Parental Divorce and Psychosocial Adjustment of Early Adolescents in the Bamenda City Council Area, North West Region, Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Divorces have left children in the hands of single parents, grandparents, other extended family members, even distant family friends to take care of them. This life condition has to a greater extent, caused enormous damage to the psychosocial development of children in general and early adolescents in particular. This study examined the effects of parental divorce on the psychosocial adjustment of early adolescents (12 -14years) in the Bamenda city council area of the North West Region of Cameroon. Four research objectives and four research questions were drawn from the general research objective and the general research question. A mixed method research design was adopted for this study. A total of 600 children (age range 12-14 years) served as participants in the study while 30 children and 10 parents took part in focus group discussions and interviews respectively. Data were collected with the use of questionnaires, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interviews. Inferential and Descriptive statistical techniques were used to analyze data. From the findings, it was realized that the majority of the early adolescents 72.8% with parental absence due to divorce are affected by it, while 27.2% are not. This represents a significantly strong, and negative effect on all four areas of psychosocial adjustment of the early adolescents (p-value=0.000, < 0.05) with an overall high correlation value of -0.700**. The findings also showed that the majority of the early adolescents 68.5% with parental death suffered from psychosocial adjustment issues, with a significantly strong, and negative effect on all four areas of the psychosocial adjustment; (p-value=0.000, < 0.05), with an overall high correlation value of -0.598**. The findings also showed that 67.5% of the early adolescents suffered from psychosocial adjustment issues due the migration of their parents, with a significantly strong, and negative effect on all four areas of the psychosocial adjustment (p-value=0.000, < 0.05). Finally, as projected by the findings, 65.9% of the early adolescents suffer from psychosocial adjustment issues due to parental forceful displacements, with a significant, moderate, and negative effect on all four areas of psychosocial adjustment (p-value=0.000, < 0.05). The significant and strong effect is also supported with a relatively high explanatory power of 58.9% (Cox and Snell statistics). Overall, findings showed that parental divorce significantly correlate with all the four dimensions of the psychosocial adjustment of early adolescents.

KEYWORDS: *Parental Absence, Psychosocial adjustment, Early Adolescents, Divorce, Self-esteem, Social bahaviour, academic resilience*

INTRODUCTION

The utmost challenge humans face in adapting to their circumstances, particularly the impact of parental absence on the psychosocial adjustment of children and early adolescents. Parental absence can be physical, as seen in cases of divorce, death, migration, and displacement, or emotional, where parents are

physically present but unresponsive to their children's needs. Both types of absence can lead to maladjustment in early adolescents, manifesting as sadness, anxiety, and emotional instability. Some adolescents adjust better than others, but the study emphasizes the importance of understanding how parental absence affects self-esteem, social behavior, mental well-being, and academic resilience. This research focuses on adolescents aged 12–14 in the Bamenda City Council Area and aims to explore the specific effects of various types of parental absence on their psychosocial adjustment.

Background to the Study

The socio-economic and socio-political situation in the Bamenda City Council area in the North West Region have not been favourable in the last decade. This situation seems to have negatively affected family structures to the detriment of the children. Some parents have decided to migrate out of the area to seek jobs elsewhere in other regions of the country or out of the country expressly, leaving the rest of their family members behind including children and minors. Other reasons for parental physical absence in the area include, parental death, parental divorce and parental forceful displacement. Even though there are no available statistical figures to support the prevalence of this phenomena, they are very common and observable in the BCCA.

Faced with the absence of one or both biological parents in their lives, adolescents in the Bamenda city council area are naturally bound to adjust to the new living conditions, after all, they have lived with their parents for a long time, enough to feel the impact of the absence once the parents stay away from them for a long time. This situation is so critical in this city because adjusting to lives changes is not an easy task to perform by children if it is not supported in one way or the other by either peers, parents, teachers or other caregivers.

On the other hand, left behind custodial parents or caregivers who now have to work double shifts to sustain the lives of the children do not have enough time to attend to most of the follow-ups and monitoring of children's schooling and other activities. For example, they do not have time enough to make contact with their children's classroom teachers, or attend Parent teacher Association meeting to check the progress of their children as was the case before. Most children who are left behind with a single parent or with a family relative or family friends, work extra hard to assist in house chores. Some of the children take care of their younger siblings in the absence of their parents. In this city, many of such children engage in petty trading, for

example, selling snacks in schools and on the street. Looking at the reasons for this commercial activities, some people mistake it for a sort of child training, meanwhile it has all the characteristics of child labour - a survival adjustment mechanism which deprives children of their leisure time and schooling activities. While this case describes the well-adjusted children, the maladjusted are those who when faced with circumstances like this, are overwhelmed, withdrawn and may engage in anti-social behaviuors such as stealing for survival.

Historically, the significance of parental absence emerged during the Industrial Revolution when a lot of manpower was required for the large factories to operate. Men who were the most solicited had to move to the cities leaving their wives and children in the rural areas. It was a very difficult decision to dare to go along with their wives and children to the industrial areas. The second major contributor to parental absence were the two world wars of between 1919 and 1945. The loss of lives from these two wars left behind a multitude of orphans and half orphans. Thousands of African strong men including those from Bamenda and all towns and villages of Cameroon joint the ally forces to fight during the Second World War. With millions of men away from home, women filled manufacturing and agricultural positions on the home front. Others provided support on the front lines as nurses, doctors, ambulance drivers, translators, and in rare cases, on the battlefields, leaving their children behind to fend for themselves. Pincus et al., (2001) explains that during pre-deployment, children and family members may withdraw emotionally. When the service member (father or mother) leaves, emotions may intensify, and children can feel overwhelmed, sad, or anxious. When he or she returns, the family feels excitement and relief, but this is followed by another readjustment as the service member reintegrates into the family. Children are not exclusively the passive victims of conflict between armed groups because they have been increasingly recruited by such groups, assuming both ancillary and more active combat roles (Ames, 2010).

