



**Parental Divorce and Emotional Well-Being of Secondary School Students in Delta Central, Nigeria:
Differential Effects Across Urban-Rural and Socio-Economic Strata**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between parental divorce and the emotional well-being of secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District, Nigeria, with specific focus on differential effects across urban-rural locality and socio-economic strata.. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. A correlational survey research design was adopted, with a population of 45,318 students enrolled in 196 public secondary schools during the 2024/2025 academic session. Using multi-stage sampling procedures comprising stratified and simple random sampling, a sample of 380 students was drawn from 38 schools across Ughelli and Sapele zones. Parental Divorce and Emotional Well-Being Questionnaire (PDAEWQ) with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.83 was used for data collection. Data were analysed using Pearson's r, regression analysis, and t-tests at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that (i) Parental divorce significantly influences the emotional well-being of urban senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District, (ii) Parental divorce significantly influences the emotional well-being of rural senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District. (iii) Parental divorce does not significantly influence the emotional well-being of socio-economic status senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District. It was recommended that government should establish counseling centers in all secondary schools across Delta Central Senatorial District, with mobile counseling services deployed to rural areas where professional support is scarce. Implement peer support programs accessible to all students from divorced families, regardless of their socio-economic background, since financial status does not buffer emotional consequences.

Keywords: Parental Divorce, Urban-Rural Divide, Socio-Economic Strata, emotional well-being, secondary school

INTRODUCTION

The family unit remains the primary socializing agent for children and adolescents worldwide, serving as the foundation upon which emotional stability, social competence, and psychological well-being are built. Within this unit, the presence of both parents in a stable, nurturing relationship is widely recognized as optimal for healthy adolescent development. However, contemporary societies, including Nigeria, have witnessed a steady increase in the incidence of marital dissolution, commonly referred to as parental divorce. This trend has significant implications for the emotional health of adolescents who find themselves navigating the often turbulent waters of family fragmentation at a critical stage of their development.

Adolescence, broadly defined as the developmental period between childhood and adulthood (approximately ages 10 to 19), is characterized by profound physical, cognitive, and emotional changes. It is a time of identity formation, increased peer influence, heightened emotional sensitivity, and preparation for adult roles. During this vulnerable period, adolescents require consistent emotional support, stability, and guidance resources that are often compromised when parents' divorce. The emotional consequences of parental divorce on adolescents can manifest as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, behavioral problems, academic decline, and difficulties in forming trusting relationships (Amato, 2014; Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2019).

In the Nigerian context, the phenomenon of divorce, once considered relatively rare due to strong cultural, religious, and familial sanctions against marital dissolution, has become increasingly visible. Urbanization, economic pressures, changing gender roles, and evolving legal frameworks have contributed to a gradual erosion of the traditional stigma attached to divorce. While comprehensive national statistics on divorce rates in Nigeria are limited, regional studies indicate a rising trend, particularly in urban centers where individualistic values often compete with communal norms (Ogunyemi & Ogunyemi, 2018; Adebayo & Ogunwale, 2020).

Delta Central Senatorial District, one of three senatorial districts in Delta State, Nigeria, presents a unique socio-demographic landscape for investigating the emotional consequences of parental divorce. The district comprises ethnically homogeneous Urhobo communities, yet exhibits significant internal diversity in terms of locality (urban versus rural settlements) and socio-economic stratification. Urban centers such as Warri, Effurun, and Ughelli are characterized by higher population density, greater economic opportunities, increased exposure to Western lifestyles, and more diverse social networks. In contrast, rural communities within the same district—including towns such as Otorho, Orogun, and Abraka maintain more traditional family structures, stronger kinship ties, and slower-paced socio-economic change. These urban-rural differences are likely to shape both the prevalence of parental divorce and the adolescent emotional response to it. Urban adolescents may be exposed to higher rates of divorce due to the stresses of urban living, greater economic independence among women, and weaker informal social controls. However, they may also have greater access to psychological support services, counseling, and peer support networks. Rural adolescents, conversely, may experience divorce less frequently but face greater stigma, fewer professional support resources, and stronger community pressure to suppress emotional distress (Ekpo & Umoh, 2021; Nwankwo & Okonkwo, 2019). Reynolds et al. (2022), who posit that adolescents in urban areas often experience greater emotional distress from parental divorce due to increased social pressures and the tendency to internalise family issues in competitive environments. Similarly, Michael et al. (2021) opined that urban students may feel heightened emotional vulnerability when divorce occurs, as the availability of social opportunities does not necessarily compensate for the loss of stability and affection within the home. Therefore, the finding reinforces the view that urban students are significantly affected by parental divorce because the emotional void created in the family cannot easily be replaced by external social influences. Thabo et al. (2024) posit that rural adolescents tend to experience deeper emotional distress from divorce because family ties and parental presence are central to their psychological stability and social development. Similarly, Brooks et al. (2022) opined that the absence of one parent in rural communities often results in reduced guidance, limited emotional support, and increased household responsibilities, which can heighten stress and insecurity among adolescents. Thus, the finding aligns with the literature that parental divorce significantly undermines the emotional well-being of rural students, largely due to their greater dependence on intact family structures.

