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The Effects of Broken Homes on Academic Performance of Pupils of Lower Manya Krobo District, Ghana

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Abstract

This paper is on the factors that contribute to the breakdown of homes, the influence and the ripple effect of the breakdown often have on children so far as their academic performance is concerned and how conditions like the socio-economic standings of parents contributed to the problem or otherwise. Opinion leaders, parents, teachers and pupils from the Lower Manya Krobo district were sampled for the collection of the data. It was established that there was a positive relationship between the performance of a child in school and the state of the family. Most children who excelled lived with both parents and well taken care of by their parents whereas children from broken homes performed badly. It is recommended that pre-marital counselling should be given to prospective couple by the key stakeholders in our societies and localities.

Keywords: Absenteeism, academic performance, adult literacy, KCSE, parallel programme, peer pressure, school based, school resources, teacher student's ratio, staffing

1. Introduction

Apart from inadequate facilities and resources that can have a negative effect on the academic performance of pupils or students, it has been observed that factors from the home, including parental support contribute significantly to performance at school as well (Hassan, 1983). Children, including adolescents need basic things such as love, affection, security, tenderness, food, clothes, school materials and fees. Those who lack these are often backward in school as they find it difficult to concentrate and study in school. It has also been observed that most school dropouts are children from families whose parents are not able to provide the necessary school requirements (Kerby, 2002). These are confirmed by (Fafunwa, 1984) that parents are the primary agents for educational development of their children. This means that when there is no composition of the home or parents are apart and not together to cater for the needs of their children, the primary educational development and further support are lost. Rodeny (1985) describes a broken home as a family in which the parents have separated or divorced or essentially not leaving together. In situations like this the upbringing of the child is left solely to one of the parents, most often the woman. Messiah (1983) explains that some parents from broken homes are usually found in low status jobs. This may be because they did not have enough school preparations to equip them for high caliber jobs with which to use in supporting their families, a common feature among African women. Anselen (1999) also asserts the necessity for combined presence and co-operation of both parents in nurturing the child, since the absence of one parent may lead to unresolved problem of deep crises creating personality problems in the society. Once the child's personality has one problem or the other, it will affect his or her relationship with people and other. In spite of the drawbacks by broken homes in encouraging children to have the best of education, stakeholders in the educational sector are doing well to avert the situation and make education very relevant to children. Basic education forms part of the overall objective of government to reduce poverty therefore issues of education are handled with a developmental perspective. Efforts being made by governments to ensure education thrives effectively include policy interventions like abolishing of school fees and the school feed program. r things around his environment. His educational attainment will also be at risk. Another approach by government to increase school enrolment was the introduction of the School Feeding Program (SFP). The SFP is said to have been introduced for 3 major reasons (Bennett, 2003; Hall, 2007). Traditional authorities as stakeholders in the educational welfare of the children in their communities also support children in basic education and even to higher levels. At the end of the day these children will become assets for their communities. Similarly, various foundations of business corporations through corporate social responsibilities support schools through donations and other renovating activities.

2. Literature Review

The study reviewed literature based on effects of broken homes on the academic performance of pupils locally, in Africa and in global perspective. Areas reviewed included the family or the home (theoretical literature), types of broken home, causes and its effects on the child.

2.1. The Family or the Home

The home or the family out of which the pupil and students come is a profound, important factor to consider in the process of education of a child. The family is the oldest human institution. It is society's basic unit. Scholars in the field offer various perspectives on what constitutes a family. They also share their views on the possible types of families. It had been stated that family is a set of people united by ties of marriage or related by blood or through adoption. The family therefore constitute a complex bond, interacting and communicating with each other in their respective social roles, a husband and wife or father and mother, son and daughter, brother, sister, cousins, aunts, uncles, nephews and niece. Schaefer (2001) is of the view that a family is a group of people related by blood, marriage or adoption who shares the primary responsibility for reproduction and caring for members of society. Members of a family constitute a household. Even if they live apart, they still consider themselves as part of the house hold. Members of a family share resources, responsibility for decisions, values and goals and have commitments to one another over time. Family life has its ups and downs. Families encounter day to day challenges. Some challenges have high impact on the family, such as death and separation or divorce, Asare and Kwafoa (2007). Fletcher (1971) identifies divorce, death and separation as the main causes of broken homes He said in addition to marriage dissolved by divorce, there are also, of course, homes which are broken by separation. Indeed, the problems attending to separation are probably far worse than those attending to divorce.

