

PERCEPTION OF DIVORCE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AMONG CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN GOMBE METROPOLIS, GOMBE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between parental divorce and juvenile delinquency in Gombe Metropolis, Gombe State Nigeria. The research explores the breakdown of family structures, societal stigmatization, and insufficient support systems that contribute to delinquent behaviors such as truancy, theft, violence, and substance abuse. Utilizing Krejcie and Morgan's formula, a sample size of 375 respondents were selected from a population of 1,000 individuals, including children from divorced families, their parents, and community stakeholders such as educators, social service providers, juvenile justice professionals, and community leaders. Employing a quantitative research design, the study collects data through standardized questionnaires to analyze variables including family dynamics, socioeconomic factors, and access to support services. By focusing on the specific socio-cultural and economic context of Gombe Metropolis, this research seeks to inform policy decisions, community programs, and intervention strategies tailored to the needs of children from divorced families. The study highlights that family structure, socioeconomic conditions, and community support significantly influence children's behavior. It finds that divorce increases the risk of delinquency, aggression, and emotional detachment among children. However, strong family support, education, and community programs can help reduce these negative effects. The study provides recommendations to guide policies and interventions aimed at promoting stable family environments and supporting vulnerable children in Gombe Metropolis.

Keywords: Divorce, juvenile delinquency, behavior, children

Introduction

Divorce is a pervasive global phenomenon that profoundly impacts families worldwide, precipitating complex emotional and financial consequences. As individuals navigate the multifaceted process of separation, they often encounter a myriad of legal, social, and personal challenges that necessitate significant adjustments and efforts to rebuild their lives (Ali Bukhtiar & Iqbal, 2025). Research has consistently demonstrated that children of divorced parents are at an increased risk of experiencing emotional and behavioral problems, including juvenile delinquency. This association is often attributed to the heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and insecurity that children encounter as a consequence of parental divorce, which can profoundly impact their emotional and psychological well-being (Sari & Arga, 2025). The disintegration of family structure can compromise parental supervision, guidance, and support, thereby increasing the likelihood of delinquent behavior among children. The absence of a stable and nurturing environment can precipitate feelings of insecurity and abandonment, leading some children to seek validation and acceptance through maladaptive peer relationships. Therefore, it is essential to address the underlying issues affecting family dynamics to promote healthier relationships and foster positive behavioral outcomes in young individuals (Andrejić, 2024). According to the World Health Organization (2019), children of divorced parents are at an increased risk of engaging in risk-taking behaviors, including substance abuse and violence. This finding underscores the imperative for policymakers and practitioners to develop evidence-based interventions tailored to support children of divorced parents, with the ultimate goal of preventing juvenile delinquency and promoting positive youth development.

Divorce in West Africa, particularly Nigeria, has a significant impact on children's behaviour. Research indicates that children from divorced families are more likely to exhibit delinquent behaviours, such as aggression, anxiety, and depression. Emotional trauma, low self-esteem, and difficulty forming healthy relationships are common issues (Roza & Silva, 2024). Academic challenges are also higher for children from separated families, leading to dropout rates and social struggles. Delinquency and crime are more likely among children from unstable families, with some being misdiagnosed or ignored by those around them (Kroese & Rouwendal, 2021). Consequently, it is crucial for communities and policymakers to address these challenges by providing support systems and resources for affected families, ensuring that children receive the guidance and care they need to thrive despite their circumstances.

In Gombe Metropolis, the rising divorce rate has sparked worries regarding behavioral development and well-being. Children with divorced parents suffer from emotional and psychological problems, including anxiety, despair, poor self-esteem, emotional trauma, and mood regulation problems. Delinquency, violence, substance misuse, and hostility are examples of behavioural issues. Academic difficulties include worse performance, a higher chance of dropping out, and challenges establishing positive relationships. The likelihood of financial hardships, unfavourable peer pressure, and child abuse is increased by social and environmental

variables (Musa & Sagir, 2016). However, the lack of effective support systems and interventions for children from divorced families has contributed to the growing problem of juvenile delinquency. Additionally, cultural and societal norms stigmatising divorce and blaming single parents have created a culture of silence and shame, making it difficult for children from divorced families to openly discuss their experiences and seek help.

This study investigates the impact of parental divorce on juvenile delinquent behavior among children in Gombe Metropolis, with a specific focus on the causes of divorce and its effects on criminal behavior. The research examines the moderating role of socio-economic factors and community support systems in mitigating the adverse effects of divorce on children. By elucidating these dynamics, this study aims to provide evidence-based insights for policymakers and social workers to develop targeted interventions supporting affected families.

