

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

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ABSTRACT

This study ascertains effects 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 Christian couples, their children and society at large were greatly affected by negative effects of divorce, which promotes endless poverty. The study recommended that Christian values of co-existence and fight any form of temptations are strong pillars to avoid the negative effects of divorce to the concerned couples, their children and the society at large.

KEY WORDS

Poverty, remarriage, Christian couples, divorce, happiness, marital conflicts, Zimbabwe

1.INTRODUCTION

Christianity as a religion in Zimbabwe has become the biggest among other religions such as African Traditional Religion (ATR), Muslim, Islam and Hinduism. Historically, Christianity in Zimbabwe was started by missionaries prior to colonialism during the 1890s. Types of Christian churches in Zimbabwe include; pentecostal, zionism, evangelical, apostolic and mainline churches. These churches can be either has originated locally or foreign (which can be regional, continentally and worldwide). Despite the type of the church which one goes marital conflicts causes different effects which disrupt harmony among couples. At times, these effects do not affect couples and their families, but also the reputation of the church and society at large (Walter, 1990).

About 45% of family institutions in Africa and Europe are struggling to survive (Laroche, 2007). This shows that quite a number of husbands and wives, whether Christians or not, regularly go through strained marital relationships. The statistics provided by Laroche (2007) concurs with what the researcher observed in Domboshava area. The area has high figures of divorcees, single parents and child headed families. Zimbabwe being a Christian country, it shows that even Christians were not spared from the scotch of marital conflicts including divorce. The major problem that has beleaguered kindness from the beginning is disagreements. Effects of marital conflict in Domboshava community, particularly among couples, family members and extended family members were explored in detail in order to come up with suitable solutions for family upkeep.

According to Amato and Previti (2003) marital disputes originate from different causes. Infrequently, they get worse and lead to divorce. Frequently, conflicts are fought in subtle ways such as verbal abuse, communication breakdown, blame game, public criticism, sarcastic

comments, intimidations, degrading comments, physical fights, deaths and insensitivity. These approaches are wrong, and they tend to worsen the situation than resolving.

One of the key functions of Christian churches was to maintain family life and live in a `godly way`. However, divorce cases and domestic disputes were on the rise. Causes of marital conflicts have been established, now what are the effects of marital conflicts on Christian life?

To compliment this assertion, this study was an assessment of the costs of marital conflicts, divorce, poverty and quality of family life as well as community status. This provoked the research to explore issues surrounding effects of marital disputes in Christian churches. Therefore, this study explored effects of marital conflicts in Christian churches. The purpose of this study was to explore effects of marital conflicts among Christian churches members in Domboshava area.

1.1 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.

1.2 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 Mvarechena, Mungate, Showground and Makumbe areas.

1.3 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, Bahaai 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 were against same-sex marriages.

1.4 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The sample for this study was 111 Christian church members who comprised 104 church members participated in 9 focus groups discussions and 7 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.

2.DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

2.1 EFFECTS OF MARITAL CONFLICTS

2.2 INCREASED RISK OF POVERTY

Church members indicated that poverty boosts the menace of divorce and in turn, divorce also increases the menace of poverty for women and their children. The majority of church leaders indicated that most Christian church members were struggling to earn a decent living for themselves and their family. Once marital conflicts spills into divorce, there might be high

chances for poverty as one struggling parent would take care of children. Some church leaders indicated that children of divorcee were likely to drop from school and face healthy challenges which do promote the vicious cycle of poverty.

Rotermann (2007) found that, within two years after a separation/divorce, 43% of women had experienced a decline in household earnings compared to 15% of men. In disparity, 29% of men and only 9% of women had experienced a raise. Nevertheless, Ambert (2005) asserts that as women employed who get better salaries, the earnings decline is less painful than before, even though it is still obvious. Rotermann (2007) also indicated that ex-husbands in comparison to ex-wives are less likely to be deprived because their earnings is usually higher, they do not have complete care of their kids with all the helper everyday expenditure, and their child support expenses are usually not crippling.

