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EFFECTS OF BROKEN HOMES ON ACADEMIC RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of broken homes on academic resilience and social adjustment among adolescents in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted an ex-post facto (causal-comparative) research design. The population comprised all 38,214 senior secondary school two (SS2) students in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Multi-stage random sampling was used to draw a sample of 380 SS2 students from 10 public secondary schools across five Local Government Areas. The instrument for data collection was the Academic Resilience and Social Adjustment Scale (ARSAS), developed and validated by the researchers, with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.83 determined using Cronbach's alpha. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while the independent samples *t*-test was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that adolescents from broken homes had significantly lower academic resilience and social adjustment scores than those from intact homes. It was recommended that school counsellors implement targeted resilience-building programmes and social skills training for adolescents from broken homes in Anambra State secondary schools.

Keywords: Broken homes, Academic resilience, Social adjustment, Adolescents, Secondary schools

Introduction

The family is widely recognised as the primary agent of socialisation and the foundational institution for nurturing academic motivation, emotional stability, and social competence in children. When the family structure is disrupted through divorce, separation, death of a parent, or abandonment, the resulting "broken home" creates an adverse developmental context that may compromise the holistic growth of adolescents. Broken homes refer to family settings in which one or both parents are permanently absent from the household due to divorce, separation, death, or desertion (Anyamene et al., 2022). Such family arrangements are a growing concern in Nigeria, including Anambra State, where rising divorce rates, rural-urban migration, and economic hardship have made single-parent and unstable family structures more common.

Resilience is the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to challenges that threaten its function, survival, or development (Masten, 2021). In the school setting, students who demonstrate academic resilience are able to maintain motivation, engagement, and performance in schoolwork despite significant adversity at home. Evidence on how broken homes relate to school outcomes is, however, not uniform. Anyamene et al. (2022) reported that secondary school students in Anambra State perceived broken home conditions as influencing their academic achievement, whereas Abrantes and Casinillo (2020) found no significant difference in the academic performance of senior high school students from single-parent and two-parent homes in the Philippines, and suggested that some students treat their problems as motivation to work harder. Such mixed findings suggest that resilience, rather than academic performance alone, may be a more informative outcome to examine.

Beyond academics, social adjustment, which is a person's ability to interact harmoniously with peers, teachers, and the wider school community, is equally at risk in broken home conditions. Adolescence is a developmental period characterised by heightened sensitivity to social relationships and peer acceptance. When home environments fail to provide the stability, warmth, and modelling necessary for pro-social development, adolescents may show withdrawal, aggression, and difficulty forming healthy peer relationships. Folayan et al. (2020) found that, among Nigerian children and adolescents, adverse childhood experiences were significantly associated with lower self-esteem and lower perceived social support, both of which are important for social adjustment. Such social deficits may compound academic difficulties and produce a cycle of underachievement and maladjustment.

Despite the growing body of literature on broken homes and student outcomes, empirical studies that simultaneously examine academic resilience and social adjustment among adolescents in Anambra State remain scarce. Anyamene et al. (2022), one of the few studies situated in the State, focused on students' perceptions of how broken homes influence academic achievement and did not examine resilience as a construct or social adjustment outcomes. This study therefore addresses that gap by empirically comparing the academic resilience and social adjustment of senior secondary school students from broken and intact homes in Anambra State. Such evidence is particularly needed because school counsellors and education policymakers require localised data to design evidence-based interventions for vulnerable students.

Statement of the Problem

Family disruption through divorce, separation, death, or desertion is a concern for the wellbeing of adolescents in Anambra State. Students from broken homes may attend school while coping with emotional strain, reduced parental supervision, and financial pressure, which can weaken their ability to persist in academic work and to relate well with peers and teachers. Existing evidence on the school outcomes of students from broken homes is mixed and is largely concerned with academic achievement rather than academic resilience or social adjustment. In Anambra State in particular, little is known about how home structure relates to these two outcomes, and without such evidence school counsellors lack a sound basis for designing targeted support. The problem of this study, therefore, is: do adolescents from broken homes differ from those from intact homes in academic resilience and social adjustment in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of broken homes on academic resilience and social adjustment among adolescents in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. compare the mean academic resilience scores of adolescents from broken homes with those from intact homes in public secondary schools in Anambra State; and
2. compare the mean social adjustment scores of adolescents from broken homes with those from intact homes in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the mean academic resilience scores of adolescents from broken homes compared to those from intact homes in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What are the mean social adjustment scores of adolescents from broken homes compared to those from intact homes in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H_{01}: There is no significant difference in the mean academic resilience scores of adolescents from broken homes and those from intact homes in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

