

Influence of Family Dysfunction on the Social Behaviour of Adolescent Children in Ekpoma, Edo State

By

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of family dysfunction on the social behavior of adolescent children in Ekpoma, Edo State. The survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of this study was made up of all dysfunctional families and adolescents in Ekpoma. A sample of 20 dysfunctional families, having fifty-two (52) adolescents was used for the study. Questionnaire was used to obtain relevant data. Data collected were analyzed using weighted mean and standard deviation. The result of the findings revealed that one of the causes of family dysfunction is controlling parents, that is authoritarian parenting. The findings also showed that family dysfunction influences the social behavior of adolescent children because the cumulative mean response of 3.8 is higher than the decision mean of 3.0. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended among other things that government at all levels; NGOs and religious bodies should establish functional counselling units/family therapy centres where families and adolescents can be helped to get out of dysfunction.

Keywords: Family dysfunction, social behavior, adolescent children.

Introduction

All families have the potential of growth and adjustment in response to distress, trauma or crises. Undoubtedly, some families, regardless of type, number of problems, ethnic or racial makeup, religion and spirituality, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, or degree of education, are happier and more stable than others. They are more flexible in seeking solutions to problems, more purposeful in pursuing satisfaction than other families.

Family dysfunction can be any condition that interferes with healthy family functioning, (Eric, 2019). Most families have some period of times where functioning is impaired by stressful circumstances (death in the family, a parents serious illness). Healthy families tend to return to normal functioning after the crises passes but dysfunctional families remain in that state. In dysfunctional families however, problems tend to be chronic and children do not consistently get their needs met. Negative patterns of behavior tend to be dominant in their children's lives (Gil, 2016). A dysfunctional family is a family in which conflict, misbehavior and often child neglect or abuse on the part of individual members of the family occur continually and regularly, leading other members to accommodate such actions (Hart, 2015). Children sometimes grow up in such families with the understanding that such arrangement is normal. They exhibit such characters among their peers without knowing that they hurt other people's feelings.

Gil (2016) stated that there are many reasons why families become dysfunctional but the four common causes of family dysfunction include, deficient parents, controlling parents, alcoholic parents and abusive parents. Regardless of the kind of dysfunction or abuse, the effect on adolescents' social behavior is the same.

The period of adolescence which is a stage between childhood and adulthood is characterized by labile emotions, personal identity, peer relationships, independence and testing boundaries and self-centered attitudes, (Anna, 2017). Adolescence is a transitional phase of growth and development (Mihalyi, 2018). World Health Organization (WHO) defines an adolescent as any person between ages 10 and 19. Anna (2017) also defines adolescence as the period lasting from approximately age 11 to 21. The five leading characteristics of adolescence are biological growth and development, an undefined status, increased decision making, increased pressures and the search for self.

Adolescence can be broken into three stages; early adolescence, middle adolescence and late adolescence. Each stage has its own characteristics (Yolanda, 2019).

According to Janet (2016), children of dysfunctional families normally show the following characteristics:

- i. They guess at what normal is;
- ii. They have difficulty in following a project through from beginning to end;
- iii. They lie when it would be just easy to tell the truth;
- iv. They judge themselves without mercy;
- v. They have difficulty having fun;
- vi. They take themselves very seriously;
- vii. They have difficulty with intimate relationships;
- viii. They over react to changes over which they have no control;
- ix. They constantly seek approval and affirmation;
- x. They feel that they are different from others;
- xi. They are either super responsible or super irresponsible;
- xii. They are extremely loyal, even in the face of evidence that the loyalty is undeserved; and
- xiii. They are impulsive.

Regardless of the kind of dysfunction or abuse, effects vary widely across individuals. Keer and Bowen (2016) stated that adolescents of dysfunctional families either at the time or as they grow older may also:

- i. Lack they ability to be playful or childlike, and may “grow up too fast”;
- ii. Have moderate to severe mental health issue, including possible depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts;
- iii. Become addicted to smoking, alcohol and drugs especially if parents or friends have done the same;
- iv. Bully or harass others, or be an easy victim thereof;
- v. Be in denial regarding the severity of the family’s situation;
- vi. Have mixed feeling of love-hate towards certain family members;
- vii. Have difficulty forming healthy relationship within their peer group (usually due to shyness or a personality disorder);

- viii. Feel angry, anxious, depressed, isolated from others or unlovable;
- ix. Become a juvenile delinquent and turn to a life of crime;
- x. Have low self-esteem or a poor self-image with difficulty expressing emotions.