The study's objectives include designing parenting programs tailored to the unique needs of divorced children, thereby contributing to the reduction of juvenile delinquency in Gombe Metropolis. Furthermore, this research contributes to the field of family sociology by advancing theoretical understandings of juvenile delinquency and highlighting the significance of family factors, including divorce. The findings are expected to inform policy decisions and foster interdisciplinary collaboration, ultimately enhancing our understanding of the complex relationships between divorce and juvenile delinquency.

Literature Review

This section of the study analysed academic content in depth concerning the impact of divorce on children's behaviour.

The Impact of Divorce on delinquent Behavior among Children

The impact of divorce on children's delinquent behaviour is a complex issue influenced by psychological, social, and environmental factors. Research suggests that children from divorced families may experience challenges that increase their risk of engaging in criminal behaviour. Key considerations include stress and anxiety, reduced parental supervision, inconsistent parenting styles, financial strain, social stigma, and substance use, all of which can exacerbate feelings of instability and lead to maladaptive coping mechanisms. Furthermore, the quality of relationships with both parents post-divorce can significantly affect a child's emotional well-being and behaviour, underscoring the importance of supportive interventions during and after the separation process (Weaver & Schofield, 2014).

Emotional distress can lead to feelings of anger, sadness, or insecurity, which can sometimes lead to delinquency. Parental supervision and involvement may be reduced post-divorce, leading to decreased monitoring of children's activities (Sabour & Yaacob, 2011). Family disruption can lead to feelings of isolation and delinquency, with parental conflict, substance abuse, and economic hardship exacerbated. Research indicates a correlation between family instability and increased likelihood of delinquency and substance use among adolescents. Early legal substance use is linked to a higher risk of illicit drug use and criminal activities. Factors like family

dynamics, socioeconomic status, and parental behavior moderate this relationship. However, family disruption can be mitigated with timely interventions and support systems (Burststein, 2012)

To mitigate the adverse effects of divorce on children, effective support systems and interventions are crucial. These may include establishing a supportive community and social network, implementing conflict reduction strategies, promoting economic stability, and providing targeted programs to prevent delinquent behaviors and address substance abuse issues. (Huff & Hartenstein, 2020)

Nelson et al. (2024) conducted a study to investigate the link between parenting quality and juvenile delinquency. The research focused on key factors such as parenting styles, communication between parents and children, family structure, and socio-economic status. The study's primary objective was to identify how variations in parenting quality contribute to juvenile delinquency. The researchers used a descriptive research design, examining the characteristics of the population being studied and examining the relationships between variables of interest. The study sample consisted of 123 juvenile delinquents from the Children Correctional Center in Benin City, Nigeria. Data was collected through structured interviews and questionnaires, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and backgrounds. The study found significant correlations between certain parenting practices and the likelihood of juvenile delinquency. Specifically, authoritative parenting, characterized by a balance of warmth and discipline, was associated with lower rates of delinquent behavior. In contrast, neglectful and authoritarian parenting styles were linked to higher rates of delinquency. Effective communication between parents and children emerged as a critical factor in preventing delinquency, with open and supportive communication reducing the likelihood of children engaging in anti-social behavior.

The study highlighted the impact of socio-economic status on juvenile delinquency, noting that economic hardship and limited access to resources exacerbate the risk of delinquent behavior. To mitigate the impact of poor parenting quality on juvenile delinquency, the research offered several recommendations:
 i. Emphasize Effective Parenting Styles: Parents should be encouraged to adopt authoritative parenting practices that combine warmth, support, and clear disciplinary boundaries.
 ii. Improve Communication: Efforts should be made to enhance communication between parents and children, fostering an environment where children feel heard and supported.
 iii. Address Socio-Economic Factors: Policies and interventions should aim to alleviate economic hardship and provide resources and support to families in need, including access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

In conclusion, Nelson et al. provide valuable insights into the link between parenting quality and juvenile delinquency, highlighting the importance of effective parenting styles, communication, and addressing socio-economic challenges, (Nelson, 2024).

Folorunsho et al. (2024) conducted a study on the impact of parenting styles and family structures on juvenile delinquency in Nigeria. The research aimed to advocate for more effective parenting

styles and incorporate family dynamics into policymaking to address the root causes of delinquent behavior. The study employed a qualitative research approach grounded in Social Learning Theory, which posits that individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within their social environment, including their family. The study involved a comprehensive review of existing literature and case studies on family dynamics and juvenile delinquency. Key findings revealed that authoritative and supportive parenting is associated with lower rates of juvenile delinquency, while neglectful and authoritarian parenting tends to correlate with higher rates. Family structures, such as single-parent households and families experiencing economic hardship, play a significant role in shaping youth behavior. These family dynamics can either exacerbate or mitigate the likelihood of delinquency, depending on the level of support and guidance provided by the parents.