For families already burdened by poverty, once separation takes place, the mother and child unit often becomes even poorer. The younger the children are at the time of parental divorce or common-law dissolution, the more likely they are to be poor, as they have younger parents who typically earn less. On average, single parents who are poor have an income that is 40% below the poverty line. This is dire poverty. Another way of looking at this is to consider single-mother families. In 2002, according to the Vanier Institute of the Family (2004), 35% of all female lone-parent families lived in poverty while many more stay close just one uncertain step above. Single-parent families experience high poverty rates and where enormous difference exists between the incomes of single- and two-parent families.

2.3 INCREASED RISK OF PROBLEMS FOR CHILDREN OF DIVORCED PARENTS

All church members and church leaders indicated that children of divorcees were most likely face life developmental challenges. Both young and older children were equally affected. Some church leaders indicated psychological, social, physical and academic development of such children was greatly affected. Some informants indicated that lacking parental care and love may instill indiscipline among such children. More so, informants indicated that divorcee kids just like orphans are most likely to become street kids.

Some informants indicated that fighting for custodian over children pose increased problems for divorced parents. In so doing, parental love withers, respect, love and socialization in general, would be at risk.

Case study data revealed that children paying the bigger price yet they are not part of the decision to separation even though they are important family members. The effects of divorce on children affect every facet of life, thus psychological, social, physical and academic development.

Although most children do not experience severe developmental challenges as a result of marital conflicts and divorce, divorce is without doubt a strong risk factor and a source of stressors. According to Kelly and Emery (2003:359) divorce is a sensitively painful change and can generate lasting feelings of unhappiness, hunger, be troubled, and regret that coexist with competent psychological and social functioning. Furstenberg and Kiernan (2001), Le Blanc (1995), Sun and Li (2002) show that children whose parents are divorced, and even after they are remarried or re-partnered, are likely than children whose parents remain together. However, these children are likely to suffer from dejection, anxiety, and other emotional disorders; demonstrate behavioral problems including hyperactivity, ferociousness, skirmishing, and unfriendliness. In addition to this, they tend to become young offenders; do less well in school and remain in school

for a shorter period of time; and experience more relationship problems, in part due to their behavioral problems.

According to Martins (2005) adults whose parents divorced during their childhood and teen years, compared to adults from integral two-parent families tend to: have a child out of marriage more often, mainly during teenage years; lower educational achievements; be more often unemployed and do less well economically; have more marital problems and divorce more; are more likely to have lost contact with their father and to report a less happy childhood (Williams, 2001).

Boyd and Norris (1995) found that older children of divorced parents go away from home earlier than young ones. They go away from home in yet larger numbers when their custodial parent remarries and more so, when both parents remarry. A result of this earlier home leaving is that it becomes difficult if not impossible to continue their education. As a result this in turn, leads to lower work-related skills and higher joblessness, Frederick and Boyd (1998).

2.4 CONFLICTS PERSISTENCE AFTER DIVORCE

The majority of church members indicated that divorce is not a single event nevertheless a series of transitions like women and their children shift after separation to more crowded and decrepit housing, where there noise and pollution. Again, mothers may be less healthy as a result and of stressful changes to adapt to new life, including working long hours to make ends meet, making it difficult to have time with children.

On the side of affected children, church members indicated that the locality may be less safe, by having more children who are similarly poor, who perform poorly or drop out of school, and employ more in criminal behaviors. As a result such children have to change to a new lifestyle and often more difficult peer group can create a great deal of problems which include loneliness, bullying, school avoidance and dropout, and delinquency.

The minority of church members indicated that a number of of the parents' reasons for divorcing can produce a very dysfunctional habitat for the children and the unhelpful costs on children do not disappear the time parents separate.

Majority of church leaders indicated that many separated parents are worried and psychologically loaded and become dejected while others instigate a desperate search for a new loving mate thereby making it far less available to their children. In turn, stressors and worry reduce parenting time, skills, care and management while increasing parenting volatility, austerity, or open-mindedness.

The minority of church leaders indicated that parents who continue quarreling and verbally abuse one another during the presence of children following divorce cause enormous suffering to their children.

