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PARENTAL ABSENCE AS CORRELATES OF ADOLESCENTS' STRESS IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between parental absence and adolescence stress in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State. The survey design was used for the study. The population of this study comprised 3,000 senior secondary one students from 123 schools within Uyo Senatorial District. Four purposes of study, four research questions were raised to guide the investigation and four hypotheses were tested in the study. The sample was 450 Senior Secondary One Students from 30 secondary schools. Stratified random sampling technique was used in choosing the sample. Students Parental Absence and Stress Questionnaire (SPASQ) was used in collecting data. Four hypotheses were tested in the study at 0.05 level of significance. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Analyses. The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between fathers' absence and adolescent females' stress, fathers' absence and adolescent males' stress, mothers' absence and male adolescents' stress, female adolescents' stress and mothers' absence. Based on these findings, the paper concludes that there is the need of stress management in adolescence through counselling interventions. The paper therefore recommends among others that parents should be available in the adolescence life by supervising and being involved in their school work and other activities

KEY WORDS: Fathers' Absence, Mothers' Absence, Adolescence Stress, Male Adolescence, Female Adolescence.

Introduction

Adolescents are individuals who are between the ages of 12 and 18 years. They have peculiar traits and a peculiar way of doing things. This is observed in the way they see themselves as adults and want to be addressed and treated as an adult. This causes identity crisis in adolescence. Arumala (2005) described them as special persons that are undergoing dynamic transformational experiences from childhood to adulthood. These transformational experiences are characterised by stress and storm. Stress can be defined as individuals' reaction to demands imposed upon him (Erkutte & Chafra, 2006). Therefore, all forms of delinquent acts exhibited by adolescents as a result of the dynamic transformational experiences are stressful events. As observed by Adeoye (2003) the stress occur because the adaptive capacity of the individual has collapsed. Likewise, Oyewole (2003) defined stress as the pattern of responses that an organism makes in order to stimulate events that disturbs its equilibrium. The stressors which are the stimulus events, can be external or internal. The external stressors could be parental physical or psychological absence in the adolescents' life. These external stresses manifest itself through the family's style of functioning, parenting style, parental relationship, separation and divorce, blended family-issues, an alcoholic parents, death, domestic violence and cultural issues. The internal stressors are the psychological challenges in adolescence. These are formation of a personal identity,

individuation from family relationships as well as adjustment to biological, cognitive and psychological changes. The external and internal stressors are both stressful and anxiety - provoking for the adolescents' as observed by Geldard and Geldard (2005).

The Concept of Parental Absence and Adolescents Stress.

Parents could serve as important agents that could help to reduce stressful and anxiety - provoking events in the adolescents. Parents are legal guardians who have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the children's personality. As described in Erik Erikson's (1902 - 1994) psychosocial theory, children's personality development is associated with their early experiences with the persons responsible for their care. Likewise Odoemelam (1991) stressed that most future unhappiness of adults is rooted in their upbringing and training and in the way and manner their needs were catered for and their concerns solved in their early life. Parents are significant individuals in each family. They are expected to care for their children from babyhood till they can stand on their own. Whenever a child is deprived of this, because of parental absence, some stressful events such as anti-social behaviours are bound to occur during adolescence stage.

The manifestation of anti-social behaviour in adolescents because of parental absence is a source of stress. Omeogun

(1996) revealed that stress results from adolescents' unmet needs, fear of failure, frustration and unhappiness. This may lead to the manifestation of serious anti-social behaviours. This is observed in adolescent's show of disrespect to their parents and elders. Ogodu (2005) pointed out that the level of anti-social behaviour among adolescents is on the increase. It is common to read about brutal attacks of children on parents, elders and among themselves. They engage in nocturnal organisations, rape and examination malpractices. Some are involved in crimes, armed robbery, and burglary, pick pocket and do not obey public laws. The adolescence stage is tempestuous and stressful for the adolescents. This stage of life is characterised by many new and intense sensations, unpredictable moods, overpowering emotions, conflicting demands and expectations from home, school and the society (Eruesegbe, 2005). Many of them are unprepared for the many surprises which occur as a natural physiological part of this period. The truth is that they have not been properly trained by parents on how to control and channel usefully their urges for more creative purposes. This is because they are deprived of the parents that would have given the training as such they involve in stressful behaviours learnt from corrupt and criminal peers and adults.

