationship between divorce by mutual consent and the psychosocial development of adolescents in some selected secondary schools in the Buea Municipality.
- (3). It also seeks to examine the relationship between divorce by irretrievable marital bond and the psychosocial development of adolescents in some selected secondary schools in the Buea Municipality.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Divorce

According to Grath (2001), divorce is a legal or customary decree that a marriage is dissolved. In other words, divorce is a permanent separation of married people as a result of unexpected marriage outcomes. Divorce usually entails the cancelling or reorganizing of the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage, thus dissolving the bonds of matrimony between a married couple under the rule of law of the particular country or state.

Divorce is considered a “social wound” because it causes a huge emotional shock on adults as well as their children. Divorce is an extremely stressful situation for all members of the family who experience it. More often than not, it is a messy, stressful struggle between parents who are in conflict. Children caught in the middle experience this conflict during the separation process, Amato (2010).

Divorce laws vary considerably around the world, but in most countries, divorce requires the sanction of a court or other authorities in a legal process, which may involve issues of distribution of property, child custody, alimony (spousal support), child visitation or access, parenting time, child support, and division of debt. In some annulment turns to be referred to as divorce. Annulment refers to a declaration of a marriage to be null and void, with a legal separation or “de jure” (a legal process by which a married couple may formalize a “de facto” separation while remaining legally married” or with a “de facto” separation (a process where the spouses informally stop cohabiting), Gawron, (2019).

Though divorce laws vary, there are basically two main approaches to divorce: fault based and no-fault based. Divorce can be obtained only on one general ground of “irretrievable breakdown of the marriage”. Yet, what constitutes such a “breakdown of marriage” is interpreted very differently from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, ranging from very liberal interpretations to quite restrictive ones (Steven Fritsch, 2013).

There are several ways of getting a divorce; divorce by mutual consent and litigation or contested divorce. In the course of this paper, three main types of divorce would be of interest;

➤ **Litigation Divorce**

Litigation or contested divorce is a type of divorce where either one of the parties files a petition seeking divorce on certain grounds. Unlike mutual consent divorce, both parties here are in a disagreement and need to go through litigation to settle issues related to their divorce, such as division of assets, child custody and spousal support. Litigation divorce is mainly grounded on the fault based grounds. There are certain fault grounds on which litigated divorce can be sought. The party filing for divorce must prove the grounds satisfactory. Though there are separate personal laws governing marriage and divorce for people belonging to different societies and religions, the grounds for litigated divorce are more or less similar for all. Some common grounds for litigated divorce are; adultery, unreasonable behaviour (such as cruelty), desertion, mental disorder, contractible venereal diseases. The decision to pursue a contested or litigation divorce is a major one as the process tends to be lengthy, expensive and a complicated one, (Vaishali. N., 2023).

➤ **Mutual Consent Divorce**

Mutual consent (also known as uncontested divorce) on the other hand is of the belief that since two persons can marry by their free will, they can also be allowed to divorce from their own free will. Mutual trust, confidence and faithfulness are the foundations of marriage, if couples believe they are unable to preserve mutual faithfulness, then the marriage should be dissolved, or else the issue might spiral out of control, (Source: www.legalserviceindia.com). Mutual consent divorce is the simplest and easiest way to get a divorce. With mutual consent divorce, the court formally grants the requested divorce without the need to go through significant portions of the adversarial litigation process, (Source: www.law.cornell.edu). There are basically two pathways to a mutual consent divorce, the first is where the spouses agree on all the issues in the divorce, such as marital property, spousal support (formally known as alimony), child custody and visitation, child support and division of shared debt. The second situation is where one spouse files for a divorce and ask for specific things such as child custody or home ownership and the second spouse does not respond to the divorce papers and does not appear in court,

(source: <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/legal/divorce/uncontested-divorce/>).

➤ **Irretrievable breakdown of marital bond divorce**

The basic postulate of irretrievable breakdown of marital bond divorce is of the construct that if a marriage had broken down without any possibility of repair (or irretrievable), then it should be dissolved, without looking at the fault of either party. This form of divorce is of the view that if a marriage has been broken down irretrievably then divorce should be granted, as there is no use in retaining the empty shell. Thus the law recognizes an unhappy situation and says to the petitioner “if you can satisfy the court with evidence that your marriage has been broken down irretrievably and that you desire to terminate that situation that has become intolerable to you then your marriage shall be dissolved whatever may be the case”, (HitabhilashMohanty& Janice Aazaragoitia, 2020).

Perspectives to divorce

Perspectives to divorce look in to the way an individual or a group of individuals view the concept of divorce. The researcher would examine the two main perspectives to divorce; these are the sociological perspectives to divorce and the feminist view on divorce.

Sociological Perspectives of Divorce

Three major sociological perspectives aid to discuss the effects of divorce on families. These are the functionalist, Marxist (Conflict Marxist) and symbolic-interactionism.

Functionalism (William James, James Rowland Angell, George H. Mead, Archibald L. Moore, and John Dewey) view the family as the basic of societal organization and is the model of the perfect family. The nuclear family is considered essential for the proper socialization of children and for the division of labour that enabled women and men to perform their social roles in an orderly manner. Families that deviated from the standard arrangement are thought to be deficient (Diversity of Family). Though functionalism is defined through the eyes of society, it holds true to the family structure as well. This perspective sees society as a complex system that promotes stability by guiding individuals with a social structure that provides certain social functions. Anything that disrupts the current social structure or functions is seen as a dysfunction, such as divorce (Doty, 2018). However, divorce is not always seen as negative when viewed from the functionalism perspective. It serves as a purpose to society by providing employment to lawyers, judges, social workers and court officials. Even though divorce is seen as a dysfunction to the family unit which makes for dysfunction in society.

The conflict theorist (Marx, Weber, Talcott Parson, & Ralf Dahrendorf) or perspectives state that societal conflict occurs between dominant and subordinate social groups that are in competition with one another over resources (Conflict theory, 2001, in J. M. Palmisano; Ed). The world holds money, power and beauty on a pedestal which should be a goal in life to get yet these values are not always obtainable therefore do not promote or have a long-term effect on relationships. Conflict perspective has the best grasp of why divorce occurs and why it occurs so frequently. When conflict occurs, tension arises in a marriage and then one person in the marriage becomes unable to handle the disproportion of resources or changes a disagreement occurs (2018). When the disagreement comes to both parties in agreement, separation or divorce occurs. The conflict may result from anything from finances, unfaithfulness, substance abuse, or how to raise children. The conflict perspective uncovers the attitudes and values when problem arise within certain cultures. This helps to uncover perceptions and give an actual cause to why divorce happens (Doty, 2019).

The symbolic interactionism perspective seeks individual social interactions as a way to see society as a whole. The key concepts are interactions, relations and symbolic meanings which provides a perspective on society as a product of everyday interactions. The world is full of meaningful objects which are considered symbols and they yield an importance towards humans in helping guide their lives around these interactions. Divorce when viewed from the interactionist perspective examines the choices that each individual has made the interactions between husband and wife, and the symbolic meaning of marriage and divorce. Marriage was at once a status symbol and meant that each partner or couples were on the right track in life. This would prove that life is stable in which it would benefit the community because married family values were seen as prestigious and that is what a community wanted. The interactionist perspective uncovers the changing meaning of divorce as a symbol in society (Essay, UK, November 2018).

Of the three sociological perspectives, the conflict perspective supports a more convincing and useful view of divorce and how it directly affects families. If a conflict cannot be resolved, there are multiple resources in today's society to make it convenient to get a divorce

Feminist Perspective of Divorce

In considering “feminist perspectives” on divorce, it is important to note that there is not one feminist perspective, but many. Feminism generally is defined not in terms of a particular position or set of positions, but by an insistence that women’s experiences, varied as they are been taken into account. Accordingly, feminist perspectives on divorce focus on the implications of divorce for the lives of women and their children.

