

# CAUSES OF MARITAL CONFLICTS IN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES IN DOMBOSHAVA AREA, MASHONALAND EAST PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE

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## ABSTRACT

*This study investigates causes of marital conflicts in mainline and modern day Christian churches found in Domboshava area. The study used a qualitative approach, using focus group discussions with church members and in-depth interviews with church leaders. The findings of the study were that marital conflicts were caused through natural problems as well as man-generated problems. If these problems arise, they weaken marriage bond. Therefore, the study recommended that couples must promptly react constructively to early warning signs of marital conflicts before they develop into bad signals of cohabitation.*

## KEYWORDS

*Marriage, Christian, marital conflicts, divorce*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe is a Christian dominated country since the coming of missionaries before colonialism. Other religious groups are Muslim, African Tradition Religion and Islam. Christianity in Zimbabwe comprises of Pentecostal churches, Zionism, Evangelical churches, apostolic churches and mainline churches. In addition, Christian churches in Zimbabwe are both locally originated and foreign originated. Despite the nature of the church, family ties are sacred, bring members close to God and above all, not tempered with. Women constituted a larger number than men in both national, (ZIMSTAT, 2012) and church population in Zimbabwe, (Walter, 1990).

Studies in Africa and Europe show that 45% of the family institution today is struggling to survive. Husbands and wives frequently undergo strained relationships. To compliment the statistics, the researcher observed that Domboshava area has high figures of divorced couples. The majority of them are coming from a Christian background. The major problem that has beleaguered kindness from the beginning is disagreements. In Domboshava community, conflict is common among family members that are believed to love each other. Notable are conflict between husbands and their wives, and between children and their parents. Professional counselors and the church have a special role, to resolve marital conflicts. Family couples even sue each other through church disciplinary authorities, in communal courts and in national court of law. (1 Cor. 6:1-8). The book of Galatians warn believers against "biting and devouring" one another (Gal. 5:15).

Literature available concerning marital conflicts in churches are mostly case studies of one particular church. The researcher feels that it is a weakness since nature and doctrine of churches differs. Therefore, causes of conflict and ways of resolving them are only applicable to churches of similar stature. This study was focusing on different types of Christian churches in the same locality. Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal Christian churches starting from line churches to modern day churches were informants which contributed to the findings of this study.

Much research about conflict attracts much attention at national, regional and international levels. This happens despite the fact the family is the early institutions where everything begins. Less attention is given to the family as everything starts from it. Why then is it that the family receives less attention if it is the nucleus of all relations, pleasant or unpleasant we face? This question prompted the researcher to put attention of forces which tear or bond family relations in religious cycles by focusing on Christian marriages.

Causes of marital conflicts become an important topic that affects every married couple, because in a relationship characterized by intimacy as marriage, some conflicts are expected. The intimacy marriage relationship is, provides the more likely for conflicting views and desires to surface. No two normal gifted persons want the same things all the time or see issues in accurately the same way. The fact that each of us is an exceptional person will lead to conflicts in relationships.

Marital disputes assume different ways. Rarely, they get worse into divorce. Most often, however, they are conflicts fought in delicate ways such as verbal abuse, stoic silence, open criticism, ironic comments, threats, humiliating comments and unresponsiveness. Such common strategies are wrong because they tend to weaken a marriage.

Despite these church platforms for resolving marital conflicts among other issues, divorce cases and domestic disputes were on the rise. What causes marital conflicts? Why are domestic disputes rising? How can Christian churches mitigate against the negative effects of marital problems? These questions prompted the research to investigate issues surrounding marital disputes in Christian churches.

### **1.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

This study was aimed at finding out what were the real conflicting issues surrounding marital conflicts by Christian churches.

### **1.2. OBJECTIVE**

To identify causes of marital conflicts among Christian church members

### **1.3. RESEARCH QUESTION**

What is the root causes of marital conflicts in Christian churches?

### **1.4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to have an in-depth understanding of causes of marital conflicts in Christian churches in Domboshava area.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The study used the descriptive survey design which incorporates the case study approach. By conducting interviews and focus group discussions, the study pursued the path of descriptive research.

### **2.1. STUDY AREA**

Domboshava is a developing peri-urban area surrounded by rural settlement. The majority of residents earn a living through horticulture, informal jobs and a few are formally employed. The

area is controlled and managed by Goromonzi Rural District Council. Catchment areas for Christian churches are Mverechena, Mungate, Showground and Makumbe areas.

