Exploring the Effects of Divorce on Pupils’ Psychological and Social Behaviours: Implications for Guidance and Counselling

Matthew Kojo Namale
University of Education, Winneba, Ghana

The study investigated the effects of divorce on the psychological behaviour and social adjustment of the junior high school (JHS) pupils in Kwahu Pepease in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The descriptive survey design and the concurrent explanatory mixed method were used for the study. Questionnaires and interview guide were used to collect data in the main instruments. Purposive sampling method was used to obtain 100 respondents made up of 40 teachers and 60 pupils (victims of divorced parents) for the study. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. The result indicated that both teachers and pupils agreed that pupils of divorced parents experienced psychological problems. Additionally, the study indicated that teachers and pupils agreed that pupils of divorced families have social problems in school. The study showed that there were no significant differences between the views of teachers and pupils with regard to the effects of divorce on pupils’ psychological and social behaviours. It was recommended the school should refer pupils showing psychological problems to the district guidance and counselling coordinator for immediate attention. Again, it was recommended that guidance talks should be organized for pupils to overcome their social challenges.

Keywords: divorce, adolescent, psychological behaviour, social behaviour

Introduction

Marriage is a relationship between two spouses that putatively lasts until death. Among many cultures of the world, marriage remains a deep-rooted cultural institution, because it reflects the purposes, character, and customs of society and transmission of socio-economic values from the older generation to the younger generation in essence (Lauer, 2002). This means that the fundamental unit of every society is the family. In Ghana and other countries, marriage is arranged through public or civil, religious, and traditional ceremonies.

Most divorce often refers to parental conflicts as a result of infidelity, financial crisis, and misunderstanding. Divorce is a legal means of dissolving marriage between two people. When marriage is disrupted by divorce, the family could be said to be undergoing some serious crisis and its effects on the psychological and social behaviours of children could be enormous.

Literature Review

In explaining the problems encountered by children after divorce, Mittingle and Pushan (1999) stated that children encounter psychological problems, such as depression, trauma, anxiety, low-concentration, and
unhappiness. Additionally, Amato and Cheadle (2005) stated that divorce has unavoidable psychological effects on victims which include anger, sadness, and low self-esteem. Social adjustment problems encountered by children of divorced parents are also captured in literature. Lauer (2002) stated that the social adjustment challenges children from divorce parents encounter includes truancy, drug abuse, uncompromising behaviour, isolation, indiscipline, and unruliness. To him/her, these problems have serious repercussions for the child academically. This view was supported by Owade and Fradella (2009) when they found that divorce affects youngsters’ behavior in the school environment and the wider society.

In Gyapong’s (2009) study on children from divorced parents in the senior high schools in the Awutu Senya Districts, he found that students were resentful, frustrated, sad, isolates, aggressive, truant, and disobedient. His findings confirmed early study conducted by Idowu (2004) which indicated that psychological and social problems manifest, to some extent, in pupils’ behaviour in the school setting.

Literatures show that there is no significant difference in opinions between teachers and students in terms of the effects of divorce on pupils’ psychological and social problems (Gyapong, 2009; Idowu, 2004). For example, Idowu (2004) explained that teachers are mandated to ensure the total growth and development of pupils, and therefore, have the opportunity to know some of the problems pupils go through. Stephenson (2013) agreed with Idowu (2004) when he wrote that teachers’ role in the appraisal services provided in schools enables them to have more information about pupils. He further explained that the use of psychological tests and observation, as some of the means of gathering information about students in schools, enable teachers to have fair knowledge about students’ academic, career, social, and personal challenges.

The Statement of the Problem

Divorce is a common phenomenon, which has attracted global attention. In Ghana, some efforts of have been made by individuals, governments, churches, mosques, and non-governmental organizations in order to reduce this social menace because of the psychological and social problems that the affected children experience but the problem still persists.

