



Towards Understanding Aggressive Behaviour of Nigerian Adolescents: Focus on Family Structure

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Abstract

Aggressive behaviour of adolescent have gained attention worldwide because of the negative impact on the perpetrators, the victims, their families and significant others; it has also been found that children who are aggressive may grow up to become adults who engage in criminal activities. In a school setting, high level of aggressive behaviour among the students portray the school as failing in its responsibility of moulding the children to become responsible members of the society. Many factors have been investigated for being responsible for this behaviour among the adolescents, among which is the family structure. This study therefore aims to find out the relationship between family structure and aggressive behaviours of Nigerian adolescents. The sample for the study comprised one hundred and twenty students randomly selected from three schools in Azare metropolis in Bauchi state of Nigeria. Findings of the study revealed that there is a relationship between family structure and aggressive behaviour. Children from polygamous family without their biological mothers tend to be more aggressive while those from polygamous family which include biological father and mother, and those from monogamous family are

less aggressive. It can therefore be concluded that it is not polygamy itself that is detrimental to child outcome, but the absence of the biological parents in the family.

Key Words: Adolescent, Aggressive behaviour, family structure, Polygamy

1 Introduction

adolescent aggressive behaviour is a disturbing phenomenon that has attracted attention worldwide because of its impact on the victims, families, society as well as influencing the perpetrators development in a destructive way.¹ since children who are aggressive may grow up to become adults who engage in criminal activities.² The short and long term negative impact of adolescent aggressive behaviour on the development of the individual in particular and the nation generally has encouraged several researches, aimed at developing effective intervention for prevention and control^{1,3,4}. these studies have shown that factors responsible for aggressive behaviour are heterogeneous⁵ including parenting, peer relationship, attachment, family structure.^{6,7} Although quite a number of interventions have also been developed there is still a high rate of adolescent aggressive behaviour despite report of a drop⁸ particularly in Nigeria

Although some studies have shown that family structure has little impact on risk taking, there are others that have supported its direct influence on the developing child.⁹ Many of the studies have established a strong association between family structure and behavioural outcome of adolescents^{10–15} endorsing the primacy of the intact families over other family structures. An intact family where the adolescent lives with both biological parents is found to have positive outcomes above single parent, step parent and cohabitation families which are characterised with negative behavioural outcomes such as antisocial behaviours, delinquency and aggressive behaviour. One of the studies¹⁰, reported that adolescents who reside with a single biological parent who cohabits with a nonbiological partner exhibit an unusually high rate of aggressive behaviour, especially if the custodial parent is the biological father. Studies have also established that even in a family where a child is living with both parents who are not married but in cohabitation, the

level of aggressive behaviour tends to be higher than those with married parents¹⁶.

Extant literature is replete with numerous studies on the relationship between different family structure and adolescents behavioural outcome, but the distinctions between families frequently made in the literature do not accurately capture the full variety of family types children face.¹⁷ for example, polygamous family structure has received less attention from researcher. A polygamous family exist where one of the parents is married to more than one spouse at the same time¹⁸. Different forms of polygamy exist around the world including polygyny, polyandry, polygynandry, but the most widely practiced of these polygamous relationship is the polygyny where a man is married to more than one wife.^{19,18} Polygyny is practiced in more than 850 societies,²⁰ living in more than 50 countries world-wide²¹. With twenty-seven of the twenty-nine nations in the world classified as having high rates of polygyny, located in sub-Saharan Africa, polygamy is an African phenomenon²² and Nigeria is a significant member of countries where polygyny is common and apparently stable in this modern era²². The Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2008, shows a national average of 18.7% polygynous marriage among men and 32.7% for women. However, prevalence of polygyny in northern Nigeria is higher than the national average with 43 percent in North East, 42 percent in North West, and 37 percent in North Central. Polygyny is more common amongst individuals with lower education levels but common at all wealth levels. Although majority of the polygynous men are married to 2 wives, about 2.6% of them reported having 3 or more wives ²².

Given the wide spread practice of polygamy across the world and considering the research findings of significant influence of family structure on children developmental outcome, it is necessary to focus on this family structure in understanding the rising spate of adolescent aggressive behaviour. However, most of the study on family structure have not given adequate attention to polygamous family structure probably due to its prohibition in the western countries where most of the researches are conducted. Given that polygyny is permitted in many countries and cultures, there is need for further research on the effects of this type of family structure on children.¹⁸ The available studies are mostly from the Middle

East, especially Bedouin Arabs^{19,23,24} with very few studies from Nigeria^{25–27}

In a summary of studies on family structure,¹⁸ only one study reported negative outcome for the monogamous family children, and none reported benefits of polygamy for children. These studies purports polygamy has detrimental effects on children and adolescents. Adolescents from polygamous families were found to have mental health disorders, scholastic difficulties and social problems compared to their peers in monogamous families. However, children from both monogamous and polygamous families were found to be similar in self-esteem, anxiety, depression, hostility, teacher report of problem behaviours, learning disorders.