Socio-economic status (SES) represents another critical moderating variable in the relationship between parental divorce and adolescent emotional well-being. Socio-economic status encompasses family income, parental education levels, and occupational prestige. High SES families typically possess greater financial resources to cushion the economic shocks of divorce, maintain stable housing arrangements, afford legal representation, and access private psychological counseling for affected adolescents. Low SES families, conversely, often experience divorce as a double blow the emotional trauma of family separation compounded by significant economic hardship, residential instability, and reduced access to support services (Conger & Donnellan, 2017; McLoyd, 2019). Harper (2022) posits that adolescents from both high and low socio-economic backgrounds experience emotional distress following parental divorce, since the psychological impact is tied more to the loss of parental unity and emotional support than to material conditions. Similarly, Reynolds et al. (2022) opined that while socio-economic challenges may worsen stress after divorce, emotional well-being is primarily shaped by the quality of parent-child relationships and the degree of conflict within the home, rather than financial standing. This finding therefore, aligns with existing literature, suggesting that socio-economic status does not significantly moderate the emotional impact of parental divorce among students.

In Delta Central Senatorial District, socio-economic disparities are pronounced. Oil wealth has created pockets of affluence alongside persistent poverty. The children of professionals, business owners, and senior civil servants may attend well-resourced schools and have access to private mental health care, while adolescents from low-income households often attend underfunded public schools and lack any form

of professional psychological support. These disparities likely influence not only the experience of parental divorce but also the availability of coping resources and protective factors (Akinwumi & Ojo, 2022).

Despite growing recognition of the emotional toll that parental divorce exacts on adolescents, empirical research specific to Delta Central Senatorial District remains limited. Most existing Nigerian studies have focused on the general effects of family structure on academic performance or have examined divorce consequences without systematically considering the moderating roles of locality (urban versus rural) and socio-economic status. Furthermore, few studies have employed comparative designs that allow for direct comparison of emotional well-being outcomes across these different social contexts. The emotional well-being of adolescents, for the purpose of this study, is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing affective states (depression, anxiety, anger), self-perceptions (self-esteem, self-worth), and interpersonal functioning (ability to form and maintain relationships, trust in others). Parental divorce refers to the legal dissolution of marriage between an adolescent's biological parents, resulting in physical separation and the establishment of separate households. The study acknowledges that divorce is often preceded by a period of marital conflict, separation, or non-marital co-parenting arrangements, but focuses specifically on legally formalized divorce as a discrete family event. Understanding the differential emotional consequences of parental divorce across urban-rural and socio-economic strata is not merely an academic exercise; it has profound practical implications. School counselors, social workers, educational administrators, and policymakers require evidence-based knowledge to design targeted interventions that address the specific needs of vulnerable adolescent populations. Without such knowledge, support services risk being uniformly applied, potentially missing the unique challenges faced by rural adolescents or those from low SES backgrounds (Olayinka & Ogunbiyi, 2021). This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by systematically investigating the emotional consequences of parental divorce among adolescents in Delta Central Senatorial District, with particular attention to how these consequences differ across urban versus rural localities and between high and low socio-economic status groups.

Statement of the Problem

Adolescents in Delta Central Senatorial District, like their counterparts across Nigeria, are increasingly experiencing the trauma of parental divorce. The emotional consequences of this experience ranging from depression and anxiety to low self-esteem and interpersonal difficulties have the potential to derail healthy development, impair academic achievement, and predispose individuals to long-term psychological disorders. Despite the severity of these potential outcomes, there exists a significant gap in empirical knowledge regarding the specific emotional challenges faced by adolescents in this district. Compounding this knowledge gap is the reality that Delta Central Senatorial District is not a homogenous entity. The district encompasses both urban centers with relatively modern infrastructure and rural communities where traditional family structures remain more intact. Similarly, the district exhibits wide socio-economic disparities, from affluent households benefiting from oil-related employment to impoverished families struggling to meet basic needs. It is highly plausible that the emotional impact of parental divorce varies significantly across these different contexts. An urban, high-SES adolescent may have access to counseling, supportive peers, and financial stability that buffers the emotional shock of divorce, while a rural, low-SES adolescent may face stigma, isolation, and economic precarity that amplifies emotional distress.

