

ASSESSMENT OF FAMILY-BASED CHALLENGES INFLUENCING THE SOCIAL LIFE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN DELTA STATE

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Abstract

The study assessed family-based challenges influencing the social life of secondary school students in Delta State. This was prompted by the dynamics of social behaviour of secondary school students that manifest in antisocial and anti-academic behaviours. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Four research question guided the study. The population of the study comprised all students in public secondary schools in Delta State. The sample comprise 600 students (300 male and 300 female) selected from 6 secondary schools. The schools were selected from the three senatorial district of the state. Two schools selected from each senatorial district and from each school, 100 students were selected. The purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used for the selection of the respondents (students). The instruments for data collection was a 45-item four-point rating scale structured questionnaire titled: Family-Based Challenges and Social Life of Secondary School Students Related Questionnaire (FBCSLSSSRQ) and validated by three experts. The reliability of the instrument was established through a trial test and a consistency value of 0.83 was attained. 600 copies of the questionnaire were administered and 543(91%) were retrieved. Mean and Standard deviation were used for data analysis. Findings from the study revealed among others that financial difficulties in families, domestic conflict, pressured by family expectations regarding academics and career choices, excessive household responsibilities, divorce of parents, access to basic needs such as food and school materials, and religious intolerance/conflict among others are common family-based challenges that influence secondary school students'

social behaviour and that students from conflict-ridden homes could be aggressive toward peers and teachers, model the hostility they experience at home, resort to fighting or verbal abuse in social interactions, have difficulty trusting others, fearing rejection or harm, lead to self-doubt, insecurity, and feelings of worthlessness. The study recommended among other that the Delta State government and NGOs should provide financial assistance or skills training for low-income families to reduce economic stress, which often affects students' social well-being.

Keywords: *Family-based challenges, secondary school students, socioeconomic challenges, and social life.*

Introduction

The family serves as a fundamental pillar of society, forming the foundation upon which all other social institutions are established. Every individual belongs to a family, from which they set out to work, attend school, participate in religious or social gatherings, engage in businesses, and travel, only to return to their family at the end of each day and eventually after retirement. As people leave their homes to pursue different endeavors, they are expected to adhere to specific social behaviour patterns in line with ethical norms. Whether in formal or informal settings, the family unit plays a crucial role in shaping social development, especially for adolescents who are more susceptible to external influences. Secondary school students, in particular, tend to explore their surroundings, bringing with them social experiences from their home and immediate environment. These experiences influence their behavioural patterns in school, where some behaviours are seen as acceptable while others are deemed inappropriate. Consequently, one of the school's key roles is to shape and refine student behaviour.

The social behaviour of learners within school settings significantly impacts their academic journey, emotional health, and relationships (Durlak et al., 2015). Over the past decade, research has identified multiple factors influencing student behaviour, including family background, peer influence, school environment,

and digital advancements (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Among these, the family plays a central role in laying the foundation for emotional stability, interpersonal relationships, teamwork, adaptability, empathy, commitment, sincerity, honesty, discipline, and morality. These qualities prepare individuals for broader societal interactions (Fink et al. 2018).

Active school engagement—such as regular attendance, participation in class activities, and adherence to school regulations—has been closely linked to family background and academic success. Wang and Degol (2016) emphasize that a positive school climate, characterized by strong teacher-student relationships and effective discipline, enhances student engagement. Likewise, Epstein (2018) underscores the significance of parental involvement in fostering positive school behaviour. However, despite these influences, challenges like bullying, absenteeism, and classroom disruptions persist. Fink et al. (2018) report that around 20–30% of students, worldwide experience bullying, which negatively affects their social adjustment, academic performance, and emotional well-being.

