

Causes and Management of Marital Problems

Wamboldt, M.Z.

Department of Performing Arts, British University in Egypt

ABSTRACT

Marriage as an institution is an ancient one. The family is a fundamental social institution occurring in all societies, although its particular forms differ substantially from place to place. There are four primary functions of the family which include the following: sexual relationships, economic cooperation among members, reproduction and, the educational function - socialization of children. The emergence of crises in marital homes is occasioned by a lot of factors including incompatibility in social and sexual life, lack of marital confidence, third-party syndrome, economic disquiets, to mention a few. Consequences of marital crises were identified to include poor mental, emotional and physical health of couples and their children, physical abuse and threat to life of partners, escalation of social vices and crimes such as drug abuse, kidnapping, prostitution, and broken homes. To prevent or manage crisis therefore will depend largely on the mutual understanding of couples involved. Recommended management strategies include pre-marriage orientation, seminars, workshops and counseling. Based on this conclusion, it is recommended that adequate provision be made for both preventive, remedial and rehabilitative counseling, interventions through different bodies such as government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for the married and prospective couples to enhance marital stability in our societies. This article evaluates some of the causes of marital problems and the management for a better society.

Keywords: Family, Marriage, Society, Institution, Marital crisis.

INTRODUCTION

The family is a fundamental social institution occurring in all societies, although its particular forms differ substantially from place to place. There are four primary functions of the family which include the following: sexual relationships, economic cooperation among members, reproduction and, the educational function - socialization of children. Again, the family is defined as the basic unit of the society. In other words, the family provides the bricks for the building of the society. The society therefore is an aggregate of the families.

At any given time in human history, a family comes into existence each time a marriage is successfully contracted. This claim is corroborated from the biblical account of God's creation of Adam and Eve whom He accommodated in the 'Garden of Eden' and charged with the responsibility of procreating to fill the earth. Again, St. Paul in the Holy Bible says that for the reason of marriage 'a

man will leave his parents and cling unto his wife and they both will become one - husband and wife.

Marriage is a covenant relationship between male and female spouses. The covenant nature of marriage provides a strong foundation and secure framework for spouses' commitment to each other. Covenant defines the marital responsibilities - of husband and wife toward nurturing and protecting their marriage. The couple is expected by their covenant to work hard to reach the level of relationship which protects the marriage from both internal and external negative forces [1].

With the arrival of children, the family keeps expanding. This is true within the African context where marriage is seen basically as a process of procreation. A good marriage guarantees a peaceful and joyful atmosphere in the home, which is most suitable for bringing up healthy and happy children. Research has shown that

children who grow up in such environments are more likely to excel in school and in all other aspects of life including their own marital life [2].

Experiences over the years have shown that at times a once blissful marital union turns sour. But before the table turned, the couples believed they were soul-mates as indicated in the way they worked together, walking hand-in-hand, exchanging pleasantries. Each partner then was a true friend, a confidant with good sense of humour ever willing to offer a helping hand to the other [3] [4]. But as the table turns, couple soon realizes they no longer share the closeness feeling rather as strange bed fellows, speaking to each other only when it becomes absolutely necessary and inevitable. At this stage, some couples who are sensitive could start to wonder how they managed to get where they presently are - conflict has set in and of course if not properly handled at this stage may lead to crisis and eventual collapse of the marriage structure.

Every marriage is constantly under the influence of some external and internal pressures, a condition that it is somewhat inevitable that every marital union faces the dynamics of marital crisis. Crises are therefore a common feature in every union or association of two or more persons and marriage is not immune to this. If it is not so, why then do couples fight and argue? Why can't they just enjoy lasting peace? Didn't they get married to have a greater life together than in a single (unmarried) state? These are questions on issues that confirm that conflicts in marital unions might not be unusual and abnormal after all. What might be of serious concern would be why such minor misunderstandings that characterize a healthy union of people often snowballs into a conflict point.

