

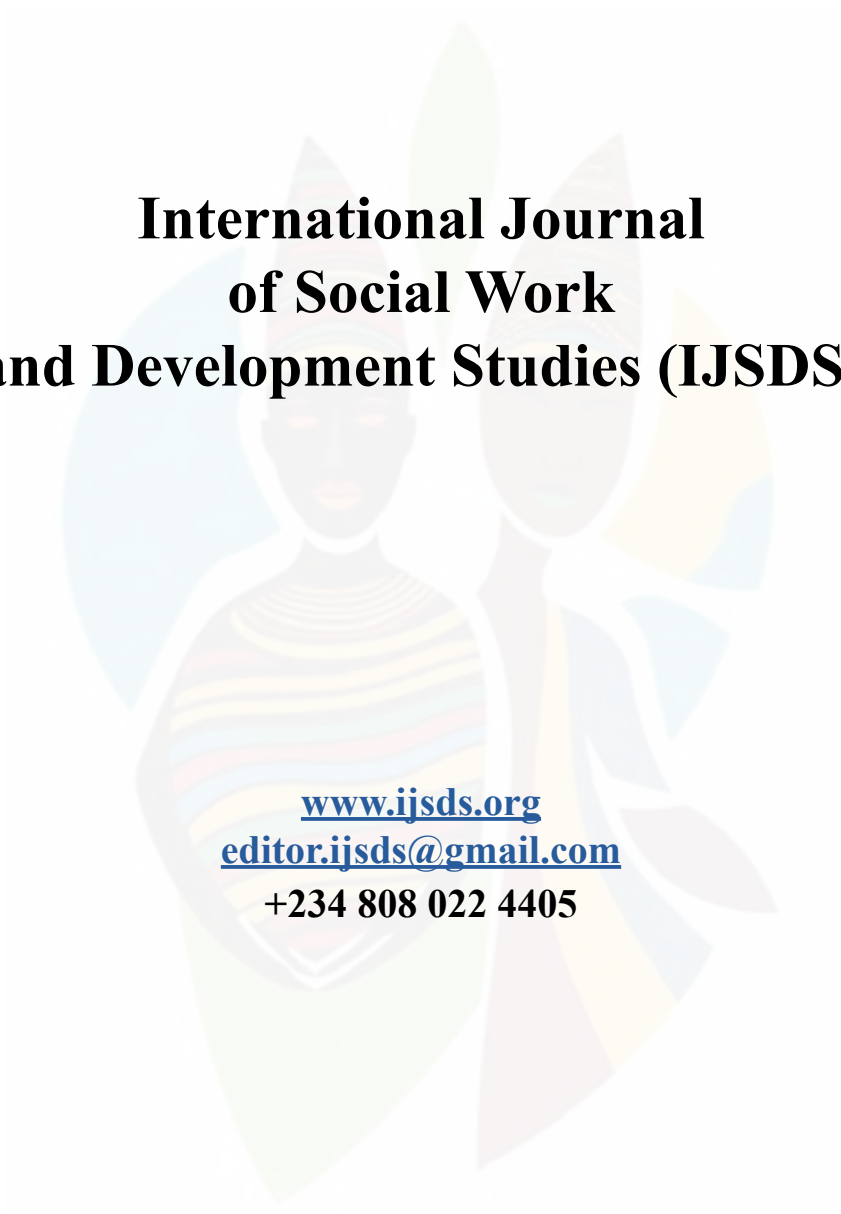
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**DIVORCE AND CHILD UPBRINGING:
A CASE STUDY OF BONNY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA
OF RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of divorce on child upbringing in Bonny Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria, with particular focus on emotional, academic, and social outcomes. Anchored on Bowlby's Attachment Theory, the research emphasized that disruptions in caregiver-child bonds due to divorce negatively influenced children's psychological development, peer relationships, and academic performance. A descriptive survey research design was employed, targeting 309,200 residents across five communities. A sample of 400 respondents was selected using purposive, quota, and convenience sampling techniques. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods, including weighted mean scores and contingency tables. Findings revealed that children from divorced families experienced significant emotional challenges, including anxiety, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal, which impaired their social interactions and peer relationships. Academic performance was also adversely affected, with children displaying poor concentration, absenteeism, and reduced motivation due to disrupted home environments and inconsistent parental support. Additionally, divorce influenced children's social adjustment, with many struggling to establish and maintain healthy friendships. The study highlighted the critical role of social work services in providing counseling, peer support, and family interventions, although accessibility and service delivery limitations were noted. Recommendations emphasized enhancing social worker resources, implementing targeted counseling programs, encouraging parental involvement, and raising public awareness about the impacts of divorce on children. Overall, the study underscored the need for holistic interventions to mitigate the negative effects of divorce and promote children's emotional, academic, and social well-being.