The increasing digitalization of family life has, in some cases, altered traditional family structures. Electronic culture has placed children in a world detached from the social environment of their homes. Social behaviours are shaped by interactions with peers, family, and digital platforms. The rise of social media and digital communication has redefined social norms among children and adolescents. While Twenge and Campbell (2018) acknowledge that digital interactions can enhance socialization, they caution that excessive screen time can reduce face-to-face interactions and social skills, which are essential for positive behavioural development. Collaborative learning and extracurricular activities have been shown to encourage positive social behaviours. Durlak et al. (2015) found that social-emotional learning (SEL) programs in schools improve students' interpersonal skills and reduce behavioural issues. However, SEL programs work more effectively when reinforced by

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positive family social experiences. Some SEL initiatives are based on social media platforms, which can lead to further detachment from family interactions. The COVID-19 pandemic amplified this issue, as prolonged online learning and social isolation affected students' social behaviour and emotional well-being. Chabbott and Sinclair (2021) observed that the extended separation from traditional social environments contributed to behavioural changes, particularly in families affected by distance marriages or polygamous structures.

In Delta State, Nigeria, like every other state in Nigeria, it is perceived that family-related challenges significantly influence students' social interactions, academic achievements, and emotional health (Nwanwukwu & Asiyai, 2024). Family structure plays a key role in social adjustment as research indicates that students from unstable homes—whether due to divorce, separation, or single parenthood—often experience stress, lack of motivation, and difficulty adapting socially and academically (Sani, 2019). In contrast, students from stable family environments tend to develop healthier social skills.

Parental involvement is another crucial factor. Studies in Delta State show that students with actively engaged parents perform better academically and socially (Nwanwukwu & Asiyai, 2024). Parental engagement includes offering educational support, monitoring assignments, and maintaining communication with teachers (Angwaomaodoko, 2023). However, the extent of parental involvement often depends on the family's socioeconomic status (SES) (Sani, 2019).

Socioeconomic status (SES), encompassing income level, parental education, and occupation, significantly impacts students' social behaviours in school. Research by Bradley and Corwyn (2002), and Duncan and Magnuson (2012), though in different timelines, corroborate that students from higher SES backgrounds benefit from enriched home environments that enhance social competence, emotional regulation, and communication skills. These

students are more likely to exhibit self-confidence, prosocial behaviours, and positive peer relationships. Conversely, children from lower SES backgrounds may face limited social resources, higher stress levels, and reduced parental involvement, which can lead to social withdrawal, aggression, or difficulty in forming friendships (Evans & Kim, 2013).

Economic hardship also affects parental mental health and parenting styles, indirectly influencing children's behavioural development (Conger et al., 2010). Schools play a critical role in addressing these disparities by offering supportive environments, SEL programs, and counseling services to help students navigate social challenges. While students from wealthier backgrounds typically have better access to educational resources and social opportunities, those from lower-income families often face constraints that hinder their social development (Nwanwukwu & Asiyai, 2024).

Additionally, family dynamics—such as problem-solving abilities and emotional support—are closely linked to adolescent psychosocial health. Dysfunctional family environments can negatively impact students' social interactions and overall well-being (Bello, Ogunlade, Ogundare, & Irinoye, 2024)). Understanding these family-related challenges is essential in developing strategies to enhance the social experiences of secondary school students in Delta State. Addressing issues such as family structure, parental engagement, socioeconomic disparities, and family functioning can lead to better academic and social outcomes, making this study highly relevant.

Statement of the Problem

The family plays a fundamental role in shaping the social development of children and adolescents by instilling values, influencing behaviour, and guiding their interactions. However, various family-related challenges, such as parental conflicts, financial difficulties, ineffective communication, and lack of

emotional support, can hinder the social growth of secondary school students. In Delta State, Nigeria, concerns have been raised about how these challenges affect students' ability to engage with peers, participate in extracurricular activities, and acquire essential social skills. Although the family is crucial in nurturing healthy social relationships, there is limited empirical evidence on the specific impact of family-related issues on secondary school students in Delta State. Many students struggle to build meaningful friendships, take part in school activities, and develop self-confidence due to factors such as parental neglect, unstable family structures, and financial hardship. These difficulties may lead to social isolation, behavioural issues, and even academic difficulties. With growing concerns about students' social well-being, this study aims to examine the family-related challenges that influence the social lives of secondary school students in Delta State. By identifying key issues and their effects, the study seeks to provide valuable insights that can guide policies and interventions to support students' social development.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to assess the family-based challenges influencing the social life of secondary school students in Delta State. Specifically, the study aimed to find out:

1. The common family-related challenges faced by secondary school students in Delta State.
2. The ways financial difficulties within the family impact students' social life in school.
3. The extent to which the level of parental involvement in a student's life influence their social behaviour in school.
4. The role domestic conflict plays in shaping students' social behaviour in school.