However, no known study has systematically compared the emotional well-being of adolescents from divorced families across urban and rural localities within Delta Central Senatorial District, nor has any study examined how socio-economic status moderates this relationship. Consequently, school counselors, teachers, and mental health professionals lack evidence-based guidance on which adolescent subgroups are most vulnerable and what specific emotional difficulties they are likely to present.

This problem is further exacerbated by cultural factors. In many Nigerian communities, including those in Delta Central Senatorial District, discussions of emotional distress, mental health, and family dysfunction remain stigmatized. Adolescents experiencing emotional difficulties following parental divorce may be expected to "manage" their feelings privately rather than seeking help. Without empirical evidence to demonstrate the prevalence and nature of these emotional well-being issues, advocacy for improved mental health services and school-based counseling programs remains hampered. Therefore, the central problem addressed by this study is the lack of empirical data on the differential emotional consequences of parental

divorce among adolescents in Delta Central Senatorial District, specifically examining how these emotional wellbeing vary according to locality (urban versus rural) and socio-economic status (high versus low).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does parental divorce influence the emotional well-being of urban senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District?
2. To what extent does parental divorce influence the emotional well-being of rural senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District?
3. To what extent does parental divorce influence the emotional well-being of high and low socio-economic status senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District?

Hypotheses

The following Null Hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Parental divorce does not significantly influence the emotional well-being of urban senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District.
2. Parental divorce does not significantly influence the emotional well-being of rural senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District.
3. Parental divorce does not significantly influence the emotional well-being of high and low socio-economic status senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a correlational survey research design. The study needed to use correlational survey research to find out how strong different variables relate to each other without changing their natural state. The study population consist of 45318 senior secondary students from 196 public secondary schools across the Delta Central Senatorial District during the 2024/2025 academic year (Examination and Standards Department of the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, 2025). The study sample included 380 students who participated in the research. The sample size of 380 students was determined from a population of approximately 45318 according to Krejcie and Morgan's 2006 statistical table. The sample size reached this level because the study required a 95 percent confidence level. The population sample was determined through Krejcie and Morgan's statistical table which provided a way to achieve a sample size that could be effectively managed. The study used multi-stage sampling methods which included both stratified sampling and simple random sampling methods to create its sample.

Parental Divorce and Emotional Well-Being Questionnaire (PDAEWQ), designed by the researchers was used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: Sections A and B. Section A collected respondents' data such as location and social economic status, while Section B consisted of two subscales which measured parental divorce and emotional well-being. Each subscale in the questionnaire consisted of 25 items, making a total of 50 items in the entire scale. The respondents were asked to indicate their opinions on a point scale with closed-ended items as Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The validity of the instrument was established by three experts in measurement and evaluation, including the research supervisor. These experts assessed the instrument for appropriateness and suitability to the study, and their suggestions were implemented.

The researchers conducted a reliability test of the instrument on 50 senior secondary school students from Delta South Senatorial District in Delta State. The test results were used to determine instrument reliability. The researchers computed the reliability coefficient for three instrument subscales using Cronbach's Alpha which produced a general reliability coefficient of 0.83 for the complete scale. The researchers conducted the questionnaire administration to senior secondary school adolescent students with assistance from two research assistants who received full training about the study's objectives and methods. The researchers collected the completed questionnaires right away to prevent any possibility of data loss. Researchers combined data through coding to assess research questions and test hypotheses. The researchers applied Pearson's r to answer research questions while regression analysis tested the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: To what extent does divorce influence the emotional well-being of urban senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District?

Table 1: Correlation and coefficient of determination of the relationship between divorce and emotional well-being of urban senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District

Variable	<i>n</i>	\bar{x}	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ²	<i>r</i> ² %	Decision
Urban		1.00				
Parental divorce	380	34.23	0.631	0.398	40.1	Positive Relationship
Emotional well-being		43.26				

Table 1 reveals that there is a positive relationship between divorce and the emotional well-being of urban senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District, with a multiple correlation coefficient (*r*) of 0.631. The coefficient of determination (*r*²) is 0.398, which means that divorce explains about 40.1% of the variation in the emotional well-being of urban students. This indicates that parental divorce considerably affects the emotional well-being of students in urban areas, hence the decision of a positive relationship.

