

THE FAMILY LIFE STRUCTURE BALANCE: KEY TO CHILDREN'S DISCIPLINE

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Abstract

The study investigated the influence of family structure in the discipline of students in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. In order to identify this relationship some questions were formulated and a sample consisting of five secondary schools was randomly selected. A total of two hundred students were used in the study as respondents to the instrument items. The children from monogamous and polygamous families in discipline, the difference between the children from intact and broken homes were all determined using the responses or items in the instrument. It was concluded that there should be a complete change of parental attitude towards children's discipline parents should create conducive home environments for their children, feel more concerned and committed and liaise with the school authorities to monitor children's academic and social activities in the school.

Introduction

The family has always been recognized as a major vehicle in the socialization of a child. This has led experts in different areas of specialization to find out the effects of family structures on the behaviour of a child. The students from various family backgrounds have a lot of personal problems which they try to cope with within their family structure. They are always pre-occupied with problems relating to their relationships with family members and school discipline. Sometimes too many of our students are characterized by over-sensitiveness, shyness, timidity, truancy, insubordination and pervasive feelings of inadequacy. However most school staff and society at large have always been pointing an accusing finger at the home environment which largely determines and shapes the students adjustment to life. The family is generally considered an important context for the development of a child's self-concept (Hurlock 1993). In the school the children are faced with relationship with teachers and other children. Their problems extend to their participation in sports and in other extra-curricula activities, leadership role, choice of values and academic performance among others. The problems caused by family structure spur the children to exhibit some disorganized and anti-social behaviours to express their unhappiness and make people feel the impact. The students themselves are aware of the magnitude of the task confronting them in terms of academics and punctuality towards the achievement of their life goals. Some children exhibit bad behaviours which include forging one's father's signature, drinking alcohol and smoking cigarette, sneaking out from the boarding house without permission, stealing classmate's belongings and resisting school authorities through breaking of school rules and regulations. All these are situations that have direct link with discipline and family structure. It is with the above understanding that (Smith 2006) stated that the family with its internal and external relationships is a highly significant social unit. He further stated that the family is probably the most important factor in determining the nature of the inter-personal relationship. The family can be an ever-available laboratory for the development of the intelligent communication among the members. The international encyclopedia of the social science volume ten, number four states that the family Service Association of America has identified the major function all families should possess as a common denominator to include: The basic biological function of reproduction and transmitter of family's special heritage; culture from one generation to another the provision of physical security; the protection; the achievement of enduring and deep emotional satisfaction. The provision of full opportunities for emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual development; the development of socially desirable character, faith or moral and ethical standards and the maintenance of order: the sharing of responsibilities and tasks among family members, the development of sound relationship between members and outside community.

Family Types in the Contemporary Society

Families may differ in terms of parental children relationship, composition, values and beliefs. All these features are known to influence the discipline process in significant ways resulting in differences in behaviour and consequently in personality types in different homes. Culturally, Nigeria has been a polygamous society right from the dawn of history. However the introduction of court and church marriages where vows and solemn promises are made, gives room for monogamy. A monogamous can be said to be an intact small unit made up of father, mother and children whereby the parents are nearly always the sole agents in the discipline of the child. In monogamous families, membership is well defined and family boundaries are clearly delineated. Otite and Ogionwo (2001) posited that monogamous type of marriage is often referred to as nuclear or intact family. However, this kind of marriage is alien to us hence, it has not been fully successful in Nigeria, rather it has always been associated with a series of divorces, separations and remarriages.