Divorce is the legal dissolution of marriage, leaving the partners free to remarry anyone they chose to marry. Divorce is generally perceived negatively in all societies where marriages are considered to be sacred. Divorce is destructive to the family which is universally acknowledged as a natural unit of society and given primary responsibility for the development and well-being of individuals, especially the nurturing and protection of children. According to Nsamenang, (2000), the world has not yet discovered a better

system to replace the family in this role. Thus, in 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child emphatically stated that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family unit. This implies that the family is still the most natural environment for human development and is likely to remain so. Van Leer Bernard Foundation, (1984) posits that it is important not to over-idealize the family, at least in its assumed traditional stable form, since it now seems to be in crisis, as can be seen from statistics worldwide. Van's position can be justified by what UNESCO observes that in society, incomplete families are emerging due to reasons such as; socio-economic crisis, deaths, and divorces.

Furthermore, marriage and divorce are both common experiences in our local communities. Healthy marriages are good for couples' mental and physical health. They are also good for children because growing up in a happy home, protects children from mental, physical, educational and social problems. An emerging body of evidence in our local Christian communities suggest that marital education, family counseling, and related services can improve couples' communication and problem-solving skills, resulting initially in greater marital satisfaction. In some cases, marital education and family counseling can possibly reduce divorce rates, although these effects appear to fade over time. McLanahan et al., (1994), argue that the combination of an alarmingly high proportion of divorce rates among families with children ensures that the majority of those children will spend a significant amount of their childhood in single-parent households. Mclanahan states farther that even after one controls for a range of family background differences, children who grow up living in an intact household with both biological parents seem to do better on average on a wide range of social indicators than do children who grow up in a single-parent household.

It is very difficult to figure out the exact number of divorces that take place in our communities. Public marriage and divorce records can capture only families with legally documented marital statuses. They cannot distinguish informal statuses like the form of marital dissolutions that take place in individual cultural-traditional settings. To equip couples with relationship skills to improve their interaction by reducing negative exchanges (anger, criticism, contempt, and blaming) and strengthening positive behaviours (expressions of support, humour, empathy, and affection) marital education programmes are necessary in our communities (Gordon Berlin, 2004). The logic is that when couples

enjoy positive interaction and are successful in handling conflict, their confidence and commitment would be reinforced, thereby fostering satisfaction and stability. Apart from other major causes of divorce like infidelity, financial constraints play a big role in destabilizing families. In our communities usually, low-income couples have fewer resources to cope with life's challenges. They are more likely to experience job loss, have an unexpected health or family crisis, be evicted from their home, be the victims of violent crimes, and so forth. As a result, they face greater difficulty than middle-class individuals in forming and sustaining marriages. The next concept that is devastating to children's psychosocial adjust is parental death.

Psychosocial adjustment is the state of accommodating a life-altering event or transition, that is, the relative degree of harmony between an individual's psychological and social needs and the requirements of the environment (Anderson et al., 2002). According to Pugh, (2002), the term psychosocial denotes the psychological and the social factors in a person's life, for instance, relationships, education, age, and employment that pertain to a person's life history. When an individual displays his capacity to adapt to a new environment or new situation, this is described as psychosocial adjustment, which implies that the individual has sufficient mechanisms to feel good, integrate appropriately, respond adequately to the demands of the environment, and achieve his or her objectives (Madariaga et al., 2014). In early adolescence, psychosocial adjustment often refers to adaptation and functioning in some of the main areas that characterize this stage within family and school settings.

Among the determinants of child psychosocial adjustment, the role of emotional intelligence (EI) as a protective or promoting factor and the role of emotional and social problems as risk factors or negatively associated factors (Piqueras, 2019). Petrides (2007) also established that (EI) is a positive predictor of mental health, especially if it is measured through particular self-reports instruments such as the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue). Extensive available evidence suggests that (EI) is a buffer of stressful circumstances in adolescents and adults (Petrides 2017). Mavroveli (2009) associates TEI to a variety of psychosocial adjustment markers, such as, higher academic achievement, better peer relations and social competence, such as nominations from peers and teachers for positive social attributes, like leadership and kindness.

Psychosocial adjustment is a multidimensional construct that entails a set of psychological and social characteristics (Chinua et al, 2019). The current study adopts a person –centered approach to identity potential psychosocial adjustment profiles in early adolescents in the BCCA that may have distinct implications on their growth and development. With regards to psychosocial profiles (indicators), Zhao et al. (2019) in (Chinua et al, 2019) report two profiles; an internalizing problem profile, and an externalizing problem profile. The constituent of internalizing indicators being; poor self-esteem, withdrawal, anxiety, depressive symptoms, loneliness, subjective happiness (well-being or life satisfaction) and the constituent externalizing indicators being, rule-breaking behavior, aggressive behavior, and deviant behavior.

Self-esteem is a person's overall evaluation of himself, including feelings of general happiness and satisfaction (Harter, 1999). Self-esteem has received considerable attention in developmental research because it has a motivational function which may affect developmental trajectories (Masselink,et al, 2017). Self-esteem does not only entail cognitive evaluative aspects of the self, but also motivational ones. Many of the developmental challenges that adolescents face revolve around their self-esteem and personal identity in their social environment (Steinberg and Morris 2001). These challenges include changing schools, building new social networks, changing relations with family members, adopting an increasingly more adult role over time, and identity. Peers play a complex role in the lives of adolescents. On the one hand, peers can be sources of interpersonal stress, which has been proposed to be one of the leading causes of maladaptation during early adolescence (Hankin et al. 2007).

