



Article

Family Disharmony and School Adjustment of Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State

Onisoya Maclean*¹, Konye Nwachukwu²

1. Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, PMB 5080, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
2. Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Education, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, PMB 5047, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

* Correspondence: 1maclean.onisoya@ust.edu.ng

Abstract: This study investigates the influence of family disharmony on school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. Three objectives were raised to guide the study. A survey research design was adopted to carry out the study. The population of the study comprised of 8,426 students from 14 Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State, with a sample size of 367 students (SSS 1-3) drawn from 5 out of 14 Public Senior Secondary Schools in the study area. The study utilized a questionnaire titled; Family Disharmony and Students' School Adjustment Questionnaire for the data collection. was validated and tested for reliability with a reliability coefficient of $r = 0.880$, through Pearson Product Moment Correlation indicating high internal consistency. Mean score and Standard Deviation were used to answer the research questions, while the Analysis of Variance was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that lack of family togetherness influences the school adjustment of senior secondary school students to a High Extent, that communication gap influences the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State to a High Extent amongst other findings. Based on the findings of the study it was concluded that a harmonious family will positively enhance the school adjustment of senior secondary school students. The study recommended amongst others that families, especially the parents should establish peaceful coexistence in the family that will promote family togetherness, as this will positively influence the adjustment behaviour of their children.

Citation: Maclean O., Nwachukwu K. Family Disharmony and School Adjustment of Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. American Journal of Social and Humanitarian Research 2025, 6(9), 2113-2121.

Received: 31st Jul 2025

Revised: 07th Aug 2025

Accepted: 22nd Aug 2025

Published: 06th Sept 2025



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Keywords: Communication Gap, Disharmony, Family, Harmony, School Adjustment

1. Introduction

The family is a fundamental institution necessary for the survival of any society. As a primary unit, it serves as a divine educational institution tasked with the responsibility of socializing and instilling spiritual values in its members harmoniously. The concept of the family encompasses a broad spectrum of members, including children, parents, grandparents, aunts, and other relatives [1]. Thus, the family is the most basic unit of life, reflecting the miniature version of the entire society. As a social institution, it is governed by social norms that ensure the survival of its members and society. The family not only facilitates procreation but also supports the learning of values, attitudes, skills, and

cultural techniques. However, the values the family aims to instill in its members and society can only be achieved within a harmonious family environment [2].

A harmonious family is one where trust and respect for each member's rights and responsibilities are upheld. Harmony, therefore, is the agreement among family members, realized through mutual respect and love [3]. In this context, harmony refers to an atmosphere where family members spend quality time together, communicate effectively, and avoid continuous disputes, while fostering mutual respect, acceptance, trust, and love.

In contrast, a disharmonious family is characterized by a lack of mutual understanding, with little tolerance for each other's strengths and weaknesses. Family disharmony occurs when family members perceive a threat to their needs, interests, or concerns, resulting in a struggle or contest between members with opposing needs, values, ideas, or goals. Disharmony occurs when one member's behavior and expectations clash with those of another, creating tension and threatening the stability of the family system. Dysfunctional families are characterized by rigid boundaries, poor communication, unrealistic expectations, unresolved conflicts, and ineffective problem-solving strategies [4].

Based on the previous discussion, this study measures family disharmony using the following factors:

1. **Lack of family togetherness:** This occurs when family members fail to spend quality time together. The absence of shared time between parents and children negatively impacts harmony within the home, leading to a breakdown in relationships [5].
2. **Communication gap:** Communication is vital in enhancing family relationships. The consequences of failing to express emotions within the family are severe. Poor communication leads to tension, mistrust, doubt, isolation, and a sense of disconnection among members [6].
3. **Continuous disputes:** The quality of parental functioning is a strong predictor of children's behavior and well-being. Continuous disputes reflect ineffective relationships and communication patterns, resulting in miscommunication and misunderstandings among family members [7].