2.2. Types of Broken Homes

Hurlock (1978) describes a broken home as a situation where one of the parents is dead; where there is separation between the parents; where there is divorce or a situation that necessitates long or frequent absence, by one or both parents. Broken homes are referred in situations where husbands and wives are no longer living together as a couple. Apart from the physical aspect of broken home, there are physical, emotional and psychological separations where members are physically living under the same roof, but cannot get along for one reason or the other. Afful- Broni (2005) identifies the following types of broken homes as those which can occur in the form of divorce, separation and desertion.

2.2.1. Divorce

Simply defined as the legal dissolution or the formal termination of marriage, divorce is becoming quite common these days even in societies that were known to be close-knit or held fast to the traditional norms of unity, community and cohesion. It is usually distinguished from an annulment in which the court makes a declaration that a marriage is invalid because of some defect at the time of the ceremony. Jorgenson & Henderson (1990) state that divorce is a legal termination of the marriage contract.

2.2.2. Separation

Ricker and Brisbane (1992) state that separation is where one spouse moves out of the relationship with notice of leaving. In this case, both parties remain married to each other though they live apart. The couples agree to separate and live apart with no legal requirement to meet. A couple can also separate with legal sanctions determined by the court. In legal separation, an order may be introduced by the court, setting down certain conditions which the couple must follow. These conditions may include financial support, custody of children, visitation rights and division of property.

2.2.3. Desertion

This is the situation where a partner walks off and breaks off all contacts. Jorgenson and Henderson (1990) postulate that to desert someone is to withdraw abandon or fail them in time of need. Stewart (1987) refers to desertion as the act by which a person abandons or forsakes, with or without justification, his or her family, thereby, denouncing and evading both lawful and moral responsibilities.

2.3. Causes of Broken Homes

There are many problems which married couples are likely to face and if care is not taken, these challenges and problems may weaken the marriage and finally break it down. Some of the problems according to Afful-Broni (2005) are:

2.3.1. Adultery

According to Fields (2001), sexual relation outside marriage indicates a clearly divided love, incomplete affection and sign of unfaithfulness towards one's partner. That is why when this is detected; the offending partner often reacts strongly in an attempt to cover up his or her shame. He concluded that marital unfaithfulness either on the part of the man or the woman is a leading cause of divorce.

2.3.2. Lack of Communication

Effective communication has been identified as the single most important factor in any relationship or interaction. Effective information flows correct misconception and solves many misunderstandings. When this is lacking, it causes conflicts in marriage. Keeping things to oneself may end up in doing harm to both the person and the marriage.

2.3.3. Childlessness

Africans, particularly Ghanaians value childbearing in marriage very much. A delay or the inability on the part of married partners to give birth to children could bring bitterness and frustration in marriage. Therefore, when a couple live together for many years without a child and they are convinced that their marriage will be fruitless they may decide to break the marriage relationship.

2.3.4. Interference of In-Laws

Under interference or involvement in the affairs of the marriage by in-laws may affect a smooth marriage such interference may deprive the married couples the kind of privacy and independence they may wish to enjoy. When in laws take side during misunderstanding in the marriage, they sometimes unknowingly end up interfering with the running of their homes. This often results in conflicts between the couples and may lead to breaking of the home.

2.3.5. Financial Constraints

It goes without saying that almost any activity or interaction involves some financial commitments. Marriage, whether in rural or urban areas, Christian, or not calls for some expense. It is a common observation that among Ghanaian living overseas, a major factor the causes separation or divorce is finance, Afful- Broni (2005). In a situation where one partner is unemployed and depends totally on the other, the stability of the marriage may be threatened. Sometimes a couple's problem may stem from how and on what to spend the family income. If one partner feels money is habitually spent on unnecessary things, he or she may be worried about the marital union.

