

## For the Sake of the Child: Quality of Spousal Relationship Impact on the Early Education of Their Child

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### ABSTRACT

*The moral fibre of the nation depends on the quality of parenting which entails emotional development, personality and behavioural moulding that fosters well-adjusted individuals. This study set out to assess how the quality of spousal relationship impacts on the early education of children. The study espoused the interpretive paradigm within the qualitative approach to consult participants in their natural environment. The emotional security hypothesis theory was adopted to understand the impact marital conflict to child learning. Purposively selected were two couples, two single males, two single female parents and two educators who responded to semi-structured interviews. Adherence to ethical issues was confirmed by signing of the consent forms. Data was recorded per emerging themes. The findings exposed the diminishing returns on school achievement, exhibition of delinquent behaviour and maladjusted adolescents due to lack of stability in the early education of children. The findings also revealed that some spouses and partners begrudgingly disconnect themselves from the children for the sake of peace. The study recommends conflict resolution strategies that encourage amicable co-parenting for unmarried partners for the sake of the child.*

### ABSTRACT

*Family stress or crisis; single parenthood; marriage; close relationships*

### INTRODUCTION

The importance of a family structure in the development of young lives cannot be over-emphasized. Neuroscience has repeatedly advised that it is during the early childhood years that the most vital cognitive, emotional, social and moral values develop. Parental involvement is pivotal to this development in children and this involvement is noted as two categories. This first, it is being home-based involvement, where parents as the first teachers have the opportunity to nurture the growth and development of their children as they advocate for their lifelong learning. The second category is school-based involvement which consolidates the first one through parent-teacher conferences and voluntary participation in school activities. Despite the importance of parental involvement literature is amass with barriers faced by parents in this God given duty to nurture their children. Whereas not all parents are eagerly involved in the early growth and development of their children others face barriers such as poverty, gatekeeping from one parent, lack of commitment or sheer negligence and spousal conflict. Marital quality is extensively acknowledged as a foundation stone of adaptive family functioning; disturbances in the marital relationship may negatively influence parents' behaviours in parent-child relationships towards growth and development of children. The welfare and education of

children has dominated the agendas of different organization based on the Human Rights to education for every child. It is against this background that in this paper, the researcher set out to establish how the quality of spousal relationship impacts on the early years' education of children.

The child is first introduced to the family at birth where initial socialisation plays a crucial role in the physical, intellectual, moral and social development (Cavanagh & Fomby, 2012; Mabuza, Thwala & Okeke, 2014). It is the responsibility of the parents to nurture and edify the child in the norms, values and culture of the home and the society. In the perspective of the psychologists, the relationship between a parent and a child is the first and most significant setting for nurturing babies' imminent social interactions (Bowlby, 1969). Furthermore, parental engagement behaviour can generate both optimistic and negative atmospheres in which development happens (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). It is within the family setup that the child learns to participate socially and develop emotional stability (Grusec & Davidov, 2010), and what the baby becomes later in life and within the society is primarily formed within the home.

The way families shape the overall well-being development of children has increased the concern from sociologists, researchers and educationists. This augmentation of interest has been propelled by speedy transformations in family organisation, intensified poverty among children, and the deteriorating welfare of vulnerable and disadvantaged children. The behavioural problems that children exhibit, which are significant aspects of child development, may later affect adulthood outcomes. Research has revealed that anger and tantrums that children express in the early childhood progress into bigger challenges in life such as erratic labour patterns and descending occupational mobility (Andersen, Tomada, Vincow, Valente, et al., 2008; Margolin, Vickerman, Oliver, & Gordis, 2010).