The growing rate of family disharmony has not only contributed to a higher divorce rate but also has been identified as a major cause of crime and indiscipline among youth and adolescents [1]. Psychologists believe that students who can adjust to negative circumstances are better equipped to adapt socially and psychologically. Adjustment refers to the ability to adapt to one's environment and social activities, cope with behavioral standards, tackle challenges, interact with the environment, manage anxiety, and resolve conflicts [8].

School adjustment, therefore, refers to the students' ability to cope effectively with the internal and external demands and pressures imposed by the school environment, such as attending lessons, being attentive during subject lessons, completing assignments without cheating, achieving good grades, scoring high marks, and avoiding school dropout. School adjustment can be emotional, psychological, social, or academic. Emotionally, a well-adjusted student is in touch with their emotions, maintains emotional stability, and does not display behaviors such as anxiety, fighting, or aggression. They have internalized control over their emotions and possess good self-esteem. Psychologically, well-adjusted students have a positive self-concept. They have a healthy perception of themselves and others, know how to cope with disappointments and losses, and can positively influence their environment. Academically, they are known for their achievements. Socially, a student is well-adjusted if they do not exhibit withdrawal behaviors or other antisocial behaviors [9].

The question this study intends to answer is whether family disharmony influences students' school adjustment, and how the identified measures of family disharmony affect

the school adjustment of secondary school students. This forms the basis of the research concerns for this study.

Theoretical Background of the Study

This study is anchored on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Sigmund Freud.#

Psychoanalytic Theory (Sigmund Freud, 1856-1939)

The theory was propounded by Sigmund Freud, born on May 6, 1856, in Freiberg in Moravia (present-day Czechoslovakia). According to Freud's psychoanalytic theory [10], adolescent behavior is a product of the early socialization process and childhood experiences, suggesting that adolescent behavior is rooted in events that occurred during earlier childhood development. Freud posited that the personality (mind) is made up of the Id, ego, and superego. The Id is the raw, blind, primitive core of the unconscious, ignorant of good and evil, seeking to gratify the sex and aggression drives (source of psychic energy). The ego, relying on defense mechanisms, provides an outlet for Id impulses or represses anxiety, while the superego is akin to conscience or character [11].

This theory implies that an adolescent's behavior should be viewed in relation to their family background, family type, and the structure or models that exert an indelible impact on the adolescent's personality. The extent of harmony in the family plays a significant role in shaping the way students adjust socially, morally, and psychologically. Therefore, parents must play a vital role in building a harmonious home and act as role models to their children. No individual can be greater than their environment; thus, family members, especially parents, have a profound influence on the adolescent's ability to adjust for the benefit of both their immediate family and society.

Statement of the Problem

Recently, there have been increasing reports of antisocial activities among secondary school-aged children (11-18 years). These maladjusted students find it difficult to interact with fellow students, family members, friends, peers, and school teachers. Some may engage in self-destructive behavior or harm others, exhibiting aggression, deviancy, and drug abuse. Personal experience suggests that many students involved in maladjusted behavior in secondary school, particularly in areas such as truancy, examination malpractice, school dropouts, fighting, and other school violence, have issues with their family relationships. These behaviors are often linked to a family environment lacking love, responsibility from parents, and mutual understanding.

A review of existing studies reveals a lack of research connecting family disharmony to student adjustment in Rivers State. Consequently, this study is essential. This research investigates the influence of family disharmony on the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Purpose of Study

The study investigated the influence of family disharmony on school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the influence of lack of family togetherness on school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.
2. Examine the influence of communication gap on school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.
3. Ascertain the influence of continuous dispute on school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does lack of family togetherness influence the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State?
2. What is the extent to which communication gap influences the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State?
3. To what extent does continuous dispute influence the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Hypotheses

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

1. There is no significant difference in the influence of family togetherness on the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State based on age.
2. There is no significant difference in the influence of communication gap on the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State based on age.
3. There is no significant difference in the influence of continuous dispute on the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State based on age.