In Laryeh’s (2016) study, we can found that the rate of divorce in Pepease was high and that affected the academic achievement of the victims. Basic Education Certificate of Examination (BECE) Reports in the 2012, 2013, and 2014 showed that the total number of candidates from divorced parents who wrote the examinations 27 out of 31 (87.1%) pupils could not qualify for the senior high school education (District Education Directorate of Ghana Education Service [GES], 2015). Perhaps, the pupils’ poor academic achievements were as a result of psychological and social problems they were experiencing at that time. According to Stephenson (2013), students’ psychological and social conditions determined the extent to which they can enhance their educational, career, and social development. The prevailing situations of children motivated the researcher to embark on this study to find out what psychological and social factors influence the behavior of pupils from divorced parents. Again, since a little seems to have been recorded on the effects of divorce on the psychological and social behaviours of pupils, in the area, the researcher believed that a study of this nature would fill the gap in literature.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the psychological and social effects of divorce on pupils from
Pepease junior high schools (JHSs). The objectives of the study were to:

1. State the views of teachers on the effects of divorce on pupils’ psychological behaviour;
2. State the views of pupils (victims) on the effects of divorce on pupils’ psychological behaviour;
3. Indicate the views of teachers on the effects of divorce on pupils’ social behaviour;
4. Indicate the views of pupils on the effects of divorce on pupils’ social behaviour;
5. Indicate the differences in opinions between teachers and pupils on the effects of divorce on pupils’ psychological and social behaviors in school.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. What is the extent of agreement of teachers on the effects of divorce on pupils’ psychological behaviour?
2. What is the extent of agreement of pupils on the effects of divorce on pupils’ psychological behaviour?
3. What is the extent of agreement of teachers on the effects of divorce on pupils’ social behaviour?
4. What is the extent of agreement of pupils on the effects of divorce on pupils’ social behaviours?

**Hypothesis**

There are no significant differences in opinions between teachers and pupils on the effects of divorce on pupils’ psychological and social behaviours in school.

**Methodology**

The descriptive survey design, using the concurrent exploratory mixed method, was employed to collect data for the study. According to Creswell (2003), a survey provided a description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of population by studying a sample of that population. The population of interest was all pupils from divorced parents in Pepease JHS in the Kwahu East District and all teachers in the school who thought such pupils. Purposive sampling method was used to select Pepease Fon R/C JHS and Pepease Presbyterian JHS, because they were the only two JHSs in the town. Purposive sampling method employed to select the sample of 100 respondents made up of 40 teachers and 60 pupils for the study. The 40 teachers were those who had pupils from divorced parents in their classes while the 60 pupils were those whose parents consented to letters written to them for their children to participate the study.

In this study, the exploration of the situation was made through the administration of questionnaires and interview guides. A questionnaire used by Gyapong (2009) was adapted to gather data for the study. The questionnaire was revised using the Cronbach coefficient alpha. That gave a reliability of 0.071, which was deemed useful (Landburg & Greener, 2000). The content and face validity of the interview guide was done by colleagues in the Department of Psychology and Education in the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana.

A 4-point Likert type scale questionnaire with “1 = Strongly disagree (SD),” “2 = Disagree (D),” “3 = Agree (A),” and “4 = Strongly agree (SA)” as responses were personally distributed to teachers and students and were duly collected. In analyzing the data, SD and D were combined and labelled as D, while SA and A were combined and labelled as A. This was done to make the data analyses more meaningful. The percentages from the quantitative data and verbatim responses from the interviews (two teachers and three pupils) were used in the data analyses. Inferential statistics were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significant level.
Data Analysis

Research Question 1: What is the Extent of Agreement of Teachers on the Effects of Divorce on Pupils’ Psychological Behaviour?

Table 1 presents the data on teachers’ views on the psychological behavior of pupils from divorced parents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children from divorce parents …</th>
<th>SD (%)</th>
<th>D (%)</th>
<th>A (%)</th>
<th>SA (%)</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are not able to pay attention during lessons</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel they are unimportant</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have no confidence in themselves</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are aggressive</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. SD = Strongly agree; D = Disagree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree; and I = Interpretation.

Table 1 indicates that pupils from divorced parents had no confidence in themselves, which had the highest percentage (83%). That was closely followed by pupils feeling that they were unimportant with 81%. Generally, Table 1 shows that teachers agreed that pupils from divorced parents have psychological problems. Comments from two teachers interviewed explained the psychological problems of the pupils. One teacher said that, “Pupils from divorced parents show violent behaviour in school, because they are often confused. Some also have low attention span.” Another teacher also said that, “Pupils do not have the belief in themselves that they are capable of answering questions correctly.” The comments by the two teachers interviewed confirmed the quantitative results in Table 1 that pupils from divorced parents have psychological problems.

Research Question 2: What is the Extent of Agreement of Pupils on the Effects of Divorce on Pupils’ Psychological Behaviour?