Folorunsho et al. offer several recommendations to combat juvenile delinquency: encouraging positive parenting styles, prioritizing family dynamics in policies, and promoting awareness on effective parenting. However, the study acknowledges several limitations, including geographical limitations, population participation, and concentration on particular factors related to parenting styles and family structures.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the vital role of family dynamics in shaping adolescent behavior and addressing juvenile delinquency in Nigeria. By advocating for positive parenting styles and integrating family considerations into policymaking, the study provides a framework for reducing delinquent behavior among youths (Folorunsho, 2024).

Zhou's (2023) explores the psychological impact of parental divorce on children, focusing on both immediate and long-term developmental outcomes. Using a literature review methodology, the study identifies key psychological effects such as increased anxiety, depression, and behavioral issues in children immediately following divorce. It also examines long-term consequences, such as academic challenges, difficulties in forming stable relationships, and potential mental health issues in adulthood. The study provides recommendations for mitigating the negative effects of parental divorce from multiple perspectives: family, school, and individual. Family-wise, maintaining effective communication and emotional support can reduce adverse impacts. School-wise, implementing counseling services and peer support groups can address emotional and social needs. Individually, encouraging healthy coping mechanisms and access to mental health resources can promote resilience and well-being.

However, the study has certain limitations. One notable limitation is the reliance on previously conducted research, which means that the study does not present original data. This reliance on secondary data may limit the ability to draw definitive conclusions and make specific generalizations. Additionally, the diversity of the studies reviewed, in terms of geographical location, cultural context, and time period, may affect the generalisability of the findings. Changing societal norms surrounding divorce, such as increased acceptance and changes in family

structures, also pose challenges to the applicability of the conclusions drawn from the literature review.

In conclusion, Zhou's study offers valuable insights into the impact of parental divorce on children and offers practical recommendations for mitigating these effects. However, further research, including primary data collection and analysis, is needed to enhance understanding and applicability of the findings in different contexts (Zhou, 2023).

Richard Jessor Problem Behavior Theory (1960)

Richard Jessor, an American psychologist, developed the Problem Behavior Theory (PBT) in the 1960s to understand adolescent problem behaviors. PBT posits that problem behaviors, such as delinquency, substance use, and promiscuity, are a result of a combination of factors, including personality factors, social environment, and behavioral factors. Its basic assumptions include that problem behaviors are interrelated, that personality, social environment, and behavioral factors all contribute to the development of problem behaviors, and that problem behaviors serve as coping mechanisms. PBT can be applied to the topic of divorce and its impact on juvenile delinquent behavior in children. Parental conflict and divorce can contribute to a social environment that increases the likelihood of problem behaviors in children. Children's personality factors, such as impulsivity and rebelliousness, may influence their likelihood of engaging in problem behaviors following parental divorce.

Problem behavior theory has strengths such as a comprehensive framework, empirical support, and practical applications in fields such as psychology, education, and public health. However, it has criticisms, including oversimplification, lack of clear boundaries, and limited generalizability.

In conclusion, PBT provides a comprehensive understanding of how various factors contribute to problem behaviors in youth, emphasizing the role of cultural norms, societal expectations, and developmental transitions. However, it may face limitations in its generalizability to other populations or contexts.

Problem Behavior Theory (PBT) provides a conceptual framework for understanding delinquent behaviors in adolescents, particularly in the context of the Gombe Metropolis, Nigeria. This theoretical model delineates three primary systems: the Personality System, the Perceived Environment System, and the Behavior System. According to PBT, risk factors such as emotional distress can contribute to delinquent behavior, while protective factors like supportive relationships can mitigate its impact. By integrating PBT into research, investigators can develop targeted interventions tailored to the needs of at-risk youth. However, further research is warranted to elucidate the complex relationship between divorce and juvenile delinquency in the Gombe Metropolis, taking into account cultural and socioeconomic factors. A comprehensive investigation into the challenges and protective factors faced by adolescents in this context could

inform the development of targeted interventions and support services, ultimately enhancing the well-being of this vulnerable population

Methodology

Area of the Study

This study is situated in the Gombe Metropolis, a prominent urban center in the northeastern region of Nigeria. As the administrative and economic hub of Gombe State, the Gombe Metropolis is characterized by a high level of economic activity and population density, rendering it a strategic location for investigating the research objectives

Population of the study

This study's target population comprises children from divorced families, their parents, and community stakeholders in the Gombe Metropolis, including social service providers, educators, juvenile justice professionals, and religious/community leaders. According to estimates from the Gombe State Ministry of Women Affairs, the population size is approximately 1000. Using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table, a sample of 375 respondents were selected from the target population to participate in the study.