Nonetheless, industrialisation in many countries has caused intended and unintended family obliteration. Children find themselves in different predicaments due to circumstances beyond their comprehension. On the face of this industrialisation, children become victims of situations such as estranged spousal relationships, denied paternity, divorce, various categories of split-ups, death of one partner or being the outcome of rape (Thwala, 2011; Falana, Bada & Ayodele, 2012). Partners separate in search for greener pastures in big cities or migrate to other countries leaving children with mothers or other relatives. Some pregnancies show up when the spouse has gone then they tend to deny responsibility and at the same time a rift develops when spouses are far apart. Furthermore, conditions such as poverty, HIV and AIDS pandemics, urban and cross boarder migration contribute to family breakdown especially in the developing countries. The situation is further aggravated by more women entering the corporate world. The breaking down of family structures has continuously affected young children who are mostly born out of wedlock or concrete partnership and grow up with unanswered questions, resentment and anger towards one or both parents.

A child is born through the union of partners or spouses. A spouse can be defined as an individual who is in a relationship with the other person. There are diverse forms of spousal relationships. Individuals in spousal relationships may be married or living together akin to husband and wife. Some individuals may become spouses because an offspring has resulted from this union. A child becomes the unifying unit between the two people who either commit to married life or never commit. They may choose to cohabit or continue living separately despite having a child (Anderson, 2014). Globally, spousal quality relationship is acknowledged as a foundation stone of adaptive family operation; turbulences in the spousal relationship may adversely affect parents' behaviours in parent-child relationships (Gao et al. 2019). The term *spousal quality* refers to both intimacy and

tension in marital union, and because there are off-springs involved, *parent-child relationship quality* speaks of the support and strain in relations between the parents.

According to Neff and Karney (2004), parents make their children feel loved and cared for, thus, fostering psychological welfare as the child grows older. This state of complete well-being may cascade over, nurturing spousal closeness for younger adults. Extensive research continually indicates that social relationships can overwhelmingly influence the welfare of children across the course of life (Umberson & Montez, 2010). Solid spousal relations afford children a grander sense of meaning and purpose, at the same time providing social and tangible resources that assist their well-being and development (Hartwell & Benson, 2007; Thomas, Liu & Umberson, 2017). Research has established that children who are raised by two-parent married spouses who have low-conflict relationships are more stable, healthy and perform well in school because there is shared income earnings and the dual responsibilities of nurturing children (Parke, 2003; Ribar, 2015).

In the middle of child development there is parental conflict that is a barrier to parental involvement. Conflict is a dispute or challenge between people with contrasting needs, thoughts, attitude, principles, or aspirations. In broader terms, conflict indicates the incongruity of individual perspectives (Diez et al, 2006). Tolorunleke (2014) defines spousal conflicts as the state of tautness or stress between spousal cohorts as the twosome attempt to perform their marital roles. Chetty et al. (2014) contend that spousal conflict happens when different expectations and hopes in the union are not fulfilled. Spousal conflict in marital relationship behaviours is constantly associated with negative parenting and children's adjustment problems (Klausli & Owen, 2011). Spousal conflict may not be just a dissimilarity of views but rather a sequence of actions that have not been properly handled, which tend to acutely damage the marriage relationship. Marital conflict might have aggravated to the point that obstinacy, pride, anger, hurt and bitterness avert effective communication in marriage unification (Modi & Thingujam, 2007).

Behavioural theories of marriage insinuate that destructive behaviours lead to negative judgment of a marriage unification and turns down in marital contentment and constancy, whereas constructive behaviours lead to improvements in evaluations of marriage and increases in marital satisfaction and stability (Kelly et al., 2003). To some spouses, having a child becomes the cause for conflict. Marital conflict is the root cause for various child adjustment problems, as well as internalising and externalising problems and the impact on social and academic performance (Davies & Cummings, 1994; Downing, 2012). When the spouses have issues that are mishandled, they can cause friction and if the misunderstanding escalates to conflict, married or unmarried coupled may decide to go their separate ways. Prominent to this paper is the impact of any kind of spousal relationship or conflict to the early education of the child.

Analogous research in childhood development has found that early childhood behaviour problems progress into delinquency and adulthood antisocial behaviour laced with crime (Boivin & Hertzman 2012). Aldous and Mulligan (2002) point out that those children exposed to marital arguments at a young age tend to have behavioural problems later in life. Similarly, Lundy (2002) reported that marital displeasure negatively affected paternal synchrony which in turn adversely influenced the security of the infant-father attachment. Corroborating revelation came from Harper and Fine (2006) who found unconstructive correlation between inter-parent conflict and child welfare.

