

COGNITIVE STRESS AS A CORRELATE OF SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS FROM DIVORCED FAMILIES IN KANO METROPOLIS, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines the correlation between the cognitive stress and school adjustment among senior secondary school students from divorced families in Kano Metropolis, Nigeria. A correlation design was employed for the study. The population of the study was 481 male and female SS II students from divorced families among senior secondary school students in Kano Metropolis. Proportionate sampling technique was used in sampling 215 students for this study. Two instruments stress questionnaire and school adjustment questionnaire were also used in data collection. Data collected was analyzed using statistical package for social science version 28.0 software. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to calculate the correlation. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance, revealed that there is significant negative relationship between cognitive stress and school adjustment among senior secondary school students from divorced families ($r = -.716$, $p = 0.001$). The result indicated that there is moderate level of cognitive stress among senior secondary school students from the divorced families in Kano metropolis (mean = 44.02; SD = 5.844). Based on the result of findings, the study concluded that there is a negative correlation between cognitive stress and school adjustment among senior secondary school students from divorced families. The study recommended the need for students who experience cognitive stress to be referred to school psychologists and counselors who should assist them to enable them cope with stress. The study also recommended the need for the establishment school psychologists units across all secondary schools in Kano Metropolis Nigeria.

Keywords: Cognitive stress, correlate, school adjustment, students, kano

Introduction

Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension that can come from any event or thought that makes someone feels frustrated, angry, or nervous (WHO 2023). It is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives. Stress is a transactional process occurring when an event is perceived as relevant to an individual's well-being, has the potential for harm or loss, it can be defined as any type of change that causes physical, emotional, or psychological strain that affects both the mind and the body, and it can come with a range of emotions, including anxiety and irritability (Salomon, 2013). When stressed, we may find it difficult to concentrate, experience headaches or other body pains, an upset stomach, or trouble sleeping. Stress can be positive in short bursts, such as when it helps you avoid danger or meet a deadline, but when stress lasts for a long time, it may harm your health (Susman, 2022). Although, the positive effects of stress may trigger response to danger or meet responsibility deadline, it may also worsen the pre-existing health problems and may cause physical and mental health problems.

However, as a natural phenomenon stress can be experienced by everyone throughout their daily lives. Everyone's life is packaged with day to day challenges and

confronting those experiences successfully, highly counts on the ability to recuperate from those stressors. In recent years, stress and anxieties are predominant among the millennial generation students. Students go through stress due to various issues like family disputes, academic challenges, parental conflicts, financial concerns, social isolation, and interpersonal matters (Cassum, 2018). Some have strong coping mechanism to muddle through it while others require time and coping to manage the situation. Stressful circumstances can have constructive and destructive effects on the health and disrupt the quality of life of an individual. Tireless tension during student life can largely impact on the mental health, learning and quality of life of the students (Melo, Williams & Ross, 2010).

Therefore, the impact of mental health and well being of a student can be achieved through school adjustment mechanism. It is an individual's general adaptation to his/her environment and the demands of life such as the way he/she relates to other people that is interpersonal behavior, handle his/her responsibility, deals with stress and meet his/her own needs and life satisfaction. The society is dynamic and change is the only constant thing. Therefore, the individual's ability to review his/her attitude and behavior in the school setting is an essential component of school adjustment. Adjustment is an important part of social nature of human and human life. It relates to how often individual social experience responses to communication about the thought of social practice, and which social script are to be used for which social situation (Towmoepeau & Ruffman, 2012). However, school adjustment refers to student's ability to maintain a balance with the demands of secondary school education. School adjustment is the degree of school acculturation required or adaptations necessitated for maximizing the educational fit between students' unique characteristics and the distinct nature and requirement of learning environments. This means that adjustment involves coping ability of physiological and emotional components to meet up the social demands of the environment. It is a continuous process that is geared towards the adaptation of the individual to school life and culture. Adjustment potentials enable students deal better with pressures of peers, school life, academic challenges and temptation of alcohol, drugs and sex. Student's variables that are involved in school adjustment are numerous and include the individual's competencies social behavioral, emotional, cultural and academic competences.