Feminist would generally see the decline of marriage as a good thing, because it is a patriarchal institution. Women are more likely to initiate divorces, which suggest that marriage works less well for women than for men. Both the decline in marriage and the increase divorce reflect the increasing empowerment and financial independence of women. When women have more money and power, more of them choose to not marry in the first place. Women unhappy in their marriages can choose a divorce more easily today. However, radical feminists would point out that the increase in divorce has not necessarily benefited women as children go to live with the mother in 85% cases following a divorce. Single parent families (mostly female) suffer high levels of poverty and stigma in today’s society, (Karl Thompson, 2023).

Feminist perspectives on divorce proceed from the ways in which women’s position at divorce systematically differ from men’s positions. From a feminist perspective, divorce is a particularly intriguing rite of passage. At divorce, a woman changes her relationship not only with an individual man but with a male-dominated society as well. In effect she changes the intimate experience of patriarchy without the buffer of wifely statues, (Barbara Stark, 1991). Although there has been a large scale increase in mother’s labour force participation, there has been no corresponding increase in fathers’ domestic contributions, and women continue to bear the overwhelming responsibility for child rearing. In substantial part because of this division of labour within the family, divorcing women, on average, face bleaker financial prospects and enjoy closer emotional ties to their children than do their former husbands. Existing divorce laws, with its emphasis on each party’s self-sufficiency, limited provisions for child support, and gender-neutral custody principles, does not fully recognize or address these differences. Feminist differ in the responses they propose to these issues. “Liberal feminist” believes that women’s domestic responsibilities will inevitably place them at a disadvantage and favour policies that encourage men to assume a proportionate share of family responsibilities. “Cultural feminist”, or “feminist of difference”, believe that it is not the fact that women care for children but that child rearing is so undervalued which is the source of the problem. “Radical feminists” believe that it is impossible to know whether women’s involvement in child rearing would differ from men’s in a different society and focus on the way in which marriage and work force policies perpetuate male dominance. All agree, however, that existing law contributes to the relative impoverishment of many women and children and that, even when the rules purport to be gender-neutral, they are administered in systematically biased ways, (Carbone JR., 1994).

The effects of divorce on adolescents

According to Ellis, (2002), divorce is not a simple event but a transitional event. It initiates a series of multiple changes in roles and family structure that occurs throughout the child’s development into adulthood. Some transitions may be easy and beneficial, but an equal number may be stressful. For many, the divorce is the first in a series of on-going losses.

In measuring the effect of divorce on adolescents, two aspects are to be considered; the quality of the marriage before divorce and the quality of the divorce. The quality of the marriage adolescents grew

up in can create a healthy environment for a dysfunctional one after parental divorce. The same can be said about the quality of the divorce process. An amicable divorce can create a positive and healthy environment where adolescents can thrive in, while a divorce of high conflict can create an unstable environment with a lack of support. With regard to the quality of the marriage before the divorce, a marriage characterized by conflicts and distress, this goes a long way in affecting adolescent's psychosocial wellbeing, (Kim, 2011).

The quality of the divorce (was it a litigated divorce or mutual consent type of divorce), can create opportunities for the post-divorcee relationship between the adults to thrive and can aid in creating a healthy, safe, and consistent environment for adolescents, (Amato, Kane & James, 2011). Two important factors are to be considered in the quality of the post-divorce family, these are; the rate of engagement of the adolescent with non-custodial parent as well as the age of the adolescent at the time of the divorce. These factors have been found to be a key in the adolescent overall psychosocial development, (Johnson & McNeil, 1998).

Divorce is considered to be accompanied by several effects be it positive or negative on adolescents lives. In the course of this paper, I would like to dwell more on the negative effect of divorce on adolescents. A clinical study by Vousourea, et al, (2012), found that parental predisposition rather than parental divorce was a determining factor regarding adolescents developing depression and anxiety. Also, research study by Arkes, (2013), revealed that physical health problems caused by divorce on adolescents includes increased likelihood of adolescents partaking in harmful substance consumptions such as alcohol consumption, cigarettes and marijuana consumption. An increase substance abuse often begins before the actual divorce as a result of the conflict and stress in the home and this may worsen during or immediately after the divorce.

To some, divorce can be a form of trauma (loss of control, unusual behaviour and behaviour changing in a relatively long time) with specific implications for children and adolescents, (Teachman, 2002).

Adolescent's psychosocial development

Introduction

The psychosocial approach looks at individuals in the context of the combined influence of psychological factors and the surrounding social environment have on their physical and mental wellness and their ability to function. This approach is used in a broad range of professions, in health and social settings as well as by medical and social science researchers, Woodward & Kath, (2015).

Adolescence marks a transitional phase from childhood to adulthood. It is characterised by cognitive, psychosocial and emotional development. The psychosocial development that occur during adolescence can be characterized as a developmental task that emphasises development of emotions, autonomy, the establishment of identity, and future orientations, (Renata, Arrington & Sanders, 2013).

In the course of this study, the researcher seeks to examine the following aspects of adolescent's psychosocial development in relation to their parental divorce: Emotional development, moral development, self-esteem and autonomy development.

Adolescents Emotional Development

Emotions can be regarded as ones "feelings". It relates to aspects of consciousness, characterized by three elements; a certain physical arousal, a certain behaviour that reveals the feeling to the outside world, and an inner awareness of the feeling. In other words, emotions are short lived feelings-

arousal-purposive-expressive phenomena that helps individuals adapt to the opportunities and challenges faced during important events, (Averill, 1990).

Ekman, (1992) points out that emotions have very rapid onsets, brief duration and can occur automatically/involuntarily. The emotion generating process begins not with the event and not with one's biological reaction to it but instead with the cognitive appraisal of its meaning, (Lazarus, 1991).

The family is the centre of emotional life, a place where adolescents find support or reassurance. Divorce to a child is a sign of the death of the integrity of his family. So it seems that half of the children's selves have been lost. Their ability to focus on a variety of things involving emotions, thoughts and action will be affected due to feelings of loss, rejection and abandonment, (Zulkefli & Mustapha, 2016).

Children from families that had experienced divorce will experience a variety of emotions and feelings due to the absence of a parent as the main driver in ensuring the functioning of the family. Among the emotions often associated with children of divorced families are feelings of sadness, depression, shame, anger, hatred, guilt. If these emotions are not properly managed by the children or family, it results to an emotional outburst or emotional problems which may be expressed differently in their behaviours displayed, (Mohammad & Masroom, 2019).

To add, the moral development of adolescent's from divorce homes is another major psychosocial developmental aspect to be reviewed in this paper.

Adolescent's Moral development

Morality is defined as a set of principles on how individuals ought to treat one another, with respect to justice, others welfare and rights, (Turiel, 1983). Understanding morality acquisition, includes investigating the roles of pro-social behaviour, emotions, beliefs, and intentionality to explain how morality is acquired in development.

Different scholars have different views on moral development. According to psychoanalysis Freud, (1962), moral development proceeds when an individual's selfish desires are repressed and replaced by the values of important socializing agents in one's life (such as parents, siblings). Similarly, Skinner, (1972), identifies socialization as the primary force behind moral development. Kohlberg, (1963), argued that moral development proceeds from a selfish desire to avoid punishment (Personal), to a concern from group functioning (Societal), to a concern for the consistent application of universal ethical principles (moral). Social learning theorist, postulates that morality results from children's modelling their parent's beliefs and practices; imitation is seen as crucial for moral development and socialization. This may not be the case for children from divorced homes as they may lose their role models in the process of divorce. According to Wallerstein, (1986), adolescents who experience parental divorce adopt a morality that was more traditional than that of their parents. They continued to condemn their parents for what they viewed as irresponsible or immoral conducts in the past which led to their divorce.

Adolescents' Social development

This paper looks at two aspects of social development; self-esteem development and autonomy development.

