

SOCIETAL IMPLICATIONS OF DIVORCE ON THE MORAL FORMATION OF THE CHILD IN THE SOCIETY: A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

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Abstract

Marriage is amongst the core value cherished in African society. The sanctity attached to marriage stems from the understanding of it as a divine institution and as such efforts are made towards its safeguard. In recent time, the institution of marriage has continued to decline as a result of many factors which the chief of them is divorce. Divorce is a cankerworm, a negation and a setback to healthy family; given its many negative effects to the society. Divorce leads to broken homes, single-parenting, child abandonment, frustration among others. It advised that couples should seek for better ways in resolving their differences rather than opting for divorce. In this research, the major causes and effects of divorce on the moral formation of the child from a socio-religious approach was pointed out. Also some factors promoting divorce amongst couples were discussed. These includes: Denial of sexual intercourse cum satisfaction, poverty, marital infidelity amongst couples, lack of honesty amongst couples and childlessness. The negative effects of divorce on the child formation was stated such as: Lack of parental control on children, lack of proper child upbringing, poor academic performance of the child, psychological imbalance, lack of parental love and affection on the child. Finally some practical approaches of the church to remedy divorce was pointed out which includes: Effective marriage counselling, forgiveness and love, dialogue approach, prompt disciplinary action, family life education, religion and spirituality, guidance and counselling and effective communication. Also the prospect of the Church in the restoration of the dignity of marriage in the society was discussed.

Keywords: Societal, Implications, Divorce, Moral Formation, Child, Society, Christian.

Introduction

Divorce is observed as one of the core vices that have posed as a challenge to most marriages in Nigeria. Dominion (2004) states that, a careful evaluation to most marriages in our contemporary time will reveal that many things have changed in the recent time. Many people from different cultural background have considered marriage as a sacred institution. Mwoye and Nnenna (2002) uphold that the institution of marriage is natural and common amongst all human races. In most tribes in Nigeria, man or woman is considered incomplete even after reaching a certain age without having a spouse. Christianity holds the institution of marriage in a more exalted position than any other religion. A careful observation from what is happening in the present society proves to be a true glaring picture of the fact that institution of marriage is no longer what it used to be. The current increase of divorce in our contemporary Nigeria society calls for serious consideration. The trend right now which is eating deep into our society has led to single parenting and co- parenting. Could this be the reason for the decline in morality and the poor formation of the child educationally?

This study is expected to make Christian parents to understand the aftermath of divorce on children as the future leaders. Marriage should be blissful and not a negative experience and as such divorce is an aberration. Divorce does not affect only the married partners but also their children and society at large. This research exposes how divorce has contributed to poor performance of children in school, child abuse and high rate of moral decadence amongst children. Also, this study would proffer solution on how the effects of divorce on the child's development can be minimized when married partners do the right thing at the right time.

Meaning and Emerging Issues of Divorce in the Society

Divorce is a common phenomenon, which has attracted global attention. There is no ambiguity in the general meaning of the word divorce, even though it means different things to different people. Thus there are variants of its definition by people. According to Hornby (2020), divorce is the termination of marriage, separation or end of marriage. The termination is usually granted by a court of law. Veevers (1991) opines that “divorce is traumatic in that it subverts the couple’s unilateral and absolute commitment to marriage per se and their high needs for achievement and endurance. Succinctly, divorce is ‘the formal, legal or socially’” (p. 109). According to Uroko and Enobong (2022) “divorce is also defined as the total breakdown of the agreement between the husband and wife either in the court of law or ordinarily” (p. 4). Rob (2016) on his part describes divorce as any home by which parents are not living together with their children as the normal family relationship. Rob further states that “divorce is an abnormal home relationship which has permanent effects upon the children's ability to do their works in the school normally responsible for their low grade in class and other difficulties in life” (p. 30). Hence in a concise manner, Shields (2004) says divorce means legal dissolution of marriage. It could be emotional in which case, husbands and wives are merely living together but there is no emotional attachment. From the variant definitions, divorce as used in the context here would therefore refers to annulment, disunion, separation, split up and so on not necessarily a legal termination of marriage since the population of people who legally end their marriages are few in churches.

In the past decades, the rate of divorce in Nigeria was very minimal. Husbands and wives knew that marriage was contracted to keep the family genealogy going. Moreover, both husband and wife knew their roles in the family. More importantly, in Nigeria, marriage was never regarded as an individual affair. The family members had much influence on what went on in the family. Today, things have changed, and marriage, an institution that used to be stable, is no longer steady. Oforchukwu (2000) observes that married partners are often faced with problems that might dissolve their relationship. These changes are obvious in social, educational, political, religious, and economic aspects of Igbo existence. Our people who travel abroad have seriously been influenced by cross-culturalization, which has affected the attitudes of our people with regard to marriage and divorce.

