

## PARENTAL CONFLICT PREDICTING TRAUMATIC BEHAVIOURS AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN ESAN LAND OF EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explored parental conflict predicting traumatic behaviours among primary school pupils in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study. This study adopted the descriptive research design. The total study participants were 498 which comprises of 104 community members and 104 primary school pupils while the study also sampled 290 primary school teachers which were drawn from a total of 2,041 teachers in 227 Public Primary School in the study area. The study instrument was a questionnaire titled: Parental Conflict Predicting Traumatic Behaviours among Primary School Pupils Questionnaire (PCPTBPSPQ) was used. Data collected were analyzed. The findings revealed that parental conflict predict traumatic behaviours among primary school pupils. The study showed that teachers and primary school pupils have positive perceptions on the effects of parental conflict among Primary School Pupils. It was also revealed in this study that community members have positive perceptions on their role in minimizing the effects of parental conflict among Primary School Pupils in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made; that parents should have a clear perception on how their way of living at home with the children is in no small measure affect the emotional, intellectual, social and psychological functioning of their children both in and outside home especially in the classroom activities; pupils should feel-free to relate their traumatic incidents at home with his/her class teacher, school psychologists and counsellors for early therapy; teachers, school psychologists and counsellors should plan appropriate preventive psychological strategies against those factors that predict traumatic behaviours among primary school pupils especially the destructive parental conflict; community leaders, clergies should always participate in accelerating the restoration of peace and harmony to a conflicting family and a good community member should always contribute to the restoration of peace and harmony of a conflict home by encouraging, supporting and praying for them.*

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## Introduction

Conflict is a normal and unavoidable part of family life. It is a common behaviour of two parents to have different ideas, opinions, values, and priorities. However, when conflict between parents is handled in destructive rather than constructive ways, it can have negative consequences both for parents and their children. Kusekwa (2017) describes parental conflict as a vexation that is expressed openly, quarrelsome acts, and disagreements that take place between a husband and wife. When a couple is upset with each other and this displeasure is seen by other parties within the home, it is parental conflict. In many cases, parental conflict is usually high in couples that experience domestic family cruelty; however, conflict may occur without resulting in a series of abusive behaviours where one partner tries to control the other or exercise their powers over the other (Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited (ANROWS, 2017). In some homes, one partner may develop feelings of suspicion or demand to know every single detail about their spouse. They insist on knowing what they are doing and who they are with at every point in time. Some even go to the extent of putting trackers on their spouse's phones, cars, and other communication devices. After the life-changing incident, the person may exhibit behaviours that show that they have become disconnected from the incident that they experienced (Lange et al., 2022). These are things that bring up discord within the family. Children are vulnerable to the impact of conflict whether their parents are together, apart, or in the process of separation. Conflict between parents can place children at risk when it is frequent, unresolved, intense, or about the child (Goetze-Morey et al., 2003; Amato, 2005). Conflict between parents, not just the event of parental separation or divorce, is a key factor in explaining why some children fair better than others when parental relationships breakdown (Coleman and Glenn, 2009). When parental conflict relationships result in dysfunctional parenting practices, it is observed that children experiences distraction in the classroom activities, low academic performance, anxiety, depression, shame, low self-esteem, among others.

Parental conflict can result in a chronic infantile narcissism, aggressiveness, emotional transference, addict type personality, increased parent-child conflict, among others. Hence, the longer parental conflict continues and the greater the tension between the parents, the greater the likelihood that psychological difficulties will result for children such as emotional and behaviour problems, anxiety, depression, sleep problems, low self-esteem, school problems and a number of other difficulties. It is perceived also that children with social-behavioral problems are at high risk for developing long-term, pervasive adjustment problems. Home-school relationships may be critical to alleviating the negative effects of behavior problems and to fostering student success. The environment or community in which homes and schools are situated represents an important influence on the home-school relationship. Despite the evidence supporting positive parent-teacher relationships and the association between community context and educational practices and student outcomes, little is known about the relation between community context and parent-teacher relationships