## **2.2. POPULATION**

The population under study consists of about 4 200 Christian members and 1 860 church leaders. The population was drawn from the following Christian churches; ZAOGA, UFI, Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, Holy Apostolic Church, Mugodhi Apostolic Church, Bahaaai Faith, Roman Catholic Church, Seventh Day Adventist, Unity Apostolic church, Kutenda Apostolic Church, AFM, Salvation Army, Bethsaida Apostolic Church and Johanne Masowe Apostolic Church. In line with the teaching of Jesus on Mathew 19:4, all of the named churches are against same-sex marriages.

## **2.3. SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE**

The sample for this study was 111 Christian church members who comprised 104 church members participated in nine focus groups discussions and seven church leaders who participated in in-depth interviews. The researcher used expert sampling (a type of purposive sampling) was used to select informants for both focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.

## **3. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **3.1. CAUSES OF MARITAL CONFLICTS**

This study identified a number of marital conflicts which leads to weaken marriage tying bond and or divorce. The following are the identified root causes of marital conflicts in Christian churches:

#### **➤ CHARACTER DIFFERENCES**

All Christian church members indicated that explanations frequently given as causes of marital conflicts and divorce are alcoholism, domestic violence and unfaithfulness. One of the informants expressed this by saying “ when words such as we didn’t get along, or we no longer love each other and we are facing money problems, the major causes if you closely look into it are alcoholism, domestic violence and unfaithfulness”. A minority of the informants indicated that character differences do not count when the unison of couples in marriage was designed in heaven by God.

Popular view of Christian church leaders indicated ‘blame game’ is the major symptom of character differences. Alcoholism, domestic violence and infidelity in African societies are embedded within a context of family cohesion; these reasons would be considered frivolous as far as marriage is concerned. A few of church leaders indicated that divorce is more difficult to obtain and less acceptable, or where matrimony may signify the only justifiable means of forming and maintaining a relation or obtaining economic security, only reasons such as abuse and abandonment are accepted.

character differences presented in this study shows that acceptable reasons in society based on differences on couples by considering negligence by one or both couples based on alcoholism, extra marital affair and domestic violence, contribute to creation and existence of marital conflicts. Because of family or community support, marriage bond weakens and in most cases, divorce is imminent (ibid).

A study by De Graaf and Kalmijn, (2006) shows that personal grounds for divorce such as fighting, alcoholism, violence, tend to be mentioned more by couples with some of the demographic characteristics such as youthful marriages, parental divorce, multiple prior cohabitations, and poverty. As a result, cultural and demographic factors related to divorce push people into divorce via their own interpersonal means. It is interesting to note that domestic violence as one of the reasons for divorce is less frequently mentioned in Africa than in Western countries. This finding agrees with studies showing a decline in marital violence, Laroche, (2007).

#### ➤ EDUCATIONAL AND INTELLECTUAL DIFFERENCES

Popular view by church members indicated that unlike in the past, modern marriages are based on intellectual abilities. All church members indicated that couples who are attain same educational level starting from Ordinary Level value their marriages than those couples who do not have attained Ordinary Level. All church members indicated that intellectual abilities are a solution to some socio-economic problems, at the same time, sticking to intellectual deficiencies of one of the couples in marriage cause socio-economic problems. Few of the church members indicated that intellectual differences as a result of wide educational gap between couples were a serious problem among couples, particularly young couples. Some church members indicated that if intellectual differences favours the husbands, it's difficult for them to accept advice from other church mates, normally their wives compelled not to invite 'foreigners' in their marriage.

Almost all church leaders indicated that intellectual abilities form the backbone of every Christian marriage. When probed further on how intellectual differences were a threat to Christian marriages, popular view indicated that Christian churches encourage their members to rise above the circumstances through learning both formally and informally. Emphasis to empower couples with intellectual differences should be solely based on teaching couples to fight for each other rather than fight each other. The minority indicated that intellectual differences have no negative effects when couples respect their duties towards each other as taught by Paul to the Corinthians Church (1Co 7:3-5).

Comparing individuals who have some attained secondary education with those without indicate that those with secondary education have an improvement on intellectual performance hence less chances of divorce. In fact, investing in education is a good way to construct a base for a better marriage, not just a better job (ibid).

Orbuch et al. (2002) found that level of education is closely related to intellectual advancement. It a variable to consider when predicting divorce for African Christian couples in marriage; divorce threat decreased with greater education. Similarly, Bumpass et al. (1991) found that rates of break up were lower among highly learned women, even after controlling for age at marriage. Kurdek (1993) also found that low levels of schooling for either spouse forecast divorce within the first four years of marriage. In contrast, Kposowa (1998) found that superior levels of education among wives predicted a higher possibility of divorce. Rather than considering education in supreme terms, it is also important to scrutinize educational heterogamy within couples. Rates of divorce are lower if the husband is in a higher educational category than his wife than they are among couples of the same educational status (Bumpass et al., 1991; Heaton, 2002) and are highest if the wife is in a higher educational category than her husband.