A polygamous family is made up of the father with two or more wives and all their children. In this case the family is rather large with many children from different wives. However, variations exist as regards to the family structures and understanding the human family, integrated and systematic theory of family that provides a set of valid explanations to account for the variations in the family structure. Majority of children nowadays experience the dissolution or disintegration of their families either through separation, desertion or death. Polygamous type of family which is fading away in our society is generally considered a family structure which deviates from the ideal family structure defined by the society. This kind of family is expected to have adverse effect on the children because of lack of proper role models and insufficient paternal or maternal care. Sometimes children are taken away to be reared by some other adults that is, the foster parents. The type of home environment too affects the children emotionally, mentally and socially among others. The type of family a child comes from matters a lot in the child's discipline. It is unfortunate that when a child misbehaves, the parents and teachers hardly take quick action to modify their behaviour. The home is the child's first external environment that should set the pattern for the child's attitudes toward people, things and life in general. A small family is usually economically able to provide their children opportunities to life, have the parental pressure for achievement and hardwork is strong and where the children do not live up to expectations there is parental restlessness and disappointment. This creates resentment and open confrontation between the children and the parents. The large family on the other hand has few opportunities due to restricted economic conditions and often the older children are better in social and economic situation, they result in defiant practices to societal values, norms and attitudes. The parents of large family contribute directly to the delinquency of their children by engaging them in sales of their wares in shops and markets. The children are exposed to different types of crimes, some parents even allow their children to live with non-members of the family on stipend salary per month and the conditions they are really subjected to could lead them to being delinquents.

Freud (1972) asserted that the child's position in the sequence of brothers and sisters is of very great significant for his later life. The first born child according to him is often given greater chance and encouragement and discipline than the other children and it is likely to achieve greater success than the rest. The last born children in the families might be over-pampered and so become too lazy to do their work in the schools and at homes. This aspect of the child's birth order should also be taken into consideration.

Smith (2006) asserted that the family as a highly significant social unit and probably the most important factor in determining the nature of the interpersonal relationships which the children and adults experience throughout their lives. Furthermore, Smith believed that the family provides the training, instructors and the models for the development of love and understanding tenderness and accommodation. Pearson (1993) also emphasized that human personality is not born but has to be "made" through a well disciplined process. He reiterated that the families are essential institutions

and they are the “factories” which produce human personalities. When both parents work together and they are supportive of their wives being employed there is likelihood of stability in that families. In such homes, children are equally likely to realize that they would be comfortable and would not be in wants at all times.

Family Types and the Child's Behaviour

A child from a happy home has been found to be associated with emotional stability and maturity, (Scheafer and Bayley, 2007 and Strans, 2008). Also children from happy homes exhibit wholesome attitudes which lead to academic achievement, positive attitudes towards school authority, intellectual interests, good adjustment to the school routine and a desire to participate in the extra-curricular activities while children from sad homes climate show contrary behaviour. Indeed, good parents produce good students (Goode 1990). He further asserted that children of working parents are more likely to be juvenile delinquents than children of non-working parents. To him inadequate supervision of children is the cause of delinquency whatever the parents' employment status. Parents therefore need to do a lot of the supervision of their children by themselves and not to delegate this noble function to the inexperienced house maids. Onyehahi (2004) on his own part, confirmed delinquency as being a departure from the accepted norms of the society, that amounts to a kind of rebellion against time honoured, social control strategies that ensure continuity, stability and coherence and shameless in human lifestyles and conduct. There is a direct relationship between home background and the occurrence of delinquency and that parents service as a model for the child adopts his parents values and imitates whether such behaviour is embedded in the culture. The home in a traditional African society is in its own way, an education centre. It is of course the bed rock from which the child's future educational attainments spring up. The home prior to the needs for formal education are adequately met by the culture in each home (Fafunwa 1994). It could be therefore deduced that the home can motivate children through reinforcement negatively or positively. On the effect of the home on the child, (Bolarin1, 1992) pointed out how child behaviour from home has a direct bearing on how the child behaves outside the home. The study really proved the home background to be of great influence on the child's pattern of life or behaviour later in life in the society.

Statement of the Problem

Recently there have been complaints from different quarters in Nigeria that the general behaviour of some students is below expectations. They are characterized with problem syndrome. Some of these students indulge in disobedience, lying, stealing, truancy, lateness, armed robbery and aggression. To most of them, the world is hostile and threatening and all its inhabitants are potentially harmful. Therefore a curious observer of the growing maladjustment behaviour of the present generation school age children will not hesitate to question the delay in checking the problem.

Research Questions

The researcher used the following research questions to direct the study.

- 1) How does monogamous or polygamous family structure influence on children's discipline?
- 2) What relationship does parental leadership style have on children's discipline?
- 3) What relationship does potential socio-economic status have on the influencer of children's discipline?