Adolescents Self-esteem development

Self-esteem refers to the subjective and emotional evaluation of one's own worth and includes aspects of self-acceptance and self-respect, and therefore tends to capture an affective evaluation of the self, (Chen, Guly, & Eden, 2001).

Rosenberg, (1965), defines self-esteem as an evaluation of an individual's beliefs and attitudes towards his or her abilities and values. Self-esteem during adolescence tends to be unstable, because of the many changes that occur in adolescent's roles and responsibilities. Self-esteem tend to decline in early adolescence and recover in the middle and later stages of adolescence, (Trezniewski et al., 2003). Adolescents with high levels of self-esteem tend to experience positive self-experiences, (Peng et al., 2019), high-quality interpersonal relationships, (Cameron & Granger, 2019), and better physical and mental health.

According to Buehler & Gerard, (2002), the disruption of the family unit, changes in living arrangements, and the conflicts that accompanies divorce (litigation divorce), can contribute to feelings of insecurity and loss self-worth in adolescents. Adolescents may also internalize feelings of blame or guilt for the divorce of their parents, which can further impact their self-esteem.

Adolescents Autonomy Development.

Adolescence is a time when individuals begin to separate themselves from their parents, develop their own identity, and take on responsibilities. This process has been variously referred to as individuation, independence, autonomy, and detachment, (Hill & Holmbeck, 1986).

Autonomy within the framework of family relationships during adolescence is composed of three main dimensions; behavioural autonomy: which refers to an adolescents ability to act independently; Cognitive autonomy: which implies the acquisition of a sense of competence and agency, through which adolescents know how to take control of his or her life; emotional autonomy: it refers to the perception of independence through self-confidence and individuality, plus the establishment of emotional bonds, (Steinberg, 1986).

Adolescents in families undergoing divorce generally consist of parents undergoing some sought of depression which is characterized by greater family dysfunction. Thus, adolescents growing up in families with depressed parents might experience the normative developmental task of individuation and autonomy differently from those not exposed to parental psychopathology. A disruptive family environment which is characteristic of families with divorced parents might be one such contextual factor that produces emotional distance and maladjustment in young adolescents, (McCauley & Myers, 1991).

The word autonomy can be defined as the degree to which behaviours are enacted with a sense of volition, (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Various developmental and motivational researchers (Ryan & LaGuardia, 2000; Steinberg, 1989) considered the emergence of a more autonomous function as a crucial developmental process for adolescents.

Theoretical Review

Theoretically, the study will be guided by four theories: Attachment Theory by John Bowlby (1969), Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1943), Ecological system theory (1979) by Urie Bronfenbrenner and the Bowen Family System theory, (1966).

Attachment theory (1969), originating from the work of John Bowlby, is a psychological, evolutionary and ethological theory that provides a descriptive and explanatory framework for understanding interpersonal relationships between human beings. The human infant is considered by attachment theorists to have a need for a secure relationship with adult care givers without which normal social and emotional development will not occur. However, different relationship experiences can lead to different developmental outcomes. The formal origin of attachment theory can be traced to the publication of two 1958 papers, one being “Bowlby’s The Nature of the Child’s Tie to his Mother” in which the precursory concepts of “Attachment” were introduced by Harry Harlow’s The Nature of Love, based on the results of experiments which showed approximately, that infant rhesus monkeys spent more time with soft mother-like dummies that offered no food than they did with dummies that provided a food source but were less pleasant to the touch. Bowlby followed this up with two more papers, “Separation Anxiety (1960)”, and “Grief and Mourning in Infancy and Early Childhood (1960)”.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs was first introduced by Maslow in his 1943 paper, “A Theory of Human Motivation”. Maslow later refined this theory in 1954 with his book “Motivation and Personality”. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is a theory of psychology explaining human motivation based on the pursuit of different levels of needs. The theory states that humans are motivated to fulfil their needs in a hierarchical order. This order begins with the most basic needs before moving on to more advanced needs. The ultimate goal, according to this theory, is to reach the fifth level of the hierarchy: self-actualization. There are basically five main levels of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. These levels began from the Physiological Need or basic needs, Safety Needs, Love and Belonging Needs, Esteem Needs, and the most advanced need being the Self-Actualization Needs.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory (1979) is one of the most accepted explanations regarding the influence of social environment on human development. This theory explains how social environments affect children’s development. It emphasizes the importance of studying children in multiple environments, known as ecological systems, in the attempt to understand their development. According to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, children typically find themselves enmeshed in various ecosystems, from the most intimate home ecological system to the larger school system, and then to the most expansive system which includes society and culture. Each of these ecological systems inevitably interacts with and influences each other in all aspects of the children’s life. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model organizes contexts of development into five nested levels of external influence; Micro system, Meso-system, Eco system, Macro system, and Chrono-system.

The family system theory was a theory developed by Dr. Murray Bowen, a psychiatrist in the late 1940’s and early 1950s and was published in 1966. Bowen who viewed the family as an emotional unit whose interactions affects human behaviour. According to Murray Bowen, the family systems theory is a theory of human behaviour that defines the family unit as a complex social system in which members interact to influence each other’s behaviour. Family members interconnect, making it appropriate to view the system as a whole rather than as individual elements.

Contextual Review

Contextually, unlike other areas where legislative reform has taken place, the Cameroonian Parliament has never legislated on divorce. Consequently, 57 years since Cameroon gained independence, the applicable laws in divorce matters are still those derived from the colonial era (received: English and French Laws) as well as customary law. Many of the rules on divorce are considered archaic and discriminatory to some extent. There are three different courts with

jurisdiction over divorce in Cameroon. These are customary courts, civil law courts and common law courts. Moreover, the current multiple systems of courts in divorce matters often generate conflicts of jurisdiction. As a result of legal pluralism in Cameroon, the law of divorce is complex, inconsistent, conflicting, over-lapping and detrimental to the rights and freedom of individuals who are bound by discriminatory customary rules (See the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon), (LekeakaAcha, 2018).

Legally, divorce in Cameroon is been governed by the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1973 which was borrowed from the British Law (From England). Divorce in Cameroon and the English-speaking regions of Cameroon to be precise is governed by the Matrimonial Cause Act 1973 and the Matrimonial and Family Proceeding Act 1984. The Matrimonial Cause Act consolidates certain enactments relating to matrimonial proceedings, maintenance agreements, and declarations of legitimacy, validity of marriage and nationality, with amendments to give effect to recommendations of the Law Commission (23rd May 1973)

In Anglophone Cameroon, the rules governing divorce are essentially those that are applicable in England today and are found in the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 (By virtue of section 15 of the southern Cameroons High Court Law 1955), while in Francophone Cameroon the grounds are derived from the French Law of 1884 known as “Lois Naquet”. The grounds for divorce under the 1884 French divorce law are now embodied in article 229-232 of the civil code applicable in francophone Cameroon, (Article 68 of the Cameroon Civil Code).

Under customary law, there are no clear grounds for divorce. The grounds for divorce vary from custom to custom and range from fault-based to no-fault-based and the reasons include adultery, laziness, problems with in-laws, accusations of witchcraft, cruelty, separation, divorce by consent and infertility. While both men and women use the fault grounds, the non- fault-based grounds are used mostly by women. If a man is no longer interested in his wife and has no fault, he can reproach her for, he can always, instead of divorcing her, marry another woman. But a wife who no longer wants to be married to a husband, who has committed no fault, must divorce the husband before she can get married to another man since polyandry is not practiced in Cameroon. Even within the same customary region, there are exceptions to given practices that lead to different or discriminatory applications of the custom. Some customary courts especially in the north west region of Cameroon, have granted divorce on grounds such as mere inconvenience (that is “the marriage has been inconveniencing the plaintiff”), so long as both parties do not wish to live with each other again (“irretrievable breakdown of marital bond”), E, Ngwafor, (1993). The court reasoned that marriage is love and when the love appetite fades, both parties could be aggressive to each other, whereby a man does away with the life of a woman and vice versa (J, Eekelaar& M, Maclean, 2004).

