

DIVORCE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SOCIAL WELL-BEING OF PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The paper examined divorce and its impact on the social well-being of primary school children in Oyo State, Nigeria. The main factors responsible for divorce were examined and discussed, which include infidelity, infertility, lack of communication, abuse, and financial issues, to mention but a few. Certain theoretical frameworks were also examined and expounded. The impact of divorce on the well-being of primary school children was also discussed. It was recommended that to alleviate the negative impact of divorce on primary school children, some measures should be taken. Such measures include enhancing the school support system, parental education programmes, community engagement, and economic empowerment. It was concluded that since divorce undeniably poses challenges to the academic achievement and social well-being of primary school children, a collaboration involving schools, parents, and the community can significantly alleviate these consequences of divorce. In relation to that, the establishment of comprehensive counseling services in educational institutions can offer young children a secure environment to articulate their emotions and cultivate coping mechanisms.

Keywords: divorce, effect, impact, social well-being, primary school children

Introduction

Divorce has emerged as a recurring familial occurrence across nations, transcending cultural, religious, and economic divides. Worldwide, shifting societal norms, economic pressures, and developing legal frameworks have led to increased divorce rates, altering the conventional family structure (Ama, 2010; Cherling, 2020). Divorce generally entails the disintegration of a

marriage covenant; nevertheless, its repercussions extend beyond the separating couples, significantly impacting children who rely on the family unit for emotional security, socialisation, and psychological stability. Children of primary school age, often encompassing early to middle childhood, are

especially susceptible due to their developmental reliance on stable caregiving in familial contexts.

Elementary school students undergo a pivotal developmental phase marked by swift cognitive advancement, emotional management, identity development, and the cultivation of social competencies (Eccles, 1999). Increasing divorce rates globally indicate changing cultural norms, transforming gender roles, and legal developments that have facilitated marriage breakdown (Ranjan & Lovely, 2026).

The formal dissolution of a marriage covenant primarily concerns the parents, however, its consequences significantly impact the psychological, social, and educational well-being of the children. Children in primary school, often aged six to twelve years, are more vulnerable to the effects of divorce due to their continuing cognitive and socio-emotional development (Hassan, Al-Bundi, & Al-Diwan, 2022; Ranjan & Lovely, 2026). Their well-being, encompassing emotional, physical, social functioning, and academic involvement, can be profoundly affected by the acute stressors linked to parental separation. An increasing amount of empirical research suggests that parental divorce can negatively impact children's emotional and psychological health, frequently resulting in heightened stress, loneliness, withdrawal, and concentration difficulties that hinder academic performance (Trenggono, 2025; Ranjan & Lovely, 2026). These findings align with recent research indicating that children from divorced homes experience increased risks of anxiety, depression, and social maladjustment relative to their counterparts in intact families (Lin, 2025). The diverse nature of these effects highlights the intricacy of divorce as a developmental stressor, influenced by contextual factors like socio-economic position, parenting methods, and the quality of parent-child connections (Lin, 2025; Trenggono, 2025).

Divorce, characterised as the formal termination of a marriage, carries extensive consequences beyond the immediate separation of partners. The rising incidence of divorce has elicited apprehensions regarding its effects on the academic performance and social welfare of elementary school pupils. This essay examines the diverse impacts of divorce on young learners, utilising multiple studies and publications to offer a thorough understanding. Although it predominantly concerns the married couple, its repercussions extend to their children, especially regarding their social welfare. Primary school children, at a pivotal time of emotional and social development, are particularly susceptible to the adverse effects of parental separation. This study examines the impact of divorce on the social well-being of primary school students in Oyo State, utilising insights from academic research and local studies.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Attachment Theory and Social Learning Theory to explain how divorce affects children's social well-being. The research will be informed by Attachment Theory and Ecological Systems Theory, which elucidate the emotional and social ramifications of familial disruption on children. Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1988) posits that children form emotional connections with their caregivers, which influence their social and emotional health. Divorce can fracture these connections, resulting in uneasiness, anxiety, and challenges in establishing healthy social interactions. In Oyo State, children from split households may endure emotional turmoil, impairing their capacity to engage confidently with classmates and educators.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1969) posits that children acquire behaviours through observation and imitation. When children observe