In most cases, adolescents are the worst hit in families that are dysfunctional. This is because they are at a stage of identifying themselves and building up on their personality. As a result, when there are crises in the home, they get confused and are affected negatively.

Statement of the Problem

The rate at which families are becoming dysfunctional in Nigeria is really on the increase. This is as a result of the economic situation and moral decadence in the society (Namka, 2018). Families where responsible individuals are expected to be formed and nurtured have become places where irresponsible acts are being carried out which in turn brings about undesired behavior in the adolescent child.

The researchers observed that a lot of adolescent in Ekpoma are engaging into all sorts of crime, and this is a clear evidence of the high rate of family dysfunction. Recently, it was reported that the activities of “Yahoo Boys” is more in Ekpoma than any other part of the country. The researchers also observed that parents always have big ambitions for their children. They tell them what they should do at all times, what their career should be, who their friends should be and who they should date. They compare their children with their mates and keep reminding them of their failures. These are causes of negative parenting which may be the causes of family dysfunction. In the height of these, the question that arose is, how does family dysfunction influence the social behavior of adolescents?

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of family dysfunction on the social behavior of adolescent children in Ekpoma, Edo State. Specifically, this sought to examine the:

1. Causes of family dysfunction in Ekpoma
2. Influence of family dysfunction on the social behavior of adolescent children in a dysfunctional family in Ekpoma.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the causes of family dysfunction among families in Ekpoma?
2. What is the influence of family dysfunction on the social behavior of adolescent children in a dysfunctional family in Ekpoma?

Method of Study

This study utilized survey research design to ascertain the effect of family dysfunction on the social behavior of adolescent children in Ekpoma, Edo State. The population comprised of all adolescents from dysfunctional families in Ekpoma. The dysfunctional families were selected through a baseline study carried out by the researchers to know the families that were dysfunctional. Twenty dysfunctional families were purposely selected. The researchers used what they scored during the baseline study to select. The baseline study was scored 0 to 100. The higher the score, the more dysfunctional the family is. So, twenty families with the highest scores were selected using the purposive random sampling. All adolescents in the twenty families were used. There was no need to sample the adolescent because the number, which was 52, was manageable. The instrument used for the study was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was in two forms, one was designed for parents to ascertain the causes of family dysfunction. The other was for the adolescents to ascertain the effect of family dysfunction on their social behavior. Family and child development experts validated the instrument and the Cronbach Alpha was used in ascertaining the reliability of the instrument and it yielded 0.85. Data collected were analyzed using weighted mean scores and standard deviation.

Findings

Research Question 1: What are the causes of family dysfunction among families in Ekpoma, Edo State?

Table 1: Weighted mean score and standard deviation on the causes of family dysfunction among families in Ekpoma, Edo State.

S/N	Item	Categories					Mean	Standard Deviation
		Always (5)	Most Times (4)	Sometimes (3)	Never (2)	Undecided (1)		
1	Do you feel happy when the children ignore their own needs and feelings just to satisfy your needs?	45	32	9	24	8	2.9	.417
2	Do you choose friends for your children?	50	44	30	6	6	3.4	.521
3	Do you feel it is important for your teenage child to own an account and manage it the way he/she feels?	25	16	33	22	9	2.6	.181
4	As an adult, do you think you can take alcohol the way you feel even in excess sometimes since it is believed to help people relieve tension and 'relax'?	20	40	63	10	0	3.3	.401
5	Do you flog rather than talk to your child at every offence he/she commits?	55	40	9	18	5	3.1	.012
6	Do you seek for your children's opinion on some family issues especially the ones that affect them?	40	32	27	28	1	3.2	.810
7	Do you exert a strong authoritarian control over the children?	90	32	24	8	2	3.9	.155
8	Are your words final in any decisions in the family?	65	40	24	8	2	3.9	.418
9	Are you consistent with your rules and regulations in the home or rules that apply one day may not apply the next?	35	24	33	28		3.0	.215
10	Do you feel it is necessary to keep promises made to any member of the family?	25	12	15	40	2	2.3	.332
	Cumulative Mean						3.1	

Decision= 3.00

Table 1 above shows a cumulative mean response of 3.1 which is higher than the decision mean of 3.0. This means that majority of the respondents were in agreement with the question items used to collect data. The table shows that some parents exert a strong authoritarian control over the children. This item score 150 with a weighted mean score of 3.9. It was also shown that some parents words are final in any family decision, as their item score 143 with a weighted mean response of 3.5. The result also shows that the respondents believe that an adult is free to take alcohol the way he or she feels even in excess. This item had a total score of 133 with a weighted mean score of 3.3. The result equally indicated that parents believe they should choose friends for their children as this item had a weighted mean score of 3.4. The item mean scores of the items are higher than the decision mean which is an indication that the items are causes of family dysfunction in the study area.