Table 2 presents the views of pupils on the effect of divorce of pupils’ psychological behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children from divorce parents …</th>
<th>SD (%)</th>
<th>D (%)</th>
<th>A (%)</th>
<th>SA (%)</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are not able to pay attention during lessons</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel they are unimportant</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have no confidence in themselves</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are aggressive</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. SD = Strongly agree; D = Disagree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree; and I = Interpretation.

Table 2 shows pupils’ views on the effect of divorce on their psychological behavior. From Table 2, it was realized that pupils (86%) agreed that did not pay attention during lessons and 81% of them agreed that they lacked confidence in themselves. A general view of Table 2 shows that pupils agreed that they have some psychological problems. Two out of the three pupils interviewed explained their situations with the following comments. A pupil said that:

I am always sad, because my friends do not believe in what I tell them in conversation. Again, I find it difficult to remember what I learn in class, because while in class I think about the good things my father gave me some time ago. Now, I do not see him again.
The other pupil commented that, “I am afraid my colleagues will laugh at me if I get an answer wrong, so I do not speak when my teacher is teaching. I am very careful in life.” The comments from the pupils confirm the quantitative results in Table 2 that pupils from divorced parents have psychological problems.

**Research Question 3: What is the Extent of Agreement of Teachers on the Effects of Divorce on Pupils’ Social Behaviour?**

Table 3 was used to analyse the data for teachers’ views with regard to social behavior of pupils from divorced parents.

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers' Views on the Effect of Divorce on Pupils' Social Behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children from divorce parents …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are isolates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easily break school rules and regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are truants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are usually uncooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarrelsome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often offend their friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are unruly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes. SD = Strongly agree; D = Disagree; A = Agree; Strongly agree; and I = Interpretation.*

A general observation of the data in Table 3 shows that teachers agreed that pupils exhibited negative social behavior. For example, they easily broke school rules and regulations, play truant, were unruly, and quarrelsome with 85%, 81%, 78%, and 73%, respectively. Interviews granted two teachers throw more light on the pupils’ social problems. A teacher commented that, “They do not join their friends for extra-curricular activities. Some are uncontrollable and always want to have their own ways.” The other teacher said that, “Pupils are unruly. They do not move on well with their colleagues. They often do not come for closing assembly. On market days, some escape into town and never come.” The findings from the interviews confirm the result of the quantitative data in Table 3 that students from divorced parents have social problems.

**Research Question 4: What is the Extent of Agreement of Pupils on the Effects of Divorce on Pupils’ Social Behaviours?**

### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupils’ Views on the Effect of Divorce on Pupils’ Social Behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children from divorce parents …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are isolates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easily break school rules and regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are truants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are usually uncooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarrelsome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often offend their friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are unruly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes. SD = Strongly agree; D = Disagree; A = Agree; Strongly agree; and I = Interpretation.*

It was realised from Table 4 that pupil agreed that they have social behavioural problems. Typical among them were uncooperativeness, breaking of school rules and regulations, isolates and quarrelsome with 88%,
One pupil said that, “I have no friends because my colleagues say I always disagree to what they do or say because of that I walk alone.” The other pupil commented that,

Well, I know I do not always go to school after I have told my father that I am going to school but that is not my fault. Sometimes, I go to school late because I do so many things in the house.

From the above comments, it could be concluded that divorce has effects on pupils’ social behavior. The qualitative data confirms the quantitative data in Table 4 that pupils from divorced parents have social problems.

The hypothesis sought to find the differences in opinions between teachers and pupils with regard to the psychological and social problems pupils experience as a result of parental divorce. Table 5 shows the results from the testing of the hypothesis using an independent samples t-test.

Table 5
Independent T-Test Showing the Views of Teachers and Pupils With Regard to the Effects of Divorce on Pupils’ Psychological Behaviour and Social Adjustment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>1.670</td>
<td>0.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pupils</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>-0.709</td>
<td>0.480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pupils</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Significant at 0.05 level.