Academic resilience is the ability to cope with and recover from setbacks in academic activities. Children who remain calm in the face of academic challenges have resilience. According to Horn et al., (2018), people with psychological resilience are able to use their skills and strengths to respond to life's challenges, which can include those related to, death of a loved one, divorce, illness, job loss, or failure in examinations. This category of people do not experience less distress, grief, or anxiety than other people do, instead they use healthy coping skills to handle such difficulties in ways that foster strength and growth, often emerging stronger than they were before. According to Whitson, (2016), resilience can come in different forms including, physical, mental, social, and emotional resilience.

Adolescents face challenges and stresses along the way as they grow and adjust to the demands of their environments. According to Neelam, (2019), families always remain the primary social support for young people. Parents are the first environmental protective agents of development. This suggests that young people become more resilient with the positive parent-child relationship, parental attention, support, encouragement especially as they go through challenges in academics. School counselors and broader social environments interventions can also help to promote academics resilience in early adolescents (Neelam, 2019).

Traditionally, early adolescence has been viewed as a period of growing autonomy from the family, in which the influence of the peer group gradually usurps the influence of parents, mostly as the result of intergenerational conflict over fundamental values, norms, and behaviors (Coleman, 1961). The establishment of a peer network is an important part of early adolescence (Larson & Richards, 1991). Peers seem to play an important role in the development of adolescent self-esteem which is factor that enhances academic resilience in children (Simmons & Blyth, 1987). Furthermore, adolescents who have stable friendships are likely to have better grades and participate in extracurricular activities, and less likely to participate in problematic behaviors (Berndt & Keefe, 1995). However, the establishment of a peer network depends on the types of friendships that adolescents form.

Psychological well-being is a multifaceted and multi-dimensional construct that encompasses an individual's overall happiness, satisfaction with life, and mental and emotional health. It includes key components such as positive emotions, autonomy, positive relationships, low levels of negative emotions, purpose in life, life satisfaction, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989). In the same light, Huppert, (2009) describes psychological well-being as the combination of, feeling good and functioning well, the experience of positive emotions such as happiness and contentment as well as the development of one's potential, having some control over one's life, having a sense of purpose, and experiencing positive relationships. Amholt et al., (2020) claims that psychological well-being represents one of the most critical aspects of efficient psychological functioning. They state further that happy people have a lot of advantages because they have better physical health, better relationships with others, and high achievement motivation. According to Deci & Ryan (2008), psychological well-being is commonly based on a combination of positive

affective states such as happiness (the hedonic perspective) and optimal personal and social functioning (the eudemonics perspective).

Again, psychological well-being integrates mental health (mind) and physical health (body) resulting in more holistic approaches to disease prevention and health promotion (Frederickson, 1998). It is impossible for humans to function properly if their mental well-being is disturbed in some way. Psychological well-being is widely considered to have both hedonic (that is, feeling good) and eudemonic (that is, functioning well) components. Drawing on the theories of Erikson, Jung, Maslow, and Rogers (among others), Ryff (1989) posited several key features of people who are functioning well in life. Such people should have the maturity to be guided by internal standards (autonomy), be capable of trusting and loving others (positive relations), be able to manage external stressors and leverage on opportunities (environmental mastery), have a positive attitude toward themselves (self-acceptance), have important aims and goals (purpose in life), and accept new challenges in life as furthering their development (personal growth).

The theoretical orientation of this study is based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory as the main theory, John Bowlby's Theory of Attachment (1982), Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1958), and Selingma's 3P model of resilience theory (1990).

Theoretical Framework

The Ecological Systems Theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979) positioned child development within systems of superimposed layers of environmental settings. They are, the Microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem, each impacting differently on child development. The interaction between factors in the child's maturing biology, his immediate family/community environment, and the societal landscape fuels and steers his development. Bronfenbrenner sees the instability and unpredictability of family life as the most destructive force to a child's development (Dede, 2001). In such living conditions, children do not have the constant mutual interaction with important adults that is necessary for their psychosocial development. The relevance of the theory to this study rests on the assumption of this theory which states that, if the relationships in the immediate microsystem break down, the child will not have the tools to explore other parts of his environment. Children looking for the affirmations that should be present in the child/parent relationship and cannot find, look for attention elsewhere in

inappropriate places. These deficiencies show themselves especially in early adolescence in the form of maladjustment, anti-social behavior, lack of self-discipline, and inability to provide self-direction. The theory that follows – the theory of attachment corroborates with Brenner's theory by explaining the critical role that a strong bond plays in parent/child relationaship.

Bowlby's Evolutionary Theory of Attachment (1982) refers to the specific relationship formed between parents and their children that perpetuates throughout life, as a permanent psychological link established between them. According to McLeod, S. A. (2017) John Bowlby formulated the basic tenets of the theory, thereby revolutionizing our thinking about a child's tie to the mother and its disruption through separation, deprivation, and bereavement. Mary Ainsworth's innovative methodology not only made it possible to test some of Bowlby's ideas empirically but also helped expand the theory itself and is responsible for some of the new directions it is now taking. Ainsworth contributed the concept of the attachment figure as a secure base from which an infant can explore the world. In addition, she formulated the concept of maternal sensitivity to infant signals and its role in the development of infant-mother attachment patterns.

By the time adolescence approaches, a colossal milestone is reached, as this system of attachment can predict functioning and behavior both beyond and within the family as well as demonstrate stability (Allen et al, 2008). Again, at early adolescence the attachment of children to their parents begins to drop but enough for them to feel the impact of the absence of their parents. The absence of a parent brings to them a different impulse - the fear that they are losing a major source of leverage (assistance). Also, they deeply feel the absence because of the strong love and affection that exists and the fact that their parents are guarantors of their livelihoods. Bowlby (1982) believed that attachment behaviors (such as proximity seeking) are instinctive and will be activated by any conditions that seem to threaten the achievement of proximity, such as separation, insecurity, and fear. Even though parents are no longer primary attachment figures, adolescents continue to turn to their caregivers under stressful conditions and monitor their parents' availability for attachment needs (Allen, 2008). Erik Erikson's (1958) theory of psychosocial development that follows describes the stages of adjustments that enable the bond between children and their parents to be stronger.

