The Effects of Marital Dissolution on Early Adolescents' Psychosocial Well-being in Tanzania

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Abstract

Marriage dissolution been a problem of global concern. In Tanzania, marriage-related separations have been reported to exceed legal divorce rate, and the majority of early adolescents in these broken families often become victims. This study explored the potential effects of marital dissolution on early adolescents' psychosocial well-being. This qualitative study employed the instrumental case study design, and involved 12 early adolescents, 12 parents, and 6 caregivers. The findings show that early adolescents from broken families are mainly affected in their psychosocial well-being. These effects appear to be short or long term. A strong sense of experiencing negative effects from parental marital dissolutions was communicated by adolescents compared with those who reported experiencing positive effects. It is concluded that the scope of understanding the effects of marital dissolution on children is very broad and entails various characteristics, this is because of the fact that, the effects on children are mainly negative and they cut across children's whole life, especially in their psychosocial well-being. These effects are not discrete but interrelated and cyclic. There is a need therefore to preserve and promote the welfare of marriages to allow each child live and thrive with the two parents under one roof.

Introduction and Background to the Problem

The term divorce signifies the end of a legal marital relationship while separation is considered a situation where married couples decide to give each

other space, thinking of the future of their marriage (Amato, & Anthony, 2014). Molepo, Maunganidze, Mudhovoz, and Sodi (2010) argue that marital dissolution starts when two married people decide to live apart and cease their roles as husband and wife. Berk (2013) comments that couples should not perceive marital dissolution as a once-off event, but rather as an incident that is accompanied by a series of changes and effects that may affect everybody involved (in this context parents and early adolescents). These changes may be related to living arrangements, socio-economic status as well as family relationships and interactions. It should be noted that marital dissolution in this paper involves both divorce and separation as in the context of Tanzania majority of couples end their relationship without formal processes (RITA Report, 2020). Marital separation seems to have increased in recent years as opposed to the situation in past when marital breakup was considered anomalous. This is unlikely in the current societies across the globe where cultural and societal transformation has made it easy for couples to separate and move on with their lives (Pillay, 2011).

More than a decade ago, Anderson and Greene, (2013) observed that approximately 40,000 early adolescents around the world experienced the breakup of their parents annually. It was predicted that up to a third of all children born in wedlock were at risk of experiencing their parents' separation before the age of 18 (Susilo, Istiawati, Aliman, & Alghani, 2021). Non-intact family structures, such as single-parent families, stepfamilies, and families in which parents are cohabiting, have become common alternatives to two-parent or functional families (Anderson & Greene, 2013). The situation is worse currently due to various social and cultural transformations (Sassler, & Lichter, 2020)

Narrowing the context to that of Tanzania, a distinct difference can be observed from other countries. Tanzania experiences an increasing rate of marital dissolution but in the form of parental separation rather than divorce (RITA Report, 2020). Since very few couples follow legal processes to get a divorce, a rather limited number of divorces are registered (Kuname & Shabani, 2011). Current statistics by the *Registration, Insolvency and Trusteeship* Agency (RITA Report 2020) reveals that 511 divorces were

registered in 2020, among which 221, were from Dar es Salaam alone. This is an increase by 69 divorces compared with 442 registered divorces in 2019. Statistics concerning marriage and divorce in Tanzania (usually kept by RITA) may, however, not provide a true picture of the situation in Tanzania because the majority of couples do not follow the legal process to divorce because of its bureaucratic nature (RITA Report, 2020). More often than not the victims of problems that occur in a marriage are the early adolescents who may experience both short- and long-term problems in terms of their social, physical, emotional, and psychological well-being (Anderson, 2014).

In this study, the researcher focuses on how marital dissolution poses some effects on psychosocial well-being, specifically among early adolescents of 12 to 15 years of age. In many broken families and particularly in the stated age group, psychosocial wellbeing has been found to be affected following the deprivation of certain needs and materials which may occur after marital dissolution (Mukosera, 2018). Unfortunately, very little regarding the effect of marital dissolution on early adolescents is documented in the context of Tanzania. Literature mainly covers the western world and few parts of Africa such as South Africa. The results of this study are therefore expected to fill the gap.