Consequently, Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) confirmed that whether a father is absent or present (emotionally and physically) in his child's life makes a significant difference in later developmental and behavioural issues of the child. The authors see fatherhood as an act of being a father as oppose to merely, "fathering". Fatherhood dimensions make fathering very important. These include breadwinning, nurturing, modeling, socialization of children, involvement in children's lives, moral and spiritual development and providing a sense of stability. There lies a critical problem when the father is absent physically or emotionally, because his own dimensions as a father will not be executed and this leaves the adolescent female to stressful events. Adams (2001) also stressed that the age at which a daughter loses her father is meaningful since it influences her perception of males, the world as well as her academic advancement. Besides the influence on her perception, it hinders her ability as observed by Graffin (1998). It also triggers negative reactions as oppose to positive ones. The negative reactions could be observed in school dropout, involvement in drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy and others. They are prone to willingly accepting sexual partners in order to get money and other items.

Fathers' absence does not only affect the female adolescent but the males are also affected. This happened because male children tend to respect their fathers more than the mothers. Wisdom (1983) in his study found out that where the father is present, the male child is more likely to conform to the rules of the family. Fathers give more punishment in the family than the mothers therefore,

male adolescent would tend to avoid those behavioural patterns that will expose them to punishment. Unfortunately, in the homes where the father is absent, the mother is left to take care of the children, control of behaviour becomes difficult. Therefore, the adolescent male is more likely to become involved in crime and violence. Furthermore, Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) opined that fathers' presence can foster creativity, a positive body image, moral standards and social competence. The authors emphasized that fathers' availability and involvement reduce aggressive behaviour in boys. However, when a father is absent, the outcome is moral collapse in the adolescent male. The fathers' absence is the stressor that triggers the manifestations of the most delinquent acts associated with adolescent male such as aggression, sexual assault, vandalism, rioting, bullying, drug abuse. As confirmed in Ekpo (2006), the great majority of antisocial deeds, especially those of theft and violence are committed among the boys.

Besides fathers' absence in adolescence life, mothers' absence produces the greatest effect on an individual (Bowlby, 1996). An attachment bond is formed between the mother and the child because the child spends more time with the mother than any other person. Where there is the absence of a mother due to death, illness, divorce, separation of mother from child, there is bound to be lack of attachment bond. In such situation adolescent male according to Shiraev and Levy (2001) are faced with problems such as neglects from surrogate mothers, unstable homes, lack of home-training lack of love, all leading to emotional and social stress. The end result is that the male adolescents are struggling with stress from home and school. They have no stamina to cope with crimes, drug trafficking, robbery and examination malpractice. Okey and Ajibo (2005) are also of the view that these deprived male victims are rebellious from their homes and they join cult groups as an extension of their social rebellion.

The adolescent females are also affected because of mothers' absence. According to Nge (2003) when an individual is treated separately from the mother there is bound to be changes. A mother has intimate personal emotional attachments to members of the family especially the adolescent female. There is often rapid changes in physiological and psychological developments in female adolescence. The availability of the mother will enhance the smooth transition of the female adolescence through this stage. Horne (2000) observed that children reared by emotionally stable mothers would likely exhibit well controlled behavioural traits, but the ones reared by mother substitutes, may become confused, frustrated and resentful of restrictions on their freedom as adolescents which subdue them to stressful behaviours.

Stress among females often tends to involve sexual promiscuity which may result in unwanted pregnancy, infection with venereal disease and school drop out to take

care of the baby. One of the causes of this situation is an unstable family background especially one where the mother is absent. Mother's absence as reported by Brown (1997) in many instances, may expose the adolescent female to lack of care when she is passing through a phase of development. Therefore, motherhood and fatherhood roles are what should be improved upon. This could be done through counselling, and enlightenment campaign. By so doing it will enhance healthy social development of the adolescents attention, love and discipline.