Research Questions

To guide the study, the following research questions were raised.

1. What are the common family-related challenges faced by

- secondary school students in Delta State?
2. How do financial difficulties within the family impact students' ability to socialize?
 3. To what extent does the level of parental involvement in a student's life influence their social behaviour at school?
 4. What role does domestic conflict play in shaping students' social behaviour at school?

Method

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised all students in public secondary schools in Delta State. The enrollment would have increased presently but the record serves as a guide. The sample size for the study comprised 600 students made up of 300 boys and 300 girls selected from six schools within the state. The six schools were selected from the three Senatorial Districts of the State. Two schools were selected from each senatorial district. The schools selected were all mixed schools. This was done to ensure parity and inclusiveness. The schools were purposively selected to reflect the perceived varied socioeconomic divides that are characterized in the State. The convenience sampling technique was used for the selection of the respondents (students). The instruments for data collection was a structured questionnaire used to elicit responses from the respondents. The questionnaire was a 45-item instrument titled: Family-Based Challenges and Social Life of Secondary School Students Related Questionnaire (FBCSLSSSRQ). It was a four-point rating type instrument. The instrument was validated by three experts who vetted the instrument for face, content, and construct validities considering those involved. The questionnaire was trial tested to ensure the reliability. The split-half method was used for the test while the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to determine the internal consistency level. An index value of 0.83 was attained as the reliability level. Six hundred copies of the Checklist and corresponding number of the questionnaire

were administered and 543(91%) were retrieved. Mean and Standard deviation were used for data analysis.

Results

Research Question One: What are the common family-related challenges faced by secondary school students in Delta State?

Table 1: *Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents’ Rating on the Common Family-Related Challenges Faced by Secondary School Students in Delta State.*

S/ N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	x	SD	Decision
	Common family-based challenges that influence secondary school students’ social behaviuour are:							
1	financial difficulties in the family	15						Agree
		186	1	79	127	2.73	1.16	
2	domestic conflicts between family members	21						Agree
		88	2	179	64	2.60	0.90	
3	pressured by family expectations regarding academics	19						Agree
		161	4	106	82	2.80	1.03	
4	pressured by family expectations regarding career choices	16						Agree
		137	6	191	49	2.72	0.94	
5	excessive household responsibilities	17						Agree
		208	7	112	46	3.01	0.96	
6	parents separation	122	92	86	243	2.17	1.22	Disagree
7	divorce of parents	11						Agree
		102	5	278	48	2.50	0.90	
8	access to basic needs such as food,	21						Agree
		211	3	68	51	3.08	0.94	
9	access to basic needs such as school materials	10						Agree
		231	2	168	42	2.96	1.02	
10	Religious intolerance/conflict	17						Agree
		187	3	86	97	2.83	1.09	
Grand Mean/Standard Deviation							2.74 1.02	Agree

Results in table 1 reveal that respondents agree with all the items except item 6(2.17), with a mean score significantly less than 2.50 criterion mean. The mean scores for the other items range between 2.50 and 3.08, values that are significantly higher than 2.50 the criterion mean for determination of mean score as agreed or disagreed.

The grand mean for the results is 2.74 and is significantly higher than the 2.50 criterion mean. The grand standard deviation stand at 1.02. The results indicate that common family-based challenges that influence secondary school students' social behaviour include financial difficulties in the family, domestic conflicts between family members, pressured by family expectations regarding academics, pressured by family expectations regarding career choices, excessive household responsibilities, divorce of parents, access to basic needs such as food, access to basic needs such as school materials, and religious intolerance/conflict. However, separation of parents is not seen as a serious family-based challenge that influence students' social behaviour.

Research Question Two: How do financial difficulties within the family impact students' social behaviour at school?