Nevertheless, perhaps, psychologists are in a unique position to identify children who are experiencing difficulties following a natural disaster because of their role, expertise, and extended contact with children. However, every young person reacts differently to a traumatic event so it is not always clear what types of reactions they will display or how the event might affect them in the longer-term. This resource package is therefore designed to assist teachers in becoming more attuned to identifying emotional and behavioural difficulties in their pupils following a traumatic event and provides information on what they can do to prevent the likelihood of children developing long-term adverse reactions.

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## Statement of the Problem

Research over the last decade has provided deeper insight into not only the outcomes for children of exposure to destructive conflict but also how children are affected and why some children appear more vulnerable or resilient than others. In other words, there is more of an understanding of 'why, when, and how' parental conflict affects some but not all children (Cummings and Davies, 2010). Parental conflict may make children feel confused, upset, helpless, or fearful and may affect their self-esteem and sense of self-worth (Acquah, 2023).

YanMing, (2023), proposed that when students with a high sense of self-efficacy face learning pressure and difficulties, they have greater confidence, are not only more willing to accept challenges, but also good at evaluating and reflecting on their own learning process and adjusting learning methods, so as to achieve learning success. On the contrary, students with low self-efficacy are full of anxiety and fear about learning, and choose to give up when they encounter difficulties, thus hindering learning

Research has also focused on how family relationship patterns are passed from one generation to the next. One explanation is that conflict between parents disturbs other relationships within the family, such as between a parent and child (Grych and Fincham, 2001). There is also evidence to suggest that a family environment marked by destructive conflict affects normal developmental processes, such as brain development, which in turn affect children's emotional, behavioural and social development (Van Goozen et al., 2007).

Children can develop difficulties when conflict between parents is handled destructively. Destructive conflict includes: physical or verbal aggression (Cummings et al., 2000; Davies et al., 2002; Kitzmann et al., 2003); sulking or the 'silent treatment' (Ablow and Measelle, 2009); getting caught up in highly intense or heated arguments (Cummings and Davies, 2010) and withdrawing or walking away from an argument (Sturge-Apple et al., 2006). Children are particularly upset when they or issues relevant to them are the subject of an argument (Amato, 2005; Shelton and Harold, 2007).

Ghysens (2009) carryout a research on parents', teachers' and children's perception of parental involvement in relation with pupils' learning achievement and wellbeing. In the study, the association between parent, pupil and teacher perceptions, and their relationship with child achievement and wellbeing were questioned. A survey was administered to 117 fifth- and sixth grade teachers, 484 parents and their children. The results indicated congruence between parent and child perceptions, but parent and teacher ratings tend to diverge. This is especially true for dimensions concerning home involvement and estimations for lower SES parents. For pupil achievement as well as wellbeing, parental involvement seemed to be an influencing factor, however exerting only a little to moderate effect. Parental involvement measures were the best predictors for children with low educated parents and traditional families.

According to Gilbert and Yungungu (2015), pupils' dropout works against the constitutional rights of a child and in the end; it can negatively affect a country's socio-economic development. Gilbert and Yungungu (2015) investigated teachers' perceptions on the factors that influence school dropout among upper primary school pupils in Trans-Nzioa East, Trans-Nzioa County, Kenya. The objectives of their study were, to establish ways in which teachers perceive cultural practices as influencing school dropouts, to find out teachers' perceptions on how insecurity influences school dropout, to determine teachers' perceptions on how pupils' family background influences school dropout and to find out teachers' perceptions on ways in which peer pressure influences school dropout. An ex-post