Statement of the Problem

Despite an acute increase in marital dissolution in Tanzania in current times, very little is documented in this area, particularly concerning its effects on psychosocial well-being of early adolescents. The increase in marital dissolution is said to have more negative than positive outcomes in westernised developed countries, specifically on the early adolescents' psycho-social well-being (Van der Wal, Finkenauer, & Visser, 2019; Crabtree, Harris, Bell, Allen, & Roberts, 2018; Sigal, Sandler, Wolchik& Braver, 2011). It is against this background, this study investigated marital dissolution and its effects on early adolescents' psychosocial well-being in the context of Tanzania. The reason for focusing on psycho-social well-being is that various sources (Amato 2010; Fagan, & Churchill, 2012; Størksen, et al. 2015) suggest that this area is the most affected especially when parents decide to go apart.

Research Objectives
The main objective of this study was to explore the effects of marital dissolution on early adolescents' psychosocial well-being.

Literature Review
Effects of Marital Dissolution on Early Adolescents' Psychosocial Well-Being
Typically, parental separation has a negative effect on early adolescents' psychological functioning - often resulting in high levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and low self-confidence (Sandler, Wheeler & Braver, 2013). The psychological harm that early adolescents may suffer as a result of parents' marital dissolution may have an impact on them throughout their lives. However, the ability of a child to conceptualize a break-up incident is co-determined by her/his self-concept and self-confidence (Wikle & Hoagland, 2019).

Raley and Sweeney (2020) comment that parents of early adolescents who are separated, or who are in the process of separating, undergo a difficult period of emotional adjustment, and when marital dissolution occurs in the family, they often tend to think that they are the cause of the problems, and at such times, they need love and reassurance. A crisis, like marital dissolution may leave adolescents feeling that they were, somehow, responsible for their parents' problems and give rise to a sense of guilt when they feel that their undesirable behaviour could have caused the separation. A tragic part of such tension is that adolescents are sometimes forced to take sides; and to avoid this, they may withdraw from both parents and become increasingly lonely (Amato, 2010; Spitze, Ward, Deane, & Zhuo, 2012). After separation these adolescents tend to be aggressive and prone to antisocial behaviour. Consequently, they maybe moody and often hostile to adults, or mean to other early adolescents (Adu-Okoree, Sedegah, & Parku, 2020). According to Albertini and Garriga (2011), marital dissolution will not necessarily solve problems but rather, initiate a time of change and adjustment for most early adolescents.

Various studies show that early adolescents from broken families may experience adjustment problems such as frequent crying, lack of enjoyment, unhappy moods, feeling sad, hopelessness, worrying, and fear whenever they experience their parents separating (Fagan, & Churchill, 2012; Stahl, 2010; Størksen, et al. 2015) add that, generally, early adolescents from broken homes experience lower levels of self-efficacy, low self-esteem, and less efficient coping styles. Such negative feelings may result in acting out behaviour, like at-risk sexual activities. Apart from the direct effects of marital dissolution, early adolescents may be indirectly affected by the way their parents handle marital dissolution. Studies on separated couples reveal that parents who separate tend to experience depression, anxiety, and health problems, and may display aggressive behaviour and substance abuse (Johnson, Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2011). Likewise, divorced couples are more exposed to the risk of overall mortality when compared to married couples, something that may further add to the risks of early adolescents who are in their care (Amato, 2010).

The vulnerability of parents' separation is influenced by the fact that marriage provides a centre of social support where couples may offer each other companionship, everyday assistance, and encouragement as well as emotional support (Amato, 2010). An absence of these benefits may negatively affect individuals' physical and mental health. Generally, parents who experience such problems find it hard to raise their early adolescents responsibly and appropriately, thereby increasing their early adolescents' vulnerability. Early adolescents from broken families may, therefore, be at risk in terms of substance abuse, anti-social behaviour, and their involvement with deviant peers because of a lack of close parental monitoring Spijkers, (2015). As this study involves parent participants from broken homes, its result may shed some light on their social, emotional, and psychological well-being, following marital dissolution and whether or not the situation may affect their early adolescents in the Tanzanian context.