Empirical Issues in the Study

Various authorities have shown that male and female adolescents are stressed differently in reaction to the stressors. The stressors could be fathers' absence or mothers' absence. Krohn and Zoe (2001) in their study examined the effects absence of fathers has on their daughters' development and college attendance. They discovered that father's departure from the home reveals the different behavioural dimensions of fatherless daughters. According to them, there are distinct differences between the behaviour of females who lost their fathers to death and that of those who lost their fathers to separation or divorce. They concluded that the ways, in which they view the opposite sex, the outside world and themselves are forever tainted as a result of missing the key element of a father. Moreover, Grimm-Wassil (1994) conducted a research to find out the degree of absenteeism of fathers. The researcher found out that fathers' absence has impact on the emotional outcome of the female child. Girls who had little contact with their fathers during adolescence were observed to have got great difficulties forming lasting relationships with men. They either shy away from males all together or become sexually aggressive. Furthermore, Griffin (1998) study on adolescence security pointed out that adolescents without a father figure, lack a sense of protection and as a result may become discouraged. The effects are teenage pregnancy, school dropout and low self-esteem. Fathers' absence not only hinders their ability, it also triggers negative reactions as opposed to positive ones. A confident base enables adolescents to be successful in their endeavors and accomplish what they attempt.

In consideration of the relationship between mothers' absence and adolescents stress, Olusakin (2005) conducted a research to find out the social adjustment of the adolescents living in mother absent homes. The findings revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in the level of the social adjustment of the adolescents living in mother – present homes compared with adolescents living in mother – absent homes. This points to the fact that mothers play a very significant role in the social adjustment of adolescents. Adolescents are faced with stressful events such as neglects from surrogate mothers, unstable homes, lack of home training, lack of love, all leading to stress. Thus, the availability of parents in adolescence's life could aid to take off stress.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study therefore is to investigate the relationship that exists between parental absence and adolescents' stress in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the purposes of this study are as follows:

- 1) To determine the relationship between fathers' absence and adolescent females' stress in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State.
- 2) To investigate the relationship between fathers' absence and adolescent males' stress in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State.
- 3) To examine the relationship between mothers' absence and males stress in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State.
- 4) To examine the relationship between mothers' absence and adolescent females' stress in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in this study.

- 1) Does fathers' absence relates to adolescent females' stress in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State.
- 2) How does fathers' absence relates to adolescent males' stress in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State.
- 3) Is there any significant relationship between mothers' absence and adolescent males' stress in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State.
- 4) What relationship exists between mothers' absence and adolescent females' stress in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance.

- (1) There is no significant relationship between fathers' absence and adolescent females' stress.
- (2) Fathers' absence does not have significant relationship with adolescent males' stress.
- (3) There is no significant relationship between mothers' absence and adolescent males stress.
- (4) There is no significant relationship between mothers' absence and adolescent females stress.

Methodology

The research design used in this study was survey design. The population was 3,000 Senior Secondary One Students from 123 secondary schools within Uyo senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State. A stratified random selection procedure was used to select 450 students as sample for the study. The instrument used to elicit responses was a self – designed questionnaire by the researcher titled, Students' Parental Absence and Stress Questionnaire (SPASQ). This questionnaire consisted of parts. A, B and C. Part "A" was on biographical data of the students Part "B" had four sections with five items each. This part was designed to elicit information on parental absence.

Sections one and four had items that were meant for adolescent females only. Sections two and three had items that were meant for male adolescents' responses only. Part 'C' had ten items that were meant for both adolescent females' and males' responses. It measured the type of stressful events experienced by adolescent. The items were responded to on a four – point scale of strongly agree (4); Agree (3); Disagree (2); Strongly disagree (1). The face and content validity of the instrument was established by giving it to some experts in test and measurement to scrutinise. Their comments and observations were used in

restructuring some items of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined through Cronbach Coefficient Alpha reliability method and the reliability coefficient of .82 was obtained. This was considered suitable for its use for the study. The data collected for the study were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

Results

The results of the four null hypotheses of the study are presented below:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between fathers' absence and adolescent females' stress.