Common Causes of Divorce Amongst Couples

Divorce has been a current re-occurrence in the society. However, the recent reports indicate that there is a consistent rise in the rate of divorce in the society. According to Lampard (2013),

almost fifty percent of marriages in the society end up in divorce. However, it is important to analyze some of the specific reasons that would make couples consider divorce as the only solution whenever the marriage is riddled with some challenges. The aim of this study is to explore factors that contribute to divorce among and how it affects the child formation.

Denial of Sexual Intercourse and Satisfaction

Sex is vital to relationship satisfaction and withholding sex can cause resentment, rejection, and a lack of connection. Sex starvation has been discovered to be one of the reasons why divorce has increased amongst many couples. In a marriage, a man denying sex to his wife and vice versa could amount to cruelty and may be grounds for divorce. Corroborating further, Odeleye (2019) laments:

Sexual problems may arise in marriage as a result of sublimation of sexual urging for several possible concentrated interests in his or her work. He or she may suddenly have become disinterested in sex as an avenue of sensual happiness. One of the spouses could be nursing a grudge against another. (p. 364).

According to Hanafi (2021), another reason for denial of sexual satisfaction are erectile dysfunction (for men), being in post-menopausal stage (for women), diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, alcohol addiction, side effects of medications and complications from smoking, among others.

Poverty

Plucker and Peters (2018) state that people in poverty are vulnerable individuals. When basic personal needs such as food, clothing and shelter are difficult to obtain, one is said to be in poverty. Banerjee and Buflo (2011) opine that amongst Christians, it is difficult to find couples who can endure poverty in food, shelter or housing. That is to say that when what the woman expects in the marriage is not materializing, and they have other men enticing them, they will file for divorce. Uroko and Enobong (2022) stress that what comes from economic insecurity in the family and chronic financial issues make dissolution of the marriage easier. Odgers and Jaffee, (2013) state that, the children from poor families suffer from certain deficiencies. Also most aspects of children's physical, cognitive and affective health and development are affected by poverty, primarily due to the effects of deleterious environments, lack of access to quality education and resources.

Marital Infidelity amongst Couples

The issue of marital infidelity is a common reason for divorce. Marital infidelity is considered as a crime which contravenes the law of marriage in the society. The Mosaic Law forbids and prescribes penalties against those involved in marital infidelity. In the covenant, he made with the Israelites; Yahweh included adultery among the sins that must be avoided. The Book of Exodus stated that followers of God must not commit adultery. According to Familusi (2019), couples must avoid committing the sin of marital infidelity. In Christian marriage, the wife is expected to be faithful to her husband and when this is not found, the one who feels cheated does not forgive the offender and this gives divorce an opportunity. Marital infidelity represents

is a sin against God, man and nature. Couples must make efforts to be faithful to one another. This will then help them to consolidate their relationship.

Lack of Honesty amongst Couples

Lack of honesty amongst couples has to do with faithfulness on the parties involved. Christianity teaches that whoever is in Christ is a new creature and old things have passed away (2 Cor. 5:17). The implication of this is that a Christian who has confessed his or her sins is considered to be innocent. This is the reason some denominations preach and practice restitution. During courtship, Familusi (2019) enunciates that intending couples may want to know the past activities of their spouses to be. This is a subject of debate because some are of the opinion that it is not every past experience that must be shared. Honesty in marriage equally extends to deceit before the marriage. That is where some vital information is concealed by any of the parties such as sickness, fertility issue, and child birth before marriage. For this reason, some may want to conceal certain sensitive things which they think may affect their relationship. Therefore, a dangerous or sensitive secret that is revealed could bring an end to a marriage. It is possible that some people had babies as teenagers but did not inform their spouses; they could refer to such children as nieces or nephews. There are also instances of people who belonged to secret societies when they were in schools and in the course committed murder or engaged in other criminal activities. Any of these secrets is sensitive enough to lead divorce if kept during courtship. The argument of some people is that no secret must be kept and that whoever genuinely loves someone will overlook his or past experiences in as much as he or she no longer engages in them.

