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Research Article

Family Disruption and Adolescent Outcomes: Examining Chemistry Performance, Substance Use, and Peer Relationships among Secondary School Students in Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract:

Background: This study examined the effects of family disruption on chemistry performance, drug use, and peer relationships among 100 Senior Secondary School 3 students from two public schools in Akure South LGA, Ondo State, Nigeria.

Aims: The study examined the relationship between family disruption and chemistry performance and drug use, and determined gender differences in peer relationships among students from broken homes.

Method: Using a cross-sectional survey design with multistage sampling, data were collected via the Survey on the Effects of Family Disruption and Chemistry Performance: Drug Use and Peer Relationships ($\alpha = 0.80$) and analyzed using chi-square, Spearman rho, and t-tests at $p < .05$ significance.

Results: Results revealed a significant association between broken homes and chemistry performance, $\chi^2(25, N = 100) = 50.05$, $p = .002$, and a strong positive correlation with drug use, $rs(100) = .671$, $p < .001$, rejecting H_{01} and H_{02}. However, no gender differences emerged in peer relationship reactions, $t(98) = 0.75$, $p = .457$, accepting H_{03}.

Conclusion: Findings confirm family disruption as a critical risk factor impairing chemistry performance and increasing substance abuse vulnerability among Nigerian secondary students, irrespective of gender. Recommendations include school counselling, academic support, drug-use awareness and prevention for students, parent and caregiver engagement in students' academic and social development, teacher training, and peer mentoring to mitigate these effects and enhance science education equity.

Keywords: chemistry achievement, drug use, family disruption, peer relationships, gender, secondary students

I. INTRODUCTION

The family is the primary agent of socialization in Nigeria, where children first learn the values, norms, and behaviours that shape their academic and social development (Adeyeye, 2023; Bernardi & Boertien, 2017; Grätz & Härkönen, 2024). Family structure is one of the contextual factors that may shape adolescents' experiences and educational outcomes. However, its effects should not be interpreted in isolation, as the quality of parenting, parental involvement, family relationships, socioeconomic circumstances, caregiving stability, and access to social support may also influence adolescents' academic, emotional, and social development. Thus, living in a two-parent household does not necessarily guarantee positive outcomes, just as experiencing a change in family structure does not inevitably result in adverse outcomes.

In this study, family disruption refers to a situation in which the usual family structure and parental support system have been altered because of parental divorce, separation, or prolonged parental absence. The term family structure is retained to describe the specific family circumstances reported by the participating students. Students were considered to be from disrupted families when they reported parental divorce, separation, or prolonged parental absence. This operational definition was used to classify participants for the study and analysis.

Although changes in family structure may be associated with challenges for some adolescents, such experiences do not affect all students in the same way. Their experiences may depend on factors such as the level of family conflict, socioeconomic conditions, parental involvement, stability of caregiving, and availability of social and emotional support. Therefore, the present study examines the relationship between family disruption and selected student outcomes rather than assuming that family structure alone determines students' academic, behavioural or social experiences. Recent trends indicate increasing family disruption in Nigeria: national divorce rates have risen, and family courts in Ondo State reported over 200 cases in 2024,

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with continued increases recorded in 2025 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023; The Hope Newspaper, 2025).

Chemistry education, with its high cognitive demands and sequential learning requirements, is especially vulnerable to the effects of family disruption. Students from broken homes often exhibit lower achievement in chemistry, decreased motivation and reduced participation in laboratory and peer-study activities—effects attributed to stress, inadequate supervision and limited resources (Adeyeye, 2023; Ekeanyanwu, 2021; Frimmel et al., 2024; Grätz & Härkönen, 2024; Kailaheimo-Lönnqvist et al., 2025; Yahaya & al., 2021). Empirical findings across Nigerian states support this pattern. Studies conducted in Lagos, Edo, and Ogun States report significant negative effects of Family disruption on academic performance, classroom interaction, cognitive development, and social adjustment (Agwogie & Kliewer, 2024; Amuda-Kannike, 2019; Ehsan Ul Haq & Saeed Khan, 2024; K. K. Lawal et al., 2024). National examination data further reinforce these concerns. WAEC reports indicate that chemistry credit pass rates have remained below 50% in recent years, while local studies have linked emotional problems arising from family disruption to poor WAEC performance (Awoyemi et al., 2024; Obozokhae, 2026; Omoregie et al., 2025; West African Examinations Council, 2023).