conflict, antagonism, or emotional turmoil in a split household, they may internalise these behaviours, resulting in violence, withdrawal, or challenges in social interactions. Conversely, the observation of effective coping mechanisms may foster resilience and adaptive social abilities (Bandura, 1969).

The Impact of Divorce on the Social Well-being of the Child

The family unit plays a critical role in a child's social and emotional development. Emotional and Psychological Distress: The upheaval stemming from parental separation can induce anxiety, despair, and a feeling of instability in children. These emotional disorders frequently present as decreased concentration, lack of enthusiasm, and impaired engagement in academic pursuits, resulting in subpar academic performance.

- **Economic Hardships:** Following a divorce, numerous single-parent households encounter financial limitations resulting from the absence of a dual income. This economic burden may result in insufficient provision of educational resources, including textbooks, uniforms, and private tutoring, negatively impacting the child's learning experience.
- **Diminished Parental Engagement:** Single parents managing numerous obligations may struggle to participate fully in their child's schooling. The absence of involvement may lead to missed opportunities for academic assistance, direction, and reinforcement of learning at home.
- **Asides academics,** divorce profoundly impacts a child's social development in the following ways:

- **Altered Social Interactions:** Children from divorced homes may experience stigmatisation or a sense of difference from their classmates, resulting in withdrawal or aggressive behaviours. This feeling of solitude can hinder the formation of good social interactions.
- **Behavioural Issues:** The emotional repercussions of divorce may present as behavioural difficulties, such as absenteeism, resistance, and involvement in harmful activities. These behaviours impact not only the child's social status but also their entire well-being.

The absence of a parent can engender feelings of abandonment or rejection, thereby affecting the child's self-esteem and sense of identity. This internal struggle may impede their social confidence and capacity to establish meaningful connections (Fatoye, 2021).

Factors Contributing to Divorce

- **Infidelity:** Marital disloyalty is a primary contributor to divorce. The breach of trust resulting from an extramarital affair frequently culminates in irreconcilable differences, emotional distress, and subsequent separation.
- **Financial Issues:** Monetary concerns, including unemployment, fiscal irresponsibility, or excessive indebtedness, can exert pressure on a marriage. Financial difficulties faced by one or both partners might result in stress, disputes, and finally dissolution of the marriage.
- **Domestic Violence and Abuse:** Physical, emotional, or verbal maltreatment can render a marriage intolerable. A multitude of domestic violence victims opt to depart

from their husbands for their safety and welfare, resulting in divorce.

- **Lack of communication:** Effective communication is essential in a marriage. When couples neglect to articulate their emotions, address disputes, or attentively listen to one another, misconceptions emerge, resulting in frustration and estrangement.
- **Incompatibility and Irreconcilable Differences:** Certain marriages collapse when partners recognise their lack of compatibility. Divergences in values, interests, or long-term objectives might result in perpetual conflicts, rendering the marriage unsustainable.
- **Infertility or Reproductive Challenges:** In some African countries, particularly Nigeria, the inability to procreate can create conflict within a marriage. Familial and cultural pressure to procreate may result in divorce if the couple experiences infertility (Payne, Price, Cox & Brosi, 2024).

Living Arrangements of Families and their Implications

Living arrangements denote the household configuration in which persons, particularly children, dwell. In Oyo State, Nigeria, residential configurations are shaped by cultural, economic, and social determinants. These arrangements significantly influence children's academic achievement, emotional well-being, and social connections. Common forms of living arrangements encompass:

Two-Parent Households

The most conventional and widespread familial structure wherein both biological parents cohabit with their offspring offers emotional stability, financial security, and parental supervision.

