

## Influence of Family Structure on the Mental Health and Academic Performance of In-School Adolescents

(Pengaruh Struktur Keluarga dalam Kesehatan Mental dan Pencapaian Akademik Remaja Sekolah)

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### ABSTRACT

*Many factors affect the mental capacity and hence the academic performance of adolescents. The aim of this study is to determine whether relationship exists between family structure and academic performance of in-school adolescents. The respondents were 128 in school adolescents aged from 10 to 19 years from three secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Questionnaire was the means of data collection and the data were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation) at 0.05 level of significance. Academic performance was used to judge the mental health of the adolescents and this was based on the average score in five major subjects for three consecutive terms. Data analysis revealed that over 80% of the respondents were being brought up in good family structures and had good academic performance. In addition, high parental occupational and socioeconomic status and being raised in a monogamous family had significant influence on the academic performance of in-school adolescents in Ekiti State. The study suggests that good family structure has positive influence on the mental health and academic performance of in-school adolescents.*

*Key words: In-school adolescents, family structure, mental health, academic performance*

### ABSTRAK

*Terdapat banyak faktor yang mempengaruhi kapasiti mental dan pencapaian akademik dalam kalangan remaja. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti sama ada terdapat hubungan antara struktur keluarga dan pencapaian akademik remaja yang masih bersekolah. Seramai 128 responden remaja sekolah yang berumur di antara 10 hingga 19 tahun dari tiga buah sekolah menengah di negeri Ekiti, Nigeria. Soal selidik digunakan dalam kajian ini. Data dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif dan inferensi (Korelasi Pearson) pada tahap signifikan 0.05. Pencapaian akademik diukur menggunakan kesihatan mental remaja dengan berdasarkan purata skor bagi lima subjek utama (major) secara berurutan. Data yang dianalisis menunjukkan bahawa lebih 80% responden membesar dalam keluarga yang baik strukturnya dan memperoleh keputusan yang baik dalam akademik mereka. Selain itu, ibu bapa yang tinggi pendidikan, status sosioekonomi, dan keluarga yang monogami (kukuh) mempunyai hubungan yang signifikan dengan pencapaian akademik bagi remaja sekolah di negeri Ekiti. Justeru, dapatan kajian ini merumuskan bahawa struktur keluarga yang baik (kukuh) member pengaruh positif kepada kesihatan mental dan pencapaian akademik remaja sekolah.*

*Kata kunci: Pendidikan remaja, struktur keluarga, kesihatan mental, prestasi akademik*

### INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is the most critical period human beings experience in the course of existence. It is a period of rapid physical, psychological and intellectual development which can either be made or marred depending on how well individuals, with the help of others, are able to go through this period. Adolescence is a period of schooling which requires good mental health to cope with the rigor of academics. Mental health, according to Maylum (2007), is the successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationship with other people and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity. From early childhood until late life, mental health is the springboard of thinking and communications skills, learning, emotional growth, resilience and self-esteem.

Many factors affect the mental health and academic performance of adolescents. One of such factors is family structure. Shelton (2012) defined family structure as the substantial makeup of the members in relationship to one another without respect to roles and function. Mosby's Medical Dictionary (2009) defined family structure as the composition and membership of the family and the organization and patterning of relationships among individual family members. It further identified the various types of family structure including: nuclear families made up of mother, father, and their biological or adoptive descendants; intact families made up of the biological parents and their children living together under the same roof; non-intact families made up of children living with their step parents; extended families consisting of two or more adults from unlike generations sharing a household;

monogamous and polygamous families which consist of one and more than one wife, respectively.

Literature is replete with findings on the influence of family structure on the mental wellbeing and academic performance of adolescents. Schneider et al. (2005) reported that family structure affects a range of child behaviour that can bear directly on educational success both at the elementary, secondary, and college levels. They further submitted that growing up in a non-intact family is linked with higher rates of stress, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem during the teenage years and *children* growing up in an "intact" family are three times less likely than those in any other family structure to experience emotional or behavioural problems such as attention deficit disorder. In addition, Manning and Lamb (2003) reported that children growing up in non-intact families were more likely to engage in delinquent behaviour, were more likely to have problem getting along with their teachers, doing homework, paying attention in school and more likely to have lower points averages. Manning and Lamb also reported that children growing up in non-intact families tended to fare worse on Peabody Vocabulary Test (PPVT) which is an indicator of cognitive development.