Erik Erikson's (1958) theory of psychosocial development consists of eight stages of human

growth, beginning with infancy and ending with old age. The theory describes how environmental factors and human experience impact us at each of the stages of our development, and how they contribute to our sense of identity. His theory is important to this study because it highlights what we understand about how children grow, how their environment (including family members) impacts their growth, and why some children experience crises at some point in their development and others do not. This study concerns early adolescents who occupy the fifth stage of Erikson's psychosocial development theory (identity vs confusion), a typical category of children in search of their personal identities.

Erikson believed that the sense of competence that children develop in the course of growing, depends on the support that parents and other members of their environments give them. So, each phase of Erikson's theory focuses upon developing competence in a certain area of life. And when the stage is handled well, the individual develops a sense of mastery, sometimes described as ego strength or ego quality. However, if a stage is poorly navigated, the individual will be left with some sense of inadequacy as regards that particular developmental feature. In this light, the proposition that parental absence in the most cases creates an imbalance with the family circles that affect children's adjustment capabilities is acceptable. The following theory of resilience by Seligman also shades light on the manner in which children strategize to navigate through crises at all stages of their development.

In order to explain his theory of resilience, Martin Seligman (1990) developed the 3Ps model. The three Ps – personalization, pervasiveness, and permanence – refer to three emotional reactions that we tend to exhibit when faced with adversity. By addressing these three, often automatic, responses, we can build resilience and grow, developing our adaptability and learning to cope better with challenges. Life is never perfect. As much as we wish things would go our way, difficulties are inevitable and we all have to deal with them (Catherine Moore, 2019). Moore goes further to state that resilience theory argues that it is not the nature of adversity that is most important, but how we deal with it. When we face adversity, misfortune, or frustration, resilience helps us bounce back. It helps us survive, recover, and even thrive in the face and wake of misfortune, but that's not all there is to it. Positive emotions (happiness) is one emotion that helps us become more explorative and adaptable in our thoughts and behaviors (Fredrickson, 1998). Individuals who frequently experience positive emotions such as happiness grow more satisfied with

their lives by creating resources, such as ego resilience, that help them tackle a wide variety of challenges including those of academics. Children cope and perform better when they are supported in their schooling by their entire environment (the ecological system)

The study explores the impact of parental absence on the psychosocial adjustment of adolescents, focusing on early adolescents in the Bamenda City Council Area. It examines various types of parental absence, such as death, divorce, migration, forceful displacement, and emotional unavailability, and highlights their negative effects on children's physical, social, and psychological well-being. The research provides valuable insights for government, municipal councils, educational stakeholders, and NGOs. It can guide the development of policies, interventions, and support systems for vulnerable children, offering practical tools to teachers, parents, and social services. Additionally, the findings can help NGOs tailor their assistance, such as providing food, scholarships, and counseling, to meet the needs of children from absent-parent households. The study also emphasizes the importance of understanding children's backgrounds in school settings to foster inclusivity and positive social support.

Methodology
Research Design
This study applied a sequential explanatory research design in which the quantitative and qualitative methods were used.

Study Area
This study was limited to the Bamenda City Council Area of the North West Region of Cameroon. The city is made up of three Fondoms; Bamendakwe, Mankon, and Nkwen, classified as Bamenda I, II, and III sub-divisions respectively for administrative reasons.

Accessible Population
The accessible population for this study was made up of early-adolescents between the ages (12-14 years) old in the Bamenda City Council Area in form one, two, and three in six (06) targeted government secondary schools.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques
Sample Size: The sample size for the early adolescent students was 656 estimated using sample calculation for one proportion with the formula stated below with the support of EPi-Info 7.0 which has an inbuilt formula for the estimation of sample size for all kinds of studies (Social sciences and health/medical sciences). This formula was preferred over the Krijce and Morgan table 1970 in that their

sample size calculation presents the minimum number for every survey studies estimated at 1.0 design effect which is no longer that convenient in 21st century research due to series of improvement in the sensitivity of statistical tests which have been modified from 1989 to 2017. In estimating the sample size for early adolescent students, a higher design effect of 1.8 was used to permit the researcher sample a good number of the students thereby increasing the chances of adequately sampling early adolescent students experiencing either one or more of the causes of parent(s) absence. More so, the high sample size equally ensure better generalization of the findings as well as external validity.

$$\frac{NZ^2P(1-P)}{d^2(N-1) + Z^2P(1-P)}$$

Sampling Techniques

The purposive and snow ball sampling techniques were used to select participants for this study. In order to recruit participants, the researcher began by explaining to the groups of children the importance and relevance of the study, which led them to consent voluntarily. The researcher was given very significant assistance in the selection of participants by school counsellors and some class master and discipline masters in all the schools that were sampled for the study.

Results

Question One: How does parental divorce affect the psychosocial adjustment of early adolescents in the Bamenda City Council Area?

Among the 600 early adolescents sample, the absence of one or both parents for 104 (17.4%) of them is as a result of divorced. Thus, findings for research question one is presented based on opinion of 104 early adolescents as seen on table 13 below.