The results presented in Table 5 show that there was no statistically significant difference in opinion between teachers and pupils (0.098, p > 0.05) with regard to the effects of divorce on pupils’ psychological behaviour in school. Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted. It was also realized in Table 5 that there was no statistically significant difference in the views between teachers and pupils (0.048, p > 0.05) with regard to the effect of divorce on pupils’ social behaviour. Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

Discussions of Findings

The data in Tables 1 and 2 indicated that both teachers and pupils agreed that pupils from divorced parents exhibited psychological problems in school. The result of the present study is similar to the finding of Gyapong (2009) which shows that pupils and teachers to a large extent agree that students have psychological problems as a result of divorce. A reason that could be assigned to the present result is that pupils from divorced parents exhibited psychological problems, such as inattentiveness in class, lack of self-confidence, aggressiveness, and the feeling of unimportance, because when they think about the dissolvent of their parents marriage they become sad (Amato & Cheadle, 2005; Idowu, 2004). This statement is supported by some comments made by a pupil that, “… I find it difficult to remember what I learn in class … Now I do not see him again.” A teacher also commented that some also have low attention span. Foulkes-Jamison (2001) indicated that divorce affects youngster’ behaviour in the school environment and the society at large. In explaining the behaviour problems exhibited by children after divorce, Mittingle and Pushan (1999) and Cheadle (2002) stated that children encounter psychological problems, such as low-concentration and inferiority complex.

The data analysis in Tables 3 and 4 indicated that teachers and pupils agreed that pupils from divorced parents have social problems. The result confirms Gyapong’s (2009) study, which indicated that teachers and
students agree to a large extent that divorce has effects on pupils’ social behaviour. What could be said about the present result is that pupils whose parents are divorced find it difficult to relate appropriately to colleagues in school and the society at large (Foulkes-Jamison, 2001), because at home they have no opportunity to develop human relation skills. In the view of Hefferman, Shuttleworth, and Ambrosine (1992), divorce signifies the loss of an intimate relationship that also brought security. These could be the reason why pupils from divorce parents are isolates, because they find it difficult to come into terms with the situations they find themselves (Lauer, 2002). Some comments from the interview confirm this statement. A pupil said that, “I have no friends … I walk alone.” A teacher also commented that they do not join their friends for extra-curricular activities.

The results presented in Table 5 shows that there was no statistically significant difference in opinion between teachers and pupils (0.098, \( p > 0.05 \)) with regard to the effects of divorce on pupils’ psychological behaviour in school. Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted. The result supports Gyapong (2009) and Idowu (2004) who indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in opinions between teachers and students in terms of the effects of divorce on the psychological behaviours of students. A reason for the present finding could be that because teachers work closely with student they are able to use psychological test to know the problems of students (Stephenson, 2013).

It was also realized in Table 3 that there was no statistically significant difference in opinion between teachers and pupils with regard to the effect of divorce on pupils’ social behaviour. Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted. The present result supports the findings of Gyapong (2009) and Idowu (2004) which showed that no statistically significant difference in opinion existed between teachers and students with regard to the effect of divorce on their social behaviour. A reason that could be assigned to this finding is that teachers are tasked to assist their pupils to achieve their goals. As a result, they have the opportunity to interact with their students, which makes it possible for them to know their social problems (Stephenson, 2013).

Recommendations

To help pupils overcome their psychological problems the teachers in collaboration with the head of school should refer students/pupils who show symptoms of psychological problems to the district guidance and counselling coordinator to enable students deal with their problems especially those that have their root causes at home. Teachers by dint of their profession especially those from the Colleges of Education should organize guidance talk for pupils apart from time to enable to be aware of the deviant behaviour and change the better.

Conclusions and Implications for Guidance and Counselling

From the foregoing, it was realized that teachers and pupils agreed that pupils from divorced parents showed some negative psychological behaviours. For example, such pupils could not concentrate well during teaching and learning. This meant that they had difficulty in learning.

It was again realized that teachers and pupils agreed that pupils from divorced homes exhibited negative social behaviours, such as truancy, unruliness, and breaking of school rules and regulations. Since schools do not tolerate such social behaviours, it meant such pupils had problems with the school authorities. Schools are mandated to ensure the total growth and development of children entrusted under their care, but in the process, the schools encounter some challenges with the children under their care. Some of these challenges most often have their root causes at home. Children who are psychologically worried may show behaviours, such as
low-concentration, aggressiveness, lack of confidence, and low self-esteem. These may prevent them from realizing their goals, especially academic achievement. Teachers and guidance coordinators could come to the aid of pupils/students by organizing both individual counselling and group counselling to assist individuals manage their challenges, especially, psychological problems.

Socialization is very important in schools because of the numerous benefits that pupils/students derive by interacting closely. For instance, pupils are able to share useful ideas for their social development through interaction. This implies that those who are not able to socialize because of their negative social behaviours, such as unruliness, uncooperativeness, and truancy may not benefit from the good things that come from socialization in school. Therefore, the information service as one of the guidance services in the schools should provide social information through guidance talks and reading materials to enable pupils/students develop good social relationship skills.

References