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design, utilizing surveys to collect numerical data on the impact of parental divorce on juvenile delinquent behavior among children in the Gombe Metropolis. Standardized questionnaires were used to measure delinquent behaviors and potential influencing factors, including family dynamics, socioeconomic status, and access to support services. The copies of questionnaires were personally administered and collected by the researchers. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, providing a comprehensive overview of the relationships between parental divorce and juvenile delinquent behavior.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: *A summary of demographic characteristics of the study's respondents*

		Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	235	64.4
	Female	130	35.6
	Total	365	100.0
Marital Status	Married	238	65.2
	Single	116	31.8
	Divorced	11	3.0
	Total	365	100.0
Educational Level	SSCE	152	41.6
	Diploma/NCE	122	33.4
	HND/Degree	66	18.1
	Postgraduate	25	6.8
	Total	365	100.0
Occupation	Student	40	11.0
	Civil Servant	152	41.6
	Self Employed	173	47.4
	Total	365	100.0
Age	26-30 years	38	10.4
	31-35 years	84	23.0
	36-40 years	125	34.2
	41-45 years	10	2.7
	46-50 years	31	8.5
	51-55 years	29	7.9
	56-60 years	22	6.0
	60 and above	26	7.1
	Total	365	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2025

The demographic composition of the respondents surveyed in the field study reveals several key characteristics. Regarding sex, the data indicates a clear male preponderance, with 235 participants identifying as male, constituting 64.4% of the total sample. In contrast, 130 participants were female, representing 35.6%. This disparity highlights a gender imbalance within the participant group.

The marital status distribution shows that the majority of participants, numbering 238 and accounting for 65.2%, were married. A notable portion, 116 individuals (31.8%), reported being single. The smallest category comprised those who were divorced, with only 11 participants, making up 3.0% of the total. This distribution underscores the prevalence of marriage within the surveyed population.

In terms of educational attainment, the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) was the most common qualification, held by 152 participants, or 41.6%. Following this, 122 participants (33.4%) had a Diploma or National Certificate of Education (NCE). A smaller segment, 66 participants (18.1%), possessed an HND or a degree, and the least represented group was those with postgraduate qualifications, numbering 25 and accounting for 6.8%. This data illustrates the educational diversity of the participants, with a skew towards secondary and diploma level qualifications.

The occupational breakdown reveals that the largest category of participants was self-employed, with 173 individuals, representing 47.4%. Civil servants constituted the second-largest group, with 152 participants, or 41.6%. Students made up the smallest occupational group, with 40 participants, accounting for 11.0%. This distribution indicates a workforce-heavy sample, with self-employment being the most prevalent.

The age distribution of the participants shows a concentration in the middle age brackets. The largest single age group was 36-40 years, with 125 participants, representing 34.2%. The 31-35 years age group was also substantial, with 84 participants (23.0%). The 26-30 years group accounted for 38 participants (10.4%). Older age groups were less represented, with 10 participants (2.7%) in the 41-45 years bracket, 31 participants (8.5%) in the 46-50 years bracket, 29 participants (7.9%) in the 51-55 years bracket, 22 participants (6.0%) in the 56-60 years bracket, and 26 participants (7.1%) being 60 years and above. This age distribution suggests that the survey predominantly captured the views and characteristics of individuals in their economically active middle years.

Causes of Divorce in Gombe Metropolis

The table two (2) below presents the responses on the causes of divorce in Gombe Metropolis

Table 2: *Causes of Divorce*

Response	Financial Issues	Lack of Communication	Infidelity	Domestic Violence
Strongly Agree	116 (31.8%)	136 (37.3%)	96 (26.3%)	125 (34.2%)
Agree	167 (45.8%)	175 (47.9%)	201 (55.1%)	193 (52.9%)
Neutral	9 (2.5%)	14 (3.8%)	33 (9.0%)	25 (6.8%)
Disagree	51 (14.0%)	21 (5.8%)	24 (6.6%)	15 (4.1%)
Strongly Disagree	22 (6.0%)	19 (5.2%)	11 (3.0%)	7 (1.9%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data presented in the table indicates that respondents in Gombe metropolis perceive several key factors as major contributors to divorce. Notably, lack of communication emerged as

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the most prominent cause, with 85.2% of participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing that it leads to marital breakdown. This suggests that poor interpersonal interaction and unresolved conflicts within marriages significantly strain relationships. Domestic violence followed closely, with 87.1% agreement, highlighting that abuse within the household whether emotional, physical, or psychological is a critical issue leading to separation. Infidelity was also identified as a major cause, with 81.4% agreement, suggesting that breaches of trust continue to erode marital stability. Financial issues, though slightly less cited than the others, still saw 77.6% agreement, indicating that economic pressures and financial incompatibility are influential stressors in marriages.