Instruments for Data Collection

Three instruments (triangulation) were used to collect data for this study. A 4-point Likert scale questionnaire, an Interview Guide and a Focus Group Discussion Guide was used to collect data for the study.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

On the other hand, the qualitative data derived from the interview and focus group discussions were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach with the aid of themes, and quotations. Before analysis, the audio data were first transcribed into textual data. During the transcription stage, all records were carefully listened to and the exact responses from each participant were type. Thereafter, the transcribed data were studied and themes were developed with respect to each direct statement. Themes are umbrella words which capture the main idea of the participants' statements while quotations are the direct statements from the participants. Similarly, statements which have the same focal point/ or highlighted on the same issue were grouped under one theme. Finally, findings were presented using frequency distribution tables and thematic tables with all inferential statistics presented at 95% level of confidence interval with alpha set at 0.05 levels, accepting 5% margin of error.

Table 1: The Early Adolescent Students Opinion on Parental Divorce

Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD
I do not feel secured enough in my parent's absence.	46 (44.2%)	48 (46.2%)	2 (1.9%)	8 (7.7%)	94 (90.4%)	10 (9.6%)
We have a lot of financial difficulties in our home.	38 (36.5%)	36 (34.6%)	16 (15.4%)	14 (13.5%)	74 (71.2%)	30 (28.8%)
My absent parent rarely communicates with us.	36 (34.6%)	30 (28.8%)	26 (25.0%)	12 (11.5%)	66 (63.5%)	38 (36.5%)
I always feel ashamed to talk about my parent's separation.	60 (57.7%)	28 (26.9%)	4 (3.8%)	12 (11.5%)	88 (84.6%)	16 (15.4%)
Some family friends do not visits us again.	26 (25.0%)	42 (40.4%)	22 (21.2%)	14 (13.5%)	68 (65.4%)	36 (34.6%)
I do more house work than was the case before.	34 (32.7%)	32 (30.8%)	22 (21.2%)	16 (15.4%)	66 (63.5%)	38 (36.5%)
I always fear that my parents will remarry other people.	48 (46.2%)	26 (25.0%)	20 (19.2%)	10 (9.6%)	74 (71.2%)	30 (28.8%)
Multiple Responses Set (MRS)	**288 (39.6%)**	**242 (33.2%)**	**112 (15.4%)**	**86 (11.8%)**	**530 (72.8%)**	**198 (27.2%)**

n=104

Source: Field Survey, 2023

In aggregate, among the 104 early adolescents with parental absence due to divorce, majority 75 (72.8%) were affected by the divorce while 29(27.2%) were not. Specifically, 94 (90.4%) of the early adolescents do not feel secured enough in their parent's absence while 10 (9.6%) feel secured. More so, 88 (84.4%) are always feeling ashamed to talk about their parent's separation while 16 (15.4%) are not. Furthermore, 74 (71.2%) of them of equal proportion agreed to have lot of financial difficulties in their home and always fear that their parents will remarry other people while 30 (28.8%) disagreed. Finally, 68 (65.4%) of them indicated that some family friends do not visits them again while 36 (34.6%) disagreed.

The chart in figure 8 below presents in percentages, the adolescents whose psychological adjustments are affected and those whose are not affected by the divorce of their parents.

Figure 1: Early Adolescents from Divorced Homes
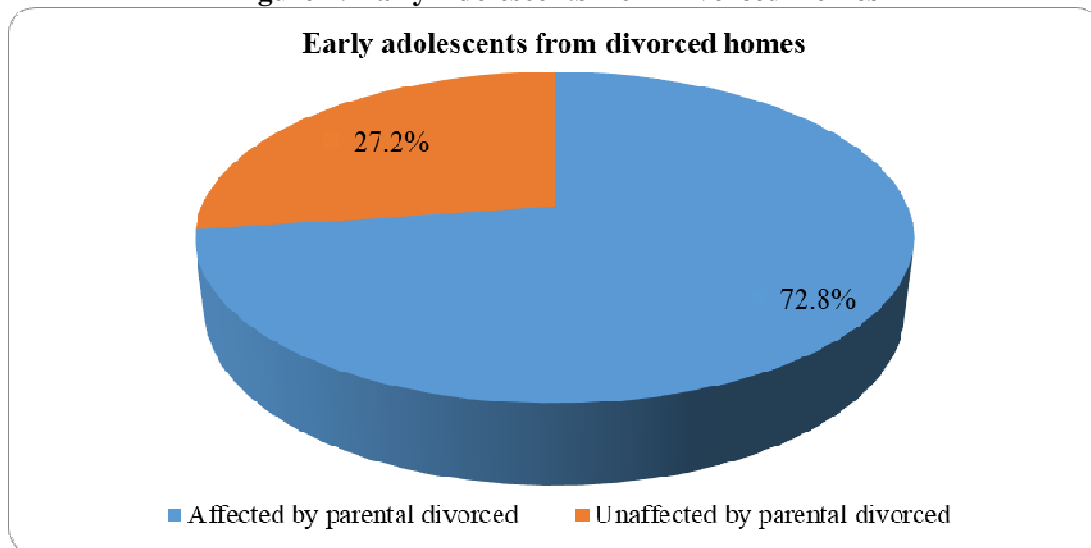
Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2: Comparing the Effect of Parental Divorce on Early Adolescent Students by Demographic Information

Demographic information			Parental divorce		Total based on MRS	Chi-square (χ2)
			Affected	Not affected		
Age	12 years	n	78	34	112	χ2=1.09 p-value=0.578
		%	69.6%	30.4%		
	13 years	n	294	112	406	
		%	72.4%	27.6%		
	14 years	n	158	52	210	
		%	75.2%	24.8%		
Sex	Male	n	154	98	252	χ2=21.96 p-value=0.000
		%	61.1%	38.9%		
	Female	n	376	100	476	
		%	79.0%	21.0%		
Family type	Monogamy	n	290	116	406	χ2=1.76 p-value=0.413
		%	71.4%	28.6%		
	Polygamy	n	58	26	84	
		%	69.0%	31.0%		
	Single parent	n	182	56	238	
		%	76.5%	23.5%		
Family size	1-3	n	194	72	266	χ2=2.90 p-value=0.234
		%	72.9%	27.1%		