Research Question 5: To what extent does divorce influence the emotional well-being of rural senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District?

Table 2: Correlation and coefficient of determination of the relationship between divorce and emotional well-being of rural senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District

Variable	<i>n</i>	\bar{x}	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ²	<i>r</i> ² %	Decision
Rural		2.00				
Parental divorce	380	34.23	0.642	0.412	41.2	Positive Relationship
Emotional well-being		43.26				

Table 2 indicates that there is a positive relationship between divorce and the emotional well-being of rural senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District, with a multiple correlation coefficient (*r*) of 0.642. The coefficient of determination (*r*²) is 0.412, showing that parental divorce accounts for about 41.2% of the variation in the emotional well-being of rural students. This suggests that parental divorce has a significant influence on the emotional well-being of students in rural areas, hence the decision of a positive relationship.

Research Question 3: To what extent does divorce influence the emotional well-being of high and low socio-economic status senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District?

Table 3: Correlation and coefficient of determination of the relationship between divorce and emotional well-being of high and low socio-economic status senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District

Variable	<i>n</i>	\bar{x}	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ²	<i>r</i> ² %	Decision
High and low Socio-economic status		1.41				
Parental divorce	380	34.23	0.705	0.498	50.1	Positive Relationship
Emotional well-being		43.26				

Table 3 shows that there is a strong positive relationship between divorce and the emotional well-being of senior secondary school students based on socio-economic status in Delta Central Senatorial District, with a multiple correlation coefficient (r) of 0.705. The coefficient of determination (r^2) is 0.498, meaning that parental divorce explains about 50.1% of the variation in students' emotional well-being. This indicates that socio-economic status plays a significant role in how parental divorce affects students' emotional well-being, hence the decision of a positive

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Parental divorce does not significantly influence the emotional well-being of urban senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District

Table 4: Regression analysis of Parental divorce and its influence on the emotional well-being of urban senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3558.046	1	3558.046	136.706	.000 ^b
	Residual	5387.571	207	26.027		
	Total	8945.617	208			

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	21.527	1.863		11.554	.000
	Parental divorce	.624	.053	.631	11.692	.000

$R = 0.631, p < 0.05$, Significant

Table 4 indicates that parental divorce has a significant influence on the emotional well-being of urban senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District. The ANOVA shows that the model is statistically significant ($F(1,207) = 136.706, p < 0.05$), meaning that parental divorce is an important predictor of students' emotional well-being. The regression coefficient for parental divorce ($B = 0.620, \beta = 0.631, t = 11.692, p < 0.05$) reveals a strong positive effect, while the correlation coefficient ($R = 0.631$) confirms a substantial relationship between the two variables. This implies that parental divorce significantly explains changes in the emotional well-being of urban students, hence the decision of a positive and significant relationship.

Hypothesis 2: Parental divorce does not significantly influence the emotional well-being of rural senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District

Table 5: Regression analysis of Parental divorce and its influence on the emotional well-being of rural senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3339.501	1	3339.501	117.625	.000 ^b
	Residual	4769.699	168	28.391		
	Total	8109.200	169			

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	19.429	2.193		8.859	.000
	Parental divorce	.667	.061	.642	10.846	.000

$R = 0.631, p < 0.05$, Significant

Table 5 shows that parental divorce significantly influences the emotional well-being of rural senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District. The ANOVA result indicates that the model is statistically significant, ($F(1,168) = 117.625, p < 0.05$), confirming that parental divorce is an important predictor of students' emotional well-being. The regression coefficient for parental divorce ($B =$

0.667, $\beta = 0.642$, $t = 10.846$, $p < 0.05$) reveals a strong positive influence, while the correlation coefficient ($R = 0.631$) confirms a substantial relationship between the two variables. This means that parental divorce accounts for a considerable proportion of the variation in the emotional well-being of rural students, leading to the decision of a positive and significant relationship.