Childlessness

The essence of marriage is to procreate in order to prolong the family lineage. Describing the importance of children, it is important to note that procreation is the main purpose of marriage. This shows that many people consider children as the consummation of marriage. A woman without a child or male child in many parts of the land loses the rights of inheritance and the family is considered hopeless. On the other hand, the woman's security is removed and the man may decide to divorce her and get another woman. Nmah (2003) states that:

In rural areas the roles of women centers on being a wife and a mother. The bearing of children is seen as a means of maintaining the lineage, whether it is in the patrilineal or matrilineal society. Barrenness could easily lead to divorce of a woman and her going back to her people. In fact barrenness is often seen as a disgrace, especially in patrilineal societies. (p. 143).

Childlessness may cause anxiety, distress and frustration in marriage and subsequently lead to divorce. Arugu (2014) states that, "in African culture, any marriage that is not blessed with children is not considered to have achieved its aim" (p. 375). It is assumed that when a couple cannot bear children, there will be nobody to remember them, their genealogical line will disappear.

Moreover, Mohanty and Biswal (2007) states that in some cultures, a woman who gives birth only to girls may be divorced because the girl child cannot continue with the surname of the father. In fact the hope of a woman in marriage is in the production of children, especially, male children. This male child preference and the consequent tendency to care more for the male child than for the female child in matters of upbringing and education have put women at a serious a tight corner. This situation can lead to a woman her losing her rights of inheritance or even a share in her husband's property and in a stricter dimension, may lose her marriage through divorce.

Societal Implications of Divorce on the Child Formation

The effects of divorce have been experienced in different societies with its gravity on children, parents, the church and the whole society at large. Thus, these effects could be seen in the area of ethics and social-orientation.

Lack of Proper Child Upbringing

Children from divorced families may not receive necessary and adequate training and education as required. Nnatuanya (2021) notes that children need both parents because each plays a complementary role in the children's life. Children from divorced parents often attempt to adjust and adapt to new situations in which they find themselves. For instance, these children run the risk of discontinuity in their emotional and intellectual development. On the other hand, in a family where parents have decided to divorce each other, the children are the ones who suffer the most. In most cases, the children of divorced families do not acquire adequate and sound life training. The children of divorced parents may be morally defective, failing to fear neither God nor man. Nkuke, Sello, and Modjadji (2018) again observe that the immediate consequence of divorce is often a moral and social aberration as many children from divorced families are lawless and irresponsible.

Poor Academic Performance of the Child

Education and training of a child start from the home. Fagan and Churchill (2012) agree that "parents play a critical role guiding children into those gender roles deemed appropriate in the society" (p. 70). Therefore parents are expected to train their children so that they will be useful to them and the society at large. It is their responsibility to send their children to school and provide all the necessary things they need in school. However, where married partners divorce they will find it difficult to train their children. Divorce contributes to the poor academic performance of children in school as each parent might be busy to monitor the academic performance of the child and to also encourage and teach them in difficult times. Furthermore, divorce can drain children of their motivation to engage in learning as the effects of divorce on children's education are not temporary and tend to persist into adulthood.

Psychological Imbalance

Divorce can be a traumatic experience for children, as it can disrupt their most cherished beliefs and uproot the foundation of their lives and routines their parents. The emotional distress caused by divorce can affect a child's ability to focus and concentrate on his psyche. Divorce

can significantly impact a child's mental health, often resulting in long-term consequences. According to Cherlin and Fomby (2019), children of divorced parents are at a higher risk of experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. These issues can persist well into adulthood, with children of divorced parents being twice as likely to experience severe mental health problems and are more likely to attempt suicide. It is crucial for parents to provide emotional support and resources to help their children cope with the emotional stress caused by divorce, including therapy and counselling. Early intervention and support can make a significant difference in a child's mental health and overall well-being. Children of parents who are going through divorce feel excluded from decision-making and are do not feel listened to, particularly in the family law system.

Lack of Parental Love and Affection on the Child

A child is a gift from the giver of life, God. As a result, parents are happy when their relationship produces a child and the child is an indication of their love. This helps them to establish a permanent bond of affection between parents and children. However, in a divorced family, unity is lacking, children lacks parental love and affection. This also affects the behavior of the children when they grow up and also their relationships with other people. It is a joint responsibility of parents to train and discipline their children and as such they should be mindful enough to care and love their children without limit. A relationship between a parent and child should be reciprocal. As it is the duty of parents to provide for the needs of their children, so also are children's duty bound to look after their parents in their old age. Children who do not receive adequate affection from their parents may experience feelings of insecurity, low self-esteem and difficulty forming healthy relationship.

