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Causes and Consequences of Divorce on Formation of the Child in the Contemporary Igbo Society: A Socio-Christian Study

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Abstract

Human society emanates from the microcosm of the society known as the family which is a product of marriage. Marriage forms the foundation upon which family builds and by doing so, the sustainability of human society is ensured. Proper forming of children is carried out in a family for the general well-being of the society. This work examines the causes of divorce among various marriages in the contemporary Igbo society as one witnesses a good number of marriages disintegrating leaving many children without proper formation morally and socially wise. The work considers the possible effects of divorce on the formation of children in the contemporary society which include lack of affection, poor performance in academic as well as social life, maladjustment in behaviors and the likes. Using Christian approach to marriage, this work offers workable practices that would help in strengthening marriage bonds among couples to reduce the rate of divorce among couples. Analysis of the findings was done using functionalist theory owing to the fact that family is a part of the society.

Keywords: Divorce, Christianity, Consequences, Formation

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1. Introduction

Marriage is a basic institution in the society that is one of the most important and fundamental in human relationships. Marriage according to Agboola and Oluwatosin (2018) is a cultural, religious and socially recognized union which is 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 children. In the recent time, people are turning away from marriages because it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain happy and stable union. This is so because Omeje (2014) states that a number of marriages today are into divorce and this has posed a severe threat to the supposedly marital satisfaction and happiness that would have been enjoyed by couples.

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Christians in Nigeria are also experience the effects of divorce in different ways, for the inability of a couple to understand what marriage is marks the beginning of conflicts between a husband and a wife which sometimes results into divorce. It is upon this fact then that this write up undertake to investigate the various factors which predispose people to divorce and possible effects of divorce among Christians in contemporary Nigeria with the view of suggesting ways of reducing those factors which predispose people to divorce and also to point out how the church can assist in solving the problem of divorce in our societies today. This work therefore examines the causes of divorce in the contemporary society as well as it effects especially in the moral formation of the child. Christian understanding of marriage is explored from various literatures which helps in understanding and appreciating the place of marriage and proper understanding of what divorce could do to the purposes of marriage.

2. Christian's Position on Marriage

The Church right from the apostolic time has never ceased from following the footsteps of Christ in matters regarding to divorce. The Church sees it as a duty to teach and uphold the truth of revelation as she receives it directly from Christ. It is in this way that we see Paul reiterating the basic teaching of the Church on the question of the indissolubility and unity of marriage. Paul himself was one of the spokespersons of the church. Paul, like Christ, condemned divorce as immoral. The New Testament has several narratives that explain Jesus' position on divorce. In Matthew, Jesus was questioned by the Pharisees thus: 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?' This means that a man can divorce his wife for anything which he dislikes in her physical attributes or character. According to Benson (1998), the Pharisees asked the question because "they knew his opinion, and solicited him to declare it, hoping it would incense the people, who reckoned the liberty which the law gave them of divorcing their wives, one of their chief privileges" (p. 1). Corroborating further, Danner (1969) explained that the bond of marriage ought not to be broken, this was further strengthened by Chiegboka (2017). According to Chiegboka, Christian marriage is indissoluble. According to Guzik (2020), understanding 'the whole counsel of God on this subject frees people from the stigma of divorced in the church. In Christianity, Callahan (2022) mentions that marriage is viewed as a life-long promise between partners.

As the Pharisees continued to interrogate Jesus, he used this opportunity to expand on Moses' law, explaining that divorce is not what God intended. Jesus said, 'Moses approved divorce merely as a concession to your stubborn hearts', but that was not what God had meant. 'Whoever divorces his or her spouse and marries someone else is guilty of adultery'. According to Domen (2021), Jesus stated that God's standard goes beyond the law and God's intent is for no one to divorce. Ademola (1990) reveals that it has been rapidly increasing due to the fact that women presently enjoy more economic independence, and divorce is often initiated by women on various grounds, including cruelty, desertion, lack of support, bad relationships between co-wives and childless wives. Some Christian denominations according to Baobab for Women's Human Rights (2007) still emphasize that divorce is still prohibited. In their teachings, they make it clear that Christian couples should learn to endure challenges and adapt to changes by following the scriptural backup. The Church is believed to be the gathering of believers, so if the church on Earth is to join the church triumphant (church in heaven), then it has to follow the path of Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus Christ mentions that divorce is not allowed, so Christians should ensure that they follow this injunction. Christians in Yoruba land become part of Christ's extended family. Therefore, they should do everything within their power to propagate these virtues. Donovan (1996) says that, church in Yoruba land is the extended family of God on Earth where God's children are equipped. Jesus reminds us that in the beginning God joined man and woman together. 'One flesh' often refers to one's relatives or kin, so the husband and wife becoming 'one flesh' should be a family unit no less permanent than our families of origin should be.