Furthermore, early adolescents may face psycho-social problems as a result of custody arrangements. Hawkins, Willoughby, and Doherty (2012) suggest that a joint custody system could expose early adolescents to confusion and

frustration, especially when it comes to parenting and disciplining arrangements. This possibility is said to be more problematic when parents decide to engage in post-divorce relationships. Gender-wise, boys are said to be at greater risk concerning problems related to behaviour and relationships while girls tend to be disadvantaged academically (Amato, 2010).

Despite the wide range of the negative effects of marital dissolution on early adolescents, still some are affected positively by the marital dissolution of their parents. A study by Spitze, Ward, Deane, and Zhuo, (2012) for example, suggests an improvement in the psychosocial well-being of early adolescents whose parents' separation freed them from conflicting and oppressive family relationships.

Knowledge Gap
In exploring the body of literature extensively, it was realised that much of the knowledge regarding marital dissolution is western based and the little that exist in the context of Tanzania is endowed with a large number of legal sources (Law of the Child Act 2009, Law of Marriage Act 1971, Mpuya & Lubeja, 2012). Few psycho-social studies in the context of marriage and family (Manyama, 2017, Stark, 2018, Schaffnit, et al 2020) have been done in Tanzania but with limited research on the psychological effects of marital dissolution on early adolescents. This study, therefore, intended to fill the knowledge gap by exploring the effects of marital dissolution on early adolescents' psychosocial well-being in Tanzania. This knowledge will be much useful to Tanzanian families, responsible ministries, policymakers as well as advocacy groups in promoting the welfare of marriage and those who live in it.

Theoretical Underpinning
This study is built on the foundations of the attachment theory by Bowlby (1988). Attachment theory was developed in order to explain, among other things, a) why mere separations cause anxiety and b) the similarities between adult and childhood mourning (Bowlby, 1988). An attachment relationship is more concerned with feelings of comfort and security, whereby the attached person (in this regard an adolescent) seeks an attachment figure (parent) to

provide security, protection, comfort, and help. The attachment relationship in this regard is considered to be complementary. Attachment theorists explain that when attachment between a parent and a child is affected by incidents, such as parents' separation, a child may display social and emotional problems. A child may, for example, withdraw from others maybe sad, and perform poorly in class (Sweeney, 2011).

Methods
Research design
This study employed an instrumental case study design of the qualitative approach (Creswell, 2012; Stake, 1994). An instrumental case study is useful in the context of this study aimed provide insight into a specific issue such as the effects of marital dissolution on early adolescents' psychosocial well-being in Tanzania. In choosing this research design the researcher relied on the knowledge, assumptions, and past experiences of the participants (early adolescents and single parents from broken families) on the concept of marital dissolution, as all these influenced the way data was collected, documented, and analysed (Notko, & Sevón, 2018; Botha, 2014).

Research Site
The study was carried out in Dar es Salaam Region in Tanzania, specifically in Kinondoni Municipality. Dar es Salaam is estimated to have a population of more than six million people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019), making it the largest residential and commercial city in Tanzania. In terms of an urban population Dar es Salaam has accommodated over one-third of all city dwellers in the country over the last three decades (Three City Land Nexus Research Team. (2020). Due to its growing economy and other features of urbanisation, Dar es Salaam currently has high levels of mixed cultures, intermarriages, early marriages, early pregnancies, and other social dynamics that may weaken the stability of the institution of marriage and create room for marital dissolution (Mpuya & Lubeja, 2012, Balilonda, 2015). RITA (2020) reports that among 511 divorces that were registered in 2020, 221 came from Dar es Salaam alone. To be specific, it is reported by Balilonda, (2015) that marital break up in Kinondoni Municipality is among the leading factors causing adolescents' truancy and drop out of secondary school.