facto study design was adopted for the study. They based their study on Vrooms' Expectancy theory of motivation as cited by Wayne and Miskel (2008). The target population was 250 respondents. The study used a sample population of 100 respondents, which included head teachers and class teachers. The adopted a combination of simple random, purposive and stratified random sampling techniques. Questionnaires, Observation schedules and interview schedules were used to collect data. Data was analyzed by frequency, tables and percentages tables of descriptive statistics. Data was analyzed using the statistical package for the social sciences program (SPSS). The findings of their study revealed that negative cultural practices, insecurity in schools, parental negligence and negative peer pressure were major factors influencing dropout among upper primary school pupils according to teachers. The researchers therefore recommend that schools can gradually introduce communication in English by pupils; moreover, punishment to victims should be mild. Stakeholders in child welfare should educate and encourage parents on the need to take active role in children's education whether formal or non-formal, teachers should trace the whereabouts of victims of pregnancy with an aim of encouraging them to continue with education, stakeholders can educate the public, teachers and pupils inclusive on human rights, besides teachers can devise ways of discouraging bullying like through counseling, more primary schools and village polytechnics can be opened up to cater for long distances and dropouts respectively. They further supports that, schools can engage in agro-business in order to raise enough food and extra money for poor pupils, more importantly pupils should be encouraged to seek guiding and counselling from teachers whenever in a dilemma.

Cornel (2014) conducted a research study on the effects of broken marriage on Primary School Pupils' Academic Performance in Ilala Municipality. The study aimed to investigate the effects of broken marriage on academic performance of primary school pupils and the role of teachers and community members in minimizing those effects. The study employed qualitative and quantitative research approach. The sample includes pupils from the selected primary schools in Ilala Municipality, head teachers, and community members. The research instruments used to collect information were interviews, observations, and documentary reviews. The study findings showed that broken marriages contribute a lot to student's poor academic performance, psychological problems academic performance and delinquent behavior among students. Community members were aware that broken marriages have effects on children's academic performance and that broken marriages contribute much to negative perception. The researcher recommends that parents should be responsible to their children by helping to make their marriages work in order to ensure the good welfare of their children. The community members, including teachers, neighbors and all who love children should make it their responsibility regardless being their biological parents or otherwise. Schools at all levels should have strong guidance and counseling unit to help all the children in need of special attention. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT), Universities and religious organizations should work together and develop training programme on Love.

Verbal and non-verbal interactions that occur daily between teachers and headteachers, teachers and pupils, and among pupils can generate conflict that may adversely affect teaching, learning, and schooling effectiveness. Little attention is, however, paid to the quality of relationships that exists between teachers and pupils, among teachers, among pupils, between teachers and their school heads, and between schools and their local communities. It was based on this aforementioned backdrop that Opoku-Asare, Takyi and Owusu-Mensah (2015) investigated the conflict prevalence in Ghana's primary schools, and how relationship conflict is understood to affect teaching and learning at the level of headteachers as administrators, teachers as classroom managers, and pupils as learners, and direct beneficiaries of primary education. Using data gathered via interview, questionnaire

administration, and observation in 30 public primary schools in 10 circuits of one district of Ashanti Region, the findings revealed a high prevalence of fighting, heckling, bullying, and other forms of relationship conflict among pupils; strained teacher-pupil relations due to insolence, indiscipline, and use of offensive language; and teacher-parent arguments and quarrels due to harsh punishment and verbal assault of pupils. Teacher-pupil conflicts may extend to teachers excluding the affected pupils from teaching and learning activities, denying them the rights to ask and answer questions, and have their class exercises marked, leading to lowered pupil self-esteem, reduced concentration during lessons, and passive involvement in learning activities, which could result in truancy and school dropout. Their study recommended that strengthening guidance mechanisms and encouraging peer mediation could significantly curb conflict in school environments and thereby raise educational standards in the district.

