Influence of paternal authority on the social development of the girl-child among the Igbo in Imo state

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Abstract

The study assesses the influence of paternal authority on the social development of the girl-child among the Igbo in Imo state. Multi stage sampling procedure was used to select 206 respondents using interview schedule. Data collected on social development, and influence of paternal authority on the social development was analyzed with percentages, mean, and standard deviation. Average age of the girl children was 15.18 ± 0.86 years. Majority (63.1%) had WASSCE, 8.7% had sexual desire for their fathers, while 66.0% had special relationship with their fathers. Most (90.7%) of the girl-children in the study area accepted that they had positive relationship with their peers, and 84.9% accepted that they had good conflict management skills. My social development was promoted by fathers' support (WMS = 2.34) and fathers' stern reaction to my failures motivated me to work harder in subsequent tasks (WMS = 2.33) ranked foremost influence of paternal authority on the social development of the girl-child. Also, 89.3% of the girl-children in the study area accepted that a fathers' absence makes a girl-child feel misunderstood and unappreciated in her social environment. The study concludes that fathers' stern reaction to their daughters' failures motivated their daughters to work harder in subsequent tasks.

Keywords: Paternal authority; social development; girl-child

Introduction

In many societies, the family unit serves as the primary agent of socialization for children, profoundly shaping their development and identities (Erna, 2018; Ignatius, 2020). Within this familial context, paternal authority, characterized by the power and influence wielded by fathers or male figures, assumes a crucial role in guiding children's upbringing and socialization (Nargiza et al., 2023). Among the Igbo community in Imo State, Nigeria, paternal authority carries significant weight, mirroring entrenched traditional values, cultural norms, and gender roles inherent in Igbo society (Adebayo et al., 2015).

The social development of children during their formative years is complex and influenced by various factors, such as cultural norms, societal arrangements, and family interactions. Within the Igbo community in Imo State, Nigeria, the significance of paternal authority in molding the social development of the girl-child is particularly noteworthy (Oguibe, 2014). Embedded in patriarchal customs, Igbo culture places a high value on the authority and decision-making roleof fathers within the family structure (Odii et al., 2023).

Traditionally, the father's role in Igbo society transcends mere provision; he also bears the responsibility of guiding and molding the behaviour and values of his children, especially the girl- child (Uzoagba, 2017). The father's authority is perceived as pivotal in the socialization process, encompassing the acquisition of skills, norms, and values necessary for the girl-child to navigate the intricate societal expectations and gender roles within the Igbo cultural context (Odii et al., 2023).

Social development plays a pivotal role in a child's holistic development and welfare, impacting their capacity to engage meaningfully with others, establish wholesome relationships, and make constructive contributions to society (Uzoagba et al., 2022). Particularly for the girl-child, this developmental journey is intricately shaped by gender-specific societal expectations and cultural norms, which delineate their roles, prospects, and limitations within the community (Ignatius, 2020).

Social development is integral to a child's overall well-being, shaping their ability to interact effectively, cultivate meaningful relationships, and contribute positively to society (Uzoagba et al., 2022). Particularly for girls, this developmental process is influenced by gender-specific expectations and cultural norms that define their roles, opportunities, and limitations within their communities (Ignatius, 2020). In the Igbo society, characterized by entrenched traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures, paternal authority holds significant sway over the social development of the girl-child. This influence extends to various aspects of their lives, including education, socialization, autonomy in decision-making, and access to opportunities for personal growth and self-expression (Uzoagba, 2017).

Despite the increasing recognition of gender equality and the importance of empowering the girl-child, empirical research on the influence of paternal authority on the social development of the girl-child among the Igbo in Imo State remains limited. This study aims to bridge this gap by providing a comprehensive assessment of the role of paternal authority in shaping the social development of the girl-child within the Igbo cultural context. The specific objectives were to: (i) ascertain the social development of the girl-child in the study area; (ii) assess the influence of paternal authority on the social development of the girl-child among the Igbo people in Imo State; and (iii) determine the effect of paternal absence on the social development of the girl-child.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Imo State, situated in the southeast, Nigeria. The state is positioned between Latitude $4^0 45^1$N and $7^0 15^1$N, and longitude $6^0 50^1$E and $7^0 25^1$E, covering an area of approximately 5,530 km2 (2140 sq. mi).

The population of the study consists of all the girl-children between thirteen and eighteen years from Igbo extraction. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select 206 girl-children for the study using an interview schedule. In the first stage, all (100%) the three senatorial zones in Imo state were selected. The three senatorial zones are Orlu, Owerri, and Okigwe.

In the second stage, a simple random sampling technique was employed to select 33.3% of the LGAs in Orlu and Owerri, and Okigwe zones. The selected LGAs are Ohaji-Egbema, Oguta, Njaba, Isu (Orlu zone); Owerri West, Owerri North, Ngor-Okpala (Owerri zone); and Obowo, Ehime Mbano (Okigwe zone). In the third stage, simple random sampling was used to select three communities from each of the chosen Local Government Areas. In the fourth stage, simple random sampling was used to choose four villages from each of the selected communities. In all the selected villages, a purposive sampling was used to choose two families each, that had at least a girl-child whose age at the time of data collection fell between thirteen and eighteen years. For families that had more than one girl-child within the age range of thirteen and eighteen years, a simple random sampling was used to select one. This gave a total of two hundred and sixteen (216) girl-children that were used for the study. However, only responses from two hundred and six (206) respondents were found useful for the data analysis.