Selection of Participants

Two children's centres within Kinondoni Municipality were purposefully selected, one accommodating 20 children and adolescents and another 28 children and adolescents. Only boys were living in these centres. Note that, the selection of Kinondoni Municipality among other municipalities in Dar es Salaam Region was done due to the unique characteristics that were in favour of this study, one of it is having a big number of truants and dropouts in secondary schools as a result of parents' marital dissolution (Balilonda, 2015). The selection of centres was based on the fact that the centres accommodated the majority of former street children and adolescents who were also coming from broken homes. This is to say that, centres whose majority members were not originally from the streets as a result of parents' marital dissolution were left out. In each centre, four early adolescents were selected. Other four early adolescent girls from custodial homes were added, making a total of 12 early adolescent participants ranging between 12 to 15 years. All these early adolescents were purposefully selected based on the criterion that they came from broken families. The purpose of selecting four early adolescents from custodial homes was influenced by the quest to know whether or not all children from broken homes display similar experiences, regardless of whether one lives in the centre or at home. In addition to this sample, the researcher purposefully selected 3 caregivers from each of the two centres (6 in total) based on their closeness and the knowledge they have about the selected early adolescents. Additionally, 12 single parents as a result of marital dissolution were also purposefully selected to participate in this study. Among these single parents, only two were males. It should be noted that the selection of four early adolescents in each centre and single parents might be seen as few but the intention was to allow the researcher to conduct indepth interviews in order to obtain deep information regarding the effect of marital dissolution in their psychosocial well-being.

The selection of the participants was based on the information required from them, for example, the researcher expected from single parents, and information on how living as a single parent after separation affected their early adolescents. From early adolescents, the researcher expected to collect

information on how parents' separation affected their psychosocial well-being. The selection of caregivers was based on their knowledge as well as their closeness with the selected adolescents. They were also expected to provide their experiences on early adolescents' behaviour, attitudes, discipline, risk-taking behaviour, attendance, and psychosocial functioning.

Data Collection Process

This study employed in-depth interviews with male and female single parents as well as early adolescents, focus group discussion with caregivers, as well as an analysis of narratives from early adolescents who lived in centres. In-depth interviews were useful in this study as they allowed the researcher to obtain indepth personal information and experiences based on the topic under study. Each interview session lasted from 45 minutes to 1:30 hours as this is a recommended time for collecting a considerable amount of qualitative information in a single session (Baker, & Edwards, 2012). A total of 24 indepth interviews were conducted, two focus group discussions were conducted, one in each centre which lasted for 1 to 2 hours. Conversation and discussion duration increased in the FGDs as compared to interviews because of an increased number of participants who were expected to speak. The four early adolescents from single-parented homes only participated in indepth interviews and narratives. FGD was hard for them because they were scattered. All sessions were conducted in the Kiswahili language to allow participants the freedom to express and flow in their first and common language. The researcher recorded all interviews and later translated and transcribed them verbatim for data analysis.

The researcher chose to use early adolescents' narratives to supplement the information obtained from in-depth interviews. The decision to use narratives was a success because it was possible to establish a close and clear flow of events in early adolescents' lives that were a result of marital dissolution. It was also easy to collect a vast amount of information because they were free to speak out their life stories without being guided by several questions. Majority of early adolescents had difficulties in writing, thus they were comfortable doing the narratives orally. Very few, particularly those who

lived in homes, narrated in writing. Just like in in-depth interviews, oral narratives were also captured using a voice recorder.

Data Analysis

The analysis was done qualitatively by using (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) which comprises processes of data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. In this qualitative study data reduction aimed to reduce the data without any significant loss of information; in other words, without stripping the information from its context (Kothari, 2007). In the first stage of data display, processes, such as organisation, compression and assembling of information, were involved. This stage was crucial due to the fact that qualitative information is, typically, high in volume and is dispersed. To begin with, the researcher organised data in terms of frequently occurring categories, although these categories were bulky at that stage. The assembling process enabled the researcher to initially group the data according to possible themes and subthemes. Setting aside the frequently occurring from the less frequently occurring categories among the data formed part of the data reduction process. The more the bulkiness of the data was reduced, the easier the data organisation process became (Punch, 2005). The process of qualitative data analysis, therefore, involved repeated and iterative displays of data. Drawing conclusions in this regard was not a distinct process rather it was a process that took place as other processes such as data collection and data documentation unfolded. In an attempt to ensure that the researcher presented the view and perceptions of the participants, member checking was used after analysing the data and before finalising the interpretations. This was done by returning the data to the participants for crosschecking if what was documented is really what was meant by the participants.