2.3.6. Cruelty and Violence

Afful-Broni (2005) also states that infliction of physical, psychological or emotional pain otherwise known as wife or husband abuse is also a factor that can lead to the breakdown of marriages. Wife and husband abuse sometimes arise as a result of drug abuse, uncontrolled anger, home mismanagement and disrespect. Studies have shown that a man who grew up in an abusive home is quite likely to perpetuate this neurotic behaviour.

2.3.7. Early Marriage

One factor which could contribute to the instability of marriage in the society is the refusal or inability to set a minimum age for those who enter into it. Another cause could be the unqualified excitement that some parents may have over the courtship of their teenage or underage children. Once the parents are unable to caution or offer mature advice about the dangers in early marriage, it will be difficult to stop them from going ahead to marry once pregnancy results. Firebough Deason (1988), supporting this view says that teenage marriages have higher likelihood of divorce, dissolution, or separation than marriages of older people. Most often these girls are not matured enough either physically or psychological to cope with financial, emotional, social and psychological demands of marriage and rising of children. The lack of ability to withstand the stress and strains of parenthood can eventually lead to divorce. According to Ricker and Brisbane (1992) early marriage suggests an emotional and social immaturity, an incomplete education, inability to be self-supporting and lack of opportunity to adjust to marriage before the strains of pregnancy jeopardize the stability of marriage.

2.4. The Effect of Broken Homes on Education

Broken home has done a lot of harm to many of our Ghanaian children. And the author of Critical Issues for Educational Leadership in Ghana, Afful-Broni (2005), talks about it. He said the effects that broken home have on people are more tremendous. First and foremost, in as much as both or either of partners may have a called for situation, they are the ones who are hit by its many negative repercussions. The effects of broken homes vary. Even though the couples themselves are the ones directly hit, the children are the ones who suffer most from these unfortunate effects. It may even be said that in extreme cases of physical, emotional or psychological abuse, the departure of one member of the family fundamentally alters the structure and dynamics of the home. Even when such cases eventually turn out for the good of the rest of the family, it still requires a great deal of adjustment on the part of all involved especially the child and such adjustment can come at great cost. Research had proved that marry juvenile delinquents such as prostitutes, drug abusers, thieves, and school dropouts are product of broken homes. Often the risk of girls from such background bearing premarital babies is significantly greater.

The phenomenon of broken home is a great obstacle to a child's ability or motivation to succeed academically. It may disturb him emotionally, having deprived him of valuable parental security within the family (Ausu, 1984). The child may experience an emotional block which in turn may interfere with his ability to demonstrate evidence of the intelligence which he/she actually possesses. When children are motivated, they are inspired to reach higher. Unfortunately, children from broken homes often lack adult encouragement.

2.5. Empirical Review

2.5.1. Divorce Impact on Academic Achievement

Early research into divorce and separation was conducted under the premise that all children would be uniformly affected (Allison, 1989). This theory was later revisited as researchers started to understand that other factors can have an impact on the effect that a divorce will have. Some of the characteristics that might impact on the effect of divorce include gender, age, socio-economic status of the family and maternal employment (Kinard, 1986). However, no evidence as of 1986 has shown these factors playing much of a role in the reactions of children to marital disruptions (Kinard, 1986). Allison's (1989) study was conducted using data collected in a nationwide probability sample of children in the United States. The sample consisted of two thousand two hundred and seventy-nine children from one thousand seven hundred and forty-seven households. This study consisted of two individual data collection sessions, one in 1976 and the other in 1981. The first consisted of personal interviews held with the children in each household and the adult that knew the child best (Allison, 1989). The second also consisted of personal interviews but was not an exact duplicate of the first. There

were modifications made to both the measures and questions in the interview due to the age changes of the children over the five-year gap (Allison, 1989). During both sessions of data collection questionnaires were sent to one of the teachers for each child with a response rate of 75% in 1976 and 85% in 1981. These variations must be considered when comparing the data between both collection samples. Similarly, Kinard and Reinherz (1986) used two separate collection dates in their study. The first was a state mandated screening three months prior to children entering kindergarten in 1977. This group was made up of seven hundred and seventy-seven members. The second samples included four hundred and thirty-two members from the first group who were going into fourth grade. The data collection consisted of questionnaires being sent to the parents of the students entering kindergarten the first time, then to the parents and teachers of the children and the end of third grade. Just as Allison (1989) had some limitations in the sample group so did Kinard (1986). This study was limited to predominantly white working-class families near a major city

