Marital Separation and The Effects on Child's Development: A Socio- Religious Approach

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ABSTRACT

The fact that the contemporary society is witnessing much disturbing increase in marital instability characterized with violence to physical and mental separation is no longer in doubt. Marriage as a divine institution was founded by God on the purpose and principle of fellowship, companionship, procreation and education and training of children for societal progress and well being. Marriage has legal, traditional, cultural and religious affinity and as such is socially viewed as being sacred. However, some intellectuals and Christian theologians in their debate have viewed certain factors as being responsible for this increase in marital instability, among which are; cultural, social, physiological, economic, religious, moral and biological. This paper examined both the legal and theological perspectives of marriage union between a man and a woman and the challenges of marital separation (physically or mentally) on child's development and the society at large. The study recommends in a strong terms a reinvigoration of efforts to enforcement of child's right of victims of marital separation to education and care and as well, promoted responsible training of the younger ones on family and marriage values both in the church and in Nigerian schools towards sustainable marital values and stability.

Keywords: *Marital separation, child's development and religious reflection.*

INTRODUCTION

Marriage generally is viewed as a sacred institution that is very basic and central to human existence and sustainability in every society, culture and creed. Marriage and family are inseparably connected since marriage from the Christian perspective is a sacred and legal union of a man and a woman based on mutual understanding and love. It is rooted on divine (God) principles and has its prime purposes among which are companionship, fellowship, and procreation for the sustainability of human race as well as the training and education of children. According to Obiefuna and Obi [1]:

One of the dreams of every newly married couple is that their marriage will be the best. This is because of the pleasures of marriage namely: the pleasure of having a companion, the pleasure associated with conjugal love and the pleasure of getting children and watching them grow. These pleasures should however not make one to forget that marriage could be a failure or a success depending on how it is managed. (p. 240).

One of the effects of marital mismanagement is separation. This can lead to: (1) Physical separation, that is, when the husband and wife resides separately without resolving their marital tie. (2) Mental separation, that is, when the couple decides to live together in the same household but without having biological and psychological relations. This state of marital conditions could be traced or linked up to many causative factors among which are cultural, economical, religious, psychological and social. The above factors can create negative stress which weakens the hub and fiber of marital harmony with its attendant consequences on the married couple, the society at large and the children's development. Child's development primarily begins at home with both parents contributing to the proper upbringing of the child and this is the correct ordained process of building a prosperous and a morally sound society with generational blessings. Unfortunately, this bedrock to child's development has been truncated in many families due to marital separation thereby abandoning their divine and natural parental functions. The purpose of this paper is to elucidate on what marital separation is based on the views of scholars, the causatives and its effects on family child's upbringing and the society at large. The researcher implored primary and secondary data collection and recommendations were offered on ways to forestall this ravaging syndrome.

THE CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE TERMS
MARITAL SEPARATION

Marital separation according to LaMance [2] is "a type of relationship in which a couple lives apart from one another but are still considered to be legally married"(p.1). This state of marital discord can be entered into for various reasons. It doesn't necessarily lead to a final divorce, although sometimes this can be the case. To this effect, marital separation is an informal arrangement between the couple (husband and wife) to live apart and or without biological and psychological relations. The effects of this marital condition on child's development had spurred researchers and scholars of various fields of studies into investigations to find out the real causes, effects and the possible solution. According to Manning & Gupta cited by Omoniyi-Oyafunke, Falola & Salau [3] the rise in marital separation and or divorce over the years is one of the fundamental changes in Nigerian society as substantial number of women and children now spend some fraction of

their life in single female-headed households, leading many to be concerned about their socio-economic circumstances. This is an aberration to God's institution of marriage. Marriage to Gove (2006) is the state of being united with a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife in a mutual relation. It is an institution whereby men and women are mutually joined in a special kind of social and legal dependence for the purpose of founding and maintaining a family; an act of marrying or rite by which the married status is affected. Although, marriage has social, cultural and legal recognitions, but it must be understood and expressed from God's point of view by both partners if abuse is to be avoided. This is why Sarker cited by Omoniyi-Oyafunke etal [3], maintained that "marriage is the oldest social institution ordained by God as the social contract between two individuals to become husband and wife"(p.68). In contributing to this, Azuakor [4] opined that it " is an institution where men and women are bound or joined in a special kind of social, legal and religious dependency for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a family" (p.82). Marriage as ordained by God therefore gives legitimacy to sexual relationship and reproduction of legitimate children as well as the responsibility of educating and training of children. On this premise, Borgatta & Edgor[5] state that , "it involves legal rights, responsibilities, and duties that are enforced by both secular and sacred laws"(p.69). These responsibilities are recognized culturally and religiously and makes demand to maturity of men and women as a prerequisite for marital contract to enable the partners manage and handle issues involved.