The Christian message is obviously popular among churches to raise the banner of marriage life by encouraging Christian church members to empower themselves intellectually formally and informally. By so doing, this not exclusively attract educated, ambitious men and women, however, as the Christian church focus on individual improvement is equally relevant to poorly-educated men and women in impoverished areas. certainly, the passion of the Christian church is to provide an another route for breaking out of socio-economic poverty, with fascinating phrases

such as 'breaking through' and 'victorious' encouraging couples to rise above their individual and general hardships. Modest methods have been anticipated to account for the relationship between education and divorce. However, Amato and Rogers (1997) found that lower levels of intellectual performance were associated with an increase in reported problems due to jealousy and drinking/drug use, behaviors which are also predictive of divorce. It is also significant to note that intellectual ability tends to provide as a substitute for other socio-demographic variables, such as income, premarital birth, parental divorce, and cohabitation (Orbuch et al., 2002).

Maxwell (1998) observed that Christian churches in Africa are encouraging their members to succeed by giving them support, and the focus on achievement serves to increase ambition and determination. Gilford (1993) observe that Pentecostal movements are criticized for ignoring external social problems; women are paradoxically attracted to the movements' internal opportunities, such as job prospects within the structure of the Church and the liberty and hope that is encouraged within the safety of family harmony. This is correct for both Christian and non-Christian couples, whether learned or uneducated.

#### ➤ **SPIRITUAL DIFFERENCES**

All church members indicated that spiritual differences between different types of Christian churches attached to others life challenges, can weaken marriage bond between couples, which could lead to divorce. The spiritual differences were caused by some believing in modern day prophecy while some do not among, non-apostolic churches and apostolic churches. Some non-apostolic Christian churches were accused of aggravating marital conflicts through unproven prophecies which accuse certain individuals for casting evil spirits which were detrimental to others. On the other hand, apostolic church members indicated that non-apostolic church members really understood the presence of such evil deeds but pretend not to know about it. More so, the non-apostolic church members were accused of 'privately' consult apostolic churches for deliverance and or cleansing.

In-depth data gathered indicated a popular view by church leaders that family church background of the two couples matters most on spiritual differences if the couples fail to tolerate and accept one's background in their new marriage life. One of the church leaders said "we have liberal Christian churches and extremists, the two groups are like water and oil, they don't mix despite preaching the same Jesus Christ. If the couples are from such backgrounds, conflicts will be the order of the day". A few of the church leaders indicated if the union of the couples involved is the willing of God, the marriage will definitely defy all demonic odds and prosper abundantly.

Case study showed that how the scriptures of the word of God are interpreted taught and valued differs a lot between different Christian churches as well as in different church doctrines. Because of this, marital conflicts are rooted on one's background church and transition to new marriage life. On the contrary, the 'Christian' characteristic is now principally missing in Christian day marriages; this is frequently referred to as the desecralization of marriage. For a lot of Christian and non-Christians, marriage has become an individual choice rather than a covenant before God and this change has contributed to the approval of its temporal nature (Cherlin, 2004). In order to promote cohabitation of couples, Sande (2004) advised that spiritual differences is something modern day Christian churches must appreciate and not a cause of conflict as guided by Paul's epistle to the Roman Church on Romans 14:1-23 and also 1Corinthians 14:1-40.

#### ➤ **VOCATIONAL CHOICE**

Majority of church members indicated that vocation create marital conflicts if one of the couples work in an environment susceptible to have an extra marital affair and or in an environment which church doctrine forbids. Working environment mention by all church members were beer breweries, selling points and distributors, tobacco growing selling and exporting companies. A

minority of church members indicated that it was not the vocation issue but it depends on one respects his/her marriage. Some church members indicated that jobs which separate couples for a long time are an enemy to modern day marriages than in the past.

Church leaders indicated that most couples consider how to earn money through working irrespective of what vocational choice to pursue. Due to harsh economic conditions in Zimbabwe, church leaders indicated that couples do have limited options to choose what is good for cohabitation or how to feed and clothe the new family. Furthermore, working in saloons and beer outlets has high chances of creating marital conflicts and churches encourage Christians to stay away from such places. Some church leaders indicated that it's difficult for a husband to earn less than the wife or being unemployed at all. Most but not all of such marriages were marred by conflict and violence. Working apart was another vocation consideration which couples took for granted yet a major cause of family disputes.