H_{02}: There is no significant difference in the mean social adjustment scores of adolescents from broken homes and those from intact homes in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Academic resilience has been conceptualised along several theoretical dimensions. Masten (2021) recommended a scalable definition of resilience as the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to challenges that threaten the function, survival, or development of the system. Extending this view, Masten (2018) described resilience not as a fixed trait of individuals but as a process that emerges from interactions between individual strengths, such as self-regulation, and the resources available in a child's wider environment, including family, school, and community. Interest in resilience has grown worldwide because of the many threats to children's development (Masten, 2014). In the context of broken homes, this interactionist framework implies that students' outcomes depend not only on the severity of family disruption but also on the protective resources available to them.

Empirical evidence on broken homes and school outcomes is mixed. Abrantes and Casinillo (2020), in a descriptive-correlational study of senior high school students in the Philippines, found no significant difference in academic performance between students from single-parent and two-parent homes, and concluded that students may treat their problems as motivation to strive harder. In contrast, Anyamene et al. (2022) reported that secondary school students in Anambra State perceived broken home conditions as influencing their academic achievement. Onah (2023) did not study family structure, but found that resilience significantly predicted a lower propensity to risky behaviour among out-of-school adolescents in Lagos State, which points to the practical relevance of resilience for Nigerian adolescents.

Social adjustment is another dimension of adolescent development that family circumstances may affect. In a study of Nigerian children and adolescents, Folayan et al. (2020) found that adverse childhood experiences were significantly and negatively associated with self-esteem and perceived social support, both of which are relevant to how well adolescents adjust socially. Masten (2021) further noted that children's adaptation depends on interconnected systems, including families and schools, which suggests that schools and peer groups may help either to buffer or to worsen the effects of a disrupted home environment.

Method

The study adopted an ex-post facto (causal-comparative) research design. This design is appropriate because the independent variable, home structure (broken or intact), had already occurred and could not be manipulated by the researchers, and the aim was to compare two naturally occurring groups on academic resilience and social adjustment after the fact (Cohen et al., 2018). No treatment was administered, participants were not randomly assigned to groups, and no pretest was used.

Methods

The population comprised all 38,214 senior secondary school two (SS2) students enrolled in public secondary schools across the 21 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Anambra State in the 2023/2024 academic session. SS2 students were targeted because they represent a stable mid-secondary cohort unlikely to be affected by examination anxiety or transition pressures.

Multi-stage random sampling was employed. First, five LGAs were randomly selected from the three senatorial zones of Anambra State. Second, two public secondary schools were randomly selected from each LGA, yielding 10 schools. Third, two intact classes of SS2 students were randomly selected from each school. This procedure yielded a final sample of 380 students (187 from broken homes and 193 from intact homes). Students' home structure was classified by self-report and verified through school records and counsellor confirmation.

The instrument for data collection was the Academic Resilience and Social Adjustment Scale (ARSAS), a researcher-developed 60-item questionnaire rated on a 4-point Likert scale (4 = Strongly Agree, 1 = Strongly Disagree). The scale comprised two subscales: the Academic Resilience Subscale (ARS, 30 items) and the Social Adjustment Subscale (SAS, 30 items). Face and content validity of the ARSAS were established through expert review by three specialists in Guidance and Counselling and Educational Psychology from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using

Cronbach's alpha, yielding coefficients of 0.81 for the ARS, 0.85 for the SAS, and 0.83 for the entire scale. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while the independent samples *t*-test was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the mean academic resilience scores of adolescents from broken homes compared to those from intact homes?

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of Academic Resilience Scores by Home Structure

Home structure	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Broken home	187	48.63	11.24
Intact home	193	57.41	9.87

Table 1 shows that adolescents from intact homes had a higher mean academic resilience score ($M = 57.41$, $SD = 9.87$) than adolescents from broken homes ($M = 48.63$, $SD = 11.24$). The mean difference was 8.78 points in favour of the intact home group.

Hypothesis 1

H_{01}: There is no significant difference in the mean academic resilience scores of adolescents from broken homes and those from intact homes.