Table 2: *Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents' Rating on the Financial Difficulties within the Family Impact Students' Social Behaviour at School.*

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	x	SD	Decision
	Financial challenges that influence secondary school students' social behaviour are:							
11	Lack of money to pay school fees	156	188	73	126	2.69	1.12	Agree
12	feel inferior to their peers,	201	111	92	139	2.69	1.21	Agree
13	withdrawal from social activities	99	86	191	167	2.22	1.07	Disagree
14	vulnerable to negative peer influence	81	112	271	79	2.36	0.91	Disagree
15	engage in theft, fraud,	70	104	159	210	2.06	1.04	Disagree
16	mocked and sometimes excluded by their peers	135	129	94	185	2.39	1.19	Disagree
17	aggressive as a defense mechanism against bullying	105	177	207	54	2.61	0.91	Agree
18	reducing their time for social interaction	111	174	97	161	2.43	1.12	Disagree

19	struggle with connecting with peers	237	182	84	40	3.13	0.93	Agree
20	usually anxious, depresses, and stressed due to financial difficulties	204	107	68	164	2.65	1.26	Agree
21	reduce opportunities for teamwork,	146	109	100	188	2.39	1.21	Disagree
Grand Mean/Standard Deviation						2.51	1.08	Agree

Results in Table 2 reveal that respondents agree with items 11(2.69), 12(2.69), 17(2.61), 19(3.13), and 20(2.65). The mean scores for these items are significantly higher than 2.50 criterion mean for determination of a mean score as agreed or disagreed. On the other hand, respondents disagree with items 13(2.22), 14(2.36), 15(2.06), 16(2.39), 18(2.43), and 21(2.39). The mean scores for these items are significantly less than the 2.50 criterion mean. The grand standard deviation for the results is 2.51 with a grand standard deviation of 1.08. The results indicate that, finance associated challenges that influence secondary school students’ social behaviour include lack of money to pay school fees, feel inferior to their peers, aggressive as a defense mechanism against bullying, struggle with connecting with peers, usually anxious, depresses, and stressed due to financial difficulties. It also indicated that financial challenges do not greatly influence students to withdraw from social activities, become vulnerable to negative peer influence, engage in theft, fraud, being mocked and sometimes excluded by peers, reducing their time for social interaction, and reduce opportunities for teamwork.

Research Question Three: To what extent does the level of parental involvement in a student's life influence their social behaviour at school?

Table 3: *Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents’ rating on the extent the Level of Parental Involvement in a Student's Life Influence their Social Behaviour at School.*

S/N	Item	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	x	SD	Decision
	Parental involvement in the							

	education of students influence their social behaviour in the following way:							
22	develop better communication skills	191	197	79	76	2.93	1.03	HE
23	receive encouragement and guidance	201	134	83	125	2.76	1.18	HE
24	feel valued and develop confidence	143	112	152	136	2.48	1.13	LE
25	help them manage emotions	181	179	109	74	2.86	1.03	HE
26	reducing the likelihood of aggressive or disruptive behaviour	95	148	73	227	2.20	1.16	LE
27	foster responsible and disciplined behaviour in students.	87	119	128	209	2.15	1.11	LE
28	decreases tendencies toward delinquency,	147	205	91	100	2.73	1.05	HE
29	Reinforces positive behaviour	156	192	88	107	2.73	1.08	HE
30	learn empathy, cooperation, and respect	202	106	167	68	2.81	1.07	HE
31	lead to healthier friendships and social interactions	189	167	143	44	2.92	0.97	HE
32	help children adjust well to different social settings.	211	106	95	131	2.73	1.21	HE
Grand Mean/Standard Deviation						2.66	1.09	

Furthermore, results in Table 3 reveal that respondents agree to a high extent with items 22(2.93), 23(2.76), 25(2.86), 28(2.73), 29(2.73), 30(2.81), 31(2.92), and 32(2.73). The mean scores are significantly higher than the 2.50 criterion mean. On the other hand, respondents agree to a low extent with items 24(2.48), 26(2.20), and 27(2.15) with mean scores significantly less than the 2.50 criterion mean. The grand mean for the results is 2.66 with a grand standard deviation of 1.09. The results indicate that parental involvement in the education of students influence their social behaviour through improved communication skills, and receiving encouragement and guidance, help them manage emotions, decreases tendencies toward delinquency, reinforces positive behaviour, learn empathy, cooperation, and respect, lead to healthier friendships and social interactions, and helps children adjust well to different social settings.