Research indicates that children from nuclear families tend to exhibit academic and social outcomes owing to stable parental care (Wahyuni, Pranata, Mubin & Ernawati, 2024).

Single-Parent Families

Arises from divorce, separation, death, or births outside of wedlock. Single mothers are more prevalent than single fathers and frequently have financial difficulties. Studies suggest that children from single-parent households may encounter mental anguish, diminished academic performance, and difficulties in socialisation (Payne, Price, Cox & Brosi, 2024).

Extended Family Living

Entails children residing with grandparents, uncles, aunts, or other relatives. Prevalent in African communities with robust kinship relationships, this dynamic can offer supplementary support yet may also result in divergent parenting approaches that impact children's welfare.

Stepfamilies and Blended Families

Established when divorced or widowed parents enter into new marriages. Children may encounter challenges in adapting to new parental figures and stepsiblings. Stability is contingent upon the efficacy of family members' integration and communication.

Foster Care and Institutional Residence

Certain children reside in orphanages, foster homes, or with guardians as a result of abandonment, parental disability, or death. These youngsters frequently have psychological and social difficulties resulting from insufficient consistent familial support.

Effects of Divorce on Social Well-being

The following are the key effects of divorce:

- **Emotional Instability and Behavioural Issues:** Divorce frequently induces emotional turmoil, resulting in anxiety, despair, and rage in children. Numerous children from divorced households display violent behaviour, social disengagement, or challenges in establishing friendships. A study conducted in Nigeria revealed that children of divorced parents frequently experience difficulties in emotional regulation, which affects their peer interactions.
- **Low Self-esteem and Identity Concerns:** Parental separation may engender feelings of rejection, abandonment, or guilt in youngsters. This frequently leads to reduced self-confidence and difficulties in self-expression within social contexts. Children in Oyo State who undergo parental divorce may grapple with their identity, particularly if they become estranged from one parent.
- **Social Withdrawal and Challenges in Peer Relationships:** Numerous youngsters from divorced households struggle to connect with classmates due to feelings of uncertainty or shame regarding their familial circumstances. They might eschew social meetings, academic events, or extracurricular activities, resulting in isolation. Studies in Ibadan indicate that children from dysfunctional households are more likely to experience social withdrawal than their counterparts from stable families.
- **Trust Issues and Future Relationships:** Divorce can adversely affect a child's perception of relationships and their trust in others. Certain youngsters experience attachment difficulties, fearing abandonment in friendships and prospective love relationships. Research in Nigeria suggests that children from divorced homes exhibit greater scepticism towards marriage and long-term commitments.
- **Delinquent Behaviour and Peer Pressure Risk:** Certain children from split families may pursue emotional support from peers engaged in detrimental behaviours, such as substance misuse or truancy. Insufficient parental oversight following divorce heightens the likelihood of children participating in delinquent conduct. Some studies in Oyo State show a correlation between divorced families and increased instances of juvenile delinquency
- **Social Isolation and Diminished Self-esteem:** Social isolation results in diminished self-esteem. Insufficient social ties may result in sensations of isolation and exclusion. Children from dysfunctional families or those experiencing bullying frequently exhibit diminished self-esteem as a result of social ostracism. Studies indicate that social isolation is a significant predictor of depression symptoms and self-doubt in Nigerian students.
- **Negative social comparison diminishes self-esteem:** Continuous comparison with peers, particularly in competitive academic settings, can lead to feelings of inadequacy. Children from economically challenged families in Oyo State may encounter self-doubt if they view themselves as socially inferior.
- **Bullying and Social Rejection Undermine Self-Confidence:** Individuals subjected to bullying or social rejection frequently experience diminished self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and a negative self-

perception. Research in Nigerian primary schools indicates that children subjected to bullying are more prone to difficulties with self-esteem. The absence of support from educators and guardians might exacerbate these effects, resulting in social withdrawal.