Practical Solutions of the Church Towards Ameliorating Divorce in the Society

The church gives answer to the ultimate problem of human existence such as the issue of divorce. The church encourages man in the time of crises and assures man of God's protection in day activities. Most of the churches have employed many measures to avert and reduce high rate of divorce experienced in our society today. Such measures are as follows:

Courtship

Courtship means the period of time that people intending to live together as husband and wife take while studying one another. Courtship is a vital aspect of human relationships, and it plays a crucial role in the development of relationships. It is a period where two people get to know each other, build trust, and determine compatibility before committing to a long-term relationship. Courtship helps the couple to establish each other's health status through medical tests and observance as this helps one to accept each other's health status without affecting the marriage. In courtship, intending couples come to a place of understanding each other's status so that each time they come together, they prepare for the financial constraints. Courtship is a time when they express love for one another like visiting, exchanging gifts and sharing inner feelings. This helps to cement their relationship. Courtship helps the partners to know each other's family background and appreciate each other leading to making a commitment from an informed point of view hence building a stable relationship. Courtship helps the couple

to know their religious beliefs and get to find and agree on how to handle the identified differences in their relationship. Courtship helps to introduce relatives to each partner. This rules out the possibility of committing incest and draws closer commitment to one another. Courtship is the time when the two share experiences in life like problems and how they intend to live together with them. Courtship helps the two to understand, identify and respect each other's likes and dislikes (individual hobbies} this helps in determining as to whether the partners will in future share their leisure time together.

Pre-Marital Courses

Pre-marital course is regarded as a sort of marriage school organized for partners who are preparing for their church wedding. Nnatuanya (2021) states that, during this programme, the man of God will enlighten them on the principles of a blissful marriage. The couples will also have the opportunity to ask questions on any aspect of marital life. This type of school helps the couples to build a happy family so as to avert marital separation, marital fights and divorce. In some Orthodox churches the course last for three months while in some other churches it may not reach three months. The most important thing is that the church makes available courses for young people about to wed to learn the ideals of marriage and what God desires of them in marriage.

The role of marriage counsellor and experts in issues relating to relationship at all levels cannot be over-emphasized. Majority of marriages having issues today are those who underwent little or no pre-marital courses at all. The church should strengthen her marriage committee. Experts in marriage issues and relationships should be invited from time to time to educate the young ones contemplating marriages on what to do. Married one should be taught how to make their homes peaceful. According to Obi (2014), the church will also create an advisory system that will keep couples having challenges in their marriages close to the members, enough to detect divorce signals in families and begin in time to deal with it. The church should often pray for families, organize marriage seminars, reconcile families prone to divorce. The church should not encourage re-marriage of divorced persons as is the case in some denominations even among the clergymen.

To the already divorced, the pastor and the entire church should see it as a challenge to its faith and practice. Anyanwu (2003) observes that guilt and depression seem to be the major problem of divorcees. The church should use the opportunity created by divorce, to minister love, compassion and forgiveness to the divorcee and find a common ground for reconciliation. Reconciliation is in fact, the most important ministry of the church. Strong emphasis must be continuously placed upon the fact that marriage is an "until death do us part" relationship. According to Maxey (2017), to lightly consider marriage bond is to disregard God's order for the human race and to undermine the very foundation God has designed for the betterment of humanity.

Forgiveness and Love

Forgiveness is another method that promotes love in a Christian marriage. Marriage is ordained by God, sacred and indissoluble. Therefore Christian couples should be careful in their relationship with one another as living must be based on forgiveness and love of one another. Although, marriage on earth will never be perfect; it still demands a continual effort toward perfection. God is the one that have ordained the institution of marriage and he is too faithful to forgive us if we confess our sins (1John 1:9) and Love covers all sins (Proverbs 10: 12). According to Anaana, Ahura and Tyoakaa (2019), forgiveness is needed in all Christian families. When the wife hurts the husband, she has to apologize to him and vice versa. It is also important that couples should endeavour to build a good and solid family life, husband and wife must exist as one and therefore they must make efforts to live together. No partner should see himself or herself as a perfect partner in marriage as every partner has weaknesses. A true and mature Christian couple should learn how to forgive each other whole heartedly. Anaana, Ahura and Tyoakaa (2019) elucidate that, unless couples learn how to forgive each other in marriage else their relationship will suffer. The spirit of forgiveness is a virtue that is needed in the lives of all couples. Oforchukwu (1995) states that, couples should also learn to accommodate each other's unique qualities. Peter emphasized the value of forgiveness when he asked the lord how often must I forgive him who sins against me? Seven times? (Matt.18:21-22). Jesus immediately answered him and said, “No, not seven times, but I say, seventy times seven. This therefore means that, we need to forgive uncountable.