2. Materials and Methods

The study investigated the influence of family disharmony on school adjustment of senior secondary school students in the Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. A survey research design was adopted for the study. The research was conducted in Senior Secondary Schools within the Port Harcourt Local Government Area. The population for the study comprised 8,426 students from 14 public secondary schools in the area [12]. However, the sample size consisted of 367 students (SSS 1-3), based on the sample size determination table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), which recommended a sample of 367 for a population between 8,000 and 8,999. The sample was drawn using the simple random sampling technique. Out of the 14 public secondary schools in the area, data were collected from 5 schools.

An 18-item questionnaire titled "Family Disharmony and Students' School Adjustment Questionnaire (FDSSAQ)" was designed by the researchers for data collection. The instrument was rated on a 4-point Likert scale as follows: Very High Extent (VHE) – 4, High Extent (HE) – 3, Low Extent (LE) – 2, and Very Low Extent (VLE) – 1, with a criterion mean of 2.5. Additionally, the instrument was validated by an expert in Measurement and Evaluation, and a lecturer in the Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, who reviewed the items to ensure they measured the intended constructs. Furthermore, the instrument was tested for reliability through a test-retest method, using students from selected secondary schools in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, ensuring they were not part of the study sample. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was found to be $r = 0.880$, as determined by Pearson's Product Moment Correlation.

The collected data were analyzed descriptively using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Ver. 22). Mean scores and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions, with a mean criterion of 2.5 used to reject items (mean below 2.5) and accept items (mean equal to or above 2.5). Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

3. Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does lack of family togetherness influence the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Extent to which Lack of Family Togetherness Influence the School Adjustment of Senior Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.

S/N	Lack of togetherness indicators	Students (n=367)			
		WTS	Mean	S.D	Remark
1.	Lack of mutual respect among family members	1086	2.96	1.19	HE
2.	No time for fun and emotional attachment by parents and children	1035	2.82	0.91	HE
3.	Lack of words of encouragement and advice needed from parents	1052	2.87	1.01	HE
4.	Lack of appreciation by parents for good behaviour conduct	1102	3.00	1.04	HE
5.	Parental lack of recognition of personal relationships with their children	1057	2.88	1.01	HE
6.	The sense of insecurity and feelings of unhappiness	1006	2.74	1.13	HE
Grand Mean			2.89		

WTS – Weighted Score (Criterion Mean = 2.5, Mean: 1.0-1.99 = VLE, 2.0-2.49=LE, 2.5-3.49 =HE, 3.5-4.0 = VHE)

Table 1 shows the extent to which lack of family togetherness influences the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. The majority of the respondents indicated High Extent (HE) to items 1-6, with their mean scores within the mean range of 2.5-3.49. However, the grand mean of 2.89 revealed that lack of family togetherness influences the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State to a High Extent.

Research Question 2: What is the extent to which communication gap influences the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Extent to which Communication Gap Influence the School Adjustment of Senior Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.

S/N	Communication Gap indicators	Students (n=367)			
		WTS	Mean	S.D	Remark
1.	Keeping secrets from family members	1064	2.90	1.10	HE
2.	Holding grudges against one another in the family	1292	3.52	0.50	VHE
3.	Apportioning blames to each other	1108	3.02	0.80	HE
4.	Giving silent treatment to family members	1164	3.17	0.74	HE
5.	Threatening family members over minor issues	1131	3.08	0.80	HE

6.	Labelling someone bad instead of the behaviour	1040	2.83	0.93	HE
Grand Mean		3.08			

WTS – Weighted Score (Criterion Mean = 2.5, Mean: 1.0-1.99 = VLE, 2.0-2.49=LE, 2.5-3.49 =HE, 3.5-4.0 = VHE)

Table 2 shows the extent to which communication gap influences the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. The majority of the respondents indicated Very High Extent (VHE) to items 2, with their mean scores within the mean range of 3.5-4.0. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents indicated High Extent (HE) to items 1, 3-6 with their mean scores within the mean range of 2.5-3.49. However, the grand mean of 3.08 revealed communication gap influence the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State to a High Extent.