Respondents were presented with 8 statements on social development of the girl-child with two response options of "yes" scored 1, and "no" scored 0. Influence of paternal authority on the social development of the girl-child was measured with 9 paternal authority influences, with response options of "strongly agree" scoring 3, "agree" scoring 2, and "disagree" scoring 1 for positively worded statements. Negatively worded paternal authority influence statements were scored in the reverse order. The weighted mean score (WMS) was calculated and was employed to assign positions to the paternal authority influence statements in descending order, while the index of the paternal authority influence derived was used to categorize the respondents into low and high satisfied using below and above the mean criterion.

Respondents were presented with 9 statements on the effect of paternal absence on the social development of the girl-child with two response options of "yes" scoring 1, and "no" scoring 0. Socio-economic characteristics of the girl-child such as age, highest educational attainment, sexual desire for one's father, and special/close relationship with one's father were measured accordingly. The data were analyzed with percentages, mean, and Standard deviation.

Results and discussion
Socio-economic characteristics

The findings presented in Table 1 illustrate that the average age of the respondents was 15.18 ± 0.86 years. A significant majority (66.0%) fell within the age range of 13 to 15 years, while 34.0% were between 16 and 18 years old. The mean age of 15.18±0.86 years observed among the girl-child participants in the study reflects various factors, including cultural norms, developmental stages, practical considerations, and the specific focus of the research. This mean age corresponds to the typical onset of puberty among girls in the Igbo community, a period marked by notable physical, emotional, and social changes, rendering it a critical phase for examining paternal influences on the social development of the girl-child.

Regarding the literacy level of the girl-child participants in the study area; Table 1 indicates that a majority (63.1%) possessed the West African Senior School Certificate Education, while 36.9% held the First School Leaving Certificate. Notably, none of the respondents had attained OND, HND, BSc, or PhD qualifications. This

distribution suggests that all the girl-child participants in the study area were literate. Education holds significant potential to empower the girl-child among the Igbo of southeast Nigeria, fostering independence, critical thinking skills, and the capacity to challenge traditional norms and structures, as posited by Nwokolo and Nwokolo (2016). Regarding the inquiry into whether the girl-child participants harbored sexual desires for their fathers, Table 1 reveals that the vast majority (90.3%) responded in the negative, indicating that they had not experienced such desires. In contrast, 8.7% acknowledged having sexual desires for their fathers, while 1.0% were unsure. This observation challenges the universality and applicability of the sexual clause of the Oedipus complex framework, highlighting the need for cultural sensitivity and specificity when interpreting psychoanalytic theories within diverse cultural contexts, as noted by Duruamaku-Dim (2019). The absence of oedipal desires underscores the complexity of human development and emphasizes the multitude of factors, including cultural, familial, and individual influences that shape psychoanalytic development and family dynamics.

Lastly, the data presented in Table 1indicate that a majority (66.0%) of the girl-child participants affirmed having a special or close relationship with their fathers, while 30.1% reported otherwise.   A small percentage (3.9%) was uncertain about the nature of their relationship with their fathers. The prevalence of close emotional bonds between the girl-child and their fathers, despite the absence of sexual desire, challenges the universal applicability of the sexual clause of the Oedipus complex framework. It underscores the importance of considering cultural factors when examining parent-child relationships and human development, as advocated by Urama (2019). Understanding family dynamics and emotional bonds in parent-child relationships necessitates a nuanced and culturally sensitive approach.

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents (girl-children) according to their personal characteristics; n = 206

Variables	Percent
Age(years)	
13-15	66.0
16-18	34.0
Mean ± SD	15.18±0.86
Girl-child's highest educational attainment	
First School Leaving Certificate	36.9
WASSCE	63.1
OND	0.0
HND	0.0
BSc	0.0
PhD	0.0
Had sexual desire for one's father	
No	90.3
Not sure	1.0
Yes	8.7
Daughter had special/close relationship with her father	
No	30.1
Not sure	3.9
Yes	66.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Social development of the girl-child
Table 2 presents the responses indicating various aspects of social development among the girl- child participants in the study area. A significant majority, comprising 90.7% of the respondents, acknowledged having positive relationships with their peers. Additionally, 84.9% reported possessing good conflict management skills, while 77.6% expressed that they consistently communicated their thoughts and feelings effectively. Moreover, 77.6% of the participants affirmed having high self-esteem, and 72.8% stated that they handled their emotions judiciously in challenging situations. Furthermore, 92.2% of the respondents indicated that they exhibited empathy towards individuals facing difficulties, and a similar percentage (92.7%) reported active participation in community

activities. Conversely, only a minority (10.1%) admitted to not having positive relationships with their family members. This finding contradicts the assertion made by Salihu (2023), which suggested that the social development of male children receives more emphasis than that of the girl-child.