Table 2

Independent Samples t-Test of Academic Resilience Scores by Home Structure

Comparison	Mean diff.	95% CI	*t*	*df*	*p*	*d*
Intact vs. broken home	8.78	[6.65, 10.91]	8.10	378	< .001	0.83

Note. Equal variances assumed. CI = confidence interval of the mean difference; *d* = Cohen's *d*.

Table 2 shows that the difference in academic resilience between the two groups was statistically significant, $t(378) = 8.10$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.83$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. Adolescents from broken homes had significantly lower academic resilience than those from intact homes.

Research Question 2

What are the mean social adjustment scores of adolescents from broken homes compared to those from intact homes?

Table 3

Mean and Standard Deviation of Social Adjustment Scores by Home Structure

Home structure	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Broken home	187	52.17	10.43
Intact home	193	63.89	8.71

Table 3 shows that adolescents from intact homes recorded a higher mean social adjustment score ($M = 63.89$, $SD = 8.71$) than adolescents from broken homes ($M = 52.17$, $SD = 10.43$). The mean difference was 11.72 points in favour of the intact home group.

Hypothesis 2

H_{02}: There is no significant difference in the mean social adjustment scores of adolescents from broken homes and those from intact homes.

Table 4

Independent Samples t-Test of Social Adjustment Scores by Home Structure

Comparison	Mean diff.	95% CI	*t*	*df*	*p*	*d*
Intact vs. broken home	11.72	[9.78, 13.66]	11.90	378	< .001	1.22

Note. Equal variances assumed. CI = confidence interval of the mean difference; *d* = Cohen's *d*.

Table 4 shows that the difference in social adjustment was statistically significant, $t(378) = 11.90$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.22$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. Adolescents from broken homes had significantly poorer social adjustment than those from intact homes.

Discussion of Findings

The finding that adolescents from broken homes had significantly lower academic resilience than their peers from intact homes is consistent with Anyamene et al. (2022), who reported that secondary school students in Anambra State perceived broken home conditions as influencing their academic achievement. The present study extends that evidence from perceived achievement to resilience, which reflects students' capacity to keep working and to

adapt when they meet academic setbacks (Masten, 2018). Onah (2023) similarly found that resilience significantly predicted a lower propensity to risky behaviour among Nigerian out-of-school adolescents, which shows why lower resilience among students from broken homes is a practical concern.

The significant difference in social adjustment agrees with Folayan et al. (2020), who reported that adverse childhood experiences were significantly associated with lower self-esteem and perceived social support among Nigerian children and adolescents. Adolescents from broken homes in the present study scored 11.72 points lower on social adjustment than their peers from intact homes, a large difference ($d = 1.22$) that points to the relational cost of family disruption during a stage of heightened social sensitivity. Masten (2021) emphasised that children's adaptation depends on interconnected systems, including families and schools; where the home system is disrupted, school-based supports such as counselling, peer mentoring, and teacher support may therefore matter even more.

The results differ from those of Abrantes and Casinillo (2020), who found no significant difference in academic performance between students from single-parent and two-parent homes in the Philippines. The difference may reflect the outcomes measured (academic performance rather than resilience and social adjustment), the setting, and the way home structure was defined, and it shows the need for caution in generalising across contexts. Because the present study used an ex-post facto design, its findings show that broken homes are associated with lower academic resilience and social adjustment; they cannot by themselves establish that family disruption is the only cause of these differences. Even so, school counsellors and education administrators in Anambra State have good reason to design resilience-building and social adjustment interventions for adolescents from broken homes.

Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence that adolescents from broken homes in public secondary schools in Anambra State have significantly lower academic resilience and social adjustment than their peers from intact homes. They showed a lower capacity to persist through academic challenges and reduced social competence. As family disruption remains a concern in the State, educational stakeholders should respond with systematic, evidence-based interventions that build protective resources within the school environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and their educational implications, the following recommendations are made:

1. School counsellors in Anambra State public secondary schools should design and implement targeted resilience-building group counselling programmes specifically for students from broken homes, incorporating cognitive-behavioural and strengths-based approaches.
2. The Anambra State Post Primary School Service Commission (PPSSC) should develop a school-based social skills training curriculum for adolescents from disrupted family backgrounds to address social adjustment deficits.

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