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Qualitative Study on Divorce and It's Psychological Impact among Couples in Nigeria: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Divorce is a global phenomenon, and is becoming a burden to the institution of marriage in recent times. It also have severe psychological consequences for couples whose marriages are affected with conflict. The purpose of this paper is to give a qualitative analysis of divorce and its psychological impact on Nigerian couples. This paper provides a holistic view on the causes of divorce, psychological problems couples may face after divorce, psychological well-being, marital stability and prevention of divorce. The paper concludes that divorce has psychological and emotional effects on couples who have experienced divorce. It also noted that divorced can cause serious emotional instability among couples leading to loneliness, depression and other challenging situations which can be psychologically draining for the couples. The paper recommends that divorced women should be supported by government at all levels by providing a community based emotional support. It also recommends that cultural stigma that result from a divorce should be tackled through public sensitization.

Keywords: Divorce, Psychological Impact, Couples, Nigeria

Introduction

In recent times, divorce is becoming the most controversial topic in Nigerian societies and its rate has risen remarkably all over the world. Some disturbances such as deviations, crimes, and suicides can be blamed at modernity urbanization and progress in technology. Divorce is another consequence of these changes that can be related to structural transformations of society and has considerable impacted the way people see life. A breakup in relationship is certainly the most terrible situation for a person, which can result into emotional setback. The mental health indicators shows that newly divorced couple's health are affected by divorce, depression, anger, low self-esteem, and anxiety. Divorce has consequential impacts in the lives of couples in. It also affects their psychological well-being. It has also been observed that stressful occupations has the tendency of interfering with couple's companionship and other family obligations due to their commitments to their jobs which could create marital issues thereby causing conflict that could in the long run lead to divorce (Odebode, 2019). In Nigeria most families are strained in marriage interactions between couples living together. Marital disharmonies which lead to marriage conflict are a great concern to the society. (Aliero, Aliero & Usman, 2021). Marriage is viewed as an ancient-cultural institution as well as a legal union of a man and a woman as husband and wife. In Nigeria, marriage is an important institution through which intending couples enter into some forms of contract for reciprocal obligations as husband and wife, and a bond between families is involved. Marriage guarantees procreation, care and socialization, as well as the survival of human race (Idris, 2021). The main goals for intending couples who desire marriage are the need for harmony, reciprocity, cohesion, fidelity, high degree of stability and unconditional love. The term marriage is defined as a relationship involving two or more people of the opposite sex, whose relationship is expected to endure beyond time. It is further explained that marriage is the union of one man and one woman for their mutual help and happiness, procreation and child rearing until death (Okesina, 2022). Marriage is also seen as a legal union between a man and a woman as husband and wife, which further connotes matrimony, wedlock, alliance, association and union (Okesina, 2022). Marriage is a basic



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institution in every society, it may also be described as one of the most important and fundamental human relationships. It is a culturally, religiously and socially recognized union, normally between a man and a woman, who are referred to as husband and wife. This union establishes rights and obligations between a spouse, their children and even between them and their in-laws. As a very important human institution, marriage not only provides the initial structure to establish family relations, but also serves as avenue to raise and train future generations (Agboola & Oluwatosin, 2018). Divorce is the dissolution or the separation from marriage between spouses. It is the termination of marital union, the canceling of legal duties and responsibilities of marriage. That is, when couples divorce they would no longer stay together and are expected to allow ex-spouse to re-partner (Malak & Kirubakaran, 2022). In Nigeria some couples experience serious challenges with their marriages which is apportioned to the developing problem they face in their homes. Such as atmosphere filled with less unconditional acceptance and love for each member. As a result of the absence of love, the couples find themselves in a conflict situation which might eventually lead to divorce (Mozhdeh & Abdollah, 2016). Divorce has become a serious problem; challenging the establishment of a family in a routine manner and causing severe impacts on the emotional and mental health of the couples. Since women are considered as the binding force in the family, they are believed to be responsible for whatever wrong is done. It has been argued that women invest more in the family, take a larger responsibility for marriage, and therefore perceive divorce as a greater failure than men do (Rathi, & Pachauri, 2018). Bradson in Idris, (2021) sees divorce as the process by which a marriage recognizes as valid can be revoked in a life time of the partners who then revert to single status and are free to remarry. It is essential to state that divorce are basically emotional and personal decisions by couples or spouses, nonetheless; researches have proven beyond this perceptions to include other factors not mentioned. Divorce is viewed as the dissolution of intimate relationship between a man and a woman, adjudged by customary laws and traditions (Idris, 2021).