Case study revealed that distant between couples due to vocational choices pose a great risk for marital conflicts. In addition to this, differences on earnings between couples, especially when a wife earns more than the husband as well as working environment associated with liquor and or working in fields dominated with singles pose a threat to modern day Christian marriages. Bumpass et al. (1991) and Tzeng (1992) found that rates of divorce are high among couples in which the husband, or both husband and wife are unemployed during the first year of marriage. Irregular work schedules are also associated with marital conflicts. Presser (2000) found that among couples with children, working nights to a certain extent than days, increased the risk of divorce. Voydanoff (1991) indicate that education and earnings helps marital success.

Kurdek (1993) postulated that earnings are inversely associated to risk of divorce. However, Orbuch et al. (2002) did not find that differences in vocation and earnings forecast divorce after controlling education. Although there is substantiation to propose that the ratio of wife's income to husband's income may have more insinuation for divorce risk than the couple's overall income, findings in this area have been varied (ibid). Heckert, Nowak and Snyder (1998) have shown that the risk of divorce is highest when spouses have equivalent incomes. On the other hand, Ono (1998) finds that similar incomes bring the lowest risk of divorce. However, Rogers (2004) found that wives' earnings were positively and linearly associated to the threat of divorce. The danger of divorce was highest when wives contributed about half of the total family income. Rogers concluded that economic reliance and responsibility predict marital stability but when economic incomes are equal spouses are then free to seek divorce.

#### ➤ AGE OF MARRIAGE

All church members indicated that young age below the age of 20 posed a great risk of marital conflicts and divorce. Most of the church members indicated that the majority of such marriages hardly exist for five years. Church members also indicate that 21-30 year age range seem to have few marital problems than below the age of 20. Some church members indicated that the longer couples stay in a marriage, the less chances of getting divorce and such couples have established ways of dealing with marital disputes.

Popular of church leaders indicated that they were against some apostolic churches which encourage child marriages even below the age of 12. Some church leaders indicated that even though such marriages to happen in Christian churches they lead or associate, it was illegal according to the detects of the country's constitution. When probed what could be the best age for marriages, popular view indicated 22-24 years for women and 25+ for men. All churches emphasized that entering in marriage at a very young age faces a lot of challenges which the involved couples are not capable of handling cognitively. Some church leaders also indicated too much age differences between couples whether very young or too old is an area which can affect

marriage. One of the informants said “as for me, I am well above the age of 50, if for any other reason I consider to remarry, I cannot marry a girl below 25 years because we have different demands. The appropriate age I should marry should be well above the age of 35”.

Case study data indicate that Christian churches consider a stable relationship if couples are above the age of 20. Early marriage below the age of 20 increases the likelihood of divorce, especially in the early years of marriage. Couples who marry in their teens have high divorce cases, (ibid). Couples who delay marriage until their 20s are most likely be more mature and able to make enhanced marriage decisions and handle the challenges of married life better than those who get married in their teens. A too wide age difference of more than 15 years is also a threat to couples in such marriages, (ibid).

DeMaris and Rao (1992) discovered that the risk of divorce declines as age at marriage increases, this defense effect lessens as age at marriage increases. Booth and Edwards (1985 link early marriage to divorce, argued that individuals marrying at a young age may be less well-suited with one another, less equipped for marriage, and lack economic resources. precise problem behaviors may also explain the link between age at marriage and divorce. Amato and Rogers (1997) found that marrying at a later age was related to a decline in problems due to unfaithfulness, resentment, and drinking/drug use; these behaviors that have been shown to predict divorce (see character differences above). Amusingly, subjective accounts of divorce among couples were also likely to differ according to age of marrying. Individuals who get married at older ages were more likely to mention incompatibility and a lack of a sense of family as causes of divorce, Amato and Previti (2003). Those who get married when young tended to blame marrying young, growing apart, and going out too much with friends. Drinking and become irresponsible has been mentioned by those who married when they were young, (Amato and Previti 2003), as well as those who married at an older age (Kitson 1992).

#### ➤ **ROLE CONFLICTS**

All church members indicated that role conflicts were common among new couples of this generation than in the past. Misconception on gender roles between couples was the major triggers of marital conflicts and divorce. A husband and wife each have a unique position and role in the Body of Christ as both individuals and as a couple. The way God created each of us helps to define our roles. We are each called to live out our lives in a way that glorifies God. All church members indicated that role conflicts normally occur when the husband is unemployed when the wife is. Couples may have very different role prospects such as who does the cooking, make a decision, yard cleaning and farm work among other issues. Make these decisions jointly, sincerely, and frankly, African husbands cannot do half the cooking and that the wife will stay home with the kids.