The inconvenience could be as a result of unreasonable behaviour, as in *Njonfang Michael v Elizabeth Wanji*, (suit No. 6/2013, CRB2/2012 Mankon, “unreported”), long separation, as in *TamfuNfor Divine v TansiGwendolineMbuli* (Suit No. 105/2013, CRB 1/2013 Mankon, “Unreported”) or adultery, as in the case of *Kometa Michael Zozoh v Nchang Vera* (Suit No. 41/2005-06, Bamuka, “Unreported”). However, this ground is wide enough to include any reason, trivial or serious, to dissolve the marriage. So long as the woman is willing to refund the marriage symbol (for example; the wedding ring, brides diary), the divorce will be granted. Other Customary Courts have refused to grant divorce to the petitioning wife just because she had reverted from the use of her husband’s name to her maiden name before filling for the divorce, even though there is no law in Cameroon that obliges a married woman to use the husband’s name (*William Ngah of Babessil v OgenTakang of Kokobuma*, CRB 2/06-77, P151-156, “Unreported”).

Overall, the laws of divorce in Cameroon offer a combination of liberal and restrictive grounds for divorce. Restrictive grounds for divorce exist in the different divorce laws in Cameroon. The restrictive grounds for divorce deal with the behaviour of one spouse. Sometimes the behaviour is directed towards the marriage itself as in desertion or where the respondent excessive violence on the petitioner. Sometimes it is behaviour outside the marriage such as imprisonment or unreasonable behaviour towards in-laws. Whatever the type of behaviour, it should be such that the petitioner cannot reasonably be expected to live with (LekeakaAcha, 2018).

The received law in Anglophone Cameroon states that the burden of proof of irretrievable breakdown of marriage under the Matrimonial Causes Act, 1973 rest on the petitioner. The petitioner must show that the respondent has behaved in such a way that he/she cannot reasonably be expected to live with the respondent. Although, it is specifically mentioned in section 1(2) (b) of the Matrimonial Causes Act, 1973. Whether the petitioner can reasonably be expected to live with the respondent is a question that the court, rather than the petitioner, must answer before deciding whether or not to grant a decree of divorce under the Matrimonial Causes Act, 1973, section 1(2)(b). Desertion can also be considered as a type of behaviour. The desertion fact under section 1(2) (c) which deals with the desertion of the petitioner by respondent for a continuous period of at least two years immediately preceding the presentation of the petition can be considered another restrictive fault ground for divorce, (Lowe & G, Douglas, 2015).

In the received law in Francophone Cameroon, (Law No. 2006/015 of 29th December, 2006), all the grounds for divorce in Francophone Cameroon are restrictive or fault based. They all deal with the respondent's unreasonable behaviour and relate to adultery, imprisonment or excessive or habitual violence by the respondent and restrict the petition to the spouse who is not at fault. The behaviour of the respondent is not specifically mentioned in the Civil Code as a ground for divorce. Divorce under article 232 of the Civil Code applicable in Francophone Cameroon is not peremptory unlike adultery or conviction. Under article 232 the violence or abuse must be excessive or habitual. Divorce may not be granted if the violence or abuse is not excessive or habitual. Excessive or habitual violence or abuse is unreasonable and intolerable (Article 232 of the Civil Code). Desertion on the other hand is not expressly mentioned in the civil code as a ground for divorce. The violation of the duty or obligation of marriage referred to in article 232 is only where there is excessive or habitual violence or abuse. However, as desertion is a violation of the duty of the parties to cohabit, the courts in francophone Cameroon have also granted divorce in cases in which the petitioner rely on desertion as a violation of the obligation of marriage, for example the case of *KomMedard v Dame Domkam Simone Beatrice EpouseKom* (judgement Number 10/CIV/TGI du 11 Juillet 2011; "unreported").

Under Customary Law, fault of unreasonable behaviour is also relevant, but it is also open to interpretation. Under Customary Law for example, some mild beating by the husband is generally allowed in situations where the wife is considered stubborn by the husband as some form of correction. The court would also grant a divorce where in addition to the physical violence, the husband restricts the wife's movement and visits from friends and family members (cruelty), (*Miami Lydia v Nana Celestin*, CBK 01/2014-case number 066/2014, "unreported"), (customary Court Buea). Problems with in-laws could also lead to divorce under customary law. A customary marriage unites two families and not just two persons. It is therefore expected that the spouses, especially the wife who leaves her family to become part and parcel of her husband's family, should live in harmony with her in-laws. A husband could divorce his wife because of lack of respect for members of his family and himself and vice versa. Another possible ground for divorce is laziness especially on the part of the husband who should provide financially for his family, but also on the part of the wife on whom more reliance is placed for the up-keep of the children. Other types of unreasonable behaviour that

could lead to the granting of a divorce under customary law include: neglect, threats, especially of murder and attempted murder, dishonesty, theft, refusal by the husband to eat food prepared by the wife, refusal of sexual intercourse and accusations of witchcraft and abortion. All the above listed grounds can therefore be put under one umbrella: “the unreasonable behaviour of the respondent”. (LekeakaAcha, 2018).

There are other customary rules which are not based on fault but which restrict the granting of a divorce. For example; Muslims have rules that prohibit a man from divorcing his wife when the wife is pregnant because it is believed that the psychological problems related to divorce can affect the harmonious development of the unborn child (Muslim tradition based on the Koran; chapter 11v 230). A divorce woman under Muslim tradition must wait for at least three months before she can remarry. This delay is to encourage reconciliation even after divorce (Muslim tradition based on the Koran; chapter 11 v 228). The Bakwerians also prohibit divorce when the woman is still breast feeding because it is believed that divorce could affect the stability and health of the child (According to the Civil Appeal number CASWP/cc/45/81).

Liberal grounds for divorce in Cameroon, is not based on petitions on a fault by the respondent. The petition could be based on separation, with or without the consent of the respondent, the inability to have children, mental illness or simply on the fading away of the love between the parties. It could also be that the parties want to be together but do not want their present form of marriage anymore. As there is no legal provision in Cameroon which allows for the conversion of a marriage from monogamy to polygamy and vice versa, divorce is an option for parties who wish to change their form of marriage. Divorce would not be granted under the received law applicable in Anglophone regions of Cameroon where both parties seek divorce to change their present form of marriage, because the only ground for divorce is the “irretrievable breakdown of the marriage”. Liberal grounds for divorce are found only in Anglophone regions of Cameroon and under customary law only. (Southern Cameroon’s High Court Law, 1955).

Methodology

Research method and research Design

This study made use of the qualitative research method with a Case Study research design. The Case Study research design is an in-depth examination of people or groups of people. The interpretive (or disciplined configurative) case study design would be used in the study as it aims to use established theories to explain a specific case. The information or opinion collected from the sample is usually generalized to the entire population.

Sampling Technique

Identification of participants

The study would make use of the non-probability sampling method and the purposive sampling technique. The idea of sampling consists of only a part of the population is studied and the findings from these are expected to be generalized to the entire population. The options of learners (adolescents) would be examined by asking them questions in relation to how divorce affects adolescent’s emotional, moral, and social development of adolescents in some selected secondary schools in Buea. The learners in these selected secondary schools would be assumed to be a representative of the target population. The findings from this study would be generalized to the entire population.

Population

The sample population was made up of adolescent learners of some selected secondary schools in Buea sub-division, Fako Division. A number of 150 adolescents from divorced homes would be selected from all the schools in the accessible population using the purposive, non-probability sampling technique in which some unit of the population had zero chances of being selected.

Selection of schools

The researcher used the simple random sampling technique to arrive at 6 schools out of 31 colleges systematically selected. It was because the researcher wants all the schools to have equal chances of being selected in the sample. The technique was also used to avoid bias. The names of the secondary schools found in the Buea Sub-division were written on pieces of papers and folded and put in a basket. The basket was shuffled and a name was picked until the fourth school was gotten. If a name was picked for the second time, it was put back until four different schools were chosen. This procedure gave each school an equal opportunity of being selected.