Research Question 3: To what extent does continuous dispute influence the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Extent to which Continuous Dispute Influence the School Adjustment of Senior Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State.

S/N	Continuous Dispute indicators	Students (n=367)			
		WTS	Mean	S.D	Decision
1.	Fighting between father and mother, and between parents and children	1235	3.37	0.89	HE
2.	Parental marital infidelity	1261	3.44	0.70	HE
3.	Social isolation by members of the family	1198	3.26	0.77	HE
4.	Inconsistent application of affection and discipline	695	1.89	0.90	VLE
5.	Communication failure	1055	2.87	1.24	HE
6.	Lack of consultation of family members in decision making	1118	3.05	0.91	HE
Grand Mean		2.98			

WTS – Weighted Score (Criterion Mean = 2.5, Mean: 1.0-1.99 = VLE, 2.0-2.49=LE, 2.5-3.49 =HE, 3.5 4.0 = VHE)

Table 3 shows the extent to which continuous dispute influences the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. The majority of the respondents indicated High Extent (HE) to items 1-3, & 5-6 with their mean scores within the mean range of 2.5-3.49. Also, the majority of the respondents indicated Very Low Extent (VLE) on item 4, with their mean score within the mean range of 1.0-1.99. However, the grand mean of 2.98 revealed continuous dispute influence the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State to a High Extent.

Hypotheses Testing

The following hypotheses were tested in the study at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the influence of family togetherness on the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State based on age.

Table 4. Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the Difference in the Influence of Family Togetherness on the School Adjustment of Senior Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State Based on Age.

ANOVA					
Sources	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	84.30	2	42.15	5.81	0.00
Within Groups	2639.99	364	7.25		
Total	2724.29	366			

The result of table 4 revealed that there is a significant difference in the influence of family togetherness on the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State based on age ($F_2 = 5.81, p = 0.00 < 0.05$). Thus, null hypothesis one was rejected at the 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the influence of communication gap on the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State based on age.

Table 5. Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the Difference in the Influence of Communication Gap on the School Adjustment of Senior Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State Based on Age.

ANOVA					
Sources	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10.49	2	5.24	0.65	0.52
Within Groups	2923.02	364	8.03		
Total	2933.50	366			

The result of table 5 revealed that there is no significant difference in the influence of communication gap on the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State based on age ($F_2 = 0.65, p = 0.52 > 0.05$). Thus, null hypothesis two was retained at the 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the influence of continuous dispute on the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State based on age.

Table 6. Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the Difference in the Influence of Continuous Dispute on the School Adjustment of Senior Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State Based on Age.

ANOVA					
Sources	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.47	2	2.24	0.29	0.75
Within Groups	2824.25	364	7.76		
Total	2828.73	366			

The result of table 6 revealed that there is no significant difference in the influence of continuous dispute on the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State based on age ($F_2 = 0.29, p = 0.75 > 0.05$). Thus, null hypothesis three was retained at the 0.05 level of significance.

4. Discussion

The result of Table 1 revealed that the lack of family togetherness influences the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in the Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State to a high extent. Additionally, the result of Table 4 showed a significant difference in the influence of family togetherness on the school adjustment of students in Port Harcourt, based on age. In line with these findings, it was found that students from harmonious families exhibit higher peer intergeneration, better self-concept, lower levels of aggression, and a lower rate of truancy compared to their counterparts from disharmonious families [13].

The result of Table 2 revealed that communication gaps influence the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt to a high extent. Similarly, the result of Table 5 showed that there is no significant difference in the influence of the communication gap on the school adjustment of students in Port Harcourt based on age. These findings align with the work of Paramanik, Saha, and Mondal, who found that in families where communication is deficient, there tend to be defective parent-child relationships, which can lead to poor school performance due to engagement in antisocial activities [14],[15].

The result of Table 3 indicated that continuous disputes influence the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt to a high extent. The result of Table 6 also revealed that there is no significant difference in the influence of continuous disputes on the school adjustment of students in Port Harcourt based on age. These findings are supported by Hurlock, who asserted that a negative or authoritarian leadership style adopted by parents can lead to continuous disputes in the family, contributing to adolescents' lack of social and academic adjustment [16],[17].