The size of the family in which a child grows is another important factor that affects adolescent's academic performance. In a large family, a child may not be given maximum attention especially in his academics. Oshunloye (2008) noted that the issue of homework, payment of school fees, attending Parent Teachers Associations meetings, and many more, may not be convenient for the parents as they have to cater for many children, while children in a small sized family who are well catered for perform better. Oshunloye further submitted that the negative effect of family size on intelligence were more pronounced among low and middle socio-economic status than high socio-economic status parents with few children who devote more time, money and affection to their academic performance.

Monogamous/polygamous family structure is another factor that impinges on the mental health and the academic performance of adolescents. Al-Krenawi and Slonim-Nevo (2006) reported that a polygamous family structure negatively affects the family's socioeconomic status and interpersonal relationships and impairs the children's psychological and social functioning. On the other hand, Lightman, Ernie and Al-Krenawi (2000) reported that children from monogamous families had higher levels of learning achievement, and they adjusted better to the school framework and also that the mean conflict rating was higher for children from polygamous families.

Nigeria in recent times has witnessed a drastic fall in the standard of education and poor academic performance among in-school adolescents (Usman 2009). Most of the blame has been placed on either the government or the teachers, exonerating the influence of family structure. The purpose of this research is therefore to determine the influence of selected family structure types on the mental

health of in-school adolescents in Ekiti State Nigeria using academic performance as the basis of judgement of their mental health. Although much work has been done on the influence of family structure on academic performance in previous studies but only few of such studies has been carried out among in-school adolescents in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

The major significance of this study is that it adds to the body of literature on the positive influence good family structure has on the mental wellbeing and the academic performance of adolescents. It also serves as an eye-opener to the role good family structure plays in enhancing the involvement of parents on the academic activities and the academic performance of in-school adolescents. This will thus serve to motivate all stakeholders to encourage the adoption of good family structure among members of the society so as to enhance the academic achievement of learners at all levels.

Two research questions were raised in the course of this study:

1. What is the relationship between family structure (nature of family, type of family, family size, number of wives, parental educational, occupational and socioeconomic status) and academic performance of adolescents?
2. What influence does family structure itemised in Question 1 above have on the involvement of parents in the academic activities of adolescents?

This study adopts a model (Figure 1) to discuss how family structure influences the mental health and academic performance of adolescents.

The model in Figure 1 shows the different forms of family structure and how they are linked with the mental wellbeing and academic performance of adolescents. It is conceptualized in this model that where the family structure is that of an intact family consisting of both parents, monogamous consisting of only one wife which does not give room for rivalry, hatred and unhealthy competition, nuclear consisting of only the parents and their children and of a moderate family size, the psychological and mental well-being of the adolescents raised in such homes will be enhanced thus resulting in improved adjustment to school framework, learning capacity and better academic performance of adolescents.

## METHODOLOGY

### POPULATION OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted using senior secondary school students (10-19 years) in Ekiti State, Nigeria. A total of 128 senior secondary school students which were randomly selected from three senior secondary schools classes 1 and 2 (SSS1 & SSS2) in Ekiti State constituted the respondents for this study. 68 (53.1%) are girls while 60 (46.9%) are boys. One major limitation of this study is the small sample



FIGURE 1. The conceptual framework on the influence of family structure on the mental health and academic performance of adolescents

size. The reason for this was that most of the schools which were supposed to constitute the study site did not give their consent. The three schools reported in this study represent only those whose authorities granted permission for data collection. This study was carried out in February 2012.