Ethical Consideration

In respecting ethical principles, all field activities were done after the researcher obtained a research permit from the University of Dar es Salaam. A letter from the Vice Chancellor of the University of Dar es Salaam, who is given the mandate by the Tanzanian Government to provide research permits in Tanzania, was given to the heads of the two children's centres, explaining the objectives and practicalities of this study. All adult participants filled in

consent forms while early adolescent participants filled assent forms showing their willingness to participate in the study. All participants' identifying information was removed from the documentation, and in addition, honesty and trust between participants and the researcher were maintained. All participants were given a thorough explanation of their freedom to withdraw from the study at any time if they would prefer to do so and that their decision would have no risk whatsoever. All these ethical measures were addressed to ensure that all risks of harm to participants are minimised.

Findings
Effects of Marital Dissolution on Early Adolescents' Psychosocial Well-Being
Effects on parent-child relationships
The participants reported that the absence of one parent due to marital dissolution affected early adolescents emotionally. Some early adolescents reportedly displayed feelings of anger towards the non-resident parent, often the father, as one of the child participants explained:

> *It is over twelve years since I saw my father. Only few days ago I received a call from a man who claimed to be my father, and we talked a lot but I have not confirmed that he is my father. I never wished to see him, but it is true that sometimes I feel his absence, and I feel the need of a father. However, when I think about what he has done to us, I know that I don't want him (A boy Child 2. Interview).*

Other early adolescent participants, specifically boys, displayed feelings of anger and enmity to their fathers who left home after marital dissolution. This boy had this narration:

> *What my father caused in my life is like an alarm in my head, and it often rings badly. Sometimes it reminds me of how disastrous he was to us, but at the same time reminding me to be focused and think further about what to do in his absence (Adolescent Boy 4. Interview).*

In the same vein, this female Parent 2 had this to say*; "My daughter was very close to her father; they were friends and so his absence hurt her very much"* (Female Parent 2. Interview).

Early adolescents' emotional pain

The challenges of single parenting as a result of marital disolution were mentioned to be among causes of emotional pain to the early adolescents:

> *I felt very bad being raised by a single parent. It is bad and painful seeing one parent suffering for you and you do not feel well. I sometimes cry when I remember my father and mother fighting. My heart still pains though my mind is a kind of stable now. When I am alone, I think too much about my past and future (Female Adolescent 8. Narrative)*

Early adolescents' behavioural problems

Acting out behaviour displayed by early adolescent participants in this study included smoking, substance abuse, stealing, fighting, and using abusive language. Such behaviour was apparently caused by several reasons, such as negative social learning; a struggle for survival on the streets, following parents' separation as well as the absence of one parent from home. One of the early adolescent participants explained how the street life affected her behaviour:

> *I can also see some of this negative behaviour in myself as a result of being on the streets after my parents separated. I wouldn't be smoking marijuana; I wouldn't be a thief; I wouldn't live a street life; this compromised life environment would never be part of me (Adolescent Boy 3. Interview).*

Early adolescents' abuse from single parents and step parents

The participants reported that early adolescents from broken families were exposed to abuse of various kinds by their custodial parents and/or step parents. One of the girl adolescent participants argued that:

> *What pains me most was the way I was abused by my father; I can't forget the beatings and kinds of punishment we used to*

> *get from our father. I hate the way he gave me his underwear full of blood to wash while he was busy with his woman. I hate the way he was rude to us - not giving us even a little freedom to play with our friends" (Adolescent Female 6. Interview).*

An additional incident of abuse is also reported by a boy:

> *Our father used to be very bitter after our mother left home. There was this incident when my sister was playing – imitating my mother cooking in the kitchen. When my father saw her, he took a hot charcoal from the kitchen and burnt her hands. She later recovered well but was left with permanent scars (Adolescent Boy 5. Narrative).*

In commenting on the negative impact of abuse from stressful single parents, it was reported that some of the early adolescents became abusive as this caregiver reported: *"A good number of early adolescents who were abused, or experienced abuse of any kind in their homes became so much abusive while living on street and even after joining the centre" (Female Caregiver 1. FGD).*

This is also supported in the following narrative from a female adolescent:

> *I saw beating and harassing other children and my fellow adolescents normal when I was on the streets, in the centres and even at school. I don't want this behaviour but I think it comes from what I went through in my life" (Adolescent Female 3. Narratives)*

The previous verbatim excerpt exposes feelings of sadness, anger, emotional pain, impact of abuse, as well as increased disruptive behaviour of selected early adolescents as among negative psychosocial effects of parents' marital dissolution.