5. Conclusion

It is evident from the findings of this investigation that family disharmony (lack of togetherness, communication gap, and continuous dispute to a high extent influences the school adjustment of senior secondary school students in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. This is because the family forms the foundation for the students' first social environment. The students' education starts from the home and spills over to other institutions such as the school. Therefore, this study concludes that a harmonious family will positively enhance the school adjustment of senior secondary school students.

Implications for Counselling

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers pointed out the following implications for counselling:

1. School Counsellors should organize guidance programmes for both parents and students with the aim to address the significance of harmonious family on the emotional and psychological well-being of the child's development and academic performance.
2. School Counsellors should endeavour to identify students from dysfunctional or disharmonious families and provide family therapy sessions to create a safe home environment for the overall development of the child.

Recommendations

Sequel to the findings of this research, the following recommendations were proffered:

1. Families, especially the parents should establish peaceful coexistence in the family that will promote family togetherness such as having play time together, going out to recreational grounds, etc., as this will positively influence the school adjustment behaviour of their children.

2. Parents should maintain good communication habits in the family such as good listening skills, use of soft words and show of empathy, as this will help their students exhibit the same in school.
3. Parents should resolve conflicts and disagreements in the family as soon as they occur, to prevent them from generating continuous disputes.

REFERENCES

- [1] D. Andarus, *Building Family Harmony and Resilience*, Jakarta: GH Publishing, 2015.
- [2] N. Arora and S. Dutt, "The relationship between dysfunctional family dynamics and depressive symptoms among young adults," *Int. J. Indian Psychol.*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 332–347, 2024.
- [3] R.H. Aseltine, "Pathways linking parental divorce with adolescent depression," *J. Health Soc. Behav.*, vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 34–48, 2006.
- [4] N.M. Astone and S.S. McLanahan, "Family structure, parental practices and high school competition," *Am. Sociol. Rev.*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 95–117, 2011.
- [5] B.N. Ezeilo, *Family Stress Management*, ABIC Publishers, 2015.
- [6] S. Freud, *New Introduction Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton, 1933.
- [7] J. Haars, *Understanding Adjustment and Behaviour*, 5th ed., New York, USA: Prentice-Hall Inc., 2006.
- [8] H. Kalu, "Adolescence, youth, and young hood," *Youth Soc.*, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 446–471, 2008.
- [9] I.A. D. Imaobong, "Parenting styles and social adjustment of adolescent students in Akwa Ibom State," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Calabar, Calabar, 2002.
- [10] E. Jamaluddin, "Al Ghazali's view regarding the witness in Islamic wedding ceremony," *BIRCI Journal*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 1–10, 2018.
- [11] R.V. Krejcie and D.W. Morgan, "Determining sample size for research activities," *Educ. Psychol. Meas.*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 3–6, 1970.
- [12] D. Marcotte, T.M. Diallo, and M.L. Pare, "Adjustment to college and prediction of depression during post-secondary transition," *Eur. J. Psychol. Educ.*, vol. 33, pp. 727–748, 2018.
- [13] V. Moisa, "Functional vs dysfunctional in the family system," *New Trends Psychol.*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 38–50, 2022.
- [14] S.O. Olaitan and A.E. Akpan, *Children Development and Family Life Education*, Bauch: Ndudim Printing and Publishing Company, 2003.
- [15] T.O. Ozoemen, "Childhood experience in a broken home and social adjustment of secondary school students in Calabar Municipality," M.Ed. thesis, University of Calabar, Calabar, 2002.
- [16] J. Paramanik, B. Saha, and B.C. Mondal, "Adjustment of secondary school students with respect to gender and residence," *Am. J. Educ. Res.*, vol. 2, no. 12, pp. 1138–1143, 2014, doi: 10.12691/education-2-12-2.
- [17] M.B. Rosenberg, *Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life*, California: Puddle Dancer, 2005.