Family disruption also increase risk that further impair chemistry learning. Research and surveys conducted in Ondo State and Akure South have identified a higher prevalence of substance misuse (e.g., codeine, tramadol, and cannabis) among youths from disrupted families, a factor that compromises cognitive functioning and academic engagement (Egga et al., 2024; Jumbe et al., 2025; A. Lawal et al., 2025; National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, 2019; World Health Organization, 2024). Affected students additionally exhibit interpersonal difficulties, including aggression, social withdrawal and poor peer collaboration, which undermine laboratory work and the mastery of chemistry concepts (Adedokun et al., 2026; Akinsola, 2020; Pollmann-Schult, 2026; Rejaän et al., 2022; Sarnoto et al., 2024). Gender differences are also evident: males are more likely to externalize distress through aggression or delinquent behaviour, whereas females tend to internalize distress, exhibiting anxiety and social isolation. Both patterns hinder chemistry learning in distinct ways (Hugh-Jones et al., 2025; Okwudili et al., 2020; Pinquart & Lauk, 2025; Yap et al., 2017).

The mechanisms linking family disruption to lower achievement in science include emotional distress, reduced family income and educational resources, impaired cognitive development, and weakened peer-support networks. Although a minority of students respond to hardship by increasing their academic effort, the prevailing evidence from Nigerian contexts indicates that family disruption contributes substantially to poor academic outcomes, psychological problems and risky behaviours (Adedokun et al., 2026; Egbo et al., 2026; Härkönen et al., 2017; Masten & Barnes, 2018; Rejaän et al., 2022).

Research shows family disruption affects students' academic, behavioural, psychological and social outcomes (Adeyeye, 2023; Akinsola, 2020; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024; Egbo et al., 2026; Ekeanyanwu, 2021; Grätz & Härkönen, 2024; Hassan et al., 2022; Okwudili et al., 2020). Evidence also links family and peer influences to substance use (Cole et al., 2024; Jumbe et al., 2025; Rodríguez-Ruiz et al., 2025; Watts et al., 2024), and broader prevalence data are available from WHO (2024) and NDLEA (2024). However, most studies examine overall school performance rather than achievement in specific subjects such as chemistry and few examine academic results together with substance use and peer relationships in the same study. There is limited context-specific evidence for public secondary schools in Akure South Local Government Area, Ondo State, and it is unclear whether reported gender differences in responses to family disruption (externalizing for males, internalizing for females) apply to interpersonal relationships there (Davila & Tubman, 2019; Hassan et al., 2022). This study, therefore, examines the relationship between family disruption, chemistry achievement, and substance use among public secondary students in Ondo State, and further explores gender differences in interpersonal relationships.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a non-experimental cross-sectional survey design. Variables were observed without manipulation, and data on family structure, chemistry performance, drug use, interpersonal relationships and gender were collected at one point in time. Analyses therefore examined associations and gender differences rather than causal effects. The population comprised students in public secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria. The study was delimited to SS III students in two selected public secondary schools in Akure South LGA. Two co-educational public secondary schools were purposively selected to ensure the inclusion of both male and female students for the gender-related analysis. SS III students available in the selected classes during data collection participated in the study. A total of 100 students participated, comprising 54 females and 46 males; this reflected the actual class composition.

Family disruption was operationally defined as parental divorce, separation, or prolonged parental absence. Students reporting any of these circumstances were classified as experiencing family disruption, while others were classified as having an intact family structure. Data were collected using a self-developed

questionnaire titled Survey on the Effect of Broken Homes on Academic Performances, Drug Use, and Interpersonal Relationships. The instrument comprised two sections: Section A obtained demographic information, while Section B contained 22 items addressing family circumstances, chemistry performance, drug or alcohol use, and interpersonal relationships. Responses to Section B were dichotomous: Yes = 2 and No = 1.

Experts from the School of Science, Federal College of Education, Iwo, reviewed the instrument for face and content validity. A pilot test involving 20 secondary school students who were not included in the main study yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.80, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The researcher obtained permission from the principals and relevant teachers of the participating schools before administering the questionnaire. Students' consent to participate was also sought after the researcher explained the purpose of the study and assured them that the information provided would be treated confidentially. Participation was voluntary, and completed questionnaires were handled confidentially.

The questionnaire was administered to the selected SS III students after obtaining the necessary school-level permission. Completed questionnaires were checked, coded, and analysed using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, Pearson's chi-square, Spearman's rank-order correlation, and independent-samples t-test at the 0.05 significance level. Chi-square examined the association between family-disruption status and the chemistry-performance measure; Spearman's correlation examined the association between family-disruption and drug-use responses; and the t-test examined gender differences in the reported scores. Given the cross-sectional design, findings were interpreted as associations or group differences rather than causal effects.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Result

This section presents the findings of the study on family disruption, chemistry performance, students' drug use and gender differences in reactions to family disruption. The results are presented according to the three research hypotheses.