Strategies for Enhancing Social Well-being and Self-Esteem

- **Promoting Positive Social Interactions:** Schools and parents can advocate for collaborative activities, collaboration, and peer relationships.
- **Establishing Support Systems:** Community and religious organisations may offer mentorship programmes for children.
- **Combating Bullying and Social Exclusion:** Schools must establish anti-bullying measures and foster inclusivity.
- **Augmenting Parental Engagement:**– Parents ought to furnish emotional support and affirmative reinforcement to elevate their child's self-assurance.

Beneficial Impact of Social Well-being and Emotional Regulation

- **Improved Emotional Resilience:** Children with robust social support from family, peers, and educators are more adept at managing stressful circumstances. Research indicates that children with robust social interactions exhibit fewer emotional outbursts and demonstrate greater emotional resilience.
- **Enhanced Conflict Resolution Abilities:** Positive social interactions instruct children on the constructive expression of their emotions. Socially adept children are more inclined to articulate their

frustrations instead of exhibiting hostile outbursts.

- **Enhanced Self-Control and Patience:** A robust social network cultivates patience and impulse regulation, diminishing the probability of abrupt emotional responses. Supportive environments, such as educational institutions with robust mentorship programs, facilitate improved emotional regulation in youngsters.

Adverse Consequences of Social Well-being on Emotional Eruptions

- **Social isolation and loneliness contribute to frustration:** Children who experience exclusion or lack a support network are more susceptible to emotional outbursts. A study conducted in Nigerian elementary schools revealed that socially isolated youngsters displayed increased levels of rage and unhappiness.
- **Bullying and Peer Rejection Elevate Aggressive Behaviour:** Children subjected to bullying or social exclusion frequently manifest their feelings through abrupt rage or defiance. Individuals experiencing social exclusion may exhibit aggressive behaviour towards peers or demonstrate emotional instability.
- **Parental Divorce and Insecure Domestic Settings Trigger Emotional Imbalance:** Children from fractured households in Oyo State are more prone to difficulties in emotional regulation. Insufficient parental support may lead to recurrent emotional disturbances or abrupt episodes of sorrow and rage.
- **Academic and social pressures contribute to stress responses:** Elevated expectations from parents and educators can induce stress, resulting in emotional outbursts. Children who experience academic

difficulties and lack social support may manifest their anger through tantrums or aggressive behaviour.

The Impact of Social Well-being on Peer Relationships

Social well-being denotes an individual's capacity to establish and sustain positive connections, participate in significant social interactions, and experience a sense of belonging within a society. Social well-being is essential in influencing peer interactions among elementary school children in Oyo State, Nigeria. Positive social well-being fosters friendships, collaboration, and communication, whereas inadequate well-being may result in isolation, bullying, and challenges in establishing connections [Yara & Tunde – Yara, 2010]. Some of the impacts of social well-being on peer relationships are succinctly discussed below:

- **Enhanced Communication Proficiencies:** Children with robust social well-being are more inclined to articulate their thoughts clearly as well as attentively listen to others. Effective communication cultivates mutual understanding, hence diminishing disagreements among peers.
- **Enhanced Friendships and Collaboration:** Socially adept children more readily establish and sustain friendships. They participate in collective activities, exchange experiences, and cultivate trust among their peers. Research indicates that children who receive social support from their families and educational institutions cultivate healthier and more enduring friendships.
- **Enhanced Empathy and Emotional Intelligence:** Positive social well-being facilitates children's comprehension and respect for the emotions of others.

Empathetic children are more inclined to provide assistance, amicably handle disputes, and cultivate robust peer relationships.

- **Enhanced Self-Confidence in Social Interactions:** When children perceive social acceptance, they exhibit greater confidence in establishing new friendships. A sense of belonging in educational and communal activities fosters active engagement in peer-related events.