Table 1: Relationship between fathers' absence and adolescent females' stress

Variables	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	df	γ -cal
Fathers' absence (x)	2701	37682	65346	218	.4115*
Female Stress (y)	5162	127262			

N = 220, *Significant P <.05

Table 1 above shows that the computed γ (.4115) is greater than the critical γ (.139) at df of 218 and .05 level of Significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that, fathers' absence significantly and positively relates to adolescent females' stress.

Hypothesis 2: Fathers' absence does not have significant relationship on adolescent males' stress.

Table 2: Relationship between fathers' absence and adolescent males' stress

Variables	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	df	γ -cal
Fathers' absence (x)	2835	37761	66245	228	.4407*
Male Stress (y)	5175	127305			

N = 230, *Significant P <.05

Date in table 2 above shows that the computed γ (.4407) is greater than the critical γ (.139) at df of 228 and .05 level of Significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that, fathers' absence significantly relates to adolescent males' stress.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between mothers' absence and adolescent males' stress.

Table 3: Relationship between fathers' absence and adolescent females' stress

Variables	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	df	γ -cal
Fathers' absence (x)	3376	53305	817445	228	.9060*
Female Stress (y)	5175	127305			

N = 230, *Significant P <.05

Since the computed γ (.9060) in table 3, is greater than the critical γ (.139) at df of 228 and .05 level of Significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, mothers' absence significantly and positively relates to adolescent females' stress.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant relationship between mothers' absence and adolescent females' stress.

Table 4: Relationship between mothers' absence and adolescent females' stress

Variables	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	df	γ -cal
Fathers' absence (x)	2349	52914	58046	218	.6252*
Female Stress (y)	5162	127262			

N = 220, *Significant P <.05

Table 4 indicates that the calculated γ (.6252) is greater than the critical γ (.139) needed for Significance at .05

level, with 218 df. This mothers' absence significantly relates to adolescent females' stress. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion

There is a significant relationship between fathers' absence and adolescent females' stress, which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis one. This finding could be explained by the fact that fathers' absence either physically or psychologically is a stressor that elicits adolescent females stress in having more desire for males, insecurity, teenage pregnancy, school dropout, keeping of bad company, fighting, disobedient and other vices. Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) supported this finding by confirming that fathers in a child's life make a significant difference in later developmental and behavioural issues of the child. The difference is often positive where the father is present. Krohn and Zoe (2001) also found that the way adolescent females view the opposite sex, the outside world and themselves are forever tainted as a result of missing a father. This result is also in consonance with the study of Grimm-Wassil (1994) on absenteeism of fathers. The researcher found out that girls who had little contact with their fathers during adolescence were observed to have got difficulties in forming lasting relationships. This findings makes counselling intervention very eminent to forestall future effects on marital relationships of the adolescent females.

The null hypothesis two was also rejected meaning that a significant relationship exists between fathers' absence and adolescent males' stress. This implies that fathers absence is a stressor that educe aggressive behaviours in adolescent males as supported by Hawkins and Dollahite (1997) that fathers' availability and involvement reduce aggressive behaviour in boys. However, when the father is absent in adolescent males' life, the outcome is moral collapse manifested in stressful conditions such as aggression, sexual assault, rioting, bullying and drug abuse. This finding indicates that adolescent males often accept rules where there is a father; they tend to respect their fathers more than their mothers. This is supported by Wisdom (1983) finding that where the father is present, the adolescent males are more likely to conform to the rules of the family.

Null hypothesis three was rejected. This means that mothers' absence significantly and positively relates to male adolescents' stress. This could be explained from the fact that mothers' absence negatively affects adolescent males' life pattern, causes frustration in males and makes them to suffer stress from mother substitutes. This is supported by Olusakin's (2005) finding that the male youths have problems with home and school in which they have no stamina to cope. This resulted to stressful events such as crimes, drug trafficking, robbery and examination malpractices because their adaptive capacity has collapsed as confirmed by Adeoye (2003).