Couple are vulnerable psychological in the situation of a divorce most especially if they are deeply emotionally attached to the just dissolved marriage. Psychological problems of divorced couples can be influenced directly or indirectly there by affecting them. Based on the interviews conducted on divorced couples, different forms of psychological problems were observed (Rathi, & Pachauri, 2018). When the couples were asked about the psychological impacts of their divorce, majority of them reported that the divorce left them in depression and health problems, because they would not been able to continue their marriage for the rest of their life. They also noted that whenever relatives or other people tried to discuss the inability them to continue their marriages, they stopped meeting them, even avoid general conversation with them because they wish to forget that aspect of their lives (Rathi, & Pachauri, 2018).

Causes of Divorce

Divorce causes several uncomfortable situations which include causing psychological, physical, and mental problems for both spouses and their children which could be economic and educational problems. The adverse effects will certainly affect the productivity couples as well as the impact on their children which might be detrimental to their future. According to Ibrahim, Abubakar, Dan Dange, (2021:3) some causes of divorce includes

1. Falling out of love among the couple due to irreconcilable disputes
2. Lack of commitment to managing marriage financial obligations and problems
3. Husbands abandon their wives for an extended period
4. Drugs and Alcohol addiction on the part of the husband
5. Communication problems
6. Lack of maturity and physical abuse, especially on couples who were forced to marry.
7. Domestic violence and lack of patience and tolerance to one another
8. Unnecessary interference by in-laws in the affairs of married couples.
9. Lack of shared interest and incompatibility among the couples
10. Infidelity and adultery among married couples is a common reason for divorce

Social Conflict Theory



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The social conflict theory model was propounded Karl Marx. Karl Marx offered a comprehensive examination of conflict at a large scale. He believed that conflict emerges as a result of economic exploitation and the inherent disparities of capitalism. According to Marx, conflict plays an important role in pushing social change, ultimately resulting in revolutionary transformations and the eventual construction of a society without social classes. He also asserted that conflict theory focuses on power dynamics in relationship. He noted that the conflict is not actually the problem in marriage, but the method to which new realities that individuals in the relationship can create. This allows sense of entitlement that can develop in aspects of relationships to be challenged. The theory exposes the grievances between individuals or groups whose interest towards the object of contention is conflicting. Social change from the Marxian perspective it is seen as the outcome of class struggle motivated by economic interest. The facts remains that the conflict theory never divorces it's self-sufficiently from its structural functionalist but turned on its head than a truly critical theory of the society. The conflict theorist believes that divorce is as a result of conflict over resources in marriage (Oluyeye, 2024).

Psychological Problems Women May Face After Divorce

Divorced couples often exhibit emotional instability characterized by euphoria, loneliness, sadness, depression, suicidal thoughts, associated changes in self-concept and self-esteem. Divorce is seen generally as a prominent cause of depression among divorced couples. Haimi, Lerner, and Genomics as cited in Ibrahim, Abubakar and Dan Dange, (2021:4) asserted that divorce elevate depression, anger, decreased self-esteem, increased suicide among others. In the words of Akter, Begum, and Remarriage (2012), they noted that women would suffer from various types of psychological problems, which according to Ibrahim, Abubakar, Dan Dange, (2021:3) includes

1. Physiological function (e.g., difficulty falling asleep, decreased appetite etc.)
2. Emotional function (e.g., frustration, hopelessness, suicide etc.)
3. Cognitive impairments (e.g., distressful thoughts about real-life crises? I have become valueless etc.)
4. Behavioral impairments (e.g., easily angered for every silly thing, quarreling with family members, relatives etc.)
5. Social functions impairments (Feeling embarrassed to meet other people avoided any social program, isolated etc.).

Psychological Well-being and Marital Stability

One of the important factors that encourage marital stability is couples' ability to know the state of their psychological health because poor psychological well-being reduces the chance of marital fulfilment (Okojide, Adekeye, & Adejumo, 2021). Randall & Bodenmann (2017) asserted that individuals who had poor psychological well-being face stressful situations and engaged in hostile conversations with their spouses, and this could lead to marital conflict, instability, and reduced psychological well-being. As note by the Mental Health Leadership and Advocacy Programme (2012), the prevalence of poor psychological well-being is about twenty per cent. African Polling Institute and EPIAFRIC 2020 also reported that 20%-30% of Nigerian Population suffer from one mental disorder or the other (Okojide, Adekeye, & Adejumo, 2021).

Effect of Divorce on Children

according to Ukpong, (2018: 175), the following are some of the effects of divorce on children:

1. Problems of Adjustment: Children from divorced homes are confronted with questions from their peers, particularly when they are in primary or nursery school, about why they have only one parent at home. They will have to adjust to a change in primary relationships, and possibly to restricted interaction with one of the parents (mostly the father). Apart from this, "they have to cope with parental conflict, which may continue after the divorce, and with attempts by each parent to gain the child's loyalty and affection at the expense of the other parent.
2. Psychological Problems: Divorce affects the children of divorced parents psychologically. Sometimes the children feel withdrawn when they are with their peers, especially when their peers are discussing about their own parents and family life. They may even carry this psychological problem into their own marriages.
3. Object of Abuse by Parents/Others: In some cases, parents pour their anger on their children in the absence of their divorced spouse. They transfer aggression to their children. This often than not affects the children's self-esteem who may also become objects of abuse and ridicule by the larger society. Therefore, instead of having parental warmth which is expected of a growing child, these children end up having abuses.