It also indicated that parental involvement in the education of children do not necessarily make students feel valued and develop confidence, reduce the likelihood of aggressive or disruptive behaviour and do not in itself foster responsible and disciplined behaviour in students.

Research Question Four: What role does domestic conflict play in shaping students' social behaviour at school?

Table 5: *Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents’ rating on role domestic conflict plays in shaping students' social behaviour at school.*

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	x	SD	Decision
33	Students from conflict-ridden homes may become aggressive toward peers and teachers	212	178	97	56	3.01	0.99	Agree
34	Students from violent-infested homes model the hostility they experience at home.	191	163	133	56	2.90	1.00	Agree
35	resort to fights or verbal abuse in social interactions	135	179	168	61	2.71	0.96	Agree
36	withdraw from social interactions, avoiding friendships and group activities	69	81	196	197	2.04	1.01	Disagree
37	have difficulty trusting others, fearing rejection or harm	217	155	96	75	2.95	1.06	Agree
38	Constant exposure to conflict can lead to self-doubt	222	87	94	140	2.72	1.24	Agree
39	Constant exposure to conflict can lead to insecurity, and feelings of worthlessness	141	211	97	94	2.73	1.03	Agree
40	Constant exposure to conflict makes students shy away from participating actively in class or extracurricular activities	137	179	117	110	2.63	1.07	Agree
41	lead to difficulty concentrating, resulting in lower grades	175	139	119	110	2.70	1.12	Agree
42	lack motivation due to stress or depression	201	169	127	46	2.97	0.97	Agree
43	bully others as a way to regain	199	165	137	42	2.96	0.96	Agree
44	challenge teachers or refuse to comply with school expectations	210	90	87	156	2.65	1.26	Agree
45	May resort to drug abuse	234	168	79	62	3.06	1.02	Agree

Grand Mean/Standard Deviation	2.57	0.97
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Results in Table 4 reveal that respondents agree with all the items except item 36(2.04) with a mean score significantly less than 2.50 criterion mean. The mean scores for all the other items range between 2.63 and 3.06, values that are significantly higher than the 2.50 criterion mean for determination of a mean value as agreed or disagreed. The grand mean for the table is 2.57 and is significantly higher than 2.50 criterion mean while the grand standard deviation is 0.97. The results indicate that Students from conflict-ridden homes may become aggressive toward peers and teachers, model the hostility they experience at home, resort to fighting or verbal abuse in social interactions, have difficulty trusting others, fearing rejection or harm, lead to self-doubt, insecurity, and feelings of worthlessness, it also indicated that constant exposure to domestic conflict makes students shy away from participating actively in class or extracurricular activities, lead to difficulty concentrating resulting in lower grades, lack motivation due to stress or depression, bully others as a way to regain confidence, challenge teachers or refuse to comply with school expectations, and may resort to drug abuse but do not seem to withdraw from social interactions, avoid friendships or group activities.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the study reveals that common family-based challenges that influence secondary school students' social behaviour include financial difficulties in the family, domestic conflicts between family members, pressured by family expectations regarding academics, pressured by family expectations regarding career choices, excessive household responsibilities, divorce of parents, access to basic needs such as food, access to basic needs such as school materials, and religious intolerance/conflict. These findings complement the position of Sani (2019) who stated that the family structure is a critical determinant of students' social

adjustment as students from broken homes—affected by divorce, separation, or single parenthood—often experience stress, lack of motivation, and social instability, hindering their ability to adjust socially and academically.

However, separation of parents is not seen as a serious family-based challenge that influence students' social behaviour.