These findings are crucial within the context of the study, which investigates the impact of juvenile delinquent behavior in Gombe. High rates of divorce, driven by the aforementioned causes, contribute to family instability, which in turn affects children's social and emotional development.

Impact of Divorce on Criminal Behaviors among Children in Gombe Metropolis

Table three (3) below shows the summary of responses on the perceived impact of divorce on children's criminal behaviors in Gombe Metropolis.

Table 3: *Impact of Divorce on Children Criminal behaviour*

Response	Increase in Delinquency	Aggressive Tendencies	Negative Influence	Peer Emotional Detachment
Strongly Agree	96 (26.3%)	90 (24.7%)	84 (23.0%)	117 (32.1%)
Agree	203 (55.6%)	191 (52.3%)	179 (49.0%)	159 (43.6%)
Neutral/Undecided	36 (9.9%)	36 (9.9%)	44 (12.1%)	49 (13.4%)
Disagree	21 (5.8%)	37 (10.1%)	42 (11.5%)	27 (7.4%)
Strongly Disagree	9 (2.5%)	11 (3.0%)	16 (4.4%)	13 (3.6%)
Total	365 (100%)	365 (100%)	365 (100%)	365 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results of the study reveal strong associations between parental divorce and various indicators of juvenile delinquency among children in Gombe Metropolis. A significant portion of the respondents over 81.9% either strongly agreed (26.3%) or agreed (55.6%) that divorce contributes to an increase in delinquent behavior among children. This suggests that the absence of a stable, two-parent household may compromise supervision and discipline, potentially leading children to engage in antisocial or unlawful behavior. Similarly, a majority of respondents acknowledged a link between divorce and the development of **aggressive or violent tendencies** in children. Approximately 77% agreed or strongly agreed that such behaviors may emerge as a result of emotional strain and a lack of proper parental guidance. Only a small fraction (13.1%) disagreed or remained undecided, reinforcing the perceived strength of this connection.

Exposure to negative peer influence also emerged as a significant concern. About 72% of participants believed that children from divorced homes are more vulnerable to bad influences, likely due to the emotional vacuum and lack of consistent parental monitoring. Peer groups may become substitutes for familial bonds, but without positive role models, these children may fall into delinquent social circles. Furthermore, emotional detachment from parents was seen as a critical factor influencing delinquent behavior. A combined 75.7% of respondents reported that children often become emotionally distant following a divorce, seeking solace and identity within peer groups—some of which may be delinquent in nature. This finding highlights the psychological toll of divorce and how it disrupts healthy emotional development.

Overall, the study underscores a consistent belief among respondents that divorce plays a major role in shaping juvenile delinquency. The cumulative data reflect a strong public perception that family breakdown has a profound impact not only on children's academic and emotional well-being but also on their behavioral development.

This study examines the demographic characteristics of respondents in Gombe Metropolis, Nigeria, with a specific focus on the antecedents of divorce and its consequential impact on juvenile delinquency. The findings reveal that the primary causes of divorce among the respondents are lack of communication, domestic violence, infidelity, and financial difficulties. Furthermore, the study's results indicate that parental divorce is associated with an increased risk of delinquency, aggressive behavior, negative peer influence, and emotional detachment among children.

Conclusion

This study examines the profound impact of parental divorce on juvenile delinquent behavior among children in Gombe Metropolis. The findings underscore the critical role of family dynamics, socioeconomic factors, and community support in influencing children's behavioral development. Specifically, the research reveals that divorce is associated with increased delinquency, aggressive tendencies, and emotional detachment in children. Nevertheless, the study highlights the potential mitigating effects of family support, education, and community-based programs in preventing and managing juvenile delinquency. The recommendations aimed to inform policy and intervention strategies that promoted stable family environments, supported children's emotional and educational needs, and fostered community engagement. By shedding light on the complex issues surrounding divorce and juvenile delinquency, this research provided valuable insights for stakeholders, policymakers, and practitioners working to support vulnerable children and families in Gombe Metropolis.

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