Keywords: Divorce, Child Upbringing, Emotional Well-being, Academic Performance, Social Development

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the rising incidence of divorce and its implications for child upbringing have become a serious social concern that demands urgent attention. Divorce, which is the legal termination of a marriage, was relatively rare in the past due to strong cultural sanctions, fear of infidelity penalties, and the societal emphasis on child welfare (Umoh, 2020). In Bonny Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria, marriage exists in several forms, including church or statutory marriages, Islamic marriages, and customary marriages conducted according to the native traditions of the people (Laoye-Balogun, 2015). The Bonny culture, however, permits polygamous unions, which often result in large families with children from different mothers (Anon, 2008). One of the fundamental purposes of marriage is to raise children, and these children are traditionally regarded as blessings and assets to their parents. The home, therefore, becomes the foundation for nurturing and shaping responsible citizens. Unfortunately, when marriages collapse, the home loses its cohesion, and children are caught in the web of insecurity, tension, and emotional distress (Lewis & Sammons, 2001).

Divorce, also referred to as dissolution of marriage, is the process through which legal obligations and responsibilities between a husband and wife are annulled. While the legal framework governing divorce varies across societies, most jurisdictions require judicial approval before marriage dissolution, often involving issues such as child custody, property division, alimony, parenting time, visitation rights, and debt sharing (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2010). In biblical and cultural traditions, marriage is a sacred institution meant to provide companionship, security, and moral order (Genesis 2:18; Stritof, 2018). In Nigeria, marriage is still revered across ethnic and religious lines, as reflected in customary, Islamic, and Christian marriage systems (Laoye-Balogun, 2015). However, increasing social pressures, economic challenges, and

value shifts have made divorce more prevalent. Social work services have thus become critical in mitigating the negative effects of divorce, offering counseling, advocacy, and intervention for families struggling with separation, neglect, and domestic conflict (Pinker, 2023; Nordesjo et al., 2022; Rembuluwani & Heiletje, 2021).

The consequences of divorce extend far beyond the immediate couple, significantly influencing children's emotional, cognitive, and social development. Research shows that children from broken homes often experience academic failure, peer relationship difficulties, and long-term emotional distress (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Kim, 2011). In Bonny Local Government, where polygamy and marital instability are common, children may face problems ranging from school dropout and juvenile delinquency to early sexual involvement and substance abuse (Culled from Daily Trust, 2007). Divorce often introduces economic strain, parental neglect, and exposure to conflicts, all of which threaten child well-being (Onofrio, 2011). Scholars argue that divorce is one of the most stressful life events, creating lasting trauma not only for spouses but also for children who may internalize blame, feel abandoned, or experience loyalty conflicts (Melgosa et al., 2005). These developmental disruptions during early childhood or adolescence often manifest as depression, behavioral issues, and reduced commitment to future relationships (Fagan & Churchill, 2012). The cumulative effects of divorce make it a pressing issue for family life, public health, and societal stability.