This study aimed at finding out the relationship between structure balance and discipline in such aspects as hardwork and punctuality among the secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. Adeyemo, (2009) in his study concluded that lack of confidence which affects hardwork and academic performance may be due to home training and family background Denga (2000) in his study of intact families recorded that good relationship between members of the family considerably reduces the children's delinquency.

Polygamous Family and Discipline

Davie and his Associates (1992) described family size as a social factor which has much to do with a child's progress in character formation and academic performance. They found out from their study that irrespective of social class, children from large families tended not to be hardwork nor do well in reading work, oral skills and creative as children from families with one or two children. Educational inspiration and moral development are influenced by the family size, for the family revenue would be concentrated on feeding when the family is too large; also the parents will have little or no time to think of their children education and discipline. The researchers are of the opinion that large families breed in inadequate supervision of children by their parents which leads to delinquency irrespective of parental-socio-status; that most of the children from frictional homes to avoid the stress, go out and join gangs developed from childhood play group which find stealing, academic laxity, lateness to school, resistance to authority and other indiscipline acts ready paths to both adventure and prestige.

Divorced/Separated Family and Discipline

This is the family situation where either the father or mother is absent from home, it could be due to separation, divorce, death, sickness, misunderstanding or a vocation that necessitates long or frequent break, Hurlock (2003). Juvenile delinquency is also associated with broken homes that is a home in which the husband and wife are not living together for one reason or another. Onyehalu (2004) concluded that some children who after separation or divorce happens to live with their father lack maternal guidance and at times the father might have another wife who cares less about those children because they are not her own. She may man-handle or at times demonstrate lukewarm attitudes towards them and these negative treatments are enough to subject them to delinquent acts. Denga (1991) indicated that an unstable home generates emotional and personal problems for youth. To him such a home is featured by frequent quarrels, fighting, disagreement between the couples, between the parents, and children and between the children in the family, such children grow up to be aggressive and susceptible to indiscipline acts.

Birth Order and Discipline

Ross (1990) has observed a number of investigators have found that marital satisfaction reported by couples during years of active parenting decreases with the birth of subsequent children and remains low during the years when there are adolescents in the home, increasing with the departure of young adult children. In the study conducted by Miller and Atkinson (1996), where they used birth order and family size as variables, they discovered that first born children have higher moral standard than later born children.

Parental Styles of Leadership

Hammer (1990) posited that parental styles of leadership is primarily dominated by discipline which centres around habit formation. However, the wholesome function of parental use of discipline in child rearing is to teach the child that certain behaviours are expected of him, to produce in the child a reasonable degree of conformity and to help develop self-control and self-direction so that he can develop a conscience to guide his actions. In general, disciplinary techniques may be divided into three broad categories: Authoritarian, Democratic and Permissiveness. Parents, can employ any of the categories, but it is important to note that each when not used with caution mediates the child's behavioural and social adjustment to life.

Family Boundary, Role Expectation and Discipline

The term boundary refers to those factors that contribute to the sense of identity differentiating the members of one group from another, Fanfor and Uche (2006) described the nuclear family in the present day society as; what really distinguishes the nuclear family father, mother and children from other parents of family life is a special sense of solidarity that separates the domestic unit from the surrounding community. Its members feel that they have much more in common with

one another than they do with anyone else from the outside, but they enjoy privilege and emotional climate which they must protect from outside intrusion, through privacy and isolation. This suggests that the boundaries of the nuclear family are relatively well defined. The typical architectural enclosure of the nuclear family household provides a physical boundary within which all members of the nuclear family reside and common activities occur. Onyehalu (2004) posited that the traditionally males are allowed greater freedom to be assertive, adventurous and aggressive while females are usually confined to modest passive roles. The child is grinded into a pattern of development suited to his capacities rather than forced to conform to socially approved ideals. However, Hurlock, (2003) maintained that the child's concept of his role is influenced by his parents.