Adverse Consequences of Inadequate Social Well-being on Interpersonal Relationships

- **Social Isolation and Loneliness:** Children with inadequate social well-being may find it challenging to engage with their peers, resulting in isolation. Experiencing exclusion can diminish self-esteem and deter engagement in academic endeavours. Studies conducted in Nigerian schools indicate that socially isolated students face an elevated risk of depression and diminished academic achievement.
- **Elevated Risk of Bullying and Peer Conflicts:** Children deficient in social skills or originating from unstable environments may fall prey to bullying. Inadequate social well-being may render certain youngsters more aggressive, resulting in disputes with their classmates.
- **Challenges in Trusting Others:** Social instability, such as parental divorce or numerous relocations, may render children reluctant to establish intimate relationships. A deficiency of trust in friendships can lead to recurrent misunderstandings and disputes.
- **Adverse Influence and Peer Pressure:** Children devoid of constructive social

support may gravitate towards detrimental peer groups. This may result in participation in hazardous behaviours, like truancy and misconduct, which adversely impacts both social and academic development.

Strategies for Enhancing Social Well-being and Interpersonal Relationships

- Promoting Collaborative Activities in Educational Institutions:– Schools ought to foster teamwork via athletics, debates, and innovative initiatives.
- Parental Guidance and Emotional Support: Parents have to assist youngsters in cultivating social skills by promoting constructive interactions within the home environment.
- School Counselling and Social Skills Training: Schools ought to implement programmes that instruct youngsters in dispute resolution, empathy, and the cultivation of friendships.
- Community Engagement and Extracurricular Activities: Involving children in religious, cultural, and recreational pursuits can improve their social well-being (Jeynes, 2002).

Conclusion

Divorce unequivocally presents obstacles to the academic performance and social welfare of primary school children in Oyo State. A collaboration strategy that involves schools, parents, and the community can substantially alleviate these impacts and foster a nurturing environment for affected children. In Oyo State, Nigeria, like in several other locations, comprehending the marital status of parents in Oyo State yields significant insights into family dynamics and child development. Despite the continued prevalence of traditional marriage, the

increasing occurrences of marriage dissolution and single motherhood underscore the necessity for focused interventions to assist impacted families and safeguard children's welfare. The nature of a living arrangement profoundly influences a child's scholastic, emotional, and social wellness. Policies that assist single-parent households, extended family carers, and children in institutional care can alleviate the adverse effects of divorce and promote the well-being of children in various living situations. Divorce significantly influences the social well-being of primary school children in Oyo State, impacting their emotional stability, peer connections, self-esteem, and trust in others. Although these consequences may be substantial, supporting actions from educational institutions, families, and communities can alleviate the problems and foster healthy social development for impacted children. In the context of divorce, disruptions in social well-being can negatively affect children's self-esteem. Robust social relationships and a sense of belonging augment self-worth, but social isolation, bullying, and unfavourable comparisons can result in diminished self-esteem. In Oyo State, cultivating a nurturing social environment for children is crucial for their emotional and psychological growth. This study provides valuable insights into how divorce and parental separation can affect the academic and social well-being of children in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

To alleviate these negative impacts, the Oyo State Ministry of Education should implement school-based counseling programmes for primary school children from divorced parents. The following measures are recommended:

- Augmented Educational Support Systems: The establishment of comprehensive counselling services in

educational institutions can offer youngsters a secure environment to articulate their emotions and cultivate coping mechanisms.

- Parental Education Programmes: Instructing parents on the importance and strategies for actively engaging in their children's education following divorce might alleviate academic deterioration.
- Community Engagement: Initiatives designed to destigmatise divorce and provide assistance to impacted families can cultivate a more inclusive atmosphere for children.
- Economic Empowerment: Offering financial assistance and resources to single-parent households will help guarantee that children's educational requirements are fulfilled despite economic difficulties.

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