Table 1:

Total Number of Adolescents from Divorced Homes in Some Selected Secondary Schools in the Buea Municipality

SN	Schools	Total Number of Adolescent from divorced homes
1	Government Bilingual Grammar School MolykoBuea	34
2	Government High School Buea	28
3	Government Secondary School Buea Town	26
4	Government Technical High School MolykoBuea	31
5	Inter Comprehensive High School Great SoppoBuea	18
6	Summerset Secondary School Buea	13
Total	6	150

Source: Researcher, 2023

Research Instrument

The instrument used for data collection was the open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of a number of questions printed or typed in a definite order on a form or set of forms. The respondents were required to answer the stipulated questions found on the questionnaire. A structured questionnaire was used for this study. Structured questionnaires are questionnaires in which there are definite, concrete and pre-determined questions. The questions are presented with exactly the same wording and in the same order to all respondents.

Validity and reliability of research instrument

The validity of an instrument refers to the extent to which the instrument measures what it was designed to measure (Gronland, 1988). In this study the instruments were subjected to face and content validity. Face validity on the one hand refers to the practice of visually judging the measurement of an instrument for appropriateness rather than by statistics (Kerlinger, 1986).

The content validity of the instrument was assured because the adolescent's responses gave a general impression of what was intended to be measured, and revealed at the same time that there was no

ambiguity in the items of the instrument. The researcher and adolescents consistently ascertained that these instruments were yielding the required and specific information (the concept of the effect of divorce on adolescent’s psychosocial development).

Administration of research instrument

A face to face administration process was conducted with the respondents in order to gain more insights and raw data. A total number of 150 open ended questionnaires would be printed and used in this study.

Table 2:

Administration of Questionnaires in the Selected Secondary School

	Schools	Number of Questionnaires distributed	Number of Questionnaires received
1	Government Bilingual Grammar School MolykoBuea	34	34
2	Government High School Buea	28	28
3	Government Secondary School Buea Town	26	26
4	Government Technical High School MolykoBuea	31	31
5	Inter Comprehensive High School Great SoppoBuea	18	18
6	Summerset Secondary School Buea	13	13
Total	6	150	150

Source: Researcher, 2023

Data was analysed using the deductive narrative data analysis method. With this approach data would be analysed using existing theories that a narrative can be tested against. The analysis would adopt particular theoretical assumptions and/or provides hypotheses, and then looks for evidence in a story that will either verify or disapprove them.

Results and Discussions

Demographic Data:

The first part of the open-ended questionnaire was used to collect the data regarding the socio-demographic attributes of respondents. It contained four questions, regarding; gender, age, school and class. Two main genders were indicated and the respondents could either be Males or Females. A total number of 60 males and 90 females were recorded. Adolescents could fall within the age ranges of 11-13 years, 14-16 years, 17-18 years old. Data collected from the respondents based on age ranges were as follow; 74 adolescents fell within the age ranges of 11-13 years of age, 55 adolescents fell within the age ranges of 14-16 years of age and the last set recorded 21 adolescents that fell within the age ranges of 17-18 years of age. Based on school, 31 respondent were recorded from Government Bilingual Grammar School MolykoBuea, 26 respondents from Government High School Buea, 24 respondents from Government Secondary School Buea Town, 28 respondents from Government Technical School MolykoBuea, 14 respondents from Inter Comprehensive High School Great SoppoBuea and 10 respondents from Summerset Secondary School Buea. The distribution of respondents according to class were recorded as follows; of a total number of 133 respondents who actively participated in the research, 40 respondents were recorded from the form 3 classes, form 4

with a total number of 38 respondents, form five with a total number of 35 respondents and lower sixth with a total number of 20 respondents.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

After seeking permission from the school authorities, due to the sensitivity of the research topic, and the rights of the students, the researcher moved to the school guidance counselling service to solicit for the assistance of the school guidance counsellor with whom are records of various students. The counsellors then went over their records and identified the names, age range and class of the students from divorced homes. The researcher and the counsellors then moved to the various classes concerned with the research study, that is the form(s): three (3), four (4), five (5) and Lower-sixth (L6th).

After having identified the adolescent students, the researcher then proceeded with ensuring that the students were from divorced homes and had an understanding of divorce and he tried to identify the specific type of divorce their parents had undergone. This information was gathered with the use of three general questions asked to all the students. These questions included;

General Questions

Q1. Are your parents divorced?

Q2. What do you understand by divorce?

Q3. Can you please describe to me how your parents' interactions, behaviours or relationship was before and after the divorce?

The above general questions consisted of a single structured question which required a yes or no response (Q1) and two general questions (Q2&Q3) which required the adolescent respondents to provide an in-depth view of their thoughts and experiences.

The researcher recorded a 150 "yes" as a response to Q1. With regards to Q2, adolescents were asked on what they understood by divorce and a general response could be derived from the 150 responses recorded from Q2. Some common responses were as follows;

"Divorce is the separation of a husband and wife".

"Divorce is the separation between a husband and wife which requires that they no longer have to live together in the same home".

"Divorce is the separation of a husband and wife by a court".

"Divorce is the legal separation of a husband and wife by a court of law".

Also, Q3 was met with a diverged range of responses from the 150 respondent. The responses gathered from question three helped in grouping the respondents based on the type of divorce their parents had. Some responses that helped in the grouping of respondents include;

"At home all my parents did was quarrelling".

"My parents did not go more than a week without quarrelling"

"I always see my parents fighting"

"I never saw my parents fight".

"At home everything was fine, no fighting or quarrelling"

"There were days were all my parents did was quarrel and some days they were fine".

"Some days my parents were fine they discussed, laughed together and there were other days were all they did was quarrel".

"There were days were my father did not come home. He could go for days without coming back home".

From the responses gather from Q3, the researcher could deduce the type of divorce the parents of these adolescents had experienced. A total number of 62 adolescent's recorded that their parents had undergone litigation divorce, 48 adolescents from mutual consent divorced homes and 40 adolescents from irretrievable breakdown of marital bond divorced homes.

After having identified the various types of divorce, the researcher together with the school counsellor administered the research instrument based on these types of divorce to the adolescent respondents.

Litigation divorce

Adolescents provided a wide range of views on how parental litigation divorce affects their emotional development. Some responses obtained from these adolescent respondents would be discussed in the course of this analysis.

Q4. How does the divorce of your parents make you feel?

A majority of the adolescent respondents expressed mainly two main emotions; these are *"feeling angry, sad, lonely, frustrated"*. The researcher could derive at a conclusion that parental litigation divorce arouses mainly negative emotions in their adolescent children.

Q5. How did you feel seeing your parents fighting, quarrelling or in conflict?

Adolescents expressed varied emotions that aroused in them as a result of being witnesses to their parents conflict of in-fighting. Some responses derived from the respondents include;

"I always felt angry whenever I saw my parents fighting and quarrelling. This is because seeing my parents fight and are always in conflict made me feel angry about how my once perfect family is being gradually torn apart and I felt helpless in such a situation because all I tried hilded no fruits".

"Seeing my parents fighting, quarrelling always makes me feel sad and at times when they quarrel I always seem to be the reason for their problems and fights"

"I always felt lonely. This is because after my parents had a fight, they paid no attention to me. It was like I was the cause of their problem because that's how I felt".

"Seeing my parents constantly fighting makes me feel sad".

"Seeing my parents constantly fighting while my friends keep telling me of how their parents are living in peace always made me feel jealous".

Adolescents responses provided to these questions were mostly associated with the development of negative emotions such as anger, sadness, loneliness, jealousy which they turn to exhibit in their behaviours, interactions with those around them.

Q6. What is your view of members of the opposite sex after the divorce of your parents?
.....