Parental conflict is also assumed responsible for students' antisocial behaviours both in and outside the school environment. Antisocial behaviours among students appear to be a major source of concern to all stakeholders in education, law enforcement agency and the general public. Since they allegedly complain about students' antisocial behaviour that includes illicit conducts, secret cult, stealing, drugs and substance use, sexual activities, smoking and aggression. More worrisome is perhaps the hue and cry by secondary school teachers and principals over gross undisciplined and misconduct. There are alleged cases of student(s) beating up their teacher(s), display of occultist prowess with impunity in the school environment, flagrant disobedience to laid down rules and regulation, and utter disregard for constituted authority.

It is on these above allegations and disputing milieu that Obiyan, Ehigbor and Ojugo (2017) opined that since the major roles of educational psychologists include ensuring a crisis-free society through behaviour modification strategies, there is the need to research into factors that are related to deviant behaviours among students. They therefore investigated the influence of parenting styles on deviant behaviours of senior secondary school students in Esan Land of Edo State. Three hypotheses were tested in the study. The study employed a correlational study. 566 senior secondary school students were sampled from the entire population of 11,316 senior secondary school students in Esan Land of Edo State. A questionnaire titled Parenting Styles and Deviant Behaviours Questionnaire (PSDBQ)" was used. Data collected were analyzed. The findings revealed that the parenting styles (authoritarian and laissez-faire) had significant positive relationship with deviant behaviours, while democratic parenting style had significant negative relationship with deviant behaviours. Based on the findings of their study, they made the following recommendations; that parents should have a clear perception of how their involvements in their child's upbringing influence the children social and psychological development and educators should create more public awareness to discourage the antisocial behaviours of adolescents.

While literature on the relationship between parental conflicts has focused on school going children's drop out, it is silent on the role of teachers and community members in minimizing the negative effects on parental conflict on school going children. Because the increasing rate of dropout has affected the government and family social economic abilities, it is important to consider teachers and community members' role in minimizing the effects of parental conflict on school going children. This study intended to fill this gap in the literature. Studies such as those of (Andrew, 1981; Harold *et al.*, 2007; Cummings & Davies 1994; Turner & Koplec, 2006) were done in USA with a focus on nuclei family. Not much has been done in Nigeria where most families still have the elements of communal and extended families.

Hence, there is a research gap in knowledge which this study sought to fill by exploring parental conflict predicting traumatic behaviours among primary school pupils in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria. Thus, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers on the effects of parental conflict among Primary School Pupils in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria?
2. What are children's perceptions on the effects of parental conflict on their academic performance in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria?
3. What are the perceptions of the community members on their role in minimizing the effects of parental conflict among Primary School Pupils in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria?

## METHODS

This study adopted the descriptive research design. The total study participants were 498 which comprises of 104 community members and 104 primary school pupils while the study also sampled 290 primary school teachers which were drawn from a total of 2,041 teachers in 227 Public Primary School in the study area as obtained in Universal Basic Education Board, Benin City, Edo State as at 2016/2017 academic session. The proportional sampling technique was used as the sampling technique in order to equitably cover the 5 Local Government Areas in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria.

The study instrument was a questionnaire titled: Parental Conflict Predicting Traumatic Behaviours among Primary School Pupils Questionnaire (PCPTBPSPQ). The questionnaire was divided into two sections of A and B. Section A solicited personal and environmental information of the respondents such as the name of their school, sex, marital status, age, teaching experience, class size and school location. Data on the name of the school helped the teacher to classify the school based on their location. Section B covered the responses of teachers' on Traumatic Behaviours among Primary School Pupils. There were 10-items that measured parental conflict predicting traumatic behaviours among primary school pupils.

The instrument was subjected to internal consistency using the split-half reliability. This was done by administering the instrument to 60 teachers who were not included in the sample. The data collected were analysed using the Cronbach Alpha formula and reliability coefficient of 0.75 and 0.89 respectively were obtained for parts A and B of the instrument. The researchers with the assistance of three trained research assistants administered the instrument on the participants. The completed copies of the questionnaire were descriptively analysed using mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) and standard deviation (S.D).