Apart from physical abuse from single parents, stepmothers were also accused of being unfair, paying less attention to stepchildren, and

badmouthing the children before their fathers. An extract from one of the parent interviews exemplifies this:

> *I am quite sure that the stepmother would never be fair and just to my son. She has two children, and my child is the third; she cannot give my son attention. I came to realise that she often beats my boy after I visited him, trying to force the boy to tell her what we were talking about at the hotel. One day when she beat the boy he shouted, 'Kill me aunt if you want to, I cannot tell you what I was talking with my mother because it has nothing to do with you!' His stepmother could do nothing, except tell her husband that the boy was spoiled and was hard to live with (Custodial Female Parent 3. Interview).*

During the data collection process with the children, and from their narrative accounts, they indicated some dissatisfaction with relocations following their parents' separation, and in most cases, subsequent poverty. An excerpt from the narrative account of a female adolescent provides evidence for this:

> *My mother left home and went to our uncle where we stayed for a while before we moved to Sinza and then Ubungo after their separation with my father. We never settled at the same place for long, but we told mom that we want to stay here and not move again. At that time, we were moving around with our mother, but I would have preferred to live with both my parents" (Adolescent Female 2. Narative).*

Frequent relocations were reported as common because the custodial parents searched for cheaper houses as illustrated in the following quotations:

> *We left Gongolamboto for Kigogo and then Chanika because my mother was looking for a cheap house that she could afford to rent. I never liked moving from one place to another. I have changed schools so much, and I have changed friends so much, but I had nothing to do to rectify the situation" (Adolescent Female 4. Interview);* and

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After my parents separated, we relocated three times before we came here as my mother says at this place the rent is more affordable despite its environment being so miserable. The place is highly congested, with dirty environments." (Adolescent Female 1. Inetrview).

Poverty and inability to provide for their children allegedly led to custodial parents sometimes taking their adolescents to children's centres for their survival. Children who missed the opportunity to enrol in, or continue with, school as a result of their parents' separation could, for example, be provided with an opportunity to obtain education when taken into a children's centre. An example of how children's centres assisted was explained by one of the parents:

My other son ended up in children's centres where he was also helped with school, which makes three children from this family going through this centre. They have really helped me (Female Custodial Parent 5. Interview).

In support, an adolescent participant described his experience with the children's centre:

I joined the centre when my mother was unable to take me to school after their separation. My brother who was also here made arrangements for me to be assisted by the Centre, both my older brothers passed through this Centre and currently there are two of us in the Centre (Adolescent Boy 2. Interview).

Effects of parents' emotonal states on early adolescents

Based on the participants' responses, it appeared that adolescents who remained in the care of emotionally challenged custodial parents experienced more negative effects than those who lived with parents who deal with the separation in an emotionally matured manner. Emotional challenges were reported to be caused by a number of factors, such as poverty, emotional struggles due to the separation, challenges related to custodianship as well as

problems in post–divorce relationships. The following narrations from a caregiver and an adolescent capture some of the experiences:

> *Marital dissolution affects parents as well. The majority of parents seemed to be confused and frustrated soon after they had separated, and these frustrations made them abusive to their children – causing a great risk for the children in their custody (Female Caregiver 5. FGD);*

One of the adolescents provided an example of an abusive parent:

> *When my father separated from my mother and when he started to have a relationship with this woman, he was very frustrated, very violent and he beat us all the time" (Adolescent Boy 7. Interview).*

Living with a custodial parent who experienced emotional challenges was, therefore, experienced negatively by their children. One of the parents had this to say in that regard:

> *It is so painful to hear these words from my children; all of last night I was crying because of their words and I don't want my children to see me crying because they become so sad, so what I do is to hide somewhere until I dry up" (Female Custodial Parent 4. Interview).*