3.1.1 Relationship Between Family Disruption and Chemistry Performance

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between family disruption and chemistry performance of secondary school students in Ondo State.

Table 1. Chi-Square Test of Association Between Family Disruption and Chemistry Performance

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Pearson Chi-Square	50.050a	25	0.002
Likelihood Ratio	54.888	25	0.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	18.647	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	100		

The analysis showed a statistically significant association between family-disruption status and the reported chemistry-performance measure, $\chi^2(25, N = 100) = 50.050$, $p = .002$. This indicates that the pattern of reported chemistry performance differed significantly in relation to family-disruption status. However, because the study was cross-sectional, the finding represents an association and should not be interpreted as evidence that family disruption caused differences in chemistry performance.

3.1.2 Relationship Between Family Disruption and Students' Drug Use

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between family disruption and students' drug use.

Table 2. Spearman's Rho Correlation Between Family Disruption and Drug Use

Variables	N	Rs	P
Family Disruption Drug Use	100	0.671	<.001

A statistically significant positive association was found between family-disruption responses and drug-use responses, $r_s = .671$, $p < .001$ ($N = 100$). The result indicates that students' responses concerning family disruption were significantly related to their reported drug-use experiences. This finding does not establish that family disruption causes drug use, given the cross-sectional nature of the study.

3.2.3 Gender Differences in Reactions to Family Disruption

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant gender difference in students' reported reactions to family disruption in terms of chemistry achievement, drug use, and peer relationships.

Table 4. Independent Samples t-test: Gender Differences in Reactions to Family Disruption (Academic Performance, Drug Use, and Interpersonal Relationships)

Gender	N	X	SD	X Diff.	tcal	df	p	d
Female	54	9.7593	1.3166	0.216	0.747	98	0.457	0.15
Male	46	9.5435	1.5735					

The independent-samples t-test showed no statistically significant gender difference in reported reactions to family disruption across chemistry achievement, drug use, and peer relationships. Females (n = 54, M = 9.7593, SD = 1.3166) had a mean score 0.216 points higher than males (n = 46, M = 9.5435, SD = 1.5735), t(98) = 0.747, p = .457, 95% CI [−0.366, 0.798], Cohen's d = 0.15. The confidence interval included zero, and the small effect size indicates that the observed difference was limited in magnitude and not statistically significant.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1. Family Disruption and Chemistry Performance

The findings from Hypothesis One revealed a statistically significant relationship between family disruption and chemistry performance among secondary school students in Ondo State, $\chi^2(25, N = 100) = 50.050$, $p = .002$. This finding indicates that family disruption is significantly associated with students' chemistry performance. The result is consistent with previous studies by Adigun (2012), Ekeanyan (2021), and Omoruyi (2014), which highlighted the relationship between family circumstances and students' academic performance.

Family disruption may affect students' academic experiences through reduced parental involvement, strained family relationships, emotional challenges, and socioeconomic difficulties. These circumstances may influence students' concentration, motivation, availability of learning resources, and ability to participate effectively in academic activities. Chemistry, as a subject that requires consistent learning, concentration, and understanding of concepts, may be particularly affected when students experience challenges within their family environment. However, the relationship observed in this study should be interpreted as an association rather than evidence that family disruption directly causes poor chemistry performance. Other factors, including parental involvement, family relationships, socioeconomic circumstances, and the availability of support, may also influence students' academic experiences.

3.2.2. Family Disruption and Students' Drug Use

The findings from Hypothesis Two revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between family disruption and students' drug use ($r_s = .671$, $p < .001$). This suggests that students' responses concerning family disruption were significantly associated with their reported drug-use experiences. The finding is broadly consistent with previous studies by Hassan et al. (2022) and Yahaya & al. (2021), which examined the relationship between family-related challenges and substance use among adolescents.

Family disruption may expose students to emotional and social challenges that could be associated with their behavioural experiences, including drug use. Changes in family relationships, reduced parental supervision, inadequate emotional support, and difficulties in the home environment may be relevant factors in understanding students' vulnerability to substance use. However, the observed relationship should not be interpreted as evidence that family disruption directly causes drug use. Students' drug-use experiences may also be influenced by peer relationships, parental monitoring, socioeconomic circumstances, and other contextual factors.

3.2.3. Gender Differences in Reactions to Family Disruption

This finding contrasts with literature suggesting that males may be more likely to externalize distress through aggression and drug use, whereas females may be more likely to internalize distress through anxiety and depression (Davila & Tubman, 2019; Hassan et al., 2022).