In their research, Formoso et al. (2007) discovered that quality fathering was negatively linked with inter-parental conflict. On the other hand, Cabrera et al. (2008) found that when fathers are romantically connected with the mothers of their children, they tend to

participate in child nurturing more than conflicting parents. The society is experiencing violence from the young generation, and mounting populace of single parenting and escalating challenges of raising children in a poverty-stricken environment. This state of affairs has triggered interest in finding out how the spousal relationships impact on the early development of the child.

Child development is based on the quality of parent-child relationship. The term parent-child relationship broadly refers to the permanent attachment between the child and the parent. Understanding the parent-child relationship requires a closer look at how parents and children interact with one another emotionally, physically and socially. Theorists in child development have persistently stressed the prominence of parent-child relationship in the early stages of the child's emotional, cognitive, physical and social development. Parents form a foundation of what a child grows up to be as an adult. For instance, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) postulated that the parent-child relationship defined the adult that one becomes, while Erik Erikson's (1950) psychosocial theory of development showed that infants grow up into trusting adults when parents provide their basic needs. Similarly, Vygotsky (1978) established that parents are the masters in the child's learning while Bandura's (1977) social learning theory demonstrates that parents are role models and children imitate the behaviours displayed by parents.

A mother is attached to the baby because of the nine months' relationship that develops pre-natal. The presence of the father post-natal creates a firm development of the child. The first relationships that the child forms are significant for the establishment of cognitive, emotional and social development which paves way for adulthood adaptation and well-adjusted individuals (Sheridan et al., 2008). In their line of work, Sheridan et al. (2010) established warmth and sensitivity, espousal for a child's emerging autonomy, and active participation, as the three dimensions of parent engagement that influence the child's development. These dimensions are in line with the attachment paradigm proved through extensive research that forms the foundation for secure behaviour, academic achievement and progressive adulthood (Ainsworth et al. 1972; Bowlby 1969; Hirsch-Pasek & Burchinal 2006). Evidently, nurturing caregiving that is emotionally warm, accessible, and responsive in the early life of a child tends to be more beneficial in terms of an all-round development.

Geffner et al. (2002) opine that women suffer from violence more than men and sustain severe injuries. There has been a notable increase in violence against women and children although there is no gender, ethnic or socio-economic grouping that is immune to this social problem (Alhabib, Nur & Jones, 2010). Evidence from studies indicate that exposure to domestic violence during early childhood is interrelated with diverse negative effects such as disorders in attention, consciousness, attribution, schemas and difficulty relating to others (D'Andrea & Graham-Berman 2017; Schnurr & Lohman 2013; Chanmugan & Teasley, 2014). Lourenço et al. (2013) state how a child's quality of life is significantly impacted by the level of care provided by family members. Thus, domestic violence that takes place in the home between two adult caregivers is one of the most toxic forms of violence to which a child can be exposed to (Moffitt, 2013). Children who have been exposed to domestic violence are fearful and show more symptoms of depression and anxiety compared to children who have not been exposed to domestic violence (David, LeBlanc, Self-Brown, 2015). Morrell and Richter (2006) observed that not all men in South African pride themselves in being fathers and not all fathers desired to be part of their own children's live. This is evidenced by their absence to witness the birth of their children. The sentiments expressed by Morrell and Richter portray a nation of uncaring men, which is likely to expose children to domestic violence. Uncaring fathers have the

habit of exposing children to domestic violence while those who desert their families expose them to poverty, vulnerability and community violence.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This study espoused Davies and Cummings' (1994) Emotional Security Hypothesis (ESH) which explains the child's discernment of the relationship between the child's parents, the past experience with parental conflicts, the emotional bond between parents and children as well as the quality of the marital relationship, and it is orientated towards future responses to parental conflicts. It is complementary to Grych and Fincham's (1990) cognitive-contextual framework. It is also the confidence in the availability of attachment which influences the susceptibility to fear (Bowlby, 1973). This confidence is built during the years of immaturity.