Table2: Distribution of the respondents according to the social development of the girl-child; n = 206

Statements	Percent
I have positive relationship with my peers	90.7
I have good conflict management skills	84.9
I do not have positive relationship with my family members	10.1
I always express my thoughts and feelings with good communication skills	77.6
I have high self-esteem	77.6
I handle my emotions wisely in challenging situations	72.8
I show empathy to people when they are going through a difficult time	92.2
I participate actively in community activity	92.7

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Influence of paternal authority

Table 3 presents the findings regarding the influence of paternal authority on the social development of the girl-child. It indicates that father's support (WMS (weighted mean score) = 2.34), father's stern reaction to failures motivating harder work in subsequent tasks (WMS = 2.33), and father's authority positively impacting interpersonal relationships in the girl-child (WMS = 2.19) were ranked as the most significant influences of paternal authority on social development. The prominence of father's support in promoting social development suggests that fathers who offer love, guidance, and positive role modeling empower their daughters with essential social skills, emotional intelligence, and self-confidence (Nduka and Ozioma, 2019).

Conversely, factors such as the quality of time spent by fathers enhancing relationships with others (WMS = 1.71), fathers' harsh discouragement of activities promoting social development (WMS = 1.19), and infrequent communication with fathers negatively affecting social development (WMS=1.15) ranked lower in influence. This suggests that the quality of time fathers spend with their daughters, their approach to discipline, and communication frequency were perceived as less impactful on the social development of the girl-child in the study area.

Furthermore, Table 3 reveals that 51.5% of the girl-child respondents indicated low influences of paternal authority on their social development, while 48.5% indicated high influence. This implies a mixed perception among the girl-children regarding the extent of paternal authority's impact on their social development.

Table 3: Distribution of the respondents according to the influence of paternal authority on the social development of the girl-child; n = 206

Statements	Weighted Mean Score
My social development was promoted by father's support	2.34
Father's stern reaction to my failures motivated me to work harder in subsequent tasks	2.33
Father's authority in the family has positive effect in the development of interpersonal relationships in the girl-child	2.19
Girl-children in father-present families are more unlikely to demonstrate socio-emotional maturity than those in father-absent homes	2.13
The quality of time my father spent with me enhanced my relationship with other people	1.71
Fathers' authority affected my self-esteem, decision making ability, and other skills needed for successful social functioning	1.48
Fathers' attitude discouraged me from engaging in activities that will enhance my social development	1.27
The harsh manner of my father discouraged me from undertaking activities that will improve my social development	1.19
Father hardly talked with me and that negatively affected my social development	1.15
Level of paternal influence	**Percentage %**
Low	51.5
High	48.5

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Effect of paternal absence on the social development of the girl-child
Table 4 illustrates the impact of paternal absence on the social development of the girl-child. The findings highlight that a significant proportion (89.3%) of the girl-children acknowledged feeling misunderstood and unappreciated in their social environment due to their father's absence. Moreover, 63.1% expressed difficulty in trusting male authority figures as a consequence of paternal absence, while 55.3% noted its adverse effect on their relationships with peers. Additionally, 52.4% reported a negative impact on their self-esteem, and 50.5% mentioned feeling insecure and unloved in their daily lives.

Furthermore, 38.8% of the girl-children admitted to adopting a male rather than a female role model in the absence of their father, and 40.8% acknowledged feelings of abandonment. Similarly, 44.7% stated experiencing social isolation from their peers due to the lack of a father figure.

These findings suggest that paternal absence significantly influences the social development of the girl-children in the study area. The perception of feeling misunderstood and unappreciated in their social environment may have profound implications for various aspects of their social development, including self-esteem, trust, communication, relationships, and academic performance (Yamn, 2018; Umana, 2020). The absence or perceived absence of a father figure may contribute to these challenges, emphasizing the importance of paternal involvement in fostering healthy social development among girl-children.

Table 4: Distribution of the respondents (girl-children) according to the effect of paternal absence on the social development of the girl-child; n = 206

Statement	Percent
A fathers' absence affected the girl-child's relationship with peers	55.3
The girl-child experiences negative feelings towards her father's absence	55.3
The girl-child's self-esteem is negatively affected by father's absence	52.4
The girl-child feels insecure and unloved in her day-to-day life as a result of father's absence	50.5
The girl-child feels isolated from her peers due to the lack of father figure	44.7
A fathers' absence makes a girl-child feel misunderstood and unappreciated in her social environment	89.3
The girl-child adopts a male rather a fellow female as a role model due to her paternal absence	38.8
A fathers' absence makes a girl-child to feel abandoned	40.8
Paternal absence makes a girl-child to demonstrate difficulty in trusting male authority	63.1

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concludes that fathers' stern reaction to their daughters' failures motivated their daughter to work harder in subsequent tasks. Also, social development of the girl-child was promoted by fathers' support in the study area. Majority of the respondents accepted that fathers' absence makes a girl-child feel misunderstood and unappreciated in her social environment.

The study recommends more of fathers' support to their girl-child in order to improve the social development of the girl-child. Fathers should express stern postures to their daughters' failure so as to motivate them to work harder in subsequent tasks.

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