Further findings from the study reveals that socioeconomic associated challenges that influence secondary school students' social behaviour include lack of money to pay school fees, feel inferior to their peers, aggressive as a defense mechanism against bullying, struggle with connecting with peers, usually anxious, depresses, and stressed due to financial difficulties. It also indicated that financial challenges do not greatly influence students to withdraw from social activities, become vulnerable to negative peer influence, engage in theft, fraud, being mocked and sometimes excluded by peers, reducing their time for social interaction, and reduce opportunities for teamwork. These findings agree with those of Evans and Kim (2013) who found out that families from high socioeconomic background are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviours, demonstrate self-confidence, and establish positive peer relationships whereas, students from lower SES backgrounds may face challenges such as limited access to social resources, exposure to stress, and reduced parental involvement, which can contribute to social withdrawal, aggression, or difficulty in forming peer connections.

Additionally, findings from the study reveal that parental involvement in the education of students influence their social behaviour through improved communication skills, and receiving encouragement and guidance, help them manage emotions, decreases tendencies toward delinquency, reinforces positive behaviour, learn empathy, cooperation, and respect, lead to healthier friendships and social interactions, and helps children adjust well to different social settings. These findings support the findings of Epstein (2018) who found out that consistent parental involvement

in the education of their children foster positive school social behaviour as the children feel checkmated or the presence of their parents in the school. It also indicated that parental involvement in the education of children do not necessarily make students feel valued and develop confidence, reduce the likelihood of aggressive or disruptive behaviour and do not in itself foster responsible and disciplined behaviour in students but can improve students involvement and participation in academic activities. This finding aligns with the findings of Angwaomaodoko, (2023) and Nwanwukwu & Asiyai (2024), who though, in different studies, corroborated that students whose parents are involved in their education tend to have improved academic performance and social skills as they (students) feel provided with educational support, monitoring homework, and maintaining communication with teachers.

Lastly, findings from the study reveal that students from conflict-prone homes are usually aggressive toward peers and teachers, model the hostility they experience at home, resort to fighting or verbal abuse in social interactions, have difficulty trusting others, fearing rejection or harm, lead to self-doubt, insecurity, and feelings of worthlessness. These findings agree with the position of Degol (2016) who posited that the social atmosphere of the home and immediate family of the student go a long way to influencing the social behaviour of the child in the school as the child goes to the school from the home with the love or the hatred, sentiments or unemotional, the violence or peaceful disposition and returns back to the home to reintegrate in the same values. The findings also indicated that constant exposure to domestic conflict makes students shy away from participating actively in class or extracurricular activities, lead to difficulty concentrating resulting in lower grades, lack motivation due to stress or depression, bully others as a way to regain confidence, challenge teachers or refuse to comply with school expectations, and may resort to drug abuse but

do not seem to withdraw from social interactions, avoid friendships or group activities.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant family-based challenges that influence the social life of secondary school students in Delta State. Key findings indicate that factors such as parental conflict, economic instability, lack of parental supervision, and emotional neglect play crucial roles in shaping students' interactions, self-esteem, and overall social development. The study underscores the need for improved parental involvement, financial support systems, and counseling services to mitigate these challenges.

To foster a more supportive environment for students, it is essential for parents, educators, and policymakers to collaborate in implementing interventions that promote emotional stability, social skills development, and positive peer relationships. Addressing these family-related issues will not only enhance students' social lives but also contribute to their academic success and overall well-being. Future research should explore targeted solutions and the long-term impact of family dynamics on students' social development.

Recommendations: Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were provided:

1. Since family-based challenges are inevitable in human society, schools and community organizations should provide regular counseling sessions and workshops for parents to help them understand the impact of family challenges on students' social lives.
2. Families should be encouraged by school managements to create open lines of communication, allowing students to express their concerns and experiences freely without fear of judgment.
3. Government and NGOs should provide financial assistance or skills training for low-income families to reduce economic stress, which often affects students' social well-being.

4. Schools should not only introduce but encourage peer mentorship programmes, clubs, and extracurricular activities to help students build social skills and resilience against family-based challenges.
5. Community leaders and religious organizations should promote awareness on responsible parenting, child welfare, and the effects of family instability on students' social development.
6. Schools, through the instrumentality of Parent-Teachers Association (PTA), should organize periodic meetings with parents to discuss students' social and academic progress, creating a more supportive environment for learning and social interaction

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