Church leaders indicated that role conflicts only surface as causes of marital conflicts among other things, rarely alone. Some church leaders find areas of incompatibility between God’s words with some feminists groups going against Christian principles as far as gender roles are concerned in Christian marriages. When probed on how role expectations cause conflicts, church leaders indicated that wives normally complain ill-treatment from their husbands is the husband because of socio-economic reasons and to some extend disability, made husband not capable of feeding, clothing and properly care for the family, yet the wives fill the gap. The failure of husbands goes unwell with a number of wives. Switching roles pose challenges.

Differences are to be anticipated in marriage. At times differences lead to misunderstanding and disagreements. Christians have to to be respectful of the ways God has created couples in marriage differently.



According to Thompson and Walker (1991), women tend to monitor their relationships more closely than men, and become aware of relationship problems sooner, and are more likely to instigate discussions of relationship problems with their partners. On the other hand, Gottman (1994) observed that, men are more likely than women to pull out from discussions of relationship problems. For these reasons, women are more expected than men to instigate divorce (Kitson 1992). Given that marital conflicts and divorce are gendered experiences, it is not amazing that researchers have documented differences between men's and women's role conflicts as causes of divorce, Cleek and Pearson (1985) and Kitson (1992).

Research indicates, contrary to popular belief, that the wife's working outside the home does *not* increase marital problems or harm the children's development. Christians should abide to the teachings of Colossians 3:12-15, Ephesians 4:32 and 1 Peter 3:8-9.

#### ➤ **FAMILY CRISES**

Case study data indicated that poor communication was the prime cause of marital conflicts. Informants indicated that poor communication affects new marriages and old marriage equally. In addition to this, the ways of raising children, their vocational choices and choice of marriage partner were some of the issues surrounding family crises. The majority of informants indicated these family crises normally are amplified by third party supporters, among them relatives and friends.

Data presented indicated that individual differences if not monitored and regulated, can cause detrimental effects which may weaken family ties and render high chances of divorce.

Amato and Rogers (1997) found that poor communication was the main complaint for couples seeking counseling. On average, such couples talk for only four minutes or less per day. According to Arnold (2002), marital happiness decline for the majority couples after children are born. Child bearing brings certain responsibilities which parents need to adjust to, safeguarding their marriage. Couples normally differ about how to raise and discipline children. Such different can be noted through jealousies and criticisms. Arnold (2002) went on to say children are magnificent blessings but they are not universally good for the all marriage. Amato and Previti (2003) believed that at times couples get carried with family crises to unpleasant levels. Alternatively, couples seek comfort and advice from different friends, develop new interests, and grow in diverging directions. When there are little common interests, it becomes a serious problem.

#### ➤ **IN-LAW DIFFICULTIES**

Case study data gathered indicated that, for a long time, the Shona people do not consider family as just the immediate, but also the extended. Because of this, Western concept of dividing the family into immediate and extended poses challenges to modern marriages than in the past. Informants indicated that whether a son is married or not, he is an important member in the family and community at large. The roles of the son were to look after the parents and other siblings as well. Once married, these roles would infer with the new marriage life causing problems. Some informants indicated that on the other hand in-laws 'demands' and expect too much from their sons and daughters, forgetting that they have also needs to fulfill in their lives. Demands of in-laws would be used to attack and diminish the son or daughter concerned. In-law demands come from both the husband and wife's side. Being married to a poor family was one of the serious challenges which in-laws find it difficult to accept. Almost all informants indicated that in most cases, in-laws from either side infer because of barrenness.



A few of the informants attribute in-law difficulties as a result of in-law who want to get rich through satanic means, there by casting an evil spell on their sons and daughters. Such evil acts affect marriage life of such a couple a lot. One of the informants says “*vanhu vanoshereketa vanobata-bata zvinotambudza mhuri dzevana vasina zvavanziva, chokwadi zvinorwadza kuzvarira mwana chikwambo*”. (Some people are so evil to the extent that they make sacrifice of their children to goblins in order to get rich).

Amato and Previti (2003) believed that troubles with relatives and in-laws are common particularly when one spouse remains reliant on his/her parents for riches or emotional support. Rogers (2004) postulated that barrenness cannot be blamed on either couple, but needs attention for rectification from both in-laws and affected couple.

#### ➤ **SEXUAL CHALLENGES**

All church members indicated that sexual problems were a challenge to a large number of Christian marriages and non-Christians as well, across all age groups. Sexual challenges emanate as a result of early ejaculation, less intimacy, stress, the ‘uncleanliness’ of sex in Christian life, infidelity and low erection. Some church members attributed sexual challenges to failure for couples to make sexual adjustments especially young couples. The majority of church members also indicated that a number of couples find it difficult to discuss and express openly to the partners how they feel about their sex life.