3. Some Factors Promoting Divorce amongst Couples

Divorce has been a current reoccurrence 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 ends 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.

3.1. 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. Familusi (2019) documents that, some women are very spiritual and claim to be praying and fasting every day. This makes the man uncomfortable and after he has endured for a while he calls for a divorce. Some of the women also usually claim to be going to church for a night vigil, simply to deny their husbands sex. The man endures but gets to a point where he feels that he needs to get another wife and divorce his current wife because his sexual needs are not met. In a marriage, a man denying sex to his wife and vice versa could amount to cruelty and may be grounds for divorce. Other reasons for this according to medical experts are as follows' 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.

3.2. Poverty

Plucker and Peters (2018) states that people in poverty are economically 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 Duflo (2011) opine that amongst Yoruba Christians, it is difficult to find couples who can endure poverty in food, shelter or housing. When what the woman expects in the marriage is not materializing, and they have other men enticing them, they will file for divorce. According Uroko and Enobong (2022) stress that comes from economic insecurity in the family and chronic financial issues make dissolution of the marriage easier'.

3.3. Marital Infidelity amongst Couples

The issue of adultery is a common reason for divorce. Adultery is considered a serious crime in Nigerian society. It is such a serious crime that even the Mosaic Law forbids it. The Law also prescribes penalties against those committing adultery. 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 adultery. In Christian marriage, the wife is expected to be faithful to her husband and vice versa. Where this is not the case, and the one who feels cheated does not forgive the offender, divorce is usually an option. Divorce permitted in the Old Testament can be seen in the event of adultery and any kind of immorality. In the New Testament, when Jesus was asked about his view on divorce, He responded that it was permitted as a result of the hardness of people's hearts (Matthew 19:7-9). He went further to say that sexual immorality was the only reason for divorce and this was why Joseph the carpenter wanted to divorce Mary secretly, when she became pregnant (Matthew 1 18-22). Jesus' position is given different interpretations by scholars and readers of the Bible. It is a sad truth that some families have failed due to adultery.

A worrisome trend which is growing up among Nigerian women especially the elite is giving birth to child outside their marriage. They get impregnated by their lovers and pass it on to their husbands and the unfortunate men are deceived into fathering children that are not theirs. According to Olatunde (2023), speaking on how DNA leads to divorce cites an example of an unknown couple whose ex-wife's infidelity was judged by a High Court Judge in Delta State. The result which came out confirms that the husband was not the biological father of the child in the said case.

Adultery represents a sin against God, justice, man, and nature. In short, the adulterer has fooled himself or herself. The victim of this injustice is the innocent member of the couple, whose marital rights have been violated by the other party. Couples must make efforts to be faithful to one another. This will then help them to consolidate their relationship.

3.4. Lack of Honesty amongst Couples

This 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. It is generally believed in Africa that secrets cannot be kept for life.

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 probably they 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.

3.5. 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 purposes of marriage. This shows that many people considered children as the consummation of the matrimonial union. It is only when children are born to marriage that they believe God has blessed it for the happy and perpetual survival of the spouse. In this regard, Nwankwo and Peters (2019) captured a scenario “in a typical Igbo society of Umuahia where a woman insisted that her daughter-in-law should give her a grand-child, or she leaves the son’s house, “for what’s use is a wife, if she has no children” (p.82). This is almost the case in many African societies. 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 divorce her and get another woman. Nmah (2003) noted 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).