Emotional Climate of the Family

The emotional climate of the family is determined largely by the parents, Travers (2000). However, it should be noted that homes characterized by friction and discord, lack of affectional relations, lack of parental interest in the child such homes are led by emotional instability and poor moral adjustment on the child's part. By contrast she maintained that a pattern of family life in which members are companionable, co-operative and democratic and attempts are made to meet the needs of the child, promotes the moral development of emotions and personality development. This type of family no doubt provides the affectional relationship every child needs with his parents and siblings. Hurlock (2003) noted that the influence of the family emotional climate on the child developing self and personality depends to some extent upon the child himself. She maintained that a child is nervous and tense when he becomes more upset by the attention given to others or by quarrelling between his parents, similarly a healthy child reacts very differently to such events.

Socio-Economic Status of the Parents

Denga (2000) in support of the findings concluded that there is a higher rate of indiscipline in polygamous than in monogamous families. Also Lamb (1990) indicated that the societies with predominantly monogamous families tend to be rated low in the rate of theft and personal crimes among children whereas societies with predominantly polygamous family structure tend to be rated high in both theft and personal crimes among the children. Smith (2006) agreed with Travers (1991) that children from broken homes are so emotionally affected by the break-up of the parents' marriage that they find it difficult to sustain close human relationship and hence are predisposed to indiscipline acts since they have more emotional problems than children from intact families. They asserted that juvenile delinquency is also associated with broken homes and that some children who after separation or divorce live without maternal guidance. Broken homes have been positively correlated with an increased incidence of inappropriate and undesirable behaviour of children and adolescents and that such broken homes generate emotional and personal problems for the youth. Denga (2000) found that where the child is reared by one of the biological parents and the other is somewhere carrying out his official duty, no structure balance in such a family is recognized. Stresses and strains in the single parent family too often lead to undesirable and disruptive behaviours. Hoffman (2002) revealed that there is a significant relationship of children's discipline on parental leadership style and that authoritarian discipline in its strictest form leaves an unfavourable mark on children's behaviour. He concluded that over-strict parents who use harsh and primitive methods to achieve their aims may produce surface goodness in their children while there is an apt inhibited resentment which will break-up sooner or later. Murriller (2002) in his research works observed that disciplining of children was not significantly influenced by personal socio-economic status but by all the factors affecting the children's delinquency. He further added that lack of material goods, that is poverty has always been shown to be a striking characteristic of all indiscipline groups. This study emphasized that family structure is the bed-rock in the training, socializing and developing of a child's moral character.

Recommendations

There should be a complete change of parental attitude towards children's discipline and parents should create conducive home environment for their children: know the correct disciplinary

methods to use on them; feel more concerned and cooperate with school authorities to monitor children's attitudes at school.

Parents should find out the type of friends of their children and wards are going along with and know if the group is worth keeping or not. If in their findings the group is bad, they should discourage the children from keeping such group, this is especially important in male-female relationships.

The counsellor has a vital role to play for proper behaviour modification such as obedience, consistence and love for all among children and adults. He should create a conducive environment for a children's moral development in order to be useful to himself and the society he belongs, to achieve this, the counsellor's services should include bringing the students close to himself and this will make the children feel accepted. He should also relate properly with other students in the school for better progress and with parents to ensure a less frictional home climate.

Conclusion

The study indicated that children from monogamous families are significantly different from the children from polygamous settings in terms of discipline. This is in accordance with the view of Denga (2000) whose finding posited that there is a higher rate of indiscipline in polygamous homes than in monogamous homes. This stems from the fact that there is close and adequate parental control and supervision of children from small sized families than in large families. The study also affirms that children from intact families are more well mannered and disciplined than those children from broken homes. This finding is in support of the view of Murrler (2002) that children from broken homes are so emotionally affected by the break-up of their parent's marriage that they find it difficult to sustain close human relationships and hence, are predisposed to indiscipline acts since they have more emotional problems than the children from intact families.

It could be concluded from the research finding that parental leadership style significantly influences a child's behaviour. This implies that children from over-strict or authoritative parents' harbour fears, resentment and threat which consequently lead to indiscipline and unhappiness. While parents of democratic leadership style employ explanation, discussion and reasoning to enable them behave in the socially approved manner. The study further leads to a conclusion that the socio-economic status of the parents is extremely negligible on the children's discipline. This implies that it is not the parental socio-economic status, but the attitude of the parents and proper supervision of children by the parents that influence the behaviour of the children.

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