Haralambos and Holborn [6] defined "marital separation as the physical separation of the spouses; they no longer share the same dwelling"(p.505). However, Omoniyi-Oyafunke,Falola and Salau[3] argued that:

> Separation in marriage may be in two categories: physical separation i.e. when the husband and the wife reside separately without resolving their marital tie: Mental separation i.e. when the couple decides to live together in the same household but without having biological and psychological relations (p.68).

Over the years, marital separation as a type of marriage instability is rooted on many factors. According to Obiefuna and Obi [1] these are traceable to cultural, social, economic, religious and psychological factors and these have tremendous negative effects on couple, the children and the society at large. To Dunkins [7] some of these factors are mostly inherited behaviors, patterns and thinking from the ancient African society as well as imported ideas from other sources that are beyond and alien to African concept of marriage.

CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

Child's development socially means improving the status of a child by increasing his access to better life or to improve the welfare of the child. Parents have the responsibility not only to ensure for a child's social development but as well spiritual, educational, economical, psychological and moral developments. Ekpe and Mamah [8] opined that "children were perceived as gifts from the creator. The maltreatment of a child might result in the return of the child's spirit to the creator"(p.54). Worthy of note is the adopted measures of Nigerian government to ensure welfare of children as noted by Onwka [9] thus; the federal government has set aside special days for addressing issues related to child's abuse and neglect. These include the following : national children's day, 27th May each year, Day of the African child, 18th June each year, International children's day of Broadcasting, 2nd Sunday of December, and Global Match against child abuse, an Annual event. Anambra State has endorsed 19th November as celebration of the world day for promotion of child's rights annually. In spite of these efforts by the government, religious institutions and cultural organizations to curb marital crisis so as to foster marital stability and child's development, marital separation has remained a deep concern with its consequent social, moral and psychological effects.

CAUSES OF MARITAL SEPARATION

1. Moral and biological factors

These include sterility, adultery, desertion and excessive cruelty or abuse. Danso cited by Omoniyi-Oyafunke, Falola and Salau [3] do observed that there is high rate of divorce or marital separation among the young highly educated women with few children than among the old, illiterate women with many children. For this reason, the greatest pressure on divorcees to seek new marital partners is economic. According to Boakye and Ardayfio cited by Omoniyi- Oyafunke [3], "the fragility of the marital bond is a notable feature of the contemporary world and thus, spares no continent and is present at every level of society" (p.70). The assertions as stated make the society sick and as well jeopardize the assignment of family education, training and trust. Moral and biological factors in marriage have often heated up the very foundation and sustaining virtues of family leading to separation and or divorce. Unfortunately, one oftentimes, sees separation or divorce as a leeway out of marital crises without consideration of other appendages like children's upbringing and the society at large.

2. Dissimilarities between the spouses on the ground of socio-economic and religious factors

These factors cannot be disassociated from the negligence of proper courtship or lack of it amongst would be couples as well as marriage between people of different cultural and religious persuasions. According to Danso, Boakye and Ardayfio (cited by Omoniyi-oyafunke etal [3] the high rate of marital separation or divorce cannot be farfetched from the inadequate length of courtship before marriage consummation, dissimilarities between spouses in social class, ethnicity, religion and age. Courtship has been assented to as a time for building foundations for a happy marriage as similarities and dissimilarities had been identified, thereby forging ahead or breaking up. On the other hand, marriage between

persons of different religious background tends to heat up marital mutuality if not well handled and the same with upheavals associated with ethnicity as well as cultural and social differences.