Given the pivotal role of the family in shaping society, the rise of divorce poses a major threat to social cohesion and child development. A healthy family structure is the foundation for a strong and morally upright society, while unstable families contribute to weak and disorganized communities (Oneke, 2004; Hughes, 2005). Studies indicate that divorce contributes to poor academic outcomes, psychological dis-

orders, teenage pregnancy, and increased social vices among children (Lewis & Sammons, 2001; Kim, 2011). In Bonny Local Government, the persistence of marital breakdown raises urgent questions about its effects on children and the role social work services can play in addressing these challenges. Social workers provide counseling, conflict resolution, and rehabilitation services, thereby helping children and families cope with the effects of separation (Oheme, 2018). Therefore, this research seeks to examine how divorce affects child upbringing in Bonny Local Government and how social work services can intervene to mitigate these effects.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Divorce has become a growing societal concern in Bonny Local Government Area, with noticeable impacts on the upbringing and development of children. The dissolution of marriages often results in family instability, which negatively affects children's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Children from divorced homes encounter challenges such as poor academic performance, difficulty in forming healthy relationships, emotional distress, and anti-social behaviors. Marital conflicts arising from poor communication, lack of intimacy, and financial disagreements often escalate to separation, leaving children vulnerable to neglect, insecurity, and psychological imbalance. The absence of one or both parents deprives children of stable love, care, and security, exposing them to embarrassment, feelings of guilt, low self-esteem, and social rejection.

Divorce contributes to poor academic achievement, especially among the girl child, who often faces additional burdens such as household responsibilities, truancy, and early sexual misconduct. Broken families also deprive children of basic needs like food, shelter, and emotional security, leading to deprivation, social imbalance, and challenges in proper socialization. The consequences of divorce include depression,

economic hardship, lowered standards of living, and weakened parent-child relationships, which further undermine child upbringing. Despite the rising cases of divorce in Bonny LGA, limited efforts have been made to address its effects on child development through social and religious interventions, leaving a significant gap in literature and practice.

1.2 Aim and Objectives of The Study

The objective of the study was to determine the effects of divorce on child upbringing in social work services in Bonny local government area of Rivers State. The specific objectives of this study are to;

- What is the ascertain impact of divorce on the emotional well-being of children in Bonny Local Government Area of Rivers State?
- How does divorce affect the academic performance of children in Bonny Local Government Area of Rivers State?
- Preventive measures on divorce and child upbringing in Bonny Local Government Area of Rivers State.

1.3 Research Questions

The following questions were formulated to guide the study.

- What is the impact of divorce on the emotional well-being of children in Bonny local government area of Rivers State?
- How does divorce affect the academic performance of children in Bonny Local Government area of Rivers State?
- In what way does divorce influence the social relationships of children in Bonny Local Government Area of Rivers State?

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1980), which emphasizes that children's emotional bonds with caregivers profoundly influence their social, emotional, and cognitive development. Secure attachments provide a child with a sense of safety, enabling exploration, independence, and emotional regulation, while disruptions—such as those caused by divorce—can trigger separation anxiety, emotional distress, and behavioral challenges. Divorce often leads to inconsistent caregiving, alternating living arrangements, and disruptions in social relationships, which may negatively affect trust, peer connections, and academic performance. In Bonny Local Government Area, the extended family and community networks play a critical role in providing additional stability and support. By fostering consistent caregiving, stable routines, and leveraging community resources, the negative effects of divorce on children's emotional and psychological well-being can be mitigated, making Attachment Theory a valuable framework for understanding the dynamics of child upbringing in this context.

2.1 The Meaning or Concept of a Child

A child has been widely defined in various contexts. The Encyclopedia Britannica (2014) describes a child as a young person between infancy and youth, a son or daughter of human parents, or even an unborn or recently born individual. Similarly, Child (2009) defines a child as a human being between birth and puberty or someone not yet of age and, therefore, legally irresponsible for their actions. Although other descriptions refer to a child as a product or descendant, the most relevant interpretations for this discussion are those that focus on age, legal recognition, and dependency.

For purposes of clarity, international legal instruments provide a more standardized definition. Article II of the O.A.U. Charter on the Rights and Welfare of

the Child (1991) defines a child as every human being below 18 years. Likewise, Article I of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that a child is any person under 18 years unless maturity is attained earlier under applicable law. Nigeria, being a signatory, also reflects this in its Child's Right Act (2016). In essence, a child is considered immature in thought and action, making them vulnerable and dependent on their parents and, by extension, society.