Carlson and Corcoran (2001) point out endless parental conflicts even after divorce cause teenagers to lack leadership and dependable parenting. On the other hand, straight family earnings, mothers' sound psychological performance, and a good home atmosphere, including sufficient parenting, reduce or eliminate the unconstructive effects of divorce and single parenting. Studies by Gagne (2005) and Pigg (2009) shows that parental alienation occurs when one parent more or less persuade a child to hate or go against the other parent and effectively stop that parent from seeing the child and the child from loving that parent. The child may in fact come to eliminate the unfortunate parent. Furthermore, children will also discover that differences can be resolved only by fighting. Such life experiences may hold added negative consequences in their own relationships in future.

Booth and Amato (2001) postulated that although divorces that stop brutal inter-parental disagreements may have constructive consequences for children, stumpy conflict marriages that end in divorce have a strong depressing effect on children because, from the children's point of view, the divorce is so unanticipated, unwanted, and ineffective. Again, such divorces may hint parents' lack of dedication to marriage and this value may be passed on to their children who will then invert it into their own relationships in future. According to Ambert (2005), children are predisposed to being challenging and uncontrollable, and live in a home environment that is conflict-ridden, confused, and promote their unconstructive inclination. When divorce happens in such situations, the home conditions may deteriorate; thereby intensify the children's presented problems in a circular or feedback model of causality.

2.5 CHALLENGES AFTER REMARRIAGE

All informants indicated that both the parent and children are equally affected if the parents decided to marry. Informants reiterated that women and children struggle to live peacefully in second marriages than men. Some informants indicated that slim chances of happiness after remarriages can be there but may last short.

Remarriages in African societies and Christian life is not advisable unless if one of the spouse is dead. In contrast, studies in the West show that when the custodial parent remarries, the child becomes a stepchild. Similarity in both Western and African context is that familial restructuring requires a great deal of adjustment on both children and parents.

According to Morrison and Ritual (2000), a custodial mother's remarriage assists the family monetarily and may be very good for her in terms of happiness. As a result, improved finances and maternal well-being may do well to the children. Research in the West carried by Amato and Gilbreth (1999), King (2006), Bzostek (2008) and Kerr and Michalski (2007) identified positives in remarriages. On the contrary, Halpern- Meekin and Tach (2008), Hofferth (2006), Ambert (2005) and Kirby (2006) shows that both young children (infants) and adolescents suffer in the remarriages most. Girls are more affected than boys. Even the happiness of adults is compromised in African context (ibid).

Generally, the study has constantly shown that children who live with their original married parents have fewer behavioral problems than other children, including children who live with their own live together parents (Hofferth, 2006; Kerr and Michalski, 2007). Another study found that persons in high-distress marriages were better-off after divorces while those who had been in moderately happy marriages were dejected (Amato and Hohmann-Marriott, 2007). Divorce normally involves periods of nervous tension, shakiness, solitude, hurt feelings, and often resentment. For African Christian perspective, the ending of good marriages is an expensive intention in terms of resultant problems for children, including juvenile delinquency, welfare expenses for single-parent families that fall into poverty, health costs, as well as a loss of productivity on the part of affected adults and older children.

2.6 FINDINGS

Christian couples are not encouraged to choose divorce as a solution to their marital conflicts. The only accepted marital separator between couples is death. Divorce is a selfish way of getting out of marital conflicts without considering the future of children involved.

Children suffer most when their parents decided to separate as a result of poorly resolved conflicts or lack of dedication in the union. They suffer physically, psychologically, socially and

academically as they grow into adulthood. Such life experiences in most cases badly affect their own relationships when they become adults.

Although remarriages may bring financial relief and happiness, in most cases, remarriages are detrimental to both children of either sex or the involved parents.

Effects of marital conflicts do not only affect the concerned couples and their kids, but also the neighborhood and society at large.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation based on this research study were;- Before separation/divorce is considered as the only viable option, Christian couples should seek help from counselors, church leaders, elders and human rights activists. Couples must think deeply about the future of their children before choosing divorce. Christian churches must spread the gospel of how important are children in their union as a body of Christ. The study recommended that Christian values of co-existence and fight any form of temptations are strong pillars to avoid the negative effects of divorce to the concerned couples, their children and the society at large.

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