Church leaders concurred with church members that sexual challenges were one of the challenges affecting modern day marriages than before. When probed on why it is like that, church leaders indicated that medical causes such as stress and some food stuffs consumed today affect sex arousal. Also, infidelity, lack of romantic play time as well as sex without the consent of the other partner was major reasons behind sexual challenges. A few of the church leaders indicated that some churches consider sexual intimacy dirty, which is totally against marriage life and the will of God himself. Also, few church leaders indicated that for most couples, frequency, quality, and infidelity are all common sources of sexual challenges.

Arnold (2002) postulated that sexual problems take place in about 45% of the couples looking for marriage counseling. However, sex may not be the central challenge since everyone does not want to make love if bothered, depressed, or angry.

According to scholars such as Amato (1996), Booth and Johnson, (1988), Heaton (2002) and DeVaus Qu, and Weston (2003), sex imperative during marriage but the majority of Christian couples have sex at least once a week, even after a decade. These scholars indicated that when making love, women enjoyed intercourse the mainly, but men enjoyed a variety of sexual activity. Furthermore, women connect love with sex more than men do. Because of this, apparently being adulterous doesn't mean as much to men as to women. Arnold (2002) went on to say men have been adulterous more often than women but that does not mean they were unhappy with their wives. When women become adulterous, however, generally it is not for a short period because they are more likely to get emotionally and physically involved.

#### ➤ **PREMARITAL COHABITATION.**

Majority of church members indicated that premarital cohabitation in Christian churches were and is increasing. Even knowing that the members involved are Christians, they are not prohibited from being members of a church. Mostly, such so called ‘married couples’ won't marry or marry and divorce early because such ‘a couple’ would be not yet to settle permanently. Some church members indicated that marital cohabitation was and is increasing because of people fleeing from

their actual marriages because of varied reasons, settling temporarily in an extra-marital affair, without denouncing the Christian status.

All church leaders indicated that premarital cohabitation pose a great challenge to their work as they do not have a mandate not to unwelcome them, yet such relationships have challenges which are difficult to resolve formally. Church leaders also indicated that such relationships were found in almost every church despite the fact that churches encourage formal marriages. When probed on the nature of problems associated with marital cohabitation, church leaders indicated that couples who live together before marriage appear to have a much higher chance of divorce if they decide to marry at a later stage. The risk is frequently for those who live together with more than one partner, or settling temporarily in an extra-marital affair. Some only live together with one partner whom they later marry and such couples do not seem to be at a lot greater risk for divorce. Premarital cohabitation increases risks for divorce and goes against a lot of Christian values that it is a good way to get to know each other better and arrange for marriage.

Scholars such as Amato (1996), Booth and Johnson, (1988), Heaton (2002) and DeVaus Qu, and Weston (2003) shows that premarital cohabitation is linked with lower levels of marital happiness and a higher danger of divorce. Bumpass and Sweet (1989) and Orbuch et al. (2002) believed that premarital cohabitation is more common among couples with lower education levels, and couples reporting parental divorce/separation. Premarital cohabitation and divorce may apply mostly to Christians and non-Christians who have been in more than one cohabiting relationship. Teachman (2003) found that premarital cohabitation was not linked with an increased danger of divorce when it was restricted to the future spouse.

Major means that may possibly account for this connection between cohabitation and divorce is duration of relationship. DeMaris and Rao (1992) posited that premarital relationships have spent longer periods of time in the relationship, and thus report higher rates of termination. Teachman and Polonko (1990) found that premarital cohabitations displayed high rates of divorce comparative to non-premarital cohabitation when marital duration was measured from the wedding date. According to DeVaus Qu, and Weston (2003), premarital cohabitation is non-Christian and non-traditional, and thus attracts individuals with unusual views of marriage and a greater openness to divorce. Other impending means include problem behaviors within marriage, as Amato and Rogers (1997) found that couples who cohabitated experienced increased problems due to spousal irritability.

#### ➤ **THE USE OF MONEY**

Case study indicated that a number of couples were facing conflicts over the use of money. The majority of informants indicated that in most cases, husbands more than wives use money without the consent of the wife. In retaliation, wives would spend and or squander every coin they get. All informants indicated that most couples quarrel over water and electricity bills, school fees arrears, debts, spending, among other financial issues. Teachman (2003), Heaton (2002) and Weston (2003) revealed that all marriages have financial problems. If available money cannot meet family demands, conflict over priorities is eminent.