Effect from parents' post-divorce conflicts

A specific cause of post-divorce conflict is the desire to obtain child custody. The informal nature of custodial arrangements in Tanzania appears to result in frequent battles between parents, with both claiming to have the right to remain with their children, following marital dissolution. An experience by an early adolescent participant attest to this:

> *One day, when we were in Morogoro, my father came and forced us into the car so that we could leave with him. He then started fighting with my mother because she didn't want us to go. I didn't want to go either but I was forced to go. I think he*

realised that we were not happy with what he had done, but he still decided to take us away (Adolescent Boy 6. Narrative).

This experience finds support in a parent's account:

There has been a battle between us about the child. My ex-husband was taking our daughter from me by force, and I would go and get her back by force. If he took her without me knowing, I would take her back when he was not around (Female Custodial Parent 2. Interview).

Discussion
Effects of Marital Dissolution on Early Adolescents' Psychosocial Well-Being

As mentioned earlier, the findings of this study disclosed that early adolescents from broken homes are at the risk of engaging in problematic behaviours such as gang activities, as well as experiencing internalised and externalised emotional problems. This finding is supported by Anderson (2014) Adu-Okoree, Sedegah and Parku (2020) who reported that when this occurs during early adolescence (the target phase of this study), adolescents may end up engaging in early at-risk sexual activity, with the girls risking early pregnancies. The study further revealed that early adolescents, especially those who once lived on the streets, were found to display numerous behavioural problems, including aggression, theft, bullying, hurling insults, selling drugs, and early sexual activity. Some girls were unable to continue with school due to early pregnancies while others were filled with anxiety, loneliness and sadness; and this is especially the case for those who ended up living with step-parents. Custodial parents reported an increase in behavioural problems such as truancy, substance abuse, and disobediency among early adolescents soon after the departure of the fathers from the home. Early adolescents apparently took advantage of their mothers' weak parenting and inability to be as strict as their fathers during the period following marital dissolution. Similar tendencies were found by Gähler and Palmtag (2015). Farooq, Chaudhry, Shafiq and Berhan (2011) indicated that early adolescents' behavioural problems may be caused by many factors from

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both inside and outside the home. One such factors is the absence of one parent from home for a long period due to marital dissolution which may weaken the ability of the other parent to raise and positively parent these early adolescents.

Similarly, in this study, it was further found that detachment from a parent; especially where emotional attachment existed between the early adolescents and the non-resident parent caused emotional pain, anxiety and sadness among early adolescents. Some early adolescents displayed feelings of fear and insecurity, whilst others were sad, having a negative attitude towards the parent whom they considered to have caused the separation. In support of this finding, attachment theorists explain that when attachment between a parent and a child is affected by incidents such as parents' separation, a child may display social and emotional problems. A child may, for example, withdraw from others, and may be sad and perform poorly in class (Sweeney, 2011). However, the findings of the current study are contrary to a study carried out by Brooks (2011) who reported that some adolescents become more caring, and completely adjust to the new family set up especially if they were properly prepared for the divorce, or if their family environment was filled with spousal violence, abuse or severe conflict. In such cases, divorce comes as a relief to such adolescents. The inconstistency in findings can be attributed to the fact that adolescents' reactions to divorce vary depending on the family level and characteristics, the level of conflict, gender, individual temperament, parents' emotional reactions, and the amount of time spent the adolescent spent with each parent.

Furthermore, the study revealed that children were angry with both parents, a situation that resulted in some children choosing to live on the street, and subsequently, ending up at the children's centres. This finding indicates that the negative effects of parents' separation on children may be determined by the nature of the parent-child relationships that existed previously. If the child was well-connected to a parent who becomes non-resident, the negative effect will be more intense. Poor parent-child relationships were also related to continuous parental conflict in this study. This finding is in line with the conclusions by Makofane and Mogoane (2012) who suggest that when

children continuously observe their parents fighting or abusing each other, it may affect their perception of one or both parents, and in turn, hamper healthy parent-child relationships that existed before. Correspondingly, other negative effects of parents' separation, expressed by the participants of this study, are related to the children's negative perceptions of marriage and family, child labour, and child abuse. Correlating with this finding, Esmaeili (2011) feels that the negative effects of marital dissolution may affect the children for a short period of time or throughout their lives. This possibility is evident in the data provided by participating parents who experienced marital dissolution as children. They confessed that some of the marital problems that caused their marital dissolution could be related to the effects of their parents' separation throughout their life-span.