Dialogue Approach

Divorce is unhealthy for the family, children, husbands, wives and the Church. Thus Anaana, Ahura and Tyoakaa (2019) states that, the Church should set up a standard to guide married couple. It is believed that the Church has the power to resolve some of the problems that the society and Christians face in their marriages. Thus, as regards dialogue between couples, the Christian Church should learn to appreciate marriage and avoid divorce amongst Christians. In dialogue, all parties involved must respect the feelings and faiths of other parties. There is need for openness and prejudice must be reduced as dialogue seeks to eliminate every prejudice, intolerance and unnecessary misunderstanding.

Position of the Church in Restoring the Dignity of Marriage in the Society

The church has a great role when it comes to solving marriage problems like divorce. Nwankwo and Peter (2019) affirm that it is the sole duty of the church to continue to preach the significance of unity of families and the damaging effects of divorce. Kunhiyop (2008) reiterated the need for Christian leaders to have a biblical, theological and pastoral perspective on marriage so that they can offer humane teaching and counselling to those in their congregations who are dealing with marital problems. The Christian ideal purpose for marriage is that marriage is a lifelong union of a man and woman. Kunhiyop (2008) states that Christian marriage is monogamous and indissoluble and is intended to be enjoyable and fruitful (Gen.2:24; Matt. 19:5-6' Rom. 7:2-3); therefore divorce is the antithesis of marriage and God's reaction" (Mal.2:16). This should be the hallmark of the church's teaching on marriage. The role of marriage counsellor and experts in issues relating to relationship at all levels cannot be

over-emphasized. Majority of marriages having issues today are those with little or no counselling at all. This problem is more with young people. It is a situation where people meet, and without any form of enquiry, courtship or counselling begin to live as husbands and wives. In many cases the parents and families of the couples are not contacted.

The church should strengthen her marriage committee. Experts in marriage issues and relationships should be invited from time to time to educate the young ones contemplating marriages on what to do. Married one should be taught how to make their homes peaceful. Obi (2014) remarks that the church should also create an advisory system that will keep couples having challenges in their marriages close to the members, enough to detect divorce signals in families and begin in time to deal with it. The church should often pray for families, organize marriage seminars, reconcile families prone to divorce and separation. The church should not encourage re-marriage of divorced persons, as is the case in some denominations, even among the clergymen. Anyanwu (2003) observes that guilt and depression seem to be the major problem of divorcees. The church should use the opportunity created by divorce, to minister love, compassion and forgiveness to the divorcee and find a common ground for reconciliation. Reconciliation is in fact, the most important ministry of the church. Strong emphasis must be continuously placed upon the fact that marriage is an “until death do us part” relationship. According to Maxey (2017), lightly consider marriage bond is to disregard God’s order for the human race and to undermine the very foundation God has designed for the betterment of humanity.

Recommendations

The societal effects of divorce as discussed in the research are pathetic given that the role the family plays in the society is therefore imperative to have the home that would be a prototype of the desired society. On this premise, the following recommendations are made.

- i. For couples who wish to go into marriage, there is need to count the cost before entering into marriage. If this is done, most of the factors that necessitate divorce would not have arisen.
- ii. Clerics must be careful in handling marital issues. Premarital counselling and marriage counsellors are admonished not preach what is not practicable. Clerics must be careful in the type of advice they give while, interference in family affairs must be minimal.
- iii. In any event of sin by any of the couples, such must be acknowledged, confessed and forsaken while the offended couple must be benevolent enough to forgive.
- iv. For divorce to be minimized, courtship must be taken as a serious business. Intending couples should make out time to know themselves properly.
- v. More so marital vows must be taken with all seriousness. Breaking marital vow is ungodly and God detests ungodliness. The clerics must make out time to teach this to the intending couples and even the married.

Conclusion

Families are of paramount importance to the Nigerian society, because they are considered to be the basic unit of society. The future of Nigeria society depends very much on successful parenting and marriages. Parents must raise children according to prevailing societal norms

and ways of life. Parents must see parenting as a joint responsibility whereby parents train and discipline their children. Parents should be help to care and love their children. A relationship between a parent and child should be reciprocal. As it is the duty of parents to provide for the needs of their children, also children are duty bound to look after their parents in their old age. But when the marriage bond is dissolved, this service will be lacking. Divorce has serious adverse effects on both the children and parents. The children lack parental love and affection and thereby run the risk of discontinuity in their emotional and intellectual development. Furthermore, it has been found that apart from parents, the children also suffer from the injury done by divorce. Ultimately, no matter the outcome, marriage is not one man's business in traditional Africa society but a collective responsibility.

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