#### ➤ **PREMARITAL PREGNANCY AND CHILDBEARING**

All churches members indicated that premarital pregnancy and child bearing pose a great risk of marital challenges and risk of divorce was high. Some church members indicated that even though *kutizira/kutiziswa* (a Shona traditional method which normal used when a girl get pregnant before marriage) is one of traditional methods of marrying, the method was not suitable for Christian church members. Some church members indicated custodian of premarital childbearing was a sensitive issue which could lead to outright no marriage in most cases. If such

couples get married, the majority of church members indicated that doubts over who the father of such children lead to another problem of unfaithfulness. Again, a few of church members indicated that premarital pregnancy and childbearing was only acceptable if one married partner fails to bear a child in the rightful marriage and then try chances outside the marriage. Closely related to this, was an issue of looking for a child of opposite sex than what is in the formal marriage.

Church leaders indicated that cases of premarital pregnancy and childbearing were increasing drastically despite all the teachings which were done Christian youths and young adults. In agreement with data gathered from church members, premarital pregnancy and childbearing were closely linked to marital problems and divorce. When probed on why such rates were on the increase, popular view showed that modern education and technological advancements in human sciences were the major causes of the rise. A few of church leaders indicated that adults deceive the vulnerable youths and young adults in return of certain 'benefits' due to the harsh economic challenges which the majority of Zimbabweans face.

Pregnancy and childbearing before marriage extensively amplify the likelihood of marital disputes and divorce. With an increase in the pain associated with raising a child which is not yours, chances of surviving of such marriages were slim. Going out of marriage in search of a child is a culturally practice of the Shona people which is totally against Christian values and norms since the bible teaches that children are a gift from God.

Heaton (2002), Martin and Bumpass (1989) postulated that premarital childbearing is connected with an increased risk of divorce. However, the birth of a child after marriage is a defending cushion against divorce. DeMaris and Rao (1992) found that the likelihood of divorce was notably reduced upon the birth of the first child. Fascinatingly, this outcome may be aligned to the gender of the child, as Morgan, Lye and Condran (1988) found that parents of girls were more likely to divorce than parents of boys.

#### ➤ NO RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

All church members and church leaders indicated that affiliated to Christianity had few marital conflicts and risks of divorce than couples who have no religious affiliation. When probed why less marital conflicts were few in Christian affiliated members than those with no religious affiliation, informants indicated that Christianity teaches its members to abstain and shun evil, in so doing preserving their marriages.

There is an extensive diversity of religious understandings of marriage. Christianity teaches of a spiritual amalgamation between couples' love reflecting God's love. Various religions consider marriage as everlasting, although others do not take a hard line on divorce (ibid).

Morgan, Lye and Condran (1988) have projected that persons who report belonging to some religious assembly have a fairly lower chance of divorce than those who say they have no religious affiliation. Furthermore, if couples share the same religious affiliation; their chances of divorce are even lower. Bramlett and Mosher (2002), Bumpass et al. (1991) and Heaton (2002) believed that little religious participation and religious heterogamy are also related to a larger risk of marital conflicts and divorce. Closely linked to this problem are behaviors within the framework of marriage that may account for the relationship between religiosity and divorce. Amato and Rogers (1997) found that lesser church attendance was linked to an increased possibility of reporting problems emanating from jealousy, moodiness, infidelity, frustrating lifestyle, spending money, and drinking/drug use. Religious affiliation has always been one of the strongest reasons in influencing human behavior. The religious norms, values and behaviors that

are reinforced by religion, have implicit religious meaning hence limiting chances for marital conflicts and divorce (Guttmann, 1993).

#### ➤ **LACK OF TEACHING**

Case study data indicated that teachings about marriage to newly wedded couples normally focus on the importance of unison before God but there was less done on pre and post marriage counseling except if the concerned couples requested. Also, case study data indicated that lack of teaching on marriage life could be seen on couples failing to resolve minor issues.

The majority of the marriages lack proper knowledge to use during difficulties they experience in their marriage life. Accordingly, teaching would help them build stronger family ties (ibid). Ambert (2005) found out that some pastors and church leaders including some elders displayed their worry on people who involve them towards the final stages of their marital processes and procedures. Consequently, this hindered pre-marital counseling lessons. Nonetheless, the church leaders would end up sanctifies such marriages. Ambert (2005) went further to say this practice seems to be a permanent practice; there are no stern procedures to guard against it in church.