One of the most important social issue that affect students school adjustment is divorce. Divorce is an unplanned event in a family's life. It is something that affects each member of a family at different times and in different ways (Martin, 2003). Divorce is not an intended event in a family's life. It is something that can affect each individual of the family differently and at different times. Today a couple's chance of getting a divorce is around fifty percent. Since this is an event that is not intended to happen, many factors need to be considered when children are involved. Many studies indicated that children from divorced families experience difficult adjustments such as social, academic, and behavioral compared to children of intact families (Doherty & Needle, 1991). Woosley (2009), also stated that children from non-intact families tend to have lower psychological well-being as compared to those from intact families. Families that come from lower incomes are more likely to divorce, which in turn cause these families to have a lower standard of living (Emery, 2004), due to the lower incomes having a lower standard of living Emery (2004).

Therefore, the number of families affected by divorce in Kano Metropolis has increased dramatically in the last three decades. Many children are negatively affected by

the high rate of the divorce of their parents. The impacts of such divorce on the children is that they are psychologically, emotionally and socially affected thereby making it difficult for them to adjust appropriately to school/academic activities. Divorce is the separation of couple as husband and wife. It is an unplanned event in a family's life. Divorce is becoming a common event in the lives of many people. It is now easier to dissolve marriage, and fewer stigmas are attached to divorced people. However, for many, divorce remains a negative and traumatic experience to not only the divorcing couple, but the children. It is something that affects each member of a family at different times and in different ways.

The large number of students affected by divorce has generated much concern over the consequences of divorce for students' development and well-being. Numerous studies have been conducted to examine the implications of divorce on students' scholastic achievement, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-esteem, social competence, and relationships with parents. Many studies have also found that students from divorced families experience lower levels of well-being across these domains than students from intact families. However, a good deal of inconsistency exists in this literature, and many studies have failed to find significant differences. In addition, studies have varied substantially both in their methodologies and in the characteristics, such as age level and social class, of the students as in the studies of (Sandler, Wolchik, Braver, & Fogas, 2018). Students from divorced families may have to change schools in order to adjust to the reality of a single parent's lower income and the attendant responsibilities, which were initially splitted (Grubb & Long, 2014). These are concerns that children may face after their parents' divorce. Due to this, their family structure will become different causing many changes and adjustments in their life. This could add more stress, anxiety and emotions for the children. Several changes can take place during a families divorce. Some of these changes could include moving, loss of contact with a parent, involvement in conflict between the parents, and possibly financial difficulties. For the students to remain focus on their academic activities, they need to adjust both psychological and socially in order not to feel detached from the love of both parents they previously had (Galluzzo, 2012).

In an intact home, children develop attachment with their parents which provides them with an idea of how to form a relationship and adjust to various life experiences. These attachments are formed early, hence, divorce or separation could cause the child to have relationship issues later in life and make them maladjusted (Majzub & Mansor, 2012). However, children from divorced homes can have feelings of anger, resentment and confusion, which can alter the child's ability to form meaningful relationships and to properly adjust to the demands of the society (Majzub & Mansor, 2012). Generally, divorce may affect the adjustment of students in school (Matthews, 2014). Adjustment in school has been described as a very important aspect of student life. Primary purpose of education is to train students to be well adjusted in their emotional life. Human beings have the capacity to adapt to new situation. School adjustment is the degree of school acculturation required or adaptations necessitated for maximizing the educational fit between students' unique characteristics and the distinct nature and requirement of learning environments.