	4-6	n	206	88	294	
		%	70.1%	29.9%		
	More than 6	n	130	38	168	
		%	77.4%	22.6%		
Who of your parents is absent from your home	Father	n	294	98	392	χ2=2.92 *p*-value=0.232
		%	75.0%	25.0%		
	Mother	n	122	60	182	
		%	67.0%	33.0%		
	Father and Mother	n	114	40	154	
		%	74.0%	26.0%		
For how long have your absent parent been away	More than one year	n	390	128	518	χ2=4.89 *p*-value=0.027
		%	75.3%	24.7%		
	Less than one year	n	140	70	210	
		%	66.7%	33.3%		
With whom are you living presently	Mother	n	240	68	308	χ2=7.24 *p*-value=0.299
		%	77.9%	22.1%		
	Father	n	66	32	98	
		%	67.3%	32.7%		
	Grandfather	n	102	38	140	
		%	72.9%	27.1%		
	Grandmother	n	50	20	70	
		%	71.4%	28.6%		
	Auntie	n	40	16	56	
		%	71.4%	28.6%		
	Uncle	n	22	20	42	
		%	52.4%	47.6%		
	Sister	n	10	4	14	
		%	71.4%	28.6%		

Source: Field Survey, 2023

In the process of comparing the impact of parental divorce on the early adolescents by demographic information, findings show that 75.2% of early adolescents of around 14 year-old are affected by parental divorced more followed by those of age 13 year old 72.4% and those 12 year-old 69.6%. In fact, effect of parental death increase with age of the children. Going by sex, one finds out that female 79.0% are significantly more affected by parental divorced (*p*-value =0.000 <0.05) than male 61.1%. Furthermore, by family type, early adolescents from single parents 76.5% are more affected by parental absence, followed by those from monogamous homes 71.4% and lastly polygamous homes 69.0%. By family size, early adolescents with household size of more than 6 are more affected by parental divorce 77.4% than those with smaller household sizes.

Furthermore, early adolescents with father absent from home are more affected by parental divorce 75.0% closely followed by those with both parents absent 74.0% and lastly by those with mother absent from home 67.0%. Also, early adolescents with parent(s) absent for more than one year are significantly more affected by parental divorced 75.3% (*p*-value = 0.027< 0.05) than those of less than one year 67.0%. Finally, more early adolescents living with mother 77.9% are more affected by parental divorce than those living with father, grandparents, auntie, uncle and sister.

Testing of Hypothesis:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between parental divorce and the psychosocial adjustment of early adolescents.

Ha1: There is a significant relationship between parental divorce and the psychosocial adjustment of early adolescents.

Table 22: The Relationship between Parental Divorce and Psychosocial Adjustment of Early Adolescent Students

Spearman's rho test	Indicator of Parental absence	Indicators of psychosocial adjustment of early adolescents				Total of psychosocial adjustment
	Divorce	Self-Esteem	Social interaction	Academic resilience	Social wellbeing	
R-value	1	-.594**	-.615**	-.402**	-.540**	-.700**
p-value		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Explanatory power of effect in terms of % (Cox and Snell) = 0.854 (85.4%)						

n=104; **. *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level* (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Statistically, among the 104 early adolescent students of divorced parents, findings showed that there is a significant, strong, and negative relationship between divorce of parents and psychosocial adjustment in all four indicators (*p*-value=0.000, < 0.05) with an overall high correlation value of -0.700**. This is also supported with a high explanatory power of 85.4% (Cox and Snell statistics). Thus, the hypothesis that states there is a significant relationship between parental divorce and the psychosocial adjustment of early adolescents was accepted.

Table 3: Cross tabulation between Parental Divorce and Psychosocial Adjustment of the Early Adolescent Students

Psychosocial adjustment		Parental divorce		Total based on MRS
		Strongly Agree/Agree	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	
Self-esteem affected by parental divorce	n	2692	794	3486
	%	77.2%	22.8%	
Social interaction affected by parental divorce	n	2700	870	3570
	%	75.6%	24.4%	
Academic resilience affected by parental divorce	n	1840	540	2380
	%	77.3%	22.7%	
Wellbeing affected by parental divorce	n	2554	778	3332
	%	76.7%	23.3%	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

In support of the hypothesis results, descriptively, among the 104 early adolescents with parental absence due to divorced, 77.2% reported that their self-esteem is negatively affected, 75.6% reported a negative effect on their social (behaviour) interaction, 77.3% also reported a negative effect on their academic resilience, and 76.7% also reported a negative effect on their wellbeing.

Discussion

Divorce and the psychosocial adjustment of children

The first objective of this study was to find out whether the divorce/separation of parents can affect the psychosocial adjustment of early adolescents. After testing the indicators of the component, it was realized that there is a significant relationship between parental divorce and the psychosocial adjustment of children. The above findings indicate that parental divorce negatively affects the children's psychosocial personality traits such as; their self-esteem, their social behaviour (interaction), their wellbeing, and their resiliency. The dissolution of a marriage is almost always an upsetting event at the very least, marked by disappointment and the loss of dreams and expectations, in addition, there are legal, financial, parenting, emotional, and practical challenges that require time, energy, and changes in responsibilities. Children are often the hardest hit by the consequences of divorce. It affects their wellbeing and many of them experience depression, loneliness and isolation, while many of them suffer from other psychological distress. This finding falls in line with (Adeniran, 2015: p. 19) who stipulates that Africa has witnessed a high rate of divorce as a result of westernization, globalization, urbanization and industrialization in recent years. Thus, extended families that used to resolve conflicts that protected marriages are no longer functioning effectively like in the past. The above statement depicts what is happening in the BCCA today. Even though divorce is still considered as taboo, the trend of the economic system has led to a shift towards the nuclear family system characterized by less involvement of extended family members in the resolution of marital conflicts.