People will always have differences of opinions and expectations, what we do with these dissimilar viewpoints are what will characterize our lives and marriages. Great marriages are those that have learned how to utilize these variant shades of opinions and views so that they as a couple can grow [5]. We need to

realize that conflicts are more than the simple difference of opinion or approach. Conflicts are the ways couples poorly carryout the expression of their varying view - points. Spouses can get quite mean and cruel at times even at the slightest provocation. On the other hand, we can see that those crises also serve as opportunities to draw them closer to God and closer to their spouses. In marriage, what starts out as a relationship of great joy and promise can become the most frustrating and painful endeavour in a person's life time. Eventually, all couples experience a significant crisis that can threaten their emotional safety and at times even the future of their marriages.

The family reckoned as the oldest human institution is today in trouble. The frightening spread in teenage drug abuse and immorality, the modern plague of divorce and faulty violence, the geometric increase in the number of single parent families and other serious problems make one to wonder if the family life will survive the 21st century and if it is still possible for a family to be a stable, nurturing environment for its members [6].

Causes of Marital Crises

Marital crises could originate from different sources some of which could be psychological and/ or psychosomatic in nature. [7] attesting to the above claim retorts that more and more marriages run into crisis and eventually pack up because one partner has a borderline personality disorder such as narcissist, antisocial, psychopathic personality disorders. These sort of people are abusers by nature where as some are even unaware or unconscious of their near helpless conditions.

Social Incompatibility of Marriage Partners

There is no doubt that some marriages have absolutely no foundation or basis for being contracted at the first instance. This is so because the pair is socially incompatible and may only manage to get along for a short while before signs of incompatibility would start to manifest. It would then be discovered that the couple

are strange bed fellows - socially, religiously and ideologically.

Crises are bound to ensue in a situation where a marriage partner sets high and unrealistic standards in the home. The fallibility of man is unquestionable and as such it is not possible that such idealistic standards are realized [8] [9]. This is capable of degenerating into crisis in the home. Many married people become disillusioned when they discover that their union is not all they had expected and that their spouse is not quite what they had envisioned him/her to be [10]. Additionally, some couples unrealistically expect to get more out of marriage than they put into it.

Sexual Incompatibility

Poor sexual-satisfaction on the part of a marital partner may spice up crisis in the union which not properly- and timely detected and managed could lead to extramarital sexual affairs - a situation that if on its own leads to disaffection and loss of trust.

Extreme Sexual Orientation

Extreme sexual orientation of one of a marriage partner is capable of endangering a marital union. Such orientations like homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, sodomy, oral sex, excessive sexual appetite especially when the other partner is at the other extreme of the scale can generate crisis in the homes [11] [12]. Most of the time, such extreme sexual behaviours or orientations are discovered rather too late or midway into the marriage that it becomes very difficult to pull out of the engagement. And when once a partner cannot get along crisis ensues.

Extended Family Affairs/Issues

Some once upon -a-time happy couples have had their marriages rocked for their inability to properly manage extended family issues. In most cases, women find it difficult to accommodate relations of the husband (especially mothers and sisters - in-law) and vice versa on the part of some husbands, a situation most marriage partners may find difficult to accommodate. Some men/women often quarrel with spouses whose interests are

only on the betterment of their own relations [13].

Management of Marital Crises

Couples who are going through a marriage crisis are often tempted to brood over the days when they still saw each other through the blissful eyes of love. At the earlier stages of all marriages, partners are always caught in a whirlwind of passionate emotions thus making them incapable of finding any fault in each other [14]. This is because this highly idealistic phase of marriage temporarily obscures the truth that a marriage is made up of two separate people with differing perspectives on life. But sooner or later, such partners will eventually come face to face with the realities of their differences and the experience can be very traumatic for some spouses; some are downright disgusted by suddenly realizing that their marriage is in fact far from the ideal perfect [15].

That a marriage which started out so wonderfully well could end up in such a woeful state is an experience that has kept many a disillusioned couple from denying the existence of marriage crisis starring them in the face. This situation often compels some marital partners to opt to reminisce a trouble-free past, wishing things could go back to what they were before. But notably, this kind of wishful thinking is damaging in the long run because one need to acknowledge all the aspects of the relationship, be it good or bad.