With this question, responses were analysed based on the gender of the respondents. Having both boys and girls as respondents, adolescents expressed their views of members of the opposite sex after having been witnesses to their parents' conflict. Some responses derived in respect to this question include;

Some Responses from Adolescent Girls

"I don't like associating myself with boys because am afraid they might beat me up should in case we have a misunderstanding like how my father always had my mother beaten whenever they had a misunderstanding".

"Boys are very wicked. Whenever my father and mother fought or quarrelled, my father would sometimes go weeks without providing money for food at home".

"My father always had my mother beaten whenever they had an argument. This makes me stay away from boys and that's why all my friends are girls".

Some responses from adolescent boys

"I always felt sorry for my mother every time she had a fight with my dad. She sometimes goes for days just crying". This makes me see women or girls as fragile beings"

"My mom sometime felt ill after she had fought or quarrelled with my father. This made me feel sad always. I don't believe women or girls should be hurt by men or boys"

"Girls (women) should be treated with more respect".

From a majority of the responses gathered, girls expressed a more negative view on the opposite sex (males). This could be generalized from the fact that they always saw their mothers in pain which they attributed to be caused by their fathers. On the other hand boys expressed more positive views on members of the opposite sex. They were more of the opinion that girls should be accorded more respect and should be treated with more patience, love and cared for.

Mutual consent and adolescents' psychosocial development (moral development)

The second aspect the researcher intended to measure in the course of this research is the effect of mutual consent divorce on adolescents' moral development. Aspects of moral development turn to vary from culture to cultures, region to region, and even from one continent to another. The researcher in the course of this study measured aspects considered to be morally appropriate to individuals in the Cameroonian context or to the African continent at large. The questions asked intended to measure aspects such as being respectful, being empathetic, peace crusaders, always abiding to rules and regulations. These aspects are measures of adolescents' moral development in the Cameroonian society. The following questions intended to measure adolescents' moral development;

Q4. I abide to rules and regulations?.....if Yes/No then how or why do u think so?
.....

Question 4 on the research instrument measured the adolescent's tendency to follow rules and regulations in any instance they may find themselves in. adolescents provided both positive and negative responses to the question above with a majority being of negative responses. Some responses derived include;

"No. Because although I never saw my parents fought before or during the divorce process I still felt like they paid less attention to whether I abide to house rules or not, for example at home before the divorce my parents had a rule of no putting on short dresses before stepping out of the house but now I do not abide to that rule because after the divorce they seem not to even pay attention to whatever I wear"

"Yes. I do abide to certain rules such as school rules. This is because I fear I might get punished if I do not"

"No. I no longer abide to the rules set by my father. This is because since we started living together he hardly has time to check on my activities so I do whatever I want to".

Yes I do abide to rules and regulations because my mom always ensures that her rules are followed if I happen not to follow then she punishes me. For example I got punished just recently because I did not wash the dishes after we had eaten".

"No. I don't abide to rules and regulations I do whatever I please. This is because my father is never at home I see him only at night mostly"

"No. because I think I get my parents attention only when I get in to trouble. So sometimes I purposely don't follow rules so when I get in trouble they will make out time for me. For example, I played rain ball and got sick even after haven't been warned not to ever play football under the rain. Me getting sick is the only time both my parents come together to take care of me so I get better".

From the responses gathered, a majority of adolescents do not abide to rules and regulations this was as a result of some cited reasons such as parental neglect, leiser faire parenting, attention seeking, considering rules to be irrelevant.

Q5. My parents' divorce has affected the way I accord respect to those around me..... if "yes" then how?.....

This question was met with both positive and negative responses provided by the adolescent respondents. Some responses derived from the adolescent respondents include;

"My parents' divorce did not affect the way I accord respect to others. This is because their divorce is a family affair so it can't affect the way I view others"

"I still respect those around me like my teachers, friends, and the elderly. For example I still greet my elders in the morning when I see them; I never talk back at my senior brothers and sisters"

Yes I do respect those around me. For example I greet my elders, I talk politely to everyone.

Yes I respect those around me. I am never rude to anyone, I don't throw insults at others because I respect them.

“No I do not respect all those around me. I respect only those who deserve to be respected. For example if you call me and start shouting at me for no reason I too will shout and talk back at you”.

“No I respect only those who respect me. If you are abusive towards me I won’t respect you too”

From the responses gathered, a majority of the respondents gave a positive remark of being respectful to those around them. Although, a handful of respondents stated that according respect to them depends on the manner in which others treat or behave towards them. Parental divorce has little or no effect on adolescents according respect to others.

In the same trend, adolescents’ ability of being empathetic was put to the test. This was with the use of the next question that is Q6.

Q6. I do feel pity for others. If Yes/No then Why?.....

Q6 was intended to test adolescent’s level of empathy. Adolescents responded to this question with varied responses with varied examples to clarify their responses. Some striking responses obtained include the following;

“Yes, I do feel pity for others. I try to put myself in any situation I see my friends going through. For example the other day my friend was sick and could not copy her notes. I felt so sorry such that I copied her notes for her”.

“No, I do not pity others. This is because I believe every situation they find themselves in is as a result of their own actions”

“No, I do not pity others. This is because I believe their troubles are as a result of their own actions. Then why should I pity them then”.

“No. Because some people are not worthy of be pitied”.

“Yes,. I do pity others because I don’t like to see others in pain”.

“No,. Because not everyone deserves to be pitied. Their troubles may be as a result of their previous actions”.

Adolescents from mutual consent divorce homes recorded being less empathetic towards others. This may be as a result of their parents’ divorce which has in turn affected them.

Q7. Do you consider vengeance to be the best reward for cruelty? If Yes/No then Why?

Some narrations from adolescent students from mutually divorced homes can be recounted as follows;

“No, vengeance is not the best reward for those that hurt you or wrong you it is best you leave them alone and karma would catch up with them, that is what my mom always says and I believe she is right”.

“Yes, if someone hurts you I think is just right for you to hurt them back. Although this was not the case of my father and mother because they never admit who amongst them causes their divorce”.

“Yes, if someone cause you pain it is only fair that you make them feel what you had gone through. This is because they should not hurt others in the first place”.

A majority of the responses obtained from the adolescent respondents suggest that vengeance should be considered as the best reward for cruelty. A majority believe that others should not be the cause or reason for others pain.

In conclusion divorce by mutual consent (uncontested divorce) has a great impact on adolescent’s moral development both positively and negatively. Negatively, to some adolescents despite the peaceful resolution of a divorce the consequences of the divorce such as neglectful parenting may cause adolescents to go way-word as they are not checked to ensure they follow the rules and regulations set by the society, loose of the virtue of being polite maybe as a result of the anger within them. Positively, mutual consent divorce has impacted in them the spirit of being empathetic (to feel for others), or to the fact that vengeance is not the best reward for cruelty.

Irretrievable breakdown of marital bond divorce and adolescents social development (Self-esteem and autonomy development)

Furthermore, the researcher went further to collect data on the third research objective which is to investigate the effect of divorce by irretrievable breakdown of marital bonds on adolescents’ psychosocial development. Two main social aspect of adolescent’s social development were to be investigated upon by the researcher. These are adolescents’ self-esteem and autonomy development. This was measured with the use of 4 open ended questions.

In the course of the research, the researcher asked the following questions and some responses provided by the respondents were as follows;

Adolescents Self-esteem development

Q4. I always try to please others? If Yes/No, then Why?.....

Adolescents provided both positive and negative responses to this question which indicated these adolescents had either a low or high self-esteem. Some responses obtained can be narrated as follows;

“Yes I always want to please my friends so I feel belong. At first it wasn’t like that but after the divorce of my parents I just feel like my friends won’t want me around them anymore so I try to please them to feel belong”

“Yes I always try to please my friends. This is because I always want to feel belong”.

“Yes I always try to please others especially my parents and my friends”.