Infertility may cause anxiety, distress and frustration in marriage and subsequently lead to divorce. According to Benokraitis (2007) having children is the most common reason why people get married. Arugu (2014) said that, “in African culture, any marriage that is not blessed with children is not considered to have achieved its aim” (p.375). Childlessness is not acceptable in many societies that place a high value on children. It is assumed that when a couple cannot bear children, there will be nobody to remember them. Their genealogical line will disappear. Another serious factor according to Nwankwo (2017) that results in the subjugation of women is the male-child preference. This is a cultural menace. Cases abound where mothers are neglected or thrown out of their matrimonial homes for failure to give birth to male children

4. Effects of Divorce on the Child Formation

The negative 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.

4.1. Lack of Parental Control on Children

God instructs parents to train up a child in the way he should go so that when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6). While for Okoye (2001) said that parents “are expected to train their children morally and educationally and vocationally so that they grow to be useful and good citizens of their community and not to turn deviant, liability and a menace to the community” (p.57). Child training is of utmost importance to God and the society Therefore parents should/train their child to achieve the purpose of God for marriage. Poor

parental upbringing probably may have contributed to the high rate of moral decadence experienced among the children nowadays. Separated partners may find it difficult to train their children and this affects the child's development.

4.2. Lack of Proper Child Upbringing

Children in divorced families may not receive necessary and adequate training and education as required. He noted that children need both parents because each plays a complementary role in the children's life. The children of divorced parents often attempt to adjust and adapt to the new situation in which they find themselves; 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 suffer. In most cases, the children of divorced families do not acquire adequate and sound life training. When they grow up, some of them may become societal detriments. The children of divorced parents may be morally defective, failing to fear neither God nor man. Nkuke *et al.* (2018) again observe that the immediate consequence of divorce is often a moral and social aberration. Many divorced offspring are lawless and irresponsible.

4.3. Poor Academic Performance of the Child

Education and training of a child starts at home. Fagan and Churchill (2012) opine 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 in the future. It is their responsibility to send their children to school and provide all the necessary things they need in school. But where married partners separate; they will find it difficult to train their children. Marital separation contributes to the poor 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 in difficult times. Furthermore, the breakdown of routine and turbulent home life can drain children of their motivation to engage with their learning. Unfortunately, the effects of divorce on children's education are not temporary and tend to persist into adulthood. According to Johnson (2017), a comprehensive meta-analysis of 92 studies found that children of divorce are less 50% less likely, on average, to complete high school and less likely to complete tertiary education.

4.4. Psychological Imbalance

The child also suffers from the injury done by divorce because it is regarded as a stigma. A child in a divorced home may find his way into the street. Divorce is one of the reasons why children see father or mother as a bad person. For instance some children who are living with their father alone see their mother as a bad person while those who are living with their mother also have the same impression about their father. This reflects that the negative effects of marital separation on the development of the child are very detrimental to the holistic well-being of the society.

4.5. 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. Their relationships to other people may be affected too. Since it is a joint responsibility of parents to train and discipline their children, they should be mindful enough to care for and love their children without limit. A relationship between a parent and child is 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. But when the marriage bond is dissolved, this service will be lacking. Children who do not receive adequate affection from their parents may experience feelings of insecurity, low self-esteem and difficulty forming healthy relationship.

5. Way Forward

Having discussed negative effects of divorce on formation of the child and the position of the Church on divorce, it becomes imperative to look for measures to forestall the menace. The society today has been witnessing bizarre of deviant behaviors. These behaviors are mostly issues arising from improper formation of children of

which divorce contributes significantly. The researcher holds that some of the practices here could help to curb increasing rate of divorce.

5.1. Courtship

Courtship is a vital aspect of human relationships, and it plays a crucial role in the development of romantic partnerships. 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, this helps one to accept each other's health status without affecting the marriage. They also come to understand each other's status so that by the 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.

5.2. Pre-Marital Courses

This is a sort of marriage school organized for would-be marriage partners who are preparing for their church wedding. The would-be 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. Some churches In the Anglican Church in Onitsha, Anambra State and Roman Catholic Church, the course lasts for 3 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.