Depending on how the child perceives and handles the parental conflict, the child's emotional security increases or decreases, which in turn affects the child's well-being. Emotional security plays the role of a mediator between the parental conflict and the child's condition. Emotional security affects the child's functional ability in three different ways: by the child's regulation of his/her emotional arousal, by his/her attempt to regulate his/her parents' emotions and by internal representations (Davies & Cummings, 1994).

## **RESEARCH OF METHOD**

A qualitative approach which is basically an interpretive inquiry procedure that is anchored on a naturalistic approach helped the researcher to understand the world as experienced by the participants. The researcher was able to expand on the multifaceted, complete picture, analysed terms, reports and detailed views of participants and carried out the study in their natural setting (Creswell & Poth 2017; Levitt et al., 2017). The researcher was able to observe the behaviour of the participants as they narrated their lived experiences. Two couples, two single males, two single female parents, and two female educators were purposively selected to respond to the semi-structured interviews. Participants' experiences were captured on a tape recorder to limit misinterpretation of the meaning. Themes and sub-themes emerged from the critical unfolding of the daily events and experiences described by participants (Leedy & Ormrod 2005).

### ***Credibility and Trustworthiness***

Trustworthiness is a means that guarantees the authenticity upon which the findings of the inquiry can be relied (Creswell 2014); therefore, it becomes necessary to maintain the factual accurateness of the account. Trustworthiness in this study was assured by presenting verbatim interpretations of respondents which were mechanically recorded during data collection. Furthermore, credibility of data was assured through member checks on transcripts and analysed texts (Creswell 2014). By using a tape recorder, the researcher enhanced the credibility and reliability of the study (Creswell 2014).

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Concerns such as maintaining anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, avoiding betrayal, deception, harm and the participants' rights to withdraw from participation at any phase of the research process were observed (Graham, Grewal & Lewis 2006). Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Fort Hare University. Using clearance letters from University's Ethics Committee and East London Education District Office, the researcher gained entrance to the research sites and participants through gatekeepers.

Having ensured that participants understood their mandate in the process, and assured them of “no come backs”, the participants signed the informed consent (Bryman 2012). The researcher assured participants that issues of anonymity and confidentiality were addressed by using pseudonyms and avoiding testimonials that could be linked to an individual.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1.** Biographic data on respondents

Respondents	Status	Educational Level	Employment Status	No. of Children
Mr. & Mrs. Page	Married	Both M.Ed.	Subject Advisor & High School Teacher	Two, aged 3 & 5
Mr. & Mrs. Maya	Married	Matric	Security Guard & Housewife	Three aged 7, 4 & 9-month-old
Steve	Separated	Dip. in Marketing	Retail Hardware	Two, aged 4 & 2
James	Single	Matric	Taxi Driver	One, aged 6
Kate	Single	Honours in Edu.	Teacher	One, aged 4
Peggie	Widow	Illiterate	Vendor	One, aged 4
Stella	Married	ECD Level 4	ECD Practitioner	Four, over 21
Ruth	Married	ECD Level 2	ECD Practitioner	Two, 10 & 15

Table 1 shows the biographic data for two couples, two single males, two single female parents and two practitioners who were given pseudonyms as Mr. and Mrs. Page; Mr. and Mrs. Maya; Steve and James (single fathers); Kate and Peggie (single mothers); Stella and Ruth (practitioners, both married). The variables were chosen in order to understand the situations faced by the respondents and factors that affect their child nurturing skills. The major question posed to all respondents was how the quality of spousal relationship impacted on the early education of their child(ren). Out of these interviews, themes that emerged were love and attachment, child neglect, stress and anxiety that lead to poor academic performance.