Today a couple's chance of getting a divorce is around fifty percent. Since this is an event that is not intended to happen, many factors need to be considered when children are involved. Literature shows that children from divorced families experience difficult adjustments such as social, academic, compared to children of intact families (Doherty &

Needle, 2011). Stress is a complex phenomenon that can significantly impact various aspects of an individual's life, including their psychological well-being and ability to adjust to new circumstances. For children and adolescents, stressors such as divorce can be particularly challenging, as they often coincide with important developmental stages and transitions, including school adjustment. The interplay between stress, school adjustment, and divorce has garnered attention in research due to its potential implications for academic performance, emotional health, and long-term development. Therefore, divorce-related stressors, such as changes in living arrangements and family dynamics, can impact a child's ability to concentrate on school tasks and establish healthy peer relationships (Bryant & Milsap, 2005). Hence, this study investigated the correlation between stress and school adjustment among secondary school students from divorced families in Kano Metropolis, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

School adjustment is an effort made by students to cope with the academic demands or challenges of school environment. It includes the individual's involvement in school activities and satisfaction with various aspects of school experiences. In the process of school adjustment, the student tries to behave in accordance with the school norms, ethics, and values that will enhance his survival, and meeting the expectations of the school environment. Every individual student from the time he or she steps out of the family and goes to school makes a long series of adjustments in his/her new environment. However, the researcher observed that divorce has caused mayhem on the psychological stability and physical health of many secondary school students in Kano Metropolis. The researcher also observed that some secondary students from divorced families in Kano metropolis have more cognitive and behavioral problems, negative feelings and less psychological well-being than those from intact families. As such, they students experience a wide range of emotional reactions such as sadness, anger, loneliness, depression, heightened anxiety, worry, lower life satisfaction, low self-esteem and confidence, fear, yearning, rejection, conflicting loyalties and a sense of fault for their parents' problems, withdrawals from friends and families, aggressive, impulsive or hyperactive behavior.

The instability of these emotions may easily initiate unusual behaviors which may affect their learning ability and academic achievements. Again, most of the secondary school students noticed by the researcher with higher level of academic stress result into violence, drug abuse, feeling inferior to others, not being able to think properly, worrying too much, feeling that life is not worth living, anxious without any apparent reason, truancy behavior, not paying attention to school activities and isolation activities. The catalogue of challenges experienced by secondary school students of divorced families are enormous and it is not just inimical to the students but to the society at large. This problem is delicate and needs cautious handling that is why conducting research on the correlation between cognitive stress and school adjustment among senior secondary school students from divorced families in Kano Metropolis, Nigeria, is imperative to illuminate the nuanced ways in which divorce-related stressors impact students' educational experiences within a specific cultural context. By investigating this relationship, the study can provide crucial insights into the potential academic, emotional, and psychological challenges faced by these students, leading to the development of targeted interventions and support systems that enhance their overall well-being and educational outcomes. Hence, this study was carried out to examine the relationship between cognitive stress and school

adjustment among secondary school students from divorced families in Kano Metropolis, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

1. To examine the relationship between cognitive stress and school adjustment among senior secondary school students from divorced families in Kano metropolis.

Research Question

1. What is the relationship between cognitive stress and school adjustment among senior secondary school students from divorced families in Kano metropolis?

Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested in this study

H01: There is no significant relationship between cognitive stress and school adjustment among senior secondary school students from divorced families in Kano metropolis.

Methods

Correlation design was adopted for this study. Correlation design is appropriate for determining whether there is relationship between two or more quantifiable variables and to what degree this relationship exists. Correlation design is a research design in which information on at least two variables are collected in order to investigate the relationship between the variable. In correlation design, the researcher will not attempt to manipulate any variables. Instead, the researcher is more concerned to determine the extent to which the multiple predictor explain the outcome variable, but does not necessarily conclude that one variable cause the other variables (Schmidt & Brown, 2009). Therefore, correlation design was used for this study because this study is geared toward examining the relationship among divorce, stress and school adjustment among senior secondary school students in Kano Metropolis. The population of the study comprised of all male and female students in senior secondary schools in some local government in Kano Metropolis whose parents are divorced. Kano metropolis has six (8) Local Government Area. In this research (6) local government were used. The researcher with the help of class masters and class mistress and structured checklist identified the students whose parents are divorced. The checklist identified the students whose parents are divorced. As a result the researcher identified 481 male and female SS II students whose parents are divorced in Kano metropolis in fifteen senior secondary schools selected by the researcher as indicated in table 1