INSTRUMENTATION

Questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section of the instrument elicits responses on respondents' demographic attributes: age, gender, parental educational, occupational status and type of family structure (intact/non-intact, family size, monogamous/polygamous, nuclear/extended). Items in the instrument were coded to aid data analysis and interpretation. With respect to type of family, nuclear family was coded '1' while extended was coded '2'. Family size, small (3-5) was coded '1', moderate (6-7) was coded '2', while large (8 and above) was coded '3'. With respect to nature of family, living with biological parent was coded '1', grandparents '2', relatives '3'. Parents with no formal education were coded '1', those with primary education '2', those with secondary education '3' and those with tertiary education '4'. Parents with low occupational and socio economic status (SES) were coded '1', medium '2', and high '3', respectively.

Section Two of the instrument was used to obtain information on the involvement of parents on the academic

activities of the respondents. This section of the instrument had eight items with reliability coefficient of 0.861. The response format used in this section was a Likert type scale of never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3) and always (4).

Section Three of the instrument was used to record information on the academic performance of the adolescents which was in turn used to judge their mental well-being. To ensure validity and reliability of the scores used to determine the academic performance of respondents, teacher-reported scores in five subjects for three consecutive terms were obtained for each respondent from the school authorities. Average performance of the respondents in five major subjects in their area of discipline (science, arts, social science, commercial) was obtained using the exam scores for three consecutive terms in each subject, summing this up for all the five subjects and calculating the average. The average mark for each student was then graded. Those who scored below 40 were graded 'poor' (1), 40-49 'fair' (2), 50-59 'above average' (3), 60-69 'good' (4) and above 70 'excellent' (5). To answer Research Question 1, each of the selected family variables was correlated (using bi-variate Pearson correlation analysis) with the academic performance of the adolescents using SPSS version 12 at 0.05 level of significance.

To answer Research Question 2, each of the selected family variables was correlated with parental involvement variables at 0.05 level of significance.

## FINDINGS

## DEMOGRAPHIC ATTRIBUTES

53.1% of the respondents are female, 50.8% are between 10-14 years, 62.5% are in public schools, majority (84.4%) are living with their biological parents, 77.3% are from nuclear families, 78.9% had moderate to fairly large family size and 77.3% are from monogamous homes. In addition, 59.4% of the parents had tertiary education, 46.1% are of high working class and 37.5% are of high socio economic status. With regards to academic performance, 82% of the in-school adolescents had good academic performance and majority of these adolescents were being brought up in good family structures. The findings on the relationship between type of family structure, demographic variables of parental educational, and academic performance of adolescents are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Association between family structure and in-school adolescents' academic performance (N = 128)

Variable	Academic performance (r)
Nature of family	-.129
Type of family	-.038
Family size	.049
Parent's educational level	.122
Parent's occupational status	.302**
Parental socioeconomic status	.401**
Number of wives	-.183*

\*significant at .05 alpha level

Table 1 shows that nature of family and type of family had negative, non-significant association with academic performance of the adolescents, indicating that adolescents living with their parents in intact families and those in nuclear families had better academic performance.

Parental occupation and socioeconomic status had positive significant relationship with academic performance of adolescents indicating that adolescents having parents of high occupational and socioeconomic status had better academic performance. Table 1 also shows that number of wives present in a family had a negative and significant relationship with academic performance of adolescents indicating that monogamy favours academic performance of adolescents. Family size and parental educational status had positive non significant relationship with academic performance of adolescents.

The result in Table 2 presents the findings on influence does family variables itemised in Question 1 have on the involvement of parents in the academic activities of adolescents.

Table 2 shows that nature of family had negative non-significant relationship with all the parental involvement variables. This is an indication that adolescents living with their parents in intact families had better academic performance. The non-significant relationship may be as a result of small sample size. Number of wives had significant relationship with parents' periodic visit to school to check adolescents' performance. Parental educational status had positive non-significant relationship with all the parental involvement variables indicating that the higher the educational status of parents, the better involved they are with the academic activities of adolescents.

## DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between family variables and academic performance of in-school adolescents in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The finding of the study shows that a form of association exists between the family structures examined and academic performance of the adolescents.