Equally, in this study it was found that the child participants experienced academic and psycho-social negative effects caused by frequent relocations that started to occur soon after the dissolution of the marriage. The children, specifically, spoke about the negative effects of losing friends from their neighbourhoods, and at school when they had to change schools, and subsequently, some had to repeat their grades after changing schools. Generally, having to repeatedly cope with a new residential environment was experienced as a challenge by the majority of the child participants. This finding is supported by Mucaj and Xeka (2015) who repoterd that adolescents in Albania who engage in delinquent practices will for example constantly find themselves in trouble with the law, school or community where they live as well as poor formance in school.

Moreover, the study found that a parent's emotional instability may, in turn, impair his/her ability to properly parent his/her children. A parent who is under stress and is depressed may, for example, directly affect the children by abusing or neglecting them, or indirectly harming them by neglecting all positive, children who were left in the care of an emotionally challenged custodial parent were, occasionally, abused and neglected because of unstable parenting. This resulted in the children displaying deviant behaviour, which could be related to a lack of close parental control. Examples of such behaviour include at-risk sexual behaviour, involvement in gang activities,

aggression, frequently running away from home, and substance abuse. In a similar vein, a study by Rosnati, Barni and Uglia (2014) which was conducted in Italy, revealed that some children ended up living on the street after being unable to cope with living under the same roof as a step-parent. For this reason, the decision of a custodial parent to engage in a post-divorce relationship is considered by life course theorists as a life course event that may, potentially, jeopardise the future of children due to the fact that it exposes them to added risks, as well as to their parents' separation.

Conversely, the findings of this study contradict those of the study done by Strong, DeVault, and Cohen (2008) who revealed that after divorce, some adolescents may become more spiritual, and therefore turn to God or divine being whom they believe in, begging for power to help them through their difficult situation. As they do this, they increase their faith and hope in the supreme being, and the belief that the supreme being will help them navigate this difficult stage of their life successfully. This group of adolescents that embarks on believing that everything happens for a reason, and that in the end everything will work out all right end up strengthening their spiritual beliefs.

With regard to the indirect effects of marital dissolution on adolescents, the study found that the majority of the parents who participated were involved in post-divorce conflicts for a number of reasons, including property possession, child maintenance, and non-agreement concerning the custody of the children. Post-divorce conflict had several negative effects on the participating children, namely it damaged parent-child relationships, reduced children's visits and contact with non-resident parents, and delayed the children's adjustment to the marital dissolution. In line with the findings of this study, a study by Esmaeili and Yaacob (2011) which was conducted in Malaysia revealed that conflicts linked to parental divorce are characterized by parent's communicating in a manner that is not polite, constant parental battles and hostility which can be traumatic and stressful to the adolescents. Parental conflicts, whether pre- or post-divorce have a negative impact on the adolescents' emotional well-being. The quality of the child- parent relationship is thus greatly affected because the adolescents are neglected in

some ways as the parents navigate through the marital problems they have to deal with.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the scope of understanding the effects of marital dissolution on early adolescents is very broad, and entails various characteristics. This is because these effects are mainly negative, and cut across adolescents' whole life, especially in their psychosocial well-being. The effects of marital dissolution on early adolescents are interrelated and cyclic in nature. This means that in some cases the effects on the adolescents' psycho-social well-being may intensify the negative effects other areas of their lives. For instance, the majority of early adolecents who were affected by their parent's marital dissolution, especially in their psychosocial well-being, were also negatively affected in their academic progress in the schools. Generally, the study concludes that the effect of marital dissolution on early adolescents affects not just one part of their lives but almost every sphere of their intellectual, social, emotional and psychological development. Therefore, the study recommends that there is a need to preserve and promote the welfare of marriages so as to allow early adolescents live and thrive with their two parents under one roof.

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