Table 1: Population of the Study

Local government	Schools	Students from Divorced Families (SS II)
Dala	GGASS Gwammaja	55
	GGSS Yan Mata	63
	GGSS Dan Dinshe	29
	GASS Yalwa	18
Kano Municipal	GGASS Hasiya Ba Yaro	22
	GGJSS TijjaniHasshim	11
	GGSS Dangana	29
	GSS Tarauni	74
Nassarawa	GGSS Gwagwarwa	17
	GGSS Hotoro (S)	23

	GSS Hotoro (N)	39
	GSS U/Uku	17
Tarauni	GSS Kundila	27
	Engr. Bashir Karaye	24
	GGASS Ado Na Mai Tuwo	33
	TOTAL	481

Source: Kano State School Management Board (2020)

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size of this study is 215 male and female SS II whose parents are divorced. This selection conforms to the Research Advisor (2006) which recommends that a population of 481 will require a sample of 215 respondents. Fifteen (15) schools were randomly selected from some schools in Kano metropolis. Proportionate sampling technique was used in the allocation of sample to the various schools. This is because the numbers of students whose parent are divorced differ from school to school. Table 2 shows the sample size of the study.

Table 2: Sample Size of the Study

Local government	Schools	Population	Sample Size
Dala	GGASS Gwammaja	55	24
Fagge	GGSS Yan Mata	63	28
Gwale	GGSS Dan Dinshe	29	13
	GASS Yalwa	18	8
Kano Municipal	GGASS Hasiya Ba Yaro	22	10
	GGJSS TijjaniHasshim	11	5
	GGSS Dangana	29	13
	GSS Tarauni	74	33
Nassarawa	GGSS Gwagwarwa	17	8
	GGSS Hotoro (S)	23	10
	GSS Hotoro (N)	39	17
	GSS U/Uku	17	8
	GSS Kundila	27	12
Tarauni	Engr. Bashir Karaye	24	11
	GGASS Ado Na Mai Tuwo	33	15
	TOTAL	481	215

Source:Kano State School Management Board (2020)

Instrumentation

Two instruments were used in this study, Stress Questionnaire and School adjustment Questionnaire.

Stress Questionnaire

Stress Questionnaire is a twenty-six (26) item instrument adopted from Copenhagen stress questionnaire subscale (SQ, 2003).The scale consists of 2subscales: Cognitive subscales and emotional subscales. Respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement for each statement. The instrument has 26 items, items 1 to 14 measures cognitive stress. Items were scored using Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA) =5-points, A (Agree) =4-poins, U (Undecided) =3-points, Disagree (D) =2-points and Strongly Disagree (SD) =1-

point. This instrument is a standardized one that seeks to determine aspects of social adjustment of students. Below is the scoring guide for the questionnaire.

Scoring Guide (Cognitive Stress)

15 – 30 Low Stress, 31 – 60 Moderate Stress and 61 – 75 High Stress

School Adjustment Questionnaire

The School Adjustment Questionnaire (SAQ) is a twenty-item instrument adapted from the Adjustment subscale of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire. The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) is a self-report inventory designed by Baker and Siryk (1989). Respondents are to respond from extremely (5), Quite a bit (4), moderately (3), a little bit (2) to not at all (1). Highest possible score is 100 ($20 \times 5 = 100$).

Procedure for Data Collection

The stress questionnaire and school adjustment questionnaire were given to the respondents to fill on the spot and collected back. The questionnaires were administered in 12 working days to cover all the schools.

Procedure for Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics were used to analyze the bio-data of the subject; percentage, mean, and standard deviation were also used to answer the research question raised while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypothesis. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance. SPSS version 28.0 was used for analysis.