3. Socio-economic factors

Economic factors manifest itself in marriage in many ways such as; unemployment, poverty, craving to make money and extravagance of the wife or husband. Unemployment factually can cause marital separation as identified by Agha [10] thus; "a period of unemployment may cause marital separation, nagging, with the wife losing confidence in her husband" (p.109). When a woman is the bread winner, she has the power to do anything which at times may not go down well with the husband. The consequences of this on children are as follows; poor standard of living, poor health condition due to malnutrition and lack of proper medical care and schooling or dropout. The above experiences can expose children to juvenile delinquencies with its social effects. Njoku [11] opined that this can lead to frustration to the point that all aggressions felt by the man is transferred to the woman and sometimes to other members of the family"(p.66). Economic factor at times forces the husband or wife live away from each other in search of greener pasture thereby opening up their marriage to marital marauders and this has led to spousal unfaithfulness and poor parental upbringing of children. On the other hand, spousal extravagance has invited poverty on many homes in the society. This was proper expanded by Agha cited by Ibezim [12] as thus; "some men spend their money on their friends, drinks, unprofitable things and in title taking to the extent that they have little or nothing for their family" (p.71). Akin to this, some women can also be extravagant in spending by expending their financial resources on latest fashion via latest clothes, hand bags, necklace, shoes and hair make ups.

4. Lack of submission

One of the virtues extolled by Christianity and traditional Igbo society in marriage is submission of wife to the husband. The lack of this moral rectitude has often resulted to marital instability. Most women found it difficult in the modern time to understand the vital place of submission in the fear of God in order to have a successful marriage. Some have attributed this to women ego, whereas others see it as a perception or equality mentality.

5. Physical attractions

According to Olukoya [13] physical attraction cannot sustain marriage. Marriage based on beauty and physical appearance alone cannot give one a lasting joy or satisfaction, because injuries can occur as a result of domestic or ghastly accident which may deface the beauty. Other biological or natural reactions like pregnancy, age may as well affect one's physical beauty. Onwuka [14] opined "even if a man has all the money on the earth, if he does not know what it means to look neat or attractive, an average woman will avoid him"(p.47). The same thing is applicable to a woman. It therefore, posits that physical attractions do not only hinge on beauty but on other components like neatness and the lack of it can cause mental or physical separation in marriage.

EFFECTS OF MARITAL SEPARATION ON CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

No doubt, spousal separation has gross effects on child's development. Researchers had contended that marital separation affects both parents and children. However, the present researcher's concern was on the effects on child's development and this would be examined on the following subtopics:

1. Educational Effect

One of the primary purposes of marriage is procreation and with this, comes the responsibility of educating the children for personal and societal productivity. Ibezim [15] opined that "education generally means the training of the mind and character for effective performance" (p.1). To Mkpa cited by Ibezim [15] education has five different perspectives viz; as a process or activity, a discipline, an enterprise, a product and a system. Education has offered men and women profound access to productivity in many fields of endeavor and moral and character formation. Spousal separation has drastically truncated the educational dreams of many children after separation. Lack of education has paved way for social deviance. Kanu [16] maintained that, the incidence of armed robbery cases and some other social vices in society can be majorly attributed to the activities of school dropouts who could not go to school due to poverty emanating from wrong investments, marital separation and divorce.

2. Socio-economic effects

Deprivation of a child care, love and support by parents due to marital separation retards and as well affects his or her development in no small measure. Manning & Gupta cited by Omoniyi-oyafunke, Falola and Salau [3] observed that "a substantial number of women and children now spend some fraction of their life in single female-headed households , leading many to be concerned about their socio-economic circumstances"(p.69). Children need parental care, support, love and welfare as they grow up knowing their socio-economic vulnerability at that age. Marital separation has indeed deprived children these inalienable rights of economic welfare and made many vulnerable to hardship, rape, abuse, rejection and sufferings with other social consequences by exposing them to anti-social behaviors as their hawk on streets to survive or taken as maids. Obi cited by Ibezim [12] opined "any person below the age of 15 is still a child and should not engage in any form of income generating venture or activity"(p.88). On the contrary, most victims of marital

separation are into hawking and other social money making ventures as a means of helping their residential parent, especially their mother in generating income for the family.

3. Effects on training of children

Jakes (*1996*) [17] said; "children are living epistles that should stand as evidence to the future that the past has made some level of contribution"(p.31). This reality is better appreciated when children were trained morally, socially and in character. God's injunction to parents is to train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6). Lack of child's training affects a child's future productivity and well being. Oyedepo cited by Obiefuna and Obi [1] averred:

> Teaching is theory, whereas training is the application of theory or knowledge through exercise in the day-to-day life. For him, to train a child is to make the child to know the correct precepts and ensures that the precepts are followed. (p.247).

Parents as the first port of contact and call takes the responsibility of inculcating in their children moral virtues socially, educationally, vocationally and as well   domestically. The lacks of these qualities become the bane of the child in tomorrow's interactions, socialization and assumption of secular or sacred duties. Proper child's development demands formal and informal trainings and parents alter this process as a result of marital separation and after effects are harvested by the society in general.