2.2 The Meaning or Concept of Divorce

Divorce, in its most basic sense, refers to the legal dissolution of a marriage, terminating the duties and responsibilities between spouses. Ukpong (2014) defines it as the legal separation of a man and his wife according to established custom, while Britannica (2020) and Cathy (2017) describe it as the cancellation or rearrangement of matrimonial obligations under the law. Importantly, divorce can only occur where a legal marriage existed, distinguishing it from separations among unmarried cohabiting partners (Fromme, 1969). Divorce is often described as a crisis, representing not only the breakdown of an intimate relationship but also the loss of security, shared dreams, and stability for both adults and children.

2.3 The Effect of Divorce on Child Upbringing in Bonny Local Government Area

Research shows that divorce has profound consequences on children's psychological, social, and educational development. Adamu & Temesgen (2014) note that children from divorced families are more prone to dropping out of school, engaging in substance abuse, early sexual activity, and delinquent behavior, which often manifest as crime, theft, and other immoral acts. Shahram, Ali & Ghoobad (2012, cited in Adamu & Temesgen, 2014) further identify anti-social behavior, prostitution, aggression, academic failure, and loss of confidence as common outcomes among children of broken homes.

2.3.1 Short-Term Effects

In the first two years following divorce, most children display noticeable adjustment problems. Boys are more likely to show conduct-related issues, while girls are prone to emotional difficulties. This period is often marked by confusion, insecurity, and behavioral disruptions as children attempt to process the sudden changes in their family structure.

2.3.2 Medium-Term Effects

Between the third and tenth year after divorce, children of separated families consistently show higher levels of maladjustment compared to those from intact families. These difficulties may include academic struggles, low self-esteem, strained parent-child relationships, and behavioral or emotional problems (Amato, 1993; Amato & Keith, 1991b). While some studies suggest this has led to the misconception that divorce always harms children, findings actually indicate that the degree of impact depends on pre-divorce conditions and post-divorce family dynamics (Melgosa & Melgosa, 2005). For example, children already facing family conflict before divorce are more likely to suffer long-lasting setbacks, whereas those from relatively stable environments may recover more quickly.

2.3.3 Long-Term Effects

In adulthood, a small proportion of individuals from divorced families struggle with stable relationships, psychological adjustment, and socioeconomic attainment compared to peers from intact homes (Amato, 1993; Cherlin, 1999). Common long-term consequences include lower educational outcomes, reduced father-child contact, and emotional skepticism about trust and loyalty. Nonetheless, many children eventually resume normal development, especially when both parents remain involved in their lives (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Arditti & Keith, 1993). However, divorce does not always eliminate conflict—issues such as custody and financial disputes may continue,

underscoring that family problems often persist in different forms (Awake, 2009).

The impact of divorce also varies by age. Young children, due to limited understanding, often blame themselves for the separation and cling to the hope of parental reconciliation (Kendall, 2003). Pre-teens and teenagers, on the other hand, show greater awareness of family breakdown, often responding with anger, resentment, or fear about their own future relationships. In both cases, children face the burden of divided loyalty and disrupted stability, which complicates their adjustment to school and social life (Rodgers & Pryor, 1998).

Beyond emotional effects, divorce exposes children to practical hardships such as economic deprivation, reduced parental care, and lack of balanced training. They may also become targets of parental aggression, develop hatred toward one parent, or fall into social vices such as drug abuse and crime (Lauer, 1995). Nonetheless, some scholars argue that in high-conflict homes, divorce may have positive effects by freeing children from constant hostility and allowing them to rebuild in a more peaceful environment (Olson & Defrain, 1994; Ukpong, 2014). Thus, while the short- and medium-term effects of divorce are largely negative, its long-term impact depends on the level of parental conflict and the coping mechanisms available to children (Amato, 1993; Wallerstein, 1991).

2.3.4 Diminished Capacity

Parental separation often diminishes children's learning capacity. A national study in the U.S. found that children from separated families performed significantly worse in reading, spelling, and math, with higher grade repetition rates compared to peers from intact homes (Mary & Parcel, 1997). Father absence in particular is associated with lower cognitive test scores—especially in mathematics—while paternal involvement enhances verbal skills, particularly when fathers engage in activities such as reading aloud (Da-

vid, 2003). Mobility caused by divorce further undermines academic performance, as frequent moves disrupt schooling and intensify emotional and behavioral difficulties (Frances, Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 2005; Ruth, Stirtzinger & Cholvat, 2007).