However, dealing with the negative tendencies has to be constructive. Affected couple should rather consider the root causes behind their present woes and address them accordingly [16] [17] [19]. It must however be appreciated that relationship problems are not same as say a problem with your car or laptop which requires a straight-forward solution. Marriage is a complex socio-psychological relationship and consequently, a marital crisis is anything but simple. Consequently taking the first step to deal with it is often the hardest. However, it must be done; otherwise, refusing to acknowledge and understand it is counterproductive.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious that conflicts in marriage are inevitable. However, marital conflicts can be managed when they occur or prevented in resulting to partial or total collapse of homes. This will depend largely on the couple's mutual understanding and handling. Marital success results from a lot of endurance, tolerance, patience and effective management of individual differences. Successful marriages are not those in

which there has never been conflict but those in which conflicts have served useful purposes. Hence in order to foster marital stability and satisfaction, couple should learn to be fair, objective and realistic when dealing with their partner's behaviors. They should learn to see their partner's short comings as natural by-product of every human interrelationship where nobody can be perfect at all times and in all things.

REFERENCES

1. Amato, P. R. and Previti, D. (2003). People's reasons for divorcing: Gender, social class, the life. *Journal of Marriage & the Family*, **23**: 86-99.
2. Amato, P. R. and Rogers, S. J. (1997). A longitudinal study of marital problems and subsequent divorce. *Journal of Marriage & the Family*, **59**: 612-624.
3. Booth, A., Amato, P. R. and Johnson, D. R. (1998). Marital instability over the life course: Methodology report for fifth wave. Lincoln, NE: Bureau of Sociological Research.
4. Bramlett, M. D. and Mosher, W. D. (2002). Cohabitation, marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the United States. Vital health statistics, Series 23, Number 2. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.
5. Cherlin, A. J. (2004). The deinstitutionalization of American marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, **66**: 848-861.
6. Dada, M. F. and Idowu, A. J. (2006). Factors Enhancing Marital Stability as perceived by Educated Spouses in Ilorin Metropolis. *The counselor*, **22**(I): 127-138.
7. De Graaf, P. M. and Kalmijn, M. (2006). Divorce motives in a period of rising divorce. *Journal of Family Issues*, **27**: 483-505.
8. Harknett, K. (2008). Mate availability and unmarried parent relationships. *Demography*, **45**: 555-571.
9. Heaton, T. B. (2002). Factors contributing to increasing marital stability in the United States. *Journal of Family Issues*, **23**: 392-409.
10. Heckert, D. A., Nowak, T. C. and Snyder, K. A. (1998). The impact of husbands' and wives' relative earnings on marital disruption. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, **60**: 690-703.
11. Idakwo, M. A. (2002). Conflict Resolution practices Among Couples in Benue State Unpublished Master's Thesis. Faculty of education, University of Abuja.
12. Kitson, G. C. (1992). Portrait of divorce: Adjustment to marital breakdown. New York: Guilford.
13. Kposowa, A. J. (1998). The impact of race on divorce in the United States. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, **29**: 529-548.
14. Melgosa, J. and Melgosa, A. D. (2005). New life style: To couples enjoying a stable lifelong relationship: Madrid: Editorial safe Liz.
15. Munroe, M. (2003). Understanding the woman's communication style: Promoting positive Muslim marital relations. *A Journal of Sound Islamic Thoughts*, **1**(1): 46-51.
16. Nadir, A. (2003). Marriage preparation education. *A journal of sound Islamic thoughts*, **1**(1): 11-20.
17. Ola. S. T. and Akande, B. (2011). Marriage and Family. *Journal of Marriage and Family Life in the Nigerian Society*, **1**: 113-116.

Wamboldt

18. Olson, D. H. and Olson, A. K. (2000). Prepare-Enrich Program: version. In: Berger R, Hannah M, editors. *Preventive approaches in couples therapy*. Lillington (NC): Edwards Brothers; 1999. p. 197-202.

www.iaajournals.org

19. Tolorunleke, C. A. (2008). Conflict resolution practices amongst couples in Ijumu L.G.A. of Kogi state. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Faculty of education, University of Abuja. Nigeria.