Yes I do my best to please my parents. This is because I don’t like to disappoint them”

“Yes, after the divorce of my parents I’m afraid of being rejected by my friends and class mates who still leave with both their parents, so I always try to do my best to be on a good side with my friends”

No I don’t care about pleasing others. This is because they have nothing to offer to me that I would try to please them to get it”

In the same light, in measuring adolescents’ self-esteem development, adolescents were asked the question;

Q5. Do you put others opinion first in whatever you do? If Yes/No then why/How?

To individuals with high self-esteem others opinion about them does not really matter to them very much. This was not the case as compared to the responses obtained with regards to this question. Some responses obtained include;

“Yes. After the divorce of my parents I easily get discouraged especially when someone tells me I haven’t done my best. For example in the last further-mathematics class when I was asked to go to the board and solve a question on the board after solving it another student was called up by the teacher X to check if what I have done was correct and if I was wrong he should tell me where I went wrong and he should show me how it is done. When my classmate stood up he said I was wrong in my calculations and this really made me feel sad”.

“Yes. Others opinion about me truly matters to me. This is because I don’t want to be rejected by them. For example I choose those who I make friends with because I don’t want to be considered as a stubborn or delinquent student”.

“YES. Others opinion matters in whatever I wish to do because since my parents are divorce they don’t have much time for me and I happen to make decisions for myself, so others opinion matters in whatever I wish to do”

Autonomy development

Q6. After the divorce of my parents I make free decisions without consulting anyone? If yes/no then why/how?.....

Q6 above was met with both positive and negative responses with a majority of the responses indicating a negative effect of divorce on adolescents’ autonomy development. Some sample responses to identify these claims include the following;

“No. I am not allowed to make decisions on my own because my father does not allow that. He always says every decision concerning me must be made by him”

“No I’m not allowed taking decisions on my own. My mother checks everything I do from my dressing to when I go out of the house. This is because my mom always says she knows what’s best for me”

“No I’m not allowed to make decisions by myself. My mom makes every decision regarding me. For example even if I want to go and visit my father she always says no I am only allowed to go when she says yes”

No I’m not allowed to make certain decisions on my own for example I wanted to be in the science class but my mom said arts will be good for me instead of the sciences”.

“YES after the divorce of my parents I make free decisions because they happen to be emotionally down and only think of the divorce and they pay little or no attention to whatever I do. For example I dress the way I want to, I can go out at any time I want”

Yes after the divorce of my parents I make free decisions because they don’t have much time spent with me were we could have conversations. There are days I could go a whole day without seeing my father, he would only come home at night sometimes when I had already slept”.

Conclusively, parental divorce from irretrievable breakdown of marital bond impacts adolescent's social development.

Summary of Findings

From the findings and results above, it was concluded that there is a significant relationship between divorce and adolescent's psychosocial development (emotional development, moral development, cognitive development and social development). From the findings, litigation divorce has a negative effect on adolescents' emotional development. Adolescents report more of negative emotions such as anger, sadness, loneliness, frustration, helplessness. Also, mutual consent divorce was to a greater extent reported to play a great role in adolescent moral development. Adolescents from mutual consent divorced homes reported to be less rule abiding, less empathetic and to some, vengeance being the best reward to cruelty. Adolescents from irretrievable breakdown of marital bond divorced homes also reported that parental divorce as a result of irretrievable breakdown of marital bond divorce has a great effect on adolescent's social development. This is with regards with adolescent's self-esteem and autonomy development. Adolescents reported aspects of low self-esteem such as always wanting to please others, making others opinions about them being a priority to them. With regards to autonomy development, adolescents reported aspects of being less autonomous. These adolescents confirmed that they have limited access to take on decisions that matters to them on their own. Without making free decisions adolescents cannot be considered as being autonomous. In conclusion divorce has an impact on the psychosocial development of adolescents.

Discussions

Discussion of findings was done in accordance with the specific research objectives as stated in chapter one. Discussions for each research objective was with the support of the existing literature as reviewed in chapter two to bring out the significance of the effect of divorce as a determinant of adolescents' psychosocial development.

The findings affirmed that divorce has negatively affected the psychosocial development of adolescents caught up in the marital conflict/issues that leads to parental divorce or even post-divorce conflicts.

(1): To examine the relationship between litigation divorce and the psychosocial development of adolescents in some selected secondary schools in the Buea Municipality.

From the findings litigation divorce is generally characterised with conflicts between parents (for example; may include physical violence, legal battles). Findings have proven that litigation divorce has a negative impact on adolescent's emotional development. Adolescents develop negative emotions such as anger, sadness, loneliness, fear which in turn causes them to exhibit behaviours that reflects their emotional states. They may become violent, exhibiting anger, introverted exhibiting sadness or loneliness.

From the findings, participants recorded similar negative emotions, namely anger, sadness, frustration, loneliness. This is in line with previous studies where emotions expressed were normal emotions of loss (negative emotions). This is because for adolescents, divorce is a very scary and traumatic experience, regardless of age. It is fraught with fighting, anger and manipulation felt from both sides (Ningrum, 2013). Some participants on the other hand reported not feeling anything, this makes it likely that they tend to hide the emotions of sadness, anger, loneliness or frustration until they can overcome these hidden emotions. When a person is coping, he or she can turn to open up to venting his/her emotions (Murat et al., 2019). The findings show that these adolescents turn to employ

strategies or different preferences to releasing the tense negative emotions they bottle up. Some of these include; engaging in fights, arguments, bullying others.

The findings suggest that the emotions that result after litigation divorce by parents have a significant impact on adolescent's development. Participants gave somewhat different perceptions of their emotions after the divorce occurred. There is no denying that the sad emotion is there after the divorce, but in most cases it's as a result of jealousy factors of seeing others happy families. This comparative jealousy and linking factor can be seen in past studies where adolescents reported increased stress, anxiety and feelings of loneliness and abandonment (Abdullah &Fitrah, 2019).

The findings show that participants seemed to feel they had lost their parents in turn feeling they had nothing else in this world after the divorce took place. This is because adolescents are very vulnerable and them being involved in a litigation divorce where/when they are unable to fully articulate what is going on, makes them confused with mixed feelings and far from reality.

The findings proved that there was a positive significant relationship between the effects of litigation divorce and adolescents' emotional development. In this light, adolescents whose parents are divorced/separated may experience, anger, sadness, trust issues as they experience fear as they interact with members of the opposite sex, would experience a low level of self-esteem. Grych and Fincham (1990) stated that parental conflicts and eventual divorce acts as a direct stressor for adolescents. Adolescents would in turn react to parental divorce with fear, anger or abnormal behaviour

The findings are in line with Zulkefli et al. (2016) study of the effect of divorce on children's emotional development, which stated that parental divorce will have an emotional impact on children who are still learning either negative or positive emotions. Among the emotions that are often associated with children when experiencing parental divorce issues are feelings of sadness, depression, shame, anger, hatred, guilt.

Similarly, Tullius, De Kroon, Almansa and Reijneveld (2021), stated that adolescent students from divorced families will feel a deep loss in them and easily feel heartbroken suddenly with things happening around them that are beyond their control. In addition, students faced with divorced parents will experience a variety of emotions and feelings due to the absence of parents as the main driver in ensuring the functioning of a family runs smoothly

The findings furthermore corroborate with that of Wolchik et al. (2019), whose findings showed that children have a variety of emotions felt when parents' divorce. Among the feelings they showed was feeling insecure and thinking that their future would be bleak. They also showed feelings of sadness, anger, loneliness and self-blame. Wolchik et al. (2019) aimed to examine the effect of divorce on adolescent's emotional development before divorce, during divorce and after divorce. Pre- Divorce effects; the study future a normal family where they are a blessing for marriage and bring joy and happiness. All the participants of the study had happy emotions, were in good shape and had no problems before the divorce of their parents occurred. Effect during-divorce; from the findings, the adolescents experienced negative emotions of anger, sadness and frustration. Post-divorce; the findings suggested that the emotions that result after divorce on average have a significant impact on the longevity of their lives. They indicated emotions of jealousy, sadness, anger, low self-esteem.