### ***A Love and Attachment***

In response to this question Mrs. Page explained that spousal relationship could have a positive and at the same time have a negative effect on children’s livelihood. When spouses love and cherish each other, that affection cascades to their children making them happy all the time. She went on to clarify that: *“Children love both parents and are attached to them, however there is a difference between love and attachment. We have two children, a girl aged three and a boy aged five. We have noticed that the boy is more attached to me while the girl is more attached to her father. They are emotionally close to me more than they are to their father and it's easier for them to ask for treats from me but when they want big things like toys, they directly ask their father.”* In support of his wife Mr. Page explained: *“Although our children spend most of the time with their mother, when I come in, they cling to me a lot and tell me about the toys they want. We are approachable to children when we are happy, they show pleasing progress in their learning, but when we quarrel, we talk to each other through children.... I think it confuses them. When there is so much love in the house children cling to us and we are also able to teach them value and help with their homework.”*

Mr. and Mrs. Maya both attested to loving their children and were certain that their children loved both of them. Mr. Maya was quick to point out that: *“I think all our children*

are attached to their mother more than me because she is always home with them, but they are excited when I am at home and I take them shopping." Mrs. Maya further advanced that: "When our 7-year-old has school homework he will ask his father because I have to do all the housework and nurse the little one. I can see he does it well because his father shows him love and rewards him for good work."

On the same question Steve said: "I really adore my children and they love me too and even though I do not understand that attachment... I think they are attached to my mother more than me. Since my wife left, they spend more time with my mother. To tell the truth... I rarely look at their schoolwork." Similarly, James adored his son although he had to move out of the house. *I love my son, still six years old. I cannot see him at all. His mother and I lived together shortly. We had a good relation in the beginning but we grew apart somehow. I moved out to a new relationship, now she refuses me access to the child. My ex-spouse' brothers threaten to kill me so I stopped going there. I think for now he is happy although I miss him.*" Kate said without hesitation: "I love my daughter and she loves me. She is attached to me. His father and I never stayed together, and he moved out of town and he rarely calls to find out how she is. I think she is progressing well at school because I always help with her homework. I don't know what triggers it but sometimes she asks about her father to which I am sometimes tempted to say he is dead because to me, he is as good as dead." Peggie is a widow raising up her 4-year-old granddaughter who lost both parents. "I love my granddaughter very much and she loves me but...at times I feel she misses her parents. She cries when people talk loudly. I think she was traumatized by her parents' fighting because they really fought a lot. I doubt they showed much love because they both loved alcohol"

Stella and Ruth, both practitioners attested to loving and having attachment to their offspring; however, they affirmed that parental love and attachment are essential for children's learning. They both confirmed that children who have a special bond with their parents are always happy and progress well in given activities at school.

### **Child Neglect**

Mr. and Mrs. Page said their children had never felt neglected: "We are always here for them except when we have to go away for work or funerals." As a teacher Mrs. Page said: "I have seen children who are neglected, and they don't perform well at school." Mr. Maya admitted to being a culprit of child neglect in that he worked long hours and hardly had quality time with his children. "I thought my 7-year-old was being naughty, he throws tantrums, breaks toys at times, especially when he does not want it, now I understand that he needs emotional support from me." Steve acknowledged that his children had been neglected by their mother before she finally left. I cannot really explain attachment to either me or their mother as we separated because of grave differences. "On several occasions I found my children alone in the house, this made me and my ex-wife to fight a lot and sometimes in front of our children. Our relationship became toxic when our son was a year old. That is when we finally divorced. When spouses quarrel, children are emotionally neglected because I am thinking of my happiness only. Because all we did was fight, we both never so much bothered with their education. Now I understand how children become delinquent adolescents". With sadness Stella elucidated that "children who are neglected don't perform well at school and as they grow older and work becomes more difficult then they drop out of school". Concurring Ruth said "in most cases these children develop behavioural problem before they finish primary school."

Information coming out of the interviews shows that children are subjected to neglect in homes where there is more misunderstanding than happiness. When spouses fight, they

tend to neglect their children in turn affecting their learning progress. When children miss out in early years learning they develop behavioural problem which lead to early drop out of school.