Among the Nigerian adolescents, there was better psychological adjustment for male children in monogamous family compared with those from polygamous families, but there was no difference among female adolescents from the two families, leading to the conclusion that female children in polygamous families enjoy more protective upbringing than the male.²⁶ In another study, no differences in examination scores between monogamous and polygamous family children except that polygamous family children reported more difficulties in maths and English than their monogamous family peers.²⁵

The current study therefore sought to find out whether Nigerian adolescents from monogamous and polygamous family structure differ in aggressive behaviour and whether gender and father education attainment was of any effect. The high rate of divorce and remarriage in northern Nigeria³¹ coupled with high rate of polygamy, has subjected many children to live in a polygamous family without either the biological father or the biological mother. None of the previous studies has considered this category of children hence this is the first to make this distinction among polygamous family.

2 MATERIAL AND METHOD

The participants in the current study comprise 120 male and female senior secondary school students aged 16-18 years old, drawn from three secondary schools in Azare Bauchi state Nigeria. Although 135 students were initially sampled, 15 could not be use in the

analysis due to incomplete information (5) and belonging to other family structure considered too small for any meaningful result; step parenthood (3), single parent (3) and other relatives (4). The demographic information provided by the participants indicate that 55% (66) were female and 45% (54) male; 38.3% (46) 16years, 28.3% (34) 17years and 33.3% (40) 18years.

The Aggressive questionnaire (AQ)32 was used to assess adolescents aggressive behaviour. AQ is a 29 items self-report measure divided into four subscales; physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility. Respondents responses are rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1= Extremely uncharacteristic of me to 5= Extremely characteristic of me. The reported Cronbachs alpha for overall AQ = .72. in the current study, alpha = .71. Obtainable score for each respondent range from a minimum of 29 points to a maximum of 145 points with higher score indicating more aggressiveness than lower score. Prior to completing the scale, the participants completed a demographic questionnaire that included items on age, gender, family type and parental education.

3 RESULTS

The result obtained from the analysis revealed that 45 respondents, mean = 72.69 SD = 11.19 were from intact monogamous family with biological father and biological mother; 36 respondents, mean = 73.08, SD = 11.15 from polygamous family with biological father, biological mother and step mother(s), and 39 respondents, mean = 91.28, SD = 14.02 were from polygamous family with biological father and step mothers, but no biological mother. Table 2 depicts the means and standard deviations for each of the three groups.

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations

Family Type	n	Mean	Standard deviation
Intact Biological Parent	45	72.69	11.192
Polygamous with Biological Mother	36	73.08	11.157
Polygamous with no Biological Mother	39	91.28	11.007
Total	120	78.85	14.024

MODE 1 OPERATION:

The result showed that there was statistically significant influence of family structure on adolescent aggressive behaviour at the $p = .05$ level for the three family types $F(2,117) = 36.11$, $p = 0.001$ as shown on table 3 below. The effect size was calculated using eta squared and the result was 0.38, considered a large effect size.²⁹ The post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test revealed a statistically significant difference of the mean score for the adolescents from monogamous biological parent family ($M = 72.69$, $SD = 11.19$) and the adolescents from polygamous with no biological mother family (91.28 , $SD = 11.01$). Similarly, there was a statistically significant difference between the means of adolescents from polygamous with biological mother family ($M = 73.08$, $SD = 11.16$) and the adolescents from polygamous with no biological mother family. There was no statistically significant difference between the means of adolescents from monogamous biological parent family and the adolescents from polygamous with biological mother family.

Table 3
Analysis of Variance for Adolescent Aggressive Behaviour

	SS	df	MS	F	P
Between Groups	8933.008	2	4466.504	36.109	.000
Within Groups	14472.292	117	123.695		
Total	23405.300	119			

Therefore, adolescents from monogamous families are not significantly different from adolescents from polygamous families if the biological father and mother are present in the family. This is in consonance with previous results that found no statistically significant difference between children from polygamous and monogamous families on self-esteem, anxiety, depression and hostility,^{19,30} national examination examinations score.²⁵ Adolescents living in polygamous family without their biological mothers were found to be more aggressive than those from the monogamous and polygamous family with biological mother. Polygamous family without the biological mother is akin to a step parent family. Compared to their peers in intact monogamous family, adolescents in stepfamilies were found to be at increased risk of negative outcomes^{32,33}

The Chi-Square value for the association between family structure and father education was obtained as 2.55 with 6 degrees of

freedom and a Significance Probability greater than 0.05, an insignificant result. Based on the evidence from this data it can be assumed that there is no association between family structure and father educational attainment in the population.

Table 4
Chi Square Test

	Value	df	Sig
Pearson Chi Square	2.553	6	.863
Likelihood Ratio	2.562	6	.862
Linear by Linear association	.969	1	.325
Number of Valid Cases	120		

The level of parental educational attainment was also compared, there was no significant difference between the family structure. This is contrary to the previous findings, mostly among the Badouin Arabs where polygamy is associated with parents with low level of education^{19,34} but supports the findings among Nigerian adolescents²⁵ and the Arabs.²³

4 CONCLUSION

The result from this study has expanded our knowledge to the understanding that polygamy is heterogeneous contrary to the assumptions in previous study of homogeneity. There are other cases of polygamy where the wives are live in different places/houses and the husband shares the days he spends in each house. This reduces the level of supervision and attention given by the father.²⁰ There are also instance of polygamous husband who abandon the first wife and move to live with the new wife thereby saddling the older wife with the responsibility of child upbringing alone, a situation similar to single parent family. In conclusion, it is not polygamy itself that is detrimental to child outcome but the absence of a parent. It is hoped that this differences in polygamous families would be taken into consideration in future studies

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