2.3.5 Broader Social Consequences

The long-term effects of divorce extend beyond education to cultural, religious, and societal domains. In many African contexts, divorced women face stigmatization and difficulty remarrying, while children often bear the brunt of family breakdown through neglect, poor supervision, and vulnerability to delinquency (Romans 7:2–3; Ruth et al., 2007). As family structures collapse, children may become school dropouts or street children, contributing to rising insecurity and crime within society. Thus, divorce not only undermines the child's socialization process but also poses wider societal challenges by fueling patterns of deviance, poverty, and instability.

2.4 Divorce on Parents

Divorce affects men and women differently, with women typically experiencing more severe economic and emotional consequences. For example, women's incomes drop by about 30% compared to only 10% for men (Bogale, 2008). Custodial mothers also report higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and inconsistent parenting in the first years after divorce (Kotwal & Prabhakar, 2009). In Ethiopia, many divorced women, often housewives, face financial insecurity since they gain custody of children without child support and are forced into informal economic activities such as petty trading or food vending (Semhal, 2007; Serkalem, 2006). Divorce also brings identity struggles, particularly for women who had defined themselves through their husbands or families, leaving them to rebuild social networks and redefine self-concepts (Kotwal & Prabhakar, 2009).

2.5 Psychological and Social Changes

Beyond finances, divorced parents experience significant lifestyle disruptions including changes in residence, reduced social support, and role overload as they balance childcare with employment. These transitions are often accompanied by health problems, though many individuals stabilize within two years (Serkalem, 2006). Emotional strain is also common, with both men and women experiencing mood swings ranging from elation at newfound independence to depression caused by loneliness and uncertainty (Bogale, 2008). Women, in particular, face greater identity crises if they lack external sources of self-definition, although employment outside the home helps mitigate this effect (Kotwal & Prabhakar, 2009).

2.6 Divorce In Nigeria

Research consistently shows that divorce negatively influences children's educational and emotional outcomes. Children from divorced families are more likely to engage in truancy and perform poorly in school due to the instability and stress associated with family breakdown (Melgosa & Melgosa, 2005). Custodial parents, often overwhelmed by financial and emotional strain, may have diminished capacity to supervise and support their children's learning, further weakening academic progress and motivation (Kotwal & Prabhakar, 2009). These factors combine to heighten the risks of school failure and disengagement among children of divorced families.

The effects of divorce on children can be seen across different stages of development. In the short term, children often experience behavioral and emotional problems, while in the medium term they face challenges such as low self-esteem, academic underachievement, and strained parental relationships (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992). Long-term consequences include difficulties in forming stable adult relationships and persistent emotional or economic struggles, though some children recover with time

(Cherlin, 1999). Father absence also plays a key role, as many children in single-mother households lose consistent paternal involvement, which is linked to increased vulnerability to delinquency and substance abuse, particularly during adolescence (Arditti & Keith, 1993; Awake, 2009).

2.6.1 Children's Perspectives on Divorce

Children experience divorce very differently from adults due to their limited ability to process complex emotional and relational issues. Younger children, in particular, often blame themselves for their parents' separation, believing that misbehavior or failure to intervene caused the divorce (PHAC, 2010). They may also develop unrealistic hopes that their parents will reconcile, even in cases involving conflict or abuse. Because of their deep emotional bond and dependence on both parents, young children struggle to understand why the two most important figures in their lives cannot live together harmoniously, leading to confusion, fear, and feelings of abandonment.

The stress of ongoing parental conflict further burdens children, who often feel caught in the middle of disputes and pressured to take sides. This creates a sense of divided loyalty and insecurity, undermining their emotional development and sense of stability (PHAC, 2010). Younger children, unable to separate themselves from their parents' struggles, may internalize conflict as a personal failure and develop anxieties about safety and belonging. Such experiences leave lasting marks on their self-concept, since children first construct their identity by observing and interacting with their parents.