Hypothesis 3: Parental divorce does not significantly influence the emotional well-being of socioeconomic status senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District

Table 6: Regression analysis of Parental divorce and its influence on the emotional well-being of **socioeconomic status** senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8253.058	2	4126.529	186.632	.000
	Residual	8335.668	377	22.111		
	Total	16588.726	379			

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	16.525	1.573		10.507	.000
	Parental divorce	.774	.040	.706	19.319	.000
	Socioeconomic status	.177	.491	.013	.362	.718

$R = 0.631$, $p < 0.05$, Not Significant

Table 6 presents the regression analysis of parental divorce and socioeconomic status on the emotional well-being of senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District. The ANOVA shows that the model is statistically significant $F(2,377) = 186.632$, $p < 0.05$, indicating that the predictors jointly explain a significant proportion of the variance in students' emotional well-being. The coefficients reveal that parental divorce ($B = 0.774$, $\beta = 0.706$, $t = 19.319$, $p < 0.05$) is a strong and significant predictor of emotional well-being. However, socioeconomic status ($B = 0.117$, $\beta = 0.013$, $t = 0.362$, $p = 0.718$), $p < 0.05$) is not significant, suggesting that it does not meaningfully predict students' emotional well-being in this context. The table notes "Not Significant which implies that Parental divorce did not influence the emotional well-being of **socioeconomic status** senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District

Discussion of Findings

The first finding shows that parental divorce significantly influences the emotional well-being of urban senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District, suggesting that family separation has a strong psychological impact regardless of the opportunities and exposure often associated with urban environments. Urban students may face additional stress because, while they are more exposed to social interactions and peer influences, they may also be more aware of family instability, stigma, or comparisons with peers from intact families. This aligns with Reynolds et al. (2022), who posit that adolescents in urban areas often experience greater emotional distress from parental divorce due to increased social pressures and the tendency to internalise family issues in competitive environments. Similarly, Michael et al. (2021) opined that urban students may feel heightened emotional vulnerability when divorce occurs, as the availability of social opportunities does not necessarily compensate for the loss of stability and affection within the home. Therefore, the finding reinforces the view that urban students are significantly affected by parental divorce because the emotional void created in the family cannot easily be replaced by external social influences.

The second finding shows that parental divorce significantly influences the emotional well-being of rural senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District, indicating that students in rural settings are not exempt from the negative effects of family breakdown. Rural students often depend heavily on family cohesion and close-knit community support systems for their sense of security and identity. When divorce occurs, the disruption in family unity may be particularly destabilising, as alternative support structures are often limited. Thabo et al. (2024) posit that rural adolescents tend to experience

deeper emotional distress from divorce because family ties and parental presence are central to their psychological stability and social development. Similarly, Brooks et al. (2022) opined that the absence of one parent in rural communities often results in reduced guidance, limited emotional support, and increased household responsibilities, which can heighten stress and insecurity among adolescents. Thus, the finding aligns with the literature that parental divorce significantly undermines the emotional well-being of rural students, largely due to their greater dependence on intact family structures.

The third finding shows that parental divorce does not significantly influence the emotional well-being of senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District when examined from the perspective of socio-economic status, suggesting that financial background alone may not be the determining factor in how adolescents respond emotionally to family separation. While socio-economic status often affects access to resources, stability, and opportunities, the emotional consequences of divorce appear to cut across different economic classes. Harper (2022) posits that adolescents from both high and low socio-economic backgrounds experience emotional distress following parental divorce, since the psychological impact is tied more to the loss of parental unity and emotional support than to material conditions. Similarly, Reynolds et al. (2022) opined that while socio-economic challenges may worsen stress after divorce, emotional well-being is primarily shaped by the quality of parent-child relationships and the degree of conflict within the home, rather than financial standing. This finding therefore, aligns with existing literature, suggesting that socio-economic status does not significantly moderate the emotional impact of parental divorce among students.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the emotional consequences of parental divorce among senior secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District, focusing on differential effects across urban-rural locality and socio-economic status. Based on the findings, the following conclusions are drawn. First, parental divorce significantly influences the emotional well-being of urban senior secondary school students. Despite greater access to modern amenities and potential support networks, urban adolescents experience notable emotional distress, including depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Urban residency does not protect against the emotional consequences of divorce. Second, parental divorce significantly influences the emotional well-being of rural senior secondary school students. Rural adolescents experience substantial emotional distress following divorce, yet they face additional challenges such as social stigma, limited access to counseling services, and geographic isolation. Rural residency does not mitigate the emotional impact of divorce. Third, parental divorce does not significantly influence the emotional well-being of senior secondary school students based on socio-economic status. Adolescents from high and low socio-economic backgrounds experience comparable levels of emotional distress following parental divorce. Economic resources do not serve as a buffer against the psychological consequences of family dissolution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Establish counseling centers in all secondary schools across Delta Central Senatorial District, with mobile counseling services deployed to rural areas where professional support is scarce.
2. Implement peer support programs accessible to all students from divorced families, regardless of their socio-economic background, since financial status does not buffer emotional consequences.
3. Train all teachers to recognize early signs of emotional distress related to parental divorce and refer affected students to school counselors.

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