(Kinard, 1986) Thus this sampling will not represent minorities or those living in rural areas, nor does it take into account the socio-economic variations. Though both of these studies do have limitations in their sample groups, combined they make a strong case for the contention that divorce has a notable impact on academic performance. These studies compared the performance of students who have not experienced a divorce with those that have and agree that a correlation does exist between marital dissolution and academic performance. Allison (1981) found that those who 'experienced a marital dissolution were significantly worse off than those who did not,' (p. 546) in the area of academic performance. Furthermore Allison (1981) indicates that variations such as age, sex and maternal education have little if any effect on these results. Kinard (1986) agrees that children's academic performance is affected by divorce; however, this study suggests that age, sex, and time since the divorce can all mitigate the degree to which a divorce impacts on school performance.

A 1989 American study and a 1996 Swedish study both found that divorce does not have a lasting impact on academic achievement. Wadsby (1996) states grade point averages of those students with divorced parents were similar to that of those students with intact families. Furthermore, these results were consistent regardless of the length of time since the divorce. McCombs (1989) indicates that many factors influence the impact that divorce has on academic performance but divorce itself does not uniformly influence performance.

In 1989, McComb reached this conclusion in a study of 71 adolescents and their mothers. The mothers had all been divorced for less than a year and had custody of the children of whom the mean age was 13.3 years (McComb, 1989). This study further distinguished itself by taking into account the mother's education level and level of depression, interparental conflict and the relationship between the child and each parent. Furthermore, McComb based academic performance on the grade point averages from the most recent grading period. This study showed that there were changes in student's performance which correlated more closely with the changes in the variants listed rather than the actual divorce.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Design

The study employed descriptive survey design. The descriptive survey was chosen because it can be used to provide a lot of information from quite a large sample of individuals. Descriptive research describes areas like possible behaviour attitudes, values and characteristics. The design, however, has its disadvantages. It is very difficult to construct, since the questions posed to be answered must be very clear to the respondents if the right responses are to be elicited. Despite these misgivings, it is considered the most appropriate of all the designs to be used to find out the effect of broken homes on academic performance of children in the Lower Manya Krobo District. The target population for the study consisted of 4485 pupils, 253 teachers in 27 schools in five communities in the Lower Manya Krobo district. In addition, 50 parents whose wards attend the five selected schools in the district and some opinion leaders in the district were included. Five schools representing 19% of the total number of schools were drawn by the simple random technique out of the 27 Junior High School (JHS) in the study area. With respect to the students, a total number of 150 JHS students were drawn for the study in which 30 students from each school were selected. Pertaining to the teachers, 15 out of the 40 teachers in the selected schools, (i.e.38%) of the teachers were used for the study; three were selected from each school. The researcher also selected 50 parents, who had at least one ward among the 150 students that had been selected, as respondents for the study. Purposive sampling was then used to select some opinion leaders in the district. The questionnaire and interview methods were used for data collection. Kerlinger (1973) observed that the questionnaire is widely used for collecting data in educational research because it is effective for securing factual information about practices and conditions and for enquiring into the opinions and attitudes of a subject. It consisted of 18 questions grouped into sections A, B, C, D and E.

To ensure face validity, all three questionnaires were tested with the various groups of respondents in a pretesting process under the pilot study. As described earlier, this is to validate the understanding of the various respondents to the questions that were posed in the survey questionnaire. To ensure the content validity of the questionnaires, the questionnaires were guided by the objectives of the study and the research questions. Other important literature on the subject of family, divorce and academic successes of children were also visited to ensure rich content of the subject matter. Again, to ensure construct validity the questionnaires were designed in a way that the respondents could easily respond to them.