2.6.2 Factors Contributing to Divorce and Child Upbringing in Bonny LGA

Research indicates that gender plays a significant role in marital separation, with women more likely than men to notice relationship problems and initiate discussions about them, often leading to divorce (Thompson & Walker, 1991; Kitson, 2002). Women

tend to cite relational and emotional issues, such as incompatibility, lack of love, or negative partner behaviors, while men often attribute separation to external factors like work pressures or in-law conflicts (Levinger, 2006; Cleeck & Pearson, 1985). These differences reflect the gendered nature of marital discord and the distinct ways men and women experience and explain divorce.

Socioeconomic status (SES) also significantly affects marital stability and child upbringing. Higher education and income promote effective communication and problem-solving, which can strengthen marriages, whereas economic hardship increases stress, reduces emotional support, and contributes to marital conflict (Voydanoff, 1991; Conger, 1990). Notably, high-SES individuals often cite expressive and relational reasons for divorce, such as lack of communication or personality conflicts, while low-SES individuals report instrumental issues like financial instability, abuse, and neglect (Kitson, 2002; Levinger, 2006). Poor communication, sexual incompatibility, domestic violence, addiction, and unmet expectations further exacerbate marital breakdown, affecting both parents and children and often creating long-term challenges for child development.

2.7 Empirical Review on the Effects of Divorce

Patrick (2012) highlighted that divorce not only disrupts families but also damages society by consuming social and human capital, increasing costs to taxpayers, and diminishing children's future competence across major societal institutions such as family, school, religion, marketplace, and government. Divorce often weakens the parent-child relationship, with up to 40 percent of children of divorced mothers experiencing reduced parental support, which becomes more pronounced through high school and college. Similarly, Videon (2002) found that parental divorce and maternal non-residence could lead to delinquent behavior in adolescent girls, particularly

when the mother-daughter relationship was otherwise strong. Breivik (2006) further reported that adolescents, especially in single-father families, tend to exhibit more antisocial and violent behaviors compared to peers from intact families.

2.8 Summary of Literature

This chapter reviewed scholarly work on the effect of divorce on child upbringing in Bonny Local Government Area of Rivers State, examining the concept and meaning of divorce as well as how children, pre-teens, and teenagers experience it differently. Kendall (2003) emphasized that while children's emotional responses are rooted in the experience of pain, teenagers benefit from a growing maturity and understanding of human relationships, which helps them process the changes more consciously. Literature also revealed that children's reactions are influenced not only by the divorce itself but also by negative family interactions prior to the separation, as well as the life transitions and strained familial relationships that follow (Rodgers & Pryor, 1998). Across ages and circumstances, children experience significant emotional and psychological challenges during divorce, highlighting the universal impact of parental separation on child well-being.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which allows for an in-depth examination of the prevailing conditions and changes in the population concerning divorce and child upbringing. Descriptive survey research seeks to reveal the characteristics, nature, and direction of variables while examining the how, what, when, and why of changes over a period of time (Kpolovie, 2010). This design is suitable for capturing the experiences, perceptions, and challenges associated with divorce in Bonny Local Govern-

ment Area.

3.2 Population of the Study

The target population consisted of 309,200 individuals from five selected communities in Bonny Local Government Area—Finima, Kalaibama, Aganya, Akiama, and Oloma. This population included men, women, and youths, forming the basis for which the findings of this study are intended to be applicable (Baridam, 1990).

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total of 400 respondents were selected for the study using Taro Yamane's formula to ensure a representative sample. Purposive sampling was used to select the five communities, quota sampling allocated 80 respondents to each community, and convenience sampling targeted respondents willing to participate. This approach ensured that the sample adequately represented the diversity and perspectives of the population within Bonny Local Government Area.

3.3.1 Method of Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured, self-constructed questionnaire administered personally by the researcher and three assistants. Respondents were approached in homes, workplaces, and public gatherings, and questionnaires were completed and retrieved immediately. The instrument included demographic information in Section A and research-related questions in Section B, designed to reflect the study objectives and research questions. The data collection process was guided by pre-testing to ensure clarity and suitability of questions.

3.3.2 Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including contingency tables and a five-point weighted mean score (WMS) approach. Scores above 2.5 were considered positive responses, while scores below 2.5 were treated as

negative. This method allowed for clear interpretation of respondents' views on divorce and child upbringing, aligned with the study's research questions.