This finding also matches those of Thiong'o (2015) at Kangema sub-county in Kenya, who found that parental divorce gravely affects children's social development and self-esteem as they grow up. In the same light, Lussen (1988) explains that children of divorce parents face a lot of challenges dealing with peer pejorative attitudes and the stigma that comes along with it. Normally, stigma causes the victim to develop a feeling of inferiority and consequently, low self-esteem. Other schools of thought have it that contrary to the past, divorce is not viewed as a degrading occurrence which once brought social exclusion, shame and the feeling of failure to family members. That notwithstanding, the Bamenda City Council Area is occupied predominantly by a people with deeply rooted cultures that still consider divorce as taboo, even though they may not manifest their discontentment directly and openly to the concern as it used to be in the long past. This therefore means that children from divorced homes in this community still experience that feeling of guilt, and shame that results in the development of low self-esteem. These types of feelings have caused many child victims to reduce the frequency with which they used to interact with their friends and acquaintants.

To add, Hankin (2007) states that peers play a complex role in the lives of children. On the one hand, peers can be sources of interpersonal stress, which has been proposed to be one of the leading causes of depressive symptoms during adolescence. Living among friends who constantly refer to a child's parent's divorce situation when there is a dispute among them, depresses the child and hence lowers his or her self-esteem. On the other hand, Levitt et al. (1993); Steinberg and Morris (2001) suggest that children also increasingly rely on their peers, and peers become the most important source of social contact and social support.

Furthermore, when asked during the interview exercise whether the participants usually discuss their family situations with their peers, many children from divorced homes stated that they do not at all discuss their family situations with friends because they feel ashamed. Which means that some of the children have already developed emotional inferiority, which is a personality trait associated with the feeling that one is losing self-esteem. That feeling of inferiority and insecurity may cause a victim not to be able to cope with the stresses of everyday life. Self-esteem is also depleted by memories of parental hostilities in which the early adolescent got involved. Some children often lured by one of the parents, usually the mother, to take sides during parental disagreements and violent disputes. At some point in time, memories

of the part they played in the crisis that eventually led to the divorce of their parents begin to haunt them. The feelings of guilt and shame often break them down, thus causing a drop in their self-esteem.

Findings of this study also fall in line with the findings of Block and Spiegel who carried out a study in New York in the United States of America, which revealed a significant positive correlation between parental divorce and self-esteem among emerging adults. Even though emerging adulthood is a stage where many individuals are seeking higher education, they are financially dependent, and have no careers yet, thus, experiencing divorce may have negative impacts on this stage of development for them (Cohen et al., 2003). Unlike in the western countries such as the United States of America, it is common to find emerging adult (15-18years olds) in the BCCA who continue to live with their single parents or step parents in the same homes where they were born. There is a stigma attached to this category of children who still live and depend on their divorced parents.

In the same vein, findings of this study are consistent with the findings of a study carried out by Thiong'o (2015) who found that as a result of parental abandonment, early adolescents engaged in anti-social behaviours such as stealing, bulling, early sexual activities and abuse of drugs. Participants of this study did not directly associate themselves with the above mentioned deviant behaviours, but they expressed having observed similar situation going on with others. However, in one of the focus group discussions of this study, one of the participants testified that because of her poor living conditions as a result of her parent's divorce, she has caught herself gradually developing wayward behaviours. Logically speaking, such a statement seems to foreshadow the speaker's innate intention to copy the negative behaviours that they are condemning. Children are fun of giving socially acceptable answers when it comes to knowing whether they engage in such deviant behaviours. The findings also revealed that children from divorced parents in their majority, suffer from a drop in academic performance. In such living conditions, it is highly likely that their performance in school work becomes poor as they face adjustment difficulties.

Similarly, the above findings are consistent with the findings of an experimental study carried out by Kinard and Reinherz (1984) on the impact of parental separation on academic performance of children. The study found that children in recently disrupted families suffer pronounced problems in attentiveness at school and lowered academic achievements because of their inability to concentrate in their

schooling activities. The capacity for being resilient abides in each child but whether it comes to the fore, depends on a child's own nature, their upbringing, and education. Children who grow up in the absence of one or both of their parents are known to face more challenges in academics than those who grow up with both of their biological parents.

According to Martin (2003) four factors predict academic resilience: self-belief, control, low anxiety, and persistence. Essentially, academic resilience is proposed to be underpinned by these factors. This suggests that learners high in self-belief, control, and persistence and low in anxiety are more academically resilient than those who are not. While the above mentioned factors may be enough for some children to be resilient, for others, the same factors must be complemented by supportive environmental factors for complete positive results to be achieved. In this study, the risk factors reported by children affecting their academic resiliency are both internal and external. The internal risk factors include; anxiety, low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, and lack of interest and commitment to schooling, while poor living environments, lack of didactic material, social barriers among peers, and poor relationships with family (guardians) constitute the external risk factors. In this context, children's resilient abilities are bound to reduce, thus, leading to less than expected performance.

Furthermore, findings of this study are consistent with that of Amato & Lincoln (1991) who carried out a study in the United States of America on parental divorce and the psychological impact on children. The findings showed that children of divorce scored lower in their general wellbeing than children in intact families across a variety of outcomes. In simple terms, wellbeing describes how satisfied people are with their lives as a whole, their sense of purpose, and how in control they feel about their lives. Bradburn (1969) specifies that an individual will be high in social well-being in the degree to which he has an excess of positive over negative affect and will be low in well-being in the degree to which negative affect predominates over positive. This suggests that children who possess positive affect attract a good number of friends and therefore accepted in their environment.