The data collected through administering questionnaire to the students in various schools in Kano metropolis. The students that were identified for the study (whose parents divorced) were analyzed. Secondly the research question was answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypothesis was tested with Pearson product moment correlation at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

Analysis of Demographic Variables

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	89	41
Female	126	59
Total	215	100.0

Source: Researcher's Data Analysis (2020)

Table 3 shows distribution of respondents by gender. A total of 89 respondents representing 41% were male students while 126 respondents which represent 59% were female students out of the total sample size of 215. This shows that majority of the respondents that participated in the study were female students in Kano Metropolis.

Results

Research question one: What is the relationship between cognitive stress and school adjustment among senior secondary school students from divorced families in Kano Metropolis?

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation on cognitive stress among senior secondary school students from divorced families in Kano Metropolis

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Cognitive Stress	215	44.02	5.844

Source: Researcher's Data Analysis (2020)

Table 4 shows that secondary school students from divorced families had moderate level of cognitive stress as indicated by mean of 44.02 and standard deviation of 5.844 which falls within moderate level of cognitive stress as vindicated by the scoring guide that a score from 31-60 falls within moderate level of emotional stress.

H01: There is no significant relationship between cognitive stress and school adjustment among senior secondary school students from divorced families in Kano metropolis

Table 5: Pearson product moment correlation (r) on the relationship between cognitive stress and school adjustment among senior secondary school students from divorced families in Kano metropolis. Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels (2 tailed)

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	P
Cognitive Stress	215	44.02	5.84	-.716	.001
School Adjustment	215	63.18	10.19		

Source: Researcher's Data Analysis (2020)

Table 5 presents Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) statistics on relationship between cognitive stress and school adjustment. The result shows the correlation index value of -0.716 p-value of 0.001 which is less than 0.05 alpha level of significance. Therefore, the result established that significant negative relationship exists between cognitive stress and school adjustment among senior secondary school students from divorced families in Kano metropolis. This means that the higher the cognitive stress, the lower the school adjustment of divorce families in Kano Metropolis. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between cognitive stress and school adjustment among senior secondary school students from divorced families in Kano metropolis is rejected.

Discussion

The study found a significant negative relationship between cognitive stress and school adjustment among senior secondary school students from divorced families in Kano metropolis. The finding corroborates the findings by Othman (2014) indicates that cognitive adjustment is the most significant predictor of academic performance and that family support was found to enhance the relationship between affected adjustment and academic performance. The study was conducted to investigate the dimension of adjustment that may contribute to student academic performance by looking at the moderate effect of social support. Similarly, Yusuf (2022) found relationship significant relationship between psychological stress academic adjustment which is similar to cognitive adjustment explored by the present study. Tinibiaje & Tinibiaje (2011) assessed the effect of single parenthood on the academic performance of secondary school students in Ekiti state, Nigeria. The study discovered that there is no significant differences between academic performance of adolescent student from single parental homes and those from intact parent homes difference between truancy behavior of adolescent student from single homes and those from intact homes. They also found there is significance difference between truancy behavior of adolescent students from single home and that of intact homes.

In a similar study, Igbinsosa (2014) examine the influence of broken homes on academic performance and personality development of the adolescents in Lagos State Metropolis. The results revealed that there is a significant difference between single-parenting and academic performance of the adolescents, there is a significant difference

between parental socio- economic status and academic performance and there is significant relationship between adolescents from broken homes and academic performance.

This finding further corroborates with findings of Vincent (2021) who observed that gender, family characteristics, ethno-cultural background, proper family conflict management and better managed pain will reduce stress and make children adjustment more effective. However, one of the implications of this finding is that, since the higher the cognitive stress, the lower the school adjustment of students from divorce families, this will adversely continues to affects the academic performance of such students. By implication it will increase number of secondary school dropout due to poor academic performance in the study area, unless urgent interventions are put in place to rescue the situation. This means that in Kano Metropolis.

Conclusion

The study concluded that, there is significant negative relationship between cognitive stress and school adjustment among senior secondary school students from divorced families in Kano metropolis.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the study recommended that:

1. Students experiencing cognitive stress should be referred to school psychologists for appropriate counselling and psychological support.
2. Particular attention should be given to students from divorced families to help them develop effective coping strategies for managing cognitive stress.

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