3.3.3 Data Presentation And Analysis

This chapter presents and analyses data collected from the field. The data collected was made possible through documented evidence from administered questionnaires to respondents.

Table 4.1: Distribution of Questionnaire

Questionnaire	Frequency	Percentage
Distributed	400	100%
Retrieved	392	98%
Not Retrieved	8	2%

Source: Fieldwork Survey (2024)

Table 4.1 indicates that 400 (100%) of questionnaires were distributed, 392 (98%) of the questionnaire were retrieved, while 8 (2%) of the questionnaire were not retrieved.

3.3.4 Data Analysis

Data analyzed was based on the four research questions. It was done using mean and standard deviation.

3.4 Research Question One

What is the impact of divorce on the emotional well-being of children in Bonny local government area of Rivers State?

Table 4.2.1: Mean and Standard Deviation Rating of Respondents

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	Children from divorced families often exhibit signs of emotional distress (e.g., sadness, anxiety, anger).	3.58	0.77	Accepted
2.	Divorce negatively affects the self-esteem and confidence of children.	3.31	0.81	Accepted
3.	Children from divorced families tend to feel isolated and have difficulty forming close emotional relationships.	3.25	0.85	Accepted
4.	Parental separation leads to emotional instability in children, making it harder for them to regulate their emotions.	2.85	0.73	Accepted
5.	Children of divorced parents in Bonny Local Government Area receive adequate emotional support from family members and community.	2.52	0.86	Accepted
	Grand Mean	3.17	0.87	Accepted

Source: Fieldwork Survey (2024).

Data on Table 4.2.1 showed that the means rating for items 1 to 5 in this cluster were 3.58, 3.31, 3.25, 2.85, and 2.52 respectively with their corresponding standard deviations of 0.77, 0.81, 0.85, 0.73 and 0.86. All the mean ratings are above the cut-off point of 2.50. This means that the respondents had agreed that children from divorced families often exhibit signs of emotional distress (e.g., sadness, anxiety, anger). Divorce negatively affects the self-esteem and confidence of children. Children from divorced families tend to feel isolated and

have difficulty forming close emotional relationships. Parental separation leads to emotional instability in children, making it harder for them to regulate their emotions. Children of divorced parents in Bonny Local Government Area receive adequate emotional support from family members and community. The grand mean of 3.17 with the standard deviation of 0.87 was also found to be above the cut-off point of 2.50.

3.5 Research Question Two

How does divorce affect the academic performance of children in Bonny local government area of Rivers State?

Table 4.2.2: Mean and Standard Deviation Rating of Respondents

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
6.	Children from divorced families often have lower academic performance compared to their peers.	3.29	0.89	Accepted
7.	Divorce leads to a lack of concentration in schoolwork among affected children.	2.82	0.97	Accepted
8.	Children from divorced families are more likely to skip school or perform poorly in exams.	3.25	0.79	Accepted
9.	Parental separation causes emotional distress that impacts children's academic motivation.	3.30	0.78	Accepted
10.	Children of divorced parents in Bonny LGA receive adequate academic support from teachers and schools.	3.39	0.85	Accepted
	Grand Mean	3.22	0.83	Accepted

Source: Fieldwork Survey (2024).

From the analysis of data shown on Table 4.2.2, the mean ratings for item 6 to 10 in this cluster were 3.39, 2.82, 3.25, 3.30 and 3.39 respectively with corresponding standard deviations of 0.89, 0.97, 0.79, 0.78 and 0.85. All the mean ratings are above the cut-off point of 2.50. This means that the respondents agreed that children from divorced families often have lower academic performance compared to their peers. Divorce leads to a lack of concentration in schoolwork among affected children. Children from divorced families are more likely to skip school or perform poorly in exams. Parental separation causes emotional distress that impacts children's academic motivation. Children of divorced parents in Bonny LGA receive adequate academic support from teachers and schools. The grand mean of 3.22 with the standard deviations of 0.83 was also found to be above the cut-off point of 2.50.

3.6 Research Question Three

What way does divorce influences the social relationship of children in Bonny local government area of Rivers State?