According to Mavroveli (2009), one determining aspect of child psychosocial adjustment and complete well-being, both present and future involves peer relationships. Being socially accepted and having friends is associated with good adaptation, personal well-being, increased school performance, high self-esteem, and a positive and pleasant feeling within the group (Wentzel, 2003). Coming from a well-balanced family background sort of gives a child a certain degree of eligibility for acceptance by peers. This is the case with only 23.3% of children of divorce in this study who reported that they did not have issues with their social wellbeing. What is commonly observable is that, as there are two categories of family backgrounds, that is, the balanced and imbalanced, naturally, children in the most cases accept only friends from their family type.

In addition, these findings are also consistent with a study carried out by Wagner (2002) in South Florida in the United States of America, who found that early adolescents fared worse overall than adolescents on most measures in the event of their parent's divorce. The early adolescents did worse on matters of social relationship (also an aspect of wellbeing) with peers and overall adjustment. The reason is simple; adolescents are more experienced and can adapt quicker to changing life conditions than early adolescents, especially those adolescents who have lived longer with their custodial parent. The economic disadvantage perspective assumes that it is economic hardship, rather than family type as such, that is responsible for the lowered well-being of children of divorce (Amato & Lincoln (1991). This perspective is justified in the sense that some single parent homes in this area of study are of the middle class, and whose children are comparatively well adjusted than some intact but poor families in the same area. This category of single families are represented in this study by the 23.3% of participants who reported that they did not have problems with their general wellbeing. In this case, their problems may be found elsewhere not around finances or they may just be naturally resilient to life challenges. The lack of economic resources increases the risk of a number of developmental problems in children. Economic hardship may negatively affect children's nutrition and health (Williams, 1990).

The findings showed that the divorce of parents have a significant, strong, and negative effect on all four areas of the psychosocial adjustment (self-esteem, social behavior, wellbeing, and resilience) of the early adolescents with an overall high correlation. Informed by the ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979), the growth and development of a child depends on the impact provided by his environment, especially his immediate environment (microsystem) which constitute of his parents, siblings, local school. If the environment is supportive enough, the child will be able to adjust to his new life situation successfully. That is why child care should go beyond the spontaneous presence of parents to children, to the

conscious desire to fulfil a psychological and emotional requirement of their children. This psychological and social security support facilitates development of well cultured children and the general psychosocial adjustment of early adolescents. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), activities that take place in all other ecological systems only affect the child indirectly. For example, when the court pronounces the divorce of a couple, the immediate and direct victims are their children. The theory gives us an understanding of the fact that parental divorce is a catastrophic event in the lives of children, unless adequate measures are taken.

Conclusion

The adverse socio political and economic atmosphere in Cameroon during the last ten years has generally been considered responsible for the socio economic crisis that has caused joblessness, lots of people dying, family disintegrations, mass movements of people seeking safety and protection. These challenges continue to affect people of all ages and gender, especially the under privileged category in our communities. An increase in the rate of parental absence has contributed to the slowdown of the psychosocial development of early adolescents.

This study discusses how the prevalence of parental absence through divorces in the Bamenda City Council Area in recent years, negatively impacts the abilities of their 12 to 14 years old children's ability to improve their social behaviours, their personalities, their subjective and objective quality of life, and their resistance to academic difficulties and challenges.

Results of this study showed that prolonged and definitive absence of a father, mother or both parents often disrupted parent/child relationship in the BCCA. It also led to psychosocial problems especially among teenagers facing multiple challenges. Results also showed that conflict among parents affected children's self-esteem, wellbeing, ability to adjust and cope with schooling, and their social competences. More research is therefore needed to continue searching for the fundamental causes and effects of parental absence to establish systematic intervention mechanisms that can improve the continuous communication and physical contact between children and their biological parents. If we cannot make efforts to combat the negative effects of parental absence on children, then we are exposing the children to a more serious crisis which is their mental health.

The purpose of this study was to find out the effect of parental divorce on the psychosocial adjustment of early adolescents (12-14years old). To achieve this purpose, four specific research questions were formulated and tested. To answer the research questions, a questionnaire was administered to a sample of 600 participants (early adolescents) and data from the 600 participants were effectively analyzed from whom conclusions were drawn. The data derived were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 17.0. The findings showed that there was a significant relationship between parental absence and psychosocial adjustment among children. A network of four theories, including; the ecological systems theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner that acted as the main theory, the socio-cultural theory of Lev Vygotsky, theory of wellbeing by Martin Seligman (2012), and Seligman's 3Ps Model of Resilience (1990) were adopted and reviewed.

The research designs adopted for this study was both the descriptive survey design (with the aid of a structured questionnaire as the main research instrument) and the ethnographic and phenomenological design (with the aid of an unstructured Focus Group Discussion Guide and Interview Guide). The research was carried out in some six secondary high schools in the three minucipal councils that constitute the Bamenda City Council Area in the North-West Region of Cameroon. The population of the study was made up of early adolescents aged 12-14 years old in the 6 selected secondary high schools. The sample size was made up of 600 early adolescents, who were purposively and conveniently selected to suit the characteristics of the study.

Data were analysed both descriptively and inferentially. The findings indicated that:

➤ There is a significant relationship between the parental divorce and the psychosocial adjustment of early adolescents. Parental divorce affected self-esteem, social behavior, wellbeing, and the academic resilience of early adolescents. Children from divorced families uniquely reported a higher rate of low self-esteem and an acute inadequacy in financial resources.

Inferring from the above, it is obvious that, parental absence in this study, operationalized as (parental divorce) significantly and negatively impacted the psychosocial adjustment (self-esteem, social behavior, wellbeing, and the academic resilience) of early adolescents.

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