In view of this, the researchers concluded that the main causes of family dysfunction in Ekpoma, is the authoritarian behavior of the parents and alcohol taking.

Research Qutestion 2: What is the influence of family dysfunction on the social behavior of adolescent children in a dysfunctional family in Ekpoma?

Table 2: Weighted mean score and standard deviation on the influence of family dysfunction on the social behavior of adolescent children.

S/N	Item	Categories					Mean	Standard Deviation
		Always (5)	Most Times (4)	Sometimes (3)	Never (2)	Undecided (1)		
1	Do you find it difficult to express your feelings?	150	60	3	2	0	4.5	.479
2	Do you lie when it would just be easy to tell the truth?	100	84	0	12	0	4.1	.504
3	Do you have difficulty with intimate relationship?	165	32	0	4	4	4.3	.80
4	Do you feel different from other people?	120	60	15	6	0	4.2	.491
5	Do you have difficulty being playful?	75	128	0	0	0	4.3	4.71
6	Do you find it difficult following a task or project from beginning to end?	155	28	0	14	2	4.2	.360

7	DO you find yourself feeling like a false in your academic or professional life?	100	60	15	4	5	3.9	.485
8	Do you find yourself having difficulty with authority figures?	125	44	0	10	5	3.9	.428
9	Have you ever been drunk?	0	12	78	36	0	2.36	.605
10	Do you freely make friends with the opposite sex?	15	20	12	60	5	2.3	.282
Cumulative Mean							3.8	

Decision = 3.00

Table 2 above shows that the cumulative mean response of 3.8 is higher than the decision mean of 3.0. The table shows that all the item mean scores are above the decision mean of 3.0 except for items 9 and 10 which has mean scores of 2.6 and 2.3 respectively. The table revealed that the respondents agreed to 8 items out of the 10 items on the table. From the results, it is evident that the adolescents have a great negative influence of family dysfunction on their social behavior. This is seen in the mean score of the different items measured.

In view of this, the researchers concluded that family dysfunction to a large extent affect negatively the social behavior of adolescent children in Ekpoma, therefore proving the fact that family dysfunction is prevalent in Ekpoma, Edo State.

Summary of findings

From the results of the analysis presented, the findings of this study are summarized thus:

1. Family dysfunction in Ekpoma is caused mostly by controlling parent (that is authoritarian parents), alcoholic parents and abusive parents.
2. Family dysfunction influences the social behavior of adolescent children in Ekpoma.

Discussion of findings

The analysis of the data collected for this study provided some insight into the objectives and research questions raised for this study. The findings of Research Question 1 reveals that family dysfunction in Ekpoma is caused mostly by controlling parents (that is authoritarian parenting), alcoholic and abusive parents. The findings agreed with the result obtained by Gil (2016) which

showed that controlling parents are often driven by a fear of becoming unnecessary to their children, so they tend to control both the children and any other person in the family in a manner that becomes a problem to the family, thereby causing dysfunction in the family.

The findings also show that another cause of family dysfunction in Ekpoma is as a result of alcoholic parents. This is in line with what Keer and Bowen (2016) stated that if the type of dysfunction in a family is alcohol addiction, it is because the family has alcoholic parents. Alcoholic families are chaotic and unpredictable (Janet, 2016).

The findings from Research Question 2 revealed that family dysfunction influence the social behavior of adolescent children. These findings concurred with what was obtained by Janet (2016) who opined that family dysfunction influences to a greater extent the social behavior of adolescent children.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the influence of family dysfunction on the social behavior of adolescent children in Ekpoma, Edo state. Based on the relevant literatures that have been reviewed, and the findings from the study, it is therefore concluded that family dysfunction to a large extent influence the social behavior of adolescent children. The study based on its findings made the following recommendations:

1. Different women and men fellowship groups of different religious bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should from time to time organize seminars/workshops on parenting to enlighten parents on different parenting styles and the implications of each of them;
2. Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should intensify on the campaign on the dangers of high alcohol consumption. They can organize health tasks using practical examples such as films shows and posters to teach people the social and health risks associated with high alcohol consumption;
3. Government at all levels, NGOs and religious bodies should establish functional counseling unit/family therapy centers where families and adolescents can be helped to get out of dysfunction; and
4. Relationship education should be introduced into the senior secondary schools and also made a general course in the tertiary institution to equip our young ones with the sound knowledge on relationships and prepare them for better marital life.

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