Table 4.2.3: Mean and Standard Deviation Rating of Respondents

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
11.	Children from divorced families struggle to form close friendships with their peers.	3.37	0.82	Accepted

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
12.	Divorce causes children to withdraw from social activities and interactions with others.	3.38	0.74	Accepted
13.	Children of divorced parents are more likely to exhibit trust issues in their social relationships.	3.50	0.78	Accepted
14.	Children from divorced families experience difficulty in adjusting to new social environments (e.g., schools, community events).	2.98	1.01	Accepted
15.	Divorce negatively impacts the communication skills of children, affecting their ability to form and maintain social connections.	3.27	0.87	Accepted
	Grand Mean	3.30	0.84	Accepted

Source: Fieldwork Survey, (2024).

From the analysis of data as shown on Table 4.2.3, the mean ratings for items 11 to 15 in this cluster were 3.37, 3.38, 3.50, 2.98 and 3.27 respectively with their corresponding standard deviation of 0.82, 0.74, 0.78, 1.01 and 0.87. All the mean ratings are above the cut-off point of 2.50. This means that the respondents had agreed that children from divorced families struggle to form close friendships with their peers. Divorce causes children to withdraw from social activities and interactions with others. Children of divorced parents are more likely to exhibit trust issues in their social relationships. Children from divorced families experience difficulty in adjusting to new social environments (e.g., schools, community events). Divorce negatively impacts the communication skills of children, affecting their ability to form and maintain social connections. The grand mean of 3.30 with the standard deviations of 0.84 was also found to be above the cut-off point of 2.50.

4.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Impact of Divorce on the Emotional Well-Being of Children

The study revealed that children from divorced families in Bonny Local Government Area experience considerable emotional challenges, including anxiety, sadness, anger, and low self-esteem, which adversely affect their psychological development. These children often exhibit withdrawal, feelings of isolation, and difficulties in forming healthy peer relationships. Emotional instability, coupled with perceived neglect from absent parents, contributes to their sense of rejection and abandonment. Consistent with prior research (Amato, 2000; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Lansford, 2009), children lacking strong support from extended family or social structures face heightened emotional distress, highlighting the urgent need for counseling, peer support, and community-based interventions to bolster their emotional well-being.

4.2 Divorce Effects on the Academic Performance of Children

Findings indicate that parental divorce negatively influences the academic performance of children in Bonny LGA due to emotional stress, inconsistent parental support, and disruptions in the home environment. Children from divorced families often struggle with concentration, motivation, and school attendance, leading to lower grades and academic disengagement. Emotional distress, absenteeism, and lack of supervision impede cognitive development and learning, in line with studies by Amato (2010) and Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan (2002). These results underscore the need for targeted academic support, counseling services, and increased parental involvement to mitigate the educational challenges faced by children affected by divorce.

4.3 Influence of Divorce on the Social Relationships of Children

The study found that divorce significantly disrupts the social relationships of children in Bonny LGA. Emotional distress, trust issues, and social withdrawal hinder their ability to establish and maintain healthy friendships, while changes in living arrangements and schools make adaptation to new social environments challenging. Children from divorced families often struggle with communication and exhibit reluctance to engage socially, consistent with findings from Hetherington (2003) and Kelly & Emery (2003). These challenges emphasize the importance of interventions such as counseling and social skills programs to help children build stronger peer relationships and foster social resilience.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The study revealed that divorce significantly affects children in Bonny Local Government Area, impacting their emotional well-being, academic performance, and social relationships. Children from divorced families often experience anxiety, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, and difficulty concentrating in school, while inconsistent parental support exacerbates these challenges. Social workers provide essential emotional and coping support, but limitations in accessibility and service delivery reduce their effectiveness. The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions that involve both children and their families to mitigate the negative effects of divorce and promote healthier development.

5.1 Recommendations

- Improve training, resources, and accessibility for social workers to provide effective support to children affected by divorce.
- Establish counseling, workshops, and peer support initiatives to enhance emotional resilience and coping skills.
- Encourage parents and guardians to participate in

interventions to strengthen family bonds and provide consistent guidance.

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