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4. Hatred Towards One Parent: Sometimes children from divorced marriages tend to develop hatred towards one of the parents whom they feel was the cause of the divorce. This is usually based on the information they received, especially when the divorce happened when they were very young.
5. Lack of Balance Training: Children are normally expected to be trained by both parents each supplying what may be deficient in the life of the other parent. In the case of divorce, the children will only be trained by one parent. Single parenthood has its own flaws which are easily transferred to the children.
6. Prone to Social Problems: Children from divorced marriages are prone to social problems. With the deficiency in their upbringing, they may decide to join peers and adults outside who may introduce them to vices which are inimical to their lives and that of the society. They may indulge in sexual vices, illicit drugs, alcoholism, robbery, area boys etc. Even though, children from unbroken homes may also be involved in these vices.
7. Economically: Though economically, children from both non-divorced and divorced homes may suffer economically, but children from the divorced homes suffer more economically. This affects their educational and other endeavors in life.
8. Educationally: Children from divorced marriages find it very difficult to complete their education right from primary up to tertiary level, very few of them can have that opportunity because of the negative treatment they will face with the members of the family particularly from the father's site and the step mother.

Prevention of Divorce

It is the belief of so many counsellors that man or woman cannot survive well without seeking one another if at all they are healthy. For healthy people, marriage is essential, and it has to be planned and prepared in such a way as to avoid marital discord since it is a lifelong affair.

The following suggestions are considered important for curtailing divorce by Abdullahi in Gaya, (2017)

1. Marriage is a permanent affair; therefore, should be careful and dynamic planning and preparation.
2. Couples should seek for professional information.
3. Couples should knowledge more about each other in a way that does not involve any immoral or deceptive and exploitative behaviour.
4. Couples are encouraged to choose partners on the basis of permanent values, i.e. moral integrity, religious devotion among others and not on the basis of wealth or family prestige or mere physical attraction.
5. Marriage should be contracted, by both the husband and wife, on mutual understanding that will assist in the growth and development of the family; and partners should be reliable, God fearing, hardworking, dependable and trustworthy.
6. Couples should develop the habit of appreciating what one does, no matter how slight it is.
7. Any fault discovered between them should be addressed by them in a peaceful and clear mood not through harassment.
8. Marriage is an institution that is demanding time of its own. Therefore, husbands and wives should not be devoting much time to work at the expense of the marriage
9. Third-party interferences should be avoided by the couples.
10. Couples should be educated on their marital responsibilities including saving, investment, reproductive health and child rearing, and so on.
11. From the very beginning of the marriage couples should ensure security in terms of religion, genotype, character, sexual desire, interest and blood group of one another.
12. Couples should sit, eat pray together for Go's guidance in your marital activities.
13. When couples are in crises and it has gone to the extreme, families of couples concerned should be called in to try effecting reconciliation or they should consult a counsellor.
14. Religious leaders should come in to propagate the ills divorces will hatch at any forum they find themselves.
15. Government should come in by providing welfare package to couples when contracting the marriage
16. Government should come in by providing welfare package to workers such as tax relief and basic needs on farms or condition to fulfill when contracting the marriage.

Conclusion

From the study, it was obvious that Divorced can cause serious emotional instability among couples leading to loneliness, sadness, depression, suicidal thoughts among other challenging situations, it was noted that marital conflicts should be managed when they happen or prevented from happening in the first place in order for it not to lead to the total collapse of



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the marriage. It was also revealed that divorce can seriously affect the psychological and emotional wellbeing of couples as well as children experience more social isolation, which makes them end up producing greater feelings of loneliness, unhappiness and lower self-esteem. Some psychological and emotional effects of divorced couples could include factors like difficulty in sleeping, disturbances, worthlessness, suicidal attempt, decreased level of confidence, feeling of shame, and feeling of sorrow in her heart, worry, anxiousness, irritated with life among other things as the major emotional and psychological effects of divorce.

Suggestions

In line with the paper's submission, the following suggestions were offered: -

1. Government at all levels and non-governmental organizations should help make available the services of counsellors and encourage religious leaders and other stake holders to strengthen the need for couples through sensitization in order for couples to attend compulsory premarital counselling before marriage and when needed marital counselling after getting married. This will help reduce cases of divorce.
2. Community sensitization should be encouraged on the need for husband to assist their wives in running the home when needed in order to foster love and unity in the home and reduce conflict.
3. Counselling centers should be established in every state and local government in Nigeria in order to help couples facing marital issues to get interventions.

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