This study found that over 80% of the respondents were from good family structures (living with parents in intact families, having moderate family size, from

TABLE 2. Association between family variables and involvement of parents in the academic activities of in-school adolescents (N = 128)

Variable	Nature of family (r)	Number of wives	Type of family	Family size	Parent's educational status	Parent's occupational status	Parental SES
Involvement in adolescent's homework and other academic activities	-.077	-.141	-.160	-.053	.120	.207*	.174
Release adolescents from household chores to prepare for exams	-.043	-.004	-.004	-.024	.048	.334*	.438*
Provision for extramural classes	-.118	.018	.027	.076	.015	.106	.171
Encourage adolescent to read	-.049	-.012	-.018	.055	.050	.169	.168
Visit school periodically to check adolescent's performance	-.164	.185*	.055	-.002	.048	.275*	.299*

\*Significant at .05 alpha level

nuclear families and from monogamous family structure) and had good academic performance, is an evidence that good family structure favours good mental health and good academic performance. The reports of Manning and Lamb (2003); Al-Krenawi and Slonim-Nevo (2006) all show that raising children in bad family structures, impairs the psychological and social functioning of children thus lowering the ability of such children to adjust to school framework and to get on well with their academics.

The nature of family had a negative non-significant association with academic performance of adolescents indicate that those living with their biological parent in intact families had better academic performance. This finding suggests that being brought up by one's parents in intact families would translate to being more psychological, socially and mentally healthy for good academic performance. This finding is in support of Heritage Foundation (2012) who stated that children in intact families tend to have greater academic achievement and educational attainment. Parents of children in intact families tend to be more involved in their school activities and to have higher expectations for them.

There is a positive non-significant association between family size and academic performance of in-school adolescents in Ekiti State and this findings is partly similar to the findings of Tenibijae (2009), who reported that family size does not have significant association with academic performance. The positive association observed between family size and academic performance indicates that the larger the family size, the better the academic performance. This finding is in contrast with the report of Oshunloye (2008) who stated that adolescents in smaller family size performed better academically. The likely reason for this is probably that adolescents in large family size have quite a number of siblings who are also academically inclined to motivate and assist them academically thus resulting in better academic performance.

This study found that parental educational status had a positive non-significant association with academic performance of adolescents is similar to that of Davis-Kean (2005) who reported direct effects of parental education on European American children's standardized achievement scores. The implication of this finding is that the more academically inclined parents are, the more they motivate their children for better academic performance. This is supported by Davis-Kean (2005); Dearing et al. 2001 who asserted that parental educational level is an important predictor of children's educational outcomes. The influence of parental education is further substantiated in further analysis which revealed that parents with higher educational status served better as sources of motivation to their children's academic activities.

The positive significant association between parental socio-economic status and academic performance of adolescents implies that the higher the socio-economic status of parents, the better the academic performance of the adolescents. Learners at all levels need financial support. In

situation where this is limited, the academic performance of such learners is often being jeopardized and vice versa. There has also being claims that low socioeconomic status has direct influence on a range of negative child outcomes, including low IQ, educational attainment and achievement and social-emotional problems.

The parental occupational status was also significantly and positively associated with in-school adolescents' academic performance. This indicates that the better the occupational status of parents, the better the academic performance of the adolescents. The likely reason for this is that better occupation leads to better socio economic status and hence better involvement of such parents in the academic activities of their children thus resulting in better academic performance of such children.

The finding of this study revealed a significantly negative association between number of wives and academic performance. This implies that the lesser the number of wives the better the academic performance. In essence this study is in support of monogamous type of family. Oshunloye (2008) reported that over 50% of the respondents in a particular study were from polygamous homes resulting in children's competition for the limited resources and parent's affection. This author further noted that in a situation whereby a man marries two or more wives at a time, it tends to lead to unequal treatment of children, jealousy and survival of the fittest. For a child to succeed in life, he has to struggle, which may be detrimental to his academic performance.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that living with ones biological parent in intact families, having a monogamous family structure and having parents with high educational, occupational and socioeconomic status, are all supportive of the mental well being of adolescents which in turn results in better academic performance of in-school adolescents. It is thus recommended that Government and religious bodies should constantly preach against divorce and remarriage and advocate for nuclear intact families so that the adolescents can be raised in family environment that is favourably disposed to their mental health and academic performance.

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