4. Moral effects

According to Okwueze [18]; "the chief protagonists in the question of enhancing morality in the family and society are the parents"(p.69). This inference posits that parents are naturally supposed to be moral catalysts and custodians in society. This missing link and experience by some children due to marital separation live children vulnerable to anti-moral exposures. The hippie moral decadence across all strata of society today is mostly to be blamed on the failures of some marriages either by spousal separation or by divorce, on government, churches and schools. The above failures in achieving maximum moral building of the citizenry at their formative stage has led to the collapse of most of our highly cherished traditional moral values such as honesty, truthfulness, accountability, chastity, hard-work, respect for elders and other constituted authorities among others. Consequently, children from such broken homes or separated parents overtly or covertly suffer some level of moral deficiency due to early exposure to deviant activities.

5. Health effects

No doubt, marital separation has negative effects on the health condition of a child physically and mentally as a result of poor or low standard of living and this leads to poor medical care and malnutrition. Arber cited by Ibezim [12] averred that "children of lone parents did overall suffer more ill-health" (p.485). To Amato and Keith [19], Children who experienced parental separation or divorce are more likely to have health problems such as a significant increase in injury rates, an increased risk of asthma, and increased risk of asthma related emergencies. Mentally, Well, Rankin, Demo and Acock cited by Popenoe [20] maintained that marital separation is "associated with a higher incidence of several mental health problems in children: Depression, withdrawal from friends and family, aggressive, repulsive or hyperactive behavior, disruptively or withdrawing from participation in the classroom"(p.62)

POSITIVE EFFECTS
1.   It can serve as a preventive measure amidst threats to life

Although, the negative effects of marital separation cannot be compared to the positive effects as the former outweighs the latter. However, marital separation can still serve as a preventive measure amidst threats of harm or death. To this, the canon law cited by Gangwari, [21] permits separation on the ground of issues which involve grave danger of physical attack on the other spouse and or children and threats of harm or death. It therefore portends that, marital separation can serve as a measure of preventing harm and curtailing exposure of children to marital stressors and its negative effects in their future marriages. Such on hand experience can as well lead a positive resolution by the stressed children to work on themselves so as to avoid similar experience in their own marriage. This paradigm shift of resolution has made tangible differences in many marriages of people who vowed to avoid same experience of their parents.

2.   It leads to self-reliance and industriousness

Marital separation can as well produce in children and the separated spouse industriousness as a result of economic enterprises implored to survival post marital separation. Through such resilience and hard work some have worked themselves up to the ladder of self-reliance. Forehand (cited by Ibeizm,2014)[12] maintained that it can make children have more autonomy in their own lives, take more responsibilities in the family and being self-reliant which will help them develop to better adults. Most children have actually turned their adversity as a result of parental separation into opportunities, improvement, invention and industriousness through skill acquisition, apprenticeship and other profitable ventures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having explored the causes and effects of marital separation on child's development, it is crucial to make possible recommendations to enable parents; academia and families find solution or preventive tips to this monumental aberration on families in our contemporary society. The following recommendations are:

    a. That would be couples be encouraged to submit for proper courtship and training by the experienced older couples and pastors to enable them understand themselves and their differences before marriage consummation

    b. That government should strengthen the enforcement of rights of children in such conditions especially the right to education, care and welfare by the parties involved

    c. That churches should take seriously teachings on marriage and family as a means of building stable home.

    d. That there is need to overhaul our educational curriculum via integration of marriage and family life as a general course in our schools to foster and inject religious marriage values into the younger ones.

CONCLUSION

In forestalling marital separation and its effects on child's development, drastic effort must be made in promoting amongst couples God's divine purposes for marriage. Among these are companionship, fellowship, procreation, training and education of children. Education and continuous enlightenment of couples and the general public on these purposes and the consequences of marital instability as well as the gains of marital stability on both the couple and child's development are very crucial. Consequently, extant laws of the land which were made to savage marriages from certain obnoxious practices and traditions which breed family instability should be promoted and enlivened by government and the traditional and religious institutions to serve as a measure against marital failures. Finally, parents must take up seriously their God given responsibility of training and raising children with the understanding of the biblical principles of marriage/ family and its sacredness as a measure in building would be couples and as well shun in all ramification marriage between the minors.

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