3.2. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process began on 9th March, 2010 and ended on 15th March, 2010. The questionnaire for teachers and students were personally delivered to the two groups in their various schools after obtaining permission

from the head teachers of the schools. The student respondents in each were put together with the help of the assistant heads. A few of respondents asked a few questions to clear their doubts and misunderstandings. The questionnaires were collected on the same day. This was done to ensure 100% return rate. In the case of the parents, the researcher again administered the questionnaires and interviews personally. Permission was sought from the heads of schools to use the parents of the students who were selected as respondents for the study. The researcher was introduced to the parents at an emergency meeting held by the PTA where the purpose of the study was carefully explained.

3.3. Summary of the Findings

The main findings from the research were as follows:

The divorce rate among married couples is quite high, an average high of about 42%. Single parenting was also high following high divorce rates and separations. The total percentage of parents who were single, separated or divorced was 78%. The main occupations for the people of the community were trading, dressmaking (seamstress), farming and transport business with majority of them in trading and transport. The number one cause of divorce and broken homes in the district was financial constraints. This was followed by Adultery or infidelity on the part of any of the spouses. Following the high rates of separations and divorce, most children did not stay with their parents but rather with guardians, such as, grandmothers, uncles and aunties. The educational level of most parents in the district was very low. Most had schooled only up to primary or Junior High/Middle School levels and this had negative impact on their children's education. More than half of families resort to arguments, quarrels and fights to resolve their differences. Fathers however were more willing to resolve or see to the resolution of family conflicts. Almost half of the number of children believed that conditions at home affected their academic performance while the other half thought it did not.

4. Conclusions

The study shows that the rate of divorce in the community is high and this is likely to threaten the future and stability of the basic unit of society, that is, the family. If this continues for the next decade, it will lead to the eventual breakdown of the family system. Children may suffer the stresses that come with single parenting and eventually affect their education.

Financial constraint stands out as the major cause of divorce in the study area. This could be due to lack of preparation especially on the part of the man before marriage as well as weak educational background of parents that could earn them gainful employment. This is followed by adultery which brings about divided love, incomplete affection and lack of trust between the couples. These developments need to be addressed by stakeholders to save the future of children with respect to education. It is evident from the study that there is the need for training or education in conflict management. Most parents lack the skills needed for conflict resolution and something positive must be done to stem the tide.

The study shows that majority of the people from broken homes are engaged in activities that do not help their academic performance either by their parents or guardians. There is the need for education to arrest the unfortunate situation.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research the following recommendations are being made:

Effective pre-marital counselling should be given to couples who are about to enter into marriage and much attention should also be placed on post-marital counselling. Parents, religious bodies, educational institutions and Non-Governmental Organisations must all be on board and educate individuals under their care about tolerance, love and commitment in marriage. This will reduce the frequency of divorce and separations in marriages.

The offices of FIDA, DOVSU, WAJU and family tribunal courts should be able to perform their roles in a more sensitive manner when resolving problems between marriage couples. They should use tact and wisdom so that one of the partners does not lose interest in the marriage. The problems of domestic violence should be resolved by these institutions with the view to protecting the marriage institution. Churches, NGOs and traditional authorities should be encouraged the more by society to take up the responsibility of caring for the needy children in their communities. Most of them can be assisted with the provision of stationery, uniforms and other material needs to contribute to their education.

The Ghana Education Service (GES) should ensure equitable distribution of teachers with various qualifications to the various regions and their districts or better still focusing on posting more teachers to schools in deprived communities or rural areas.

This must also go with incentives for the teachers and strict supervision by circuit supervisors to ensure that the teachers there are effectively contributing their quota to the development of the children in those areas. This will ensure effective teaching and thereby boosting the morale of pupils especially from broken homes.

Government should create more tax reliefs and reductions for businesses in the rural areas and deprived communities to encourage people to set up their businesses there. This will offer jobs for the people there. Again, people from deprived communities who have made it elsewhere should be encouraged by society to go back and support the youth and make contributions that will go a long way to raise the standard of living of the people in deprived communities.

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