The findings are supported by John Bowlby's theory of attachment. According to his theory, attachment bonds have been found to play a critical role in ensuring and guide individual's feelings

(emotions), thoughts and expectations. Therefore, there is a relationship between the effects of divorce and adolescents' emotional development.

(2): To examine the effect of divorce by mutual consent on the psychosocial development of adolescents in some selected secondary schools in the Buea Municipality.

The findings proved that there was a positive significant relationship between the effects of divorce by mutual consent and adolescents' moral development. In this light, adolescents whose parents are divorced/separated reported more negative experience related to moral development such as, having issues with abiding to rules and regulations, according respect to those around them, little or no pity for others (empathetic) or considering vengeance as a reward to cruelty. Despite mutual consent divorce been considered as a peaceful divorce process, it still greatly impacts adolescent's moral development.

The family unit provides the most important socialization aspect in the life of a child. A traditional perspective holds that a family that has two parents living together with their children provides a better environment for moral development. Divorce breaks the social fiber that holds the family and consequently exposes the children to socialization deficit, (Guidubaldi et al., 2007).

The results obtained in this study are in line with the studies of Daum and Bieliauskas, (1983); Hoffman, (1971) which focused on the impact of father's absence in children's development as a result of divorce. His findings stated that divorce is associated with lower levels of moral development and higher levels of deviancy and delinquency.

The findings furthermore corroborate with that of Jennifer L. Kogos and John Snarey, (2008), whose findings showed a positive association between adolescents moral reasoning and judgment and their parents divorced status.

The findings are in congruence with the ecological system theory of UrieBronfernbrenner. Bronfernbrenner's ecological framework for human development applies socio-ecological models to human development. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, children typically find themselves enmeshed in various ecosystems, from the most intimate home ecological system to the larger school system, and then to the most expansive system which includes society and culture. Each of the systems inevitably interacts with and influences each other in all aspects of the children's life.

(3): To examine the effect of divorce by irretrievable marital bonds on the psychosocial development of adolescents in some selected secondary schools in the Buea Municipality.

Research findings from this study indicated that divorce from irretrievable breakdown of marital bond has an impact on adolescent's social development (self-esteem and autonomy development). Adolescents reported aspects of low self-esteem such as always trying to please others, and letting others opinions matter most to them. With regards to autonomy development, adolescents reported little or no development to aspects related to behavioural autonomy, which refers to the ability to make decisions independently and to follow through on these decisions and actions. Adolescents reported little or no ability or freedom in making independent decisions.

Although we often use the words autonomy and independence interchangeably, in the study of adolescents 'they mean slightly different things. Independence generally refers to teens' capacity to behave on their own. the growth of independence is surly a part of becoming autonomous during

adolescence, but autonomy means thinking, feeling, and making moral decisions that are truly your own, rather than following along with what others believe, Steinberg, L. (1999). The research findings corroborates with Steinberg, L. view on adolescent's autonomy development.

The findings proved that there was a positive relationship between divorce and adolescents' social development. In this light, divorce was observed to have a significant effect on adolescent's development of self-esteem and autonomy development. The results of this study are consistent with those of previous research. Research study by Pawlak and Klein (1997) reported that parental conflict and divorce is negatively associated with adolescent students' self-esteem. Also, adolescents who reported poor relationship with parents tend to exhibit low self-esteem.

Empirical studies by Turner and Kopiec (2006) reported that exposure to parental conflict and divorce in childhood and adolescents are negatively associated with the level of self-esteem on adolescents. This study is also in line with the research study of Shen (2009), which stated that parental conflict and divorce may damage adolescents' self-esteem since they perceive themselves as helpless or unable to protect their parents in the face of their conflict.

Empirical research by (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986), using the Emotional Autonomy Scale aimed assessing adolescents' emotional autonomy showed a consistent relation with negative adolescent functioning. Thus, it appears that separating oneself from parental influence may have emotional costs. On the basis of previous findings, researchers argued that optimal development towards autonomy will only take place within a supportive parent-child relationship.

The above study is in line with the attachment theory by Bowlby, and the ecological system theory by UrieBronfenbrenner. Bowlby's Attachment theory. If a child is exposed to a positive experience with caregivers, the child is more likely to experience secure relationships. In contrast, if a child is exposed to an environment of neglect, intrusiveness, and emotional coldness, the child is more likely to develop an insecure life orientation (Lopez et al., 2000). Bronfenbrenner (2004), explored environmental systems and how they interface with human development. He identified five systems: the Micro-system; is the environment and the family. The Meso-system is the relationship between all of the parts of the Micro-system. If children feel rejected, they have negative experiences with relationships. The Exo-system is described as links to social setting that could be disrupted if the child transfers to another environment due to the separation of the parents. The micro system involves the culture that is passed on from generation to generation. The Chrono-system which contains environmental events and transitions in life.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Adolescents is considered to be a period of significant storms and stress as they undergo bodily or physical changes, cognitive changes, psychological as well as social changed. In recent years, it has been observed that despite these changes, adolescents have been observed to exhibit some antisocial behaviour's which a call for concern to the society is in general. Adolescents have been observed to be engaged in drug consumption, alcohol consumption, fights, involved in crimes, bullying, unwanted pregnancies just to name a few. This behaviour's may have resulted from increased rates of divorce in our society today. This study was conducted to test this theory if these antisocial behaviours were as a result of the increased divorce rates in our Cameroonian societies today. The researcher calved out the Buea municipality to be the geographical local for this research study. The study was guided by three main objectives; (1) to examine the impact of litigation divorce on adolescent's psychosocial

development, (2) to examine the impact of mutual consent divorce on adolescents psychosocial development, (3) to examine the impact of divorce from irretrievable breakdown of marital bond on adolescents psycho social development. The research study made use of the qualitative research method with a case study research design. The case study research design is an in-depth examination of people or groups of people. The interpretive (or disciplined configurative) case study design was used in the study as it aimed to use established theories to explain a specific case. The information or opinion collected from the sample is usually generalized to the entire population.

The findings revealed that divorce be it by litigation, mutual consent or from irretrievable breakdown of marital bond greatly have a negative effect on adolescent's psychosocial development. From the findings, divorce from ligation greatly impacted adolescent's emotional development more negatively than positively. Adolescent participants reported to exhibit more negative emotions such as anger, loneliness, sadness, frustration. A majority of the participants reported to exhibit these negative emotions due to the conflicts (physically or legally) observed from their parents' divorce. The findings also acknowledged that parental divorce from mutual consent despite been a peaceful divorce process also greatly impact adolescent's moral development from a more negative light than positively. Negatively, adolescents reported to exhibit antisocial moral values such as not abiding to rules and regulations, considering vengeance to is a reward for cruelty to some and not to some not considering vengeance as an option. Positively, the participants reported to have a show of empathy. To add the findings also revealed that participants from divorced parents (irretrievable breakdown of marital bond), exhibited low self-esteem, such as not believing in themselves and always considering others point of views and opinions before theirs, fear of being rejected and not loved by others, fear of being criticised. They also reported aspects of less autonomy development. Generally, divorce be it from litigation, mutual consent or from irretrievable breakdown of marital bond greatly has an effect on adolescent's psychosocial development.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends the following;

The researcher recommends that divorce should be the least option or the last resort to be considered by spouses when a relationship start turning sour. Their children's development should be considered before taking that big step of divorcing.

More so, adolescents should be shown more love and care from their parents during and after their divorce process. This could help reduce the negative emotions they feel as a result of their divorce.

Also, the researcher recommends that parents should take a more authoritative approach to parenting which should be characterized by a child-centre approach that holds high expectations for maturity. Authoritative parents can understand how their children are feeling and teach them how to regulate their feelings. They also encourage their children to be independent but still place limits on their actions.

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