## RESULTS

Results of the analysis and test of hypothesis are presented below:

**Research Question 1:** What are the perceptions of teachers' on the effects of parental conflict among Primary School Pupils in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria?

**Table 1:** Perceptions of teachers' on the effects of parental conflict among Primary School Pupils in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria

S/n	Items	N	$\bar{X}$	Std.dev.	Remark
1.	Children from broken home are tend to experience distraction in the classroom activities	290	2.45	1.48	Disagreed
2.	I can boldly say that parental conflicts are responsible for low academic performance of pupils	290	2.63	1.08	Agreed
3.	I have observed that children with low self-esteem and chronic anxiety are from homes of conflict	290	2.56	1.21	Agreed
4.	Children from destructive conflicting homes are likely to behave aggressively	290	2.60	1.16	Agreed
5.	Children with conflicting parents are likely to possess the habit of infantile narcissism even throughout their period of transition	290	2.69	1.06	Agreed
Overall mean = 2.59					

**Note:** Significant mean ( $\bar{X} \geq 2.50$ )

Result in Table 1 showed that majority of the teachers agreed on items 2, 3, 4 and 5 at a mean score range of 2.56 to 2.69 and disagreed with item 1 at a mean score of 2.45. Furthermore, the overall mean score of 2.59 is greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. Hence, it is concluded that teachers have positive perceptions on the effects of parental conflict among Primary School Pupils in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria.

**Research Question 2:** What are children's perceptions on the effects of parental conflict on their academic performance in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria?

**Table 2:** Children's perceptions on the effects of parental conflict and their academic performance in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria

S/n	Items	N	$\bar{X}$	Std.dev.	Remark
	I am often unable to concentrate in doing my assignment because of my parents' regular disagreement at home	104	2.52	1.03	Agreed
	The joy of my parent is my inspiration in everything I do, especially in the classroom activities	104	2.68	0.99	Agreed
	I found it difficult to forget about how my father maltreat my mother sometimes	104	2.37	1.12	Disagreed
	I often sleep in classroom during teaching and learning process because the quarrel of my parent deprive me from sleep in the night	104	2.65	1.05	Agreed
	I can't just control my aggression sometimes	104	2.55	1.06	Agreed
Overall mean = 2.55					

**Note:** Significant mean ( $\bar{X} \geq 2.50$ )

Result in Table 2 revealed that almost all the pupils who participated agreed on items 1, 2, 4 and 5 at a mean score range of 2.55 to 2.68 and disagreed with item 3 at a mean score of 2.37. Furthermore, the overall mean score of 2.55 is greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. Consequently, it is concluded that primary school pupils have positive perceptions on the effects of parental conflict and their academic performance in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria.

**Research Question 3:** What are the perceptions of the community members on their role in minimizing the effects of parental conflict among Primary School Pupils in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria?

**Table 3:** Perceptions of the community members on their role in minimizing the effects of parental conflict among Primary School Pupils in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria

S/n	Items	N	$\bar{X}$	Std.dev.	Remark
	Punishment should be implemented on family likely to involve in any destructive conflict	104	2.72	1.06	Agreed
	Quarrelling in the present of children should be ban	104	2.47	1.14	Disagreed
	Community leaders, clergies should always participate in accelerating the restoration of peace and harmony to a conflicting family	104	2.70	1.02	Agreed
	Community members should show extra love and care to the children with fighting parents	104	2.62	0.73	Agreed
	A good community member should always contribute to the restoration of peace and harmony of a conflict home by encouraging, supporting and praying for them	104	2.52	0.74	Agreed
Overall mean = 2.62					

**Note:** Significant mean ( $\bar{X} \geq 2.50$ )

Result in Table 3 proved that almost all the community members who participated agreed on items 1, 3, 4 and 5 at a mean score range of 2.52 to 2.72 and disagreed with item 2 at a mean score of 2.47. Furthermore, the overall mean score of 2.62 is greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. Therefore, it is concluded that community members have positive perceptions on their role in minimizing the effects of parental conflict among Primary School Pupils in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria

## Discussions

Results showed that there are positive perceptions on the effects of parental conflict among Primary School Pupils in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria. This is in line with the findings of Cornel (2014) who conducted a research study on the effects of broken marriage on Primary School Pupils' Academic Performance in Ilala Municipality. The study findings showed that broken marriages contribute a lot to student's poor academic performance, psychological problems, academic performance and delinquent behavior among students. Community members were aware that broken marriages have effects on children's academic performance and that broken marriages contribute much to negative perception. The researcher recommends that parents should be responsible to their children by helping to make their marriages work in order to ensure the good welfare of their children. The community members, including teachers, neighbors and all who love children should make it

their responsibility regardless being their biological parents or otherwise. Schools at all levels should have strong guidance and counseling unit to help all the children in need of special attention. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT), Universities and religious organizations should work together and develop training programme on Love.

Corroborating findings, Ghysens (2009) opined that there is a relationship/congruence between parent and child perceptions, but parent and teacher ratings tend to diverge. This is especially true for dimensions concerning home involvement and estimations for lower SES parents. For pupil achievement as well as wellbeing, parental involvement seemed to be an influencing factor, however exerting only a little to moderate effect. Parental involvement measures were the best predictors for children with low educated parents and traditional families.

The study is also in accordance with Gilbert and Yungungu (2015) who investigated teachers' perceptions on the factors that influence school dropout among upper primary school pupils in Trans-Nzioa East, Trans-Nzioa County, Kenya. The findings of their study revealed that negative cultural practices, insecurity in schools, parental negligence and negative peer pressure were major factors influencing dropout among upper primary school pupils according to teachers. The researchers therefore recommend that schools can gradually introduce communication in English by pupils; moreover, punishment to victims should be mild. Stakeholders in child welfare should educate and encourage parents on the need to take active role in children's education whether formal or non-formal, teachers should trace the whereabouts of victims of pregnancy with an aim of encouraging them to continue with education, stakeholders can educate the public, teachers and pupils inclusive on human rights, besides teachers can devise ways of discouraging bullying like through counseling, more primary schools and village polytechnics can be opened up to cater for long distances and dropouts respectively. They further supports that, schools can engage in agro-business in order to raise enough food and extra money for poor pupils, more importantly pupils should be encouraged to seek guiding and counselling from teachers whenever in a dilemma.

## **Conclusion**

When conflict between parents is handled in destructive rather than constructive ways, it can have negative consequences both for parents and their children. Children are vulnerable to the impact of conflict whether their parents are together, apart, or in the process of separation. Conflict between parents can place children at risk when it is frequent, unresolved, intense, or about the child. This study has established that parental conflict predict traumatic behaviours among primary school pupils. The study showed that teachers and primary school pupils have positive perceptions on the effects of parental conflict among Primary School Pupils. It was also revealed in this study that community members have positive perceptions on their role in minimizing the effects of parental conflict among Primary School Pupils in Esan Land of Edo State, Nigeria

## **Recommendations**

Arising from the findings, are the following recommendations:

1. Parents should have a clear perception on how their way of life at home with the children, in no small measure affect the emotional, intellectual, social and psychological functioning of their children both in and outside home especially in the classroom activities.

2. Pupils should feel-free to relate their traumatic incidents at home with his/her class teacher, school psychologists and counsellors for early therapy
3. Teachers, school psychologists and counsellors should plan appropriate preventive psychological strategies against those factors that predict traumatic behaviours among primary school pupils especially the destructive parental conflict.
4. Community leaders, clergies should always participate in accelerating the restoration of peace and harmony to a conflicting family
5. Community members should show extra love and care to the children with fighting parents
6. A good community member should always contribute to the restoration of peace and harmony of a conflict home by encouraging, supporting and praying for them

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