The absence of a statistically significant gender difference suggests that male and female students in the sampled schools reported broadly similar reactions to family disruption. This similarity may reflect the shared school and family circumstances experienced by the students, although the cross-sectional design does not permit conclusions about the factors responsible for this pattern. The finding also suggests that gender alone may not account for substantial variation in students' reported reactions to family disruption within the present sample. Consequently, school-based support may appropriately address common needs arising from family disruption while remaining responsive to individual differences rather than assuming that students' needs are determined primarily by gender.

Overall, the finding contributes context-specific evidence from secondary school students in Ondo State. While previous literature has identified possible gender-related differences in responses to family and psychosocial stressors (Davila & Tubman, 2019; Hassan

et al., 2022), the present result indicates that such differences were not statistically evident in this sample.

3.2.4 implications

The findings have implications for chemistry teaching and learning, student counselling, substance-use prevention, and the provision of support services in secondary schools. The finding on family disruption and chemistry performance has implications for chemistry teaching and learning in secondary schools. School administrators, chemistry teachers, and guidance counsellors should recognise that students experiencing family disruption may require additional academic and emotional support. Schools could provide academic assistance, access to chemistry learning materials, and counselling services to help students manage challenges affecting their learning.

The finding on family disruption and drug use highlights the importance of strengthening substance-use prevention and counselling services in secondary schools. School administrators and guidance counsellors could collaborate with parents, caregivers, and relevant agencies to provide drug education, early identification, and appropriate support for students who may be vulnerable to substance use.

The finding on gender differences suggests that school-based support services should be accessible to both male and female students experiencing family disruption. Teachers and guidance counsellors should consider individual circumstances and needs rather than assume that students' reactions are determined primarily by gender. Counselling and peer-support programmes should provide opportunities for all affected students to seek assistance.

3.2.5 Research Contribution

This study contributes context-specific evidence on the association between family disruption and chemistry performance among secondary school students in Ondo State. It adds to existing research on family circumstances and science education by providing evidence from the Nigerian secondary school context.

The study also contributes evidence on the relationship between family disruption and drug use among secondary school students in Ondo State. By examining drug use alongside chemistry achievement and peer relationships, the study provides a basis for further investigation into the academic and behavioural experiences of students experiencing family disruption.

Furthermore, this study contributes context-specific evidence on gender differences in reported reactions to family disruption among secondary school students in Ondo State. The absence of a statistically significant gender difference in the present sample provides an additional perspective on the relationship between gender and students' responses to family-related challenges.

3.2.6 Limitations

The findings were based on 100 students selected from two purposively selected public secondary schools in Akure South Local Government Area, Ondo State. Therefore, the result may not be generalisable to all secondary school students.

Furthermore, the cross-sectional design establishes an association but does not demonstrate that family disruption causes differences in chemistry achievement. The cross-sectional survey design also does not establish whether family disruption preceded drug use or determine the direction of the observed relationship. Other factors, including peer influence, socioeconomic circumstances, family conflict, and parental monitoring, may also be associated with students' drug use. The findings should therefore be interpreted as evidence of an association rather than causation.

The gender comparison was based on 100 students from two purposively selected public secondary schools. Consequently, the findings may not be generalisable to other student populations. Furthermore, the absence of a statistically significant difference does not establish that male and female students experience family disruption identically across all emotional, behavioural, academic, and interpersonal domains.

3.2.7 Suggestions

Future studies should include larger samples from more schools and different locations to examine the relationship between family disruption and chemistry performance. Further research could also investigate the roles of parental involvement, socioeconomic circumstances, access to learning resources, and emotional support in students' chemistry achievement.

Future studies should examine the relationship between family disruption and drug use using larger and more diverse samples. Longitudinal research could investigate how changes in family circumstances relate to substance-use patterns over time. Further studies could also examine the roles of peer influence, parental monitoring, emotional support, and school-based drug-prevention programmes. Future studies should involve larger samples from different locations to examine whether similar gender patterns occur in other settings. Researchers could also examine specific emotional, behavioural, academic, and interpersonal responses separately to determine whether gender differences emerge in particular domains. Qualitative studies could further explore students' experiences and coping strategies.

4. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that family disruption was statistically associated with chemistry performance and reported drug use among the sampled secondary school students in Ondo State. The findings indicate that

students experiencing family disruption reported differences in chemistry performance and drug use, while no statistically significant gender difference was found in their reported reactions. These findings highlight the importance of considering family circumstances when examining students' academic and behavioural experiences, without implying that family disruption directly causes these outcomes.

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6. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The author conceived the study, designed the research, collected the data, analysed the data, interpreted the findings, and wrote and approved the final manuscript.

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