### **Stress and Anxiety Child**

Mr. and Mrs. Maya said at times they argue a lot. Mrs. Maya admitted that: *"I have also seen some confusion or sadness in their eyes when we argue loudly in their presence. In the heat of the moment we never think of them. Now that you ask ... yes, I think it causes stress on them. Fighting causes children to change their normal channel of making requests. If the father is violent, they tend to be afraid of him. These stressful situations certainly hinder learning, firstly we don't look at their homework and they can't dare ask for help at that time."* From experience Kate recalls: *"I remember how my mother used to be stressed, the quarreling between her and my father was worse when he came home drunk in the wee hours of the morning. I think I recalled that situation in my mind when I was in school because my teacher would always shout at me to stop dreaming. Now I understand that the toxic situation with my parent affected me so much, hence I left my abusive boyfriend while my child was still almost two years old. I think when other children talk about their fathers at school... and out of the blue she asks me about his whereabouts. Yes.... I think she has some stress and anxiety about her absent father."*

Ruth brought out her observation that: *"Spouses quarrel in front of children and when they solve their differences and make up, they forget to include children who witnessed the dispute and were affected. Boys tend to emulate that and abuse girls even at a tender age."* Steve said whenever he and his ex-spouse had a conflict, he does not recall talking to his children about it. He further said: *"When spouses are in a conflict children analyse the situation and take sides...they are confused... yes ... they have that uncertainty as to what happens next when both of you are at home. I think conflict does affect their learning. We don't see it while we are fighting but children copy us and become violent later in life."* Concurring with others Stella said she had come to learn that parental fights cause stress and anxiety on young children and *"because we as Africans do not realise the effect of stress on children which parents and educators often assume the child is just being naughty or stubborn. We rarely think of seeking help from the psychologist"*

Data shows that spousal conflict leads to stress and anxiety in young children hindering progress in learning. Parents are mostly oblivious how difficult is for children to catch up on leaning in the later years hence, children become delinquents and prematurely drop out of school. When deficit in learning is not immediately addressed, the accumulated loss usually needs remediation which may not be readily available in most instances.

### **Academic Challenges**

Although Peggie is illiterate, she can see that there is something amiss with her granddaughter. *"She had just turned two when both parents died a month apart. By then she was not talking and had just stated to walk a few steps. I found out that both parents drank alcohol and fought a lot. She is not performing well in everything at school. The teacher called me to find out more about her and that they wanted to refer her for psychological tests as she is not doing well in learning. They suspect that she was affected by the alcohol"* Stella advanced that as a teacher she has seen children who seem not to recall any previously taught concepts. *"It is because when a mother consumes alcohol during pregnancy the child is likely to be born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome; when spouses physically fight in front of children and sometimes they hit children in the process. Such children struggle a lot with learning."* Mr. and Mrs. Page advanced that: *"To be honest, we*

*have never given thought to how spousal conflict makes children not to learn well. Now that you mention it we realise why some children struggle to recall what they have been taught. "* On the other hand, Mr. and Mrs. Maya wondered if the conflict they had at one time could be the reason their eldest child who is seven is not as smart as the four-year-old.

These comments indicate that spousal conflict cause academic challenges in children. All interviewees seem to be of the same mind that spousal conflict hinders academic progress. In most cases conflicting spouses deny children access to their fathers to spite them and in the process children's education is affected. Such children need remediation which is not often available in the schools.

It has been established that whatever happens between the spouses can have positive or negative impact on the lives of their children. Some spouses may not realise how their behaviour towards their partner affects the children. Various themes emerged from this discourse on the impact of spousal conflict on the early education of children. This study found that where there is harmony between the spouses, married or unmarried children experience love and affection. This finding confirms the notion that spouses in compact relations are able to provide for their children with social and tangible means that nurture their well-being and development (Hartwell & Benson, 2007; Thomas, Liu & Umberson, 2017). The findings from this study concur with Stangor, Tarry and Jhangiani (2014) who explain that a greater number of children develop a strong or secure attachment style, when parents are perceived as safe, accessible, and approachable caregivers and can easily relate to them. Studies have proved that social relationships between spouses can overwhelmingly influence the education and welfare of their children across the course of life in general (Umberson & Montez, 2010; Dexter et al., 2013).

