DIVORCE: A SOCIAL MENACE

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ABSTRACT

Whether in the developed or developing countries of the world, the family is seen as a very important institution in the society. This is because it is one of the most important primary groups of socialization. It is also referred to as the cornerstone of any society as an ideal family provides stability, support and continuity of the values of such society. Recently, several kinds of data show the extent and seriousness of family problems that has led to divorce. The alarming single parent families and the number of reconstituted families in which there is a stepparent-stepchild relationship reveals that the family is doomed. Thus this research work gives a detail explanation of the general causes of family divorce not only in Nigeria as a developing nation but even among the developed nations of the world. The work exposes the negative effects of divorce on the quality of life of family members and suggests ways of ameliorating the problem.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage and divorce are both common experiences. Married couple expects a healthy life. Healthy marriage is good for couple's mental and physical health. It is also good for children; children grow up to be mentally, physically, educationally and socially balanced. However, divorce often shatters the peace and harmony in the family. About 30 to 40 percent of married couples in Nigeria divorce.

Divorce is typically a painful process for all concerned. It takes time for parties involved to regain psychological equilibrium. While the adults may regain, the children continue to suffer one form of maladjustment or the other. Post-divorce hostility between adults, in addition to directly harming

kids, is a sure indicator that the emotional split is incomplete. Like every major life change, divorce is stressful affecting finances, living arrangements, household jobs, schedules and more.

In Nigeria, divorce rate have been rising since the beginning of the 20th century, and especially since the 1980s. Some experts contend that the availability of divorce laws has helped weaken the strength of marriage making it difficult for couple to work out the inevitable difficulties that arise in marriage (Browne and Hamilton, 1998; Snyder and Sickmund, 1999; Mezieobi and Okpara, 2007; Edinyang, 2012a). This is evident considering the numerous divorce laws available. But, is divorce truly the answer for family instability? This question is what this research work seeks to explore.

Clarification of Concepts

Divorce, generally perceived, means the break up or discontinuity in marriage arising from couple's inability to resolve their intolerable incompatibilities. According to Wikipedia the free encyclopedia, divorce is the final termination of marital union, thus putting to an end the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage and dissolving bonds that hitherto bind couple together. This, though not the answer to family instability, divorce is a social problem.

Social problem can be conceptualized as an issue many people talk about. Horton and Leslie (1974) defines it as a condition affecting a significant number of people in ways considered undesirable, about which it is felt something can be done through collective social action. The definition has four component parts that need clarification; (a) condition affecting a significant number of people, (b) in ways considered undesirable, (c) about which it is felt something can be done; and (d) through collective social action.

First, for a condition to be termed social problem it must affect a significant number of people who talk and write about the condition. The more the people talk on the condition, the more the condition becomes a social problem. Although there is no exact number to what constitutes a significant number of people that must be affected before a condition can make for a social problem. Sociologists are of the view that when a condition affects enough people so that they take notice and begin to talk about it, then a social problem exist;

Second, a social problem involves value judgment over the decision that a particular condition is bad. Since what is considered desirable by some people might be undesirable for others, the decision for what constitutes value judgment must affect a considerable number of people. Unless and until the value of a considerable number of people within the society defines it as social problem, it will not be termed so;

Third, the condition to warrant for social problem is such that is believed something can be done about (it) and the possibility of the treatment being applied forces people to consider it a social

problem; and, Fourth, the condition to be termed social problem must be such that is widely spread, affecting large number of people in the society. If such situation involves an individual or a select few, they are termed private problems. Social problems are public and require collective social action to solve them.

Causes of Divorce

Discussion on the causes of divorce in Nigeria will be centered on variables such as negligence, sexual harassment, incompatibility, psychological problems, social problems, addictive behaviour, economic problems, opposition and absence of consensual decision making, intra dyad running down and health problems as outlined by Mezieobi and Okpara (2007). The research, even though has a Nigerian perspective, the problems are universal in contemporary global community.

Negligence of:

a.   Emotional, physiological, financial maturity or readiness and family/marital encumbrances before contracting marriage.

b.   pre marital and marital counseling

c.   family responsibilities

d.   Societal or culturally established marital norms that violates the principle of incest avoidance or marrying an outcast.

e.   The complexities and entanglements of marriage and family life.

f.   parental advice and those of relations against early marriage; and

g.   principles governing good mate selection;

Sexual Problems

a.   lack of sexual gratification;

b.   sexual promiscuity;

c.   infertility, barrenness, frigidity, impotence, childlessness or sexual aversion;

d.   bearing only female children without even a male child at least;

e.   infidelity or extra marital sex;

f.   denial of sex on demand;

g.   inadequate or excessive craving for sex (sexual hyperversion)

h.   observed sexual deviations or dysfunctions.

Incompatibilities in:

a.   educational attainment;

b.   perception, behaviour, attitude, values;

c.   social and political status, life and activities;

d.   sexual urge;

e.   companionship;

f.   economic status;

g.   language;

h.   culture;

i.   background;

j.   environment;

k.   personality; and

l.   religion.

Psychological Problems

a.   infatuative love;

b.   emotional stress;

c.   over possessiveness;

d.   over assertiveness;

e.   aggressiveness.

      i.   active aggressive fighting (shouting, hitting out)

      ii.   passive aggressive fighting (leaving the room, sulking or staying silent).

f.   perceiving each other in poor light;

g.   temperament;

i.   anxiety;

j.   moldiness or depression;

k.   ignorance;

l.   dependency syndrome; and

m.   exhibition of withdrawal behaviour.

Social Problems

a.   faculty socialization;

b.   social apathy;

c.   blocked social and communicative interaction due to communication breakdown;

d.   interacting with people or peers one of the spouses is opposed to;

e.   indulging in interactions that leave the children and one of the spouses uncared for;

f.   allowing interactional interference of in-laws and relatives that threaten family stability;

g.   poor relationships between the dyad husband and wife and between the wife and her husband's parents relationship and vice versa;

h.   painting one of the spouses socially black.

Addictive Behaviour

a.   drunkenness;

b.   chain smoking;

c.   keeping late nights;

d.   drug addiction;

e.   pool betting to the detriment of the household;

f.   sex maniac;

g.   womanizing (running after women) or manizing (running after men);

h.   wife battering or beating;

i.   child abuse particularly of children, maids/house helps.

Economics Problem

a.   poverty or inadequacy of financial resources;

b.   reckless spending or poor financial management;

c.   non utilization of what is financially available for the maintenance and care of the family members;

d.   refusal of the wife to yield to the husband's desire to control the wife's income;

e.   refusal of the wife to bring out her money contributory to the financial health of the family;

f.   the wife spending her money only on her parents, her dresses and cosmetics;

g.   unfulfilled promises and expectations of financial buoyancy;

h.   impecuniousness (No money syndrome in the house);

Opposition and Absence of Consensual Decision Making

a.   opposing each other;

b.   issuing counter directives/instructions/advice to the children;

c.   incessant disagreement on family decision-making, authority, control of power struggles;

e.   insubordination; and

f.   accusations and counter accusations.

Intra Dyad Running Down

a.   blackmailing and gossiping against each other;

b.   Betray;

c.   wrong accusations;

d.   constant name calling (abuse);

e.   labeling such as corpse or dead man, bastard, prostitute, womanizer, idiot.

Health Problems

a.   incurable insanity

b.   neurotic epileptic or deadly diseases

c.   constant sickness that are time, money and pleasure consuming

(Mezieobi and Okpara, 2007). The above, though varied and diverse in (their) nature, breed