5.3. Effective Marriage Counseling

Anuka (1999) sees marriage counseling as a practice which is intended towards helping the couples to discover the differences in their union, and to learn how those missing inter personal skill they would be enriched in order to help improve the emotional situation in their marriage. This type of counseling may be carried out when the couples have not separated and when they have separated. Doing the counseling before the marital separation is easier than after the separation. Anuka maintains that marriage counseling is a sensitive exercise that involves the third person intruding into the relationship of married partners with intention of resolving conflict that may lead to divorce.

5.4. Forgiveness and Love

Forgiveness is another important method and quality that promotes Christian marriage. Marriage is ordained by God, sacred and indissoluble. Therefore, Christian couples should be careful in the relationship with one another, living must be based on forgiveness 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 faithful to forgive us if we confess our sins (1John 1:9) so couples are to forgive as Christians and Love covers all sins (Proverbs 10: 12). According to Anaana *et al.* (2019), forgiveness is needed in all Christian families. When the wife hurts the husband, she has to apologies to him and vise visa. It is also important that, couple should jointly endeavor to build a good and solid family life, husband and wife must exist as one and therefore, they must make this effort together. No partner should see himself or herself as a perfect partner in marriage. Every partner has weaknesses and idiosyncrasies. A true and mature Christian couple should learn how to forgive each other whole heartedly. Anaana *et al.* (2019) elucidate that, unless couples must learn how to forgive in their married life, if not 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.

5.5. Dialogue Approach

Divorce is unhealthy for family, children, husbands, wives, the Church, and indeed, every society. The Church and our traditional society has been at the frontline of bringing solution in order to reduce the increasing rate of divorce in the country today. According to Anaana *et al.* (2019), 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. This will surely reduce the rate of divorce in our societies. Acknowledging the importance of dialogue in the society, Pope John Paul II called for the Synod of Bishops for Africa in 1994. He tasked all Bishops to make a meaningful dialogue between Churches and Traditional societies in Africa for the rapid growth and expansion of the gospel across Africa. In place of dialogue in resolving conflict cannot be under estimated. Applying dialogue in marital issues can reduce divorce rate.

5.6. Family Life Education

To maintain and sustain marital stability and family life, education as a curricular intervention should be widely accepted in order to pass information and guidance to the couples for the development of right attitudes and values. Family life education instills in an individual orientation and acceptable sexual behaviors that emanates from the development of responsible and appropriate values and attitudes. Majority perceive youth's exposure to family life education as having unpleasant consequences and prevailing risky behavior. Since the traditional mode of checking couple's moral rectitude seems to have broken down in the name of modernization and civilization, parents should educate their children on accepted family values in their community. This is aimed at reducing risky behavior as strategy for the high rate of divorce among couples.

6. Conclusion

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 parents also suffer from the injury done by divorce. Divorce is regarded as a stigma. It may be difficult for both husband and wife to cope from the emotional and psychological effects of divorce. Parents may be crushed by a sense of shame, fear, and hatred. Therefore, it becomes difficult for them to live a secured and meaningful life. Sometimes, divorced parents may go to the extreme and seek an unfulfilling life through drunkenness and sexual immorality. Women suffer especially when divorce becomes inevitable. It is difficult for them to get financial support. Traditionally in African society, marriage was considered a lifelong contract. Indissoluble, as it was looked upon as a permanent, social, and spiritual bond between a man and his wife, as well as their respective families. Marriage was almost universally stable, and divorce was rare. As a result, divorce did not play a significant role in African society. In the early African societies, the community usually settled quarrels and disputes, which precluded divorce in most cases. A husband's family members were required to hear about his decision for divorce and judge the case on its merit, weighing all the consequences of the outcome. As a result, it was not easy for a man to divorce his wife during the early period. If divorce was allowed in traditional African society, it generally was on the grounds of adultery, which is considered a sin against God, nature, and society. Ultimately, no matter the outcome, marriage is not one man's business in traditional Africa society.

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