This study found child neglect which is a byproduct of spousal conflict can have negative influence on the early childhood education. The results from this study confirm the notion that spousal conflict weakens parent-child bond (Klausli & Owen, 2011), which usually develops multifaceted types of emotional dysregulation (Kim & Cicchetti, 2010; Zilberstein, 2014) and belligerent behaviours. Ogundele (2018) posits that these behaviours can encumber learning, constrain access to normal school activities and social prospects, and require a substantial quantity of both manpower and financial expenses to effectively manage them. The study found that when spouses argue a lot, abuse substances and fight, children are psychologically and emotionally tormented, thus affecting their learning, behaviour and relationship connections (Aldous & Mulligan, 2002; Boivin & Hertzman, 2012). In this process, children mostly lose sense of meaning and purpose, at the same moving further apart from their parents. The toxic relationship between parents often leads to child neglect causing stress and anxiety on children. When children become victims, they learn to tolerate the excruciating difficulties in which mistreatment is perceived as normal. The findings of this study confirm that in trying to adjust to this new normal as enlightened by the Emotional Security Hypothesis the child's emotional security increases or decreases, which in turn affects the child's learning and well-being (Davies and Cummings, 1994). It is also the lack of attachment which influences the susceptibility to fear (Bowlby, 1973).

The study also revealed that, even though it is to a lesser extent, children who are brought up by married spouses still suffer from stress and anxiety which leads to academic under performance. Spousal conflict may be the source of parental separation and divorce which have been proved to be detrimental and are damaging to children, affecting families' financial resources and the moral fibre of the society as a whole (Anderson 2014). This study found that children in single-parent homes lack sound affection, attention and nurturing. Confirming this notion is a present study carried out by Harvard on single-parent

families which uncovered that mostly children living with a single parent are prevented from upward mobility (Chetty et al. 2014). Such children tend to respond to deficient comfort and nurturing by constraining their feelings and learning to take care of themselves. The findings of this study corroborate with a study by Waldman-Levi et al. (2015), which revealed that children exposed to abusive or unattached nurturing tend to develop negative responses to their caregiver, have increased tantrums that lead to low performance even at school. Findings from this study also show that violence in a home can have serious adversative influence on the behaviour of children, their development, academic success, and can be the source of future health problems.

## CONCLUSION

The study set out to find out how the quality of spousal relationship affects the early life of children. Based on the findings of this study, the quality spousal relationship can either have a positive influence or negative impact on the lives of their off-spring. When there is harmony and love between the spouses they tend to cascade the loving atmosphere to their children which in turn translates to good performance at school and well-adjusted behaviour. Children from loving spouses enjoy the parent-child attachment and receive the deserved attention to their education and well-being. At the same time, loving spouses find time to spend with their children to teach them values and help with homework. Children from conflicting spouses are deprived of the love and parent-child attachment that necessitate their nurturing to well-adjusted adolescents. While it is believed that to a lesser extent, children from married spousal conflict may face negative vibes, separation becomes a blessing in disguise for the survival of children facing abuse, violence and neglect in their homes. The findings of this study also show that even though spouses fight openly in front of children they often kiss and make up secretly to the children. This leaves them more confused, not knowing what to expect when parents are together. Based on the findings, the study recommends parental skills training to be embedded in antenatal classes. This training should be offered to both fathers and mothers with the aim to bring to their attention how their relationship will influence the well-being of their child and to empower them with strategies to prevent and respond to unbecoming behaviors in children. The quality of spousal relationships ultimately shapes the outcome of the children. The study ultimately recommends conflict resolution strategies that encourage amicable co-parenting for unmarried partners for the sake of the child.

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