Again, null hypothesis four was rejected, which implies that female adolescent stress relates to mothers' absence. This findings is supported by Ng (2003) views that there

are often changes in the life pattern when an individual is treated separately from the mother. These changes lead to the stressful conditions in the adolescent females. Children reared by biological mothers would exhibit controlled behavioural traits but the ones reared by mother substitutes as supported by Horne (2000) may become confused, frustrated and resentful of restrictions. These points to the fact that mothers' absence is a stressor. This finding is in line with Olusakin (2005) finding that there is a significant difference in the social adjustment of the adolescents living in the mother – present homes and those from mother – absent homes. This also explained the fact that mothers are very important in the life of adolescent female, because availability of a mother will bring a good counsel of these stressful problems.

Stress Management in Adolescence through Counselling Intervention

Guidance and counselling is a helping relationship. It is a psychological process of helping individuals to cope with various life situations. This study has revealed that the adolescence are stressed in various situations because of the stressor, parental absence. This has made it very important to examine the various ways they could be helped through counselling interventions to manage stress.

At adolescence boys and girls are expected to stop behaving like children but they are not expected to behave like adults. This expectation has caused psychological stress in the adolescent. Therefore, the counsellor must endeavour to use exploration method to explore with the client what he thinks an adolescent life pattern and expectations should be like at a particular point in time. Through the exploration, the counsellor will assist the adolescent to clarify issues on his expectations and help him to understand and make a choice of the ones that are realistic.

Sharing experiential knowledge can help adolescence manage stress. This is the narration of significant life experiences that deprived adolescence obtained from living through a particular stressful events. According to Nyarks (2011) the knowledge derived from these experiences will help adolescence to solve problems and improve his quality of life.

Personal coping resources can also help adolescence manage stress. These are the stable characteristics of the adolescence. According to Geldard and Geldard (2005) these include temperamental and personal characteristics such as beliefs about self and the world, self esteem, locus control, optimism, skill and knowledge of problem solving techniques. The individual that makes use of this coping style according to the authors are always most successful.

Reference to others could also be used by adolescence in managing stress. The adolescence can willingly seek help

Cognitive coping resource could also be used by the adolescence himself. This could be done by locating a peaceful place to relax, think things through and make decisions.

Defence mechanism resource could also be used by adolescence to manage stress. This concept was introduced by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). He believed that defence mechanisms could help to keep information in the unconscious mind from awareness. The mechanism of repression and sublimation could help to cushion the adolescence response to stress, enabling them to gather strength to carry on in life. Repression is the ability of an individual to forget stress provoking events and never remembering past emotionally traumatic events while sublimation is the capacity of an adolescents to channel stress provoking events such as aggression, promiscuity, stealing fighting and others into socially acceptable behaviours such as hard work and creativity.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is undisputed that adolescents are stressed. The stressor as found in this study is parental absence. This stressor evokes stressful events in the adolescence male and female alike. Therefore, the thought of helping adolescence manage stress is a welcome development. Until this is achieved adolescence stage may continue to be a period of stress and storm.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- (1) Parental absence enhances adolescents' stress, therefore parents should protect their marriage from collapse through relevance and understanding of one another.
- (2) Parents should be available in the adolescence life by supervising and being involved in their school work and other activities.
- (3) Government in collaboration with counsellors should organize parenting support groups in the society to help empower and guide parents to determine underlying problems and learning strategies for behaviour change.
- (4) The emotional and psychological outcome of stress often lead to stressful events in adolescence. Therefore, the counsellor as well as parents should learn to recognise and deal with the stressful events as soon as possible in order to promote adaptive behaviours.
- (5) The counsellor intervention in marriage could also help to manage adolescence stress. Parents should be enlightened to seek for marriage and family therapy. This could be done through the media, the church and during parent teachers meetings.

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