#### ➤ **SOCIAL MEDIA MISUSE**

All church leaders and church members indicated misuse of social media particularly Whatsapp and Facebook has become a major enemy of Christian marriages. Social media misuse is worsened by not only sending erotic messages but also pornographic pictures and videos. Also, informants indicated that young couples and to some extent, middle adulthood were the major victims. The danger comes from pornographic images and videos coming from a member of the opposite sex, be it a friend, church mate, workmate or a stray message.

Mbwirire and Masunungure (2016) found out that social media platforms if misused may be an enemy not only marital life but also Christianity in general. This applies both to Christian church members and non-Christians. Further, this social media platforms are addictive, which impedes with time for social interaction and play between couples (ibid).

#### ➤ **REMARRIAGES**

All informants indicated remarry, although not always but frequently result in marital conflicts, and chances for divorce are high. In addition, if one spouse is having kid(s) outside the marriage when the other does not have, such situation is worse compared to a situation where the involved couples had kids.

Ambert (2005) postulated that remarriages are a risk factor for divorce, in great part because of the complications of reconstituted families. All marriages had one or both partners who had been in the past divorced and, of these, well over a third included two previously-divorced persons.

Amato (1996) revealed divorce is considerably higher in second marriages than it is in first marriages). Bramlett and Mosher (2002) noted that this style is more tremendous among women younger than 25 at the time of remarriage, and women from separated/divorced families. Martin and Bumpass (1989) found that chances of divorce was 25% higher in second marriages than first marriages, and dispute that individuals who remarry bring with them the same intrapersonal and interpersonal variables that led to divorce in their first marriage. Conversely, White and Booth (1985) argue that second marriages are less triumphant because they generally present more multifaceted family dynamics than first marriages.

## ➤ SEX RATIO

All church members and their leaders indicated that male church members were a quarter of women in Christian churches. Some of the women in Christian churches were not after worshipping God, but to find a life partner. In so doing, such women can lure men both single and married, there by weakening marriage bonds and creating serious conflicts related to infidelity. Some informants call such women congregants 'devil agents' within the church.

Marital conflicts and divorce are gendered experiences, Cleek and Pearson (1985), Kitson (1992) and Levinger (1966) identified those differences between men's and women's accounts of divorce. For example, several studies have shown that former wives present longer and more multifarious details for their divorces than do former husbands.

In a related study, South (2001) assert that men are more likely to divorce when there is a high percentage of unmarried women with them in their locality and the same occurs for women who work, live and or associate in domains with a male predominance. Conditions of this nature heave married persons', mainly men's, chances of sexual disloyalty and of forming new relationships. Equally, when there is a sex ratio inequity favoring men in a particular cultural group in society, this group may also have higher rates of ongoing cohabitation and divorce (Harknett, 2008).

## 4. FINDINGS

The study finds that notable warning signs of marital conflicts are; less or no respect and more disappointments among couples, increase in anger-arguments, prevalence of negative condemnation, more blaming, doing less mutually, feeling lonely and mistreated, less sex, less confidence, less mutual decision- making, less or no sharing of thoughts and feelings, less or no helping, less or no touching.

Danger signals in marriages facing conflicts for both Christians and non-Christians indicated in this study were; noticeable decline (between couples) in satisfaction, no or less faith in marriage, reduced or no degree of attachment, and no or less pleasure or pay offs from the marriage.

The study shows that no or low religiosity is associated to lesser marital cheerfulness and a higher tendency to divorce. Some conflicts are inevitable in every marriage because no two persons have exactly the same personalities, attitudes, and values. Some of the differences do not come to light until the couple has been married for some time. When the differences appear, some conflicts are bound to arise.

Marital conflicts are not automatically bad or sinful. It is the ways conflicts are resolved that establish their impact on the marriage relationship. Conflicts may ruin a marriage, but they may also fortify it. A flourishing Christian marriage is not inevitably one in which there are no conflicts, but rather one in which the couples have to resolve their differences frankly, truthfully, and constructively in time.

The study also revealed that conflicts are damaging to the marriage bond when they become a way to attack, hurt, and diminish the each other. When couples engage in name-calling, disrespect, and mocking each other, the result will only separate them more. Little incomes and paucity are risk factors because financial stressors often impact harmfully on marital relationships.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended that couples must pay attention to warning signs of marital conflicts as soon as they occur and get to the root of the problem.

Christian couples must resolve their differences beneficially, turning them into opportunities for removing obstructions to a stronger marriage.

Christian church members should in no way get divorced. Christ living in you has the power to overcome the vilest of problems. And with the Holy Spirit, there is always hope for change. If a couple is having marriage problems, regardless of what those problems are, the answer is never divorce. Genesis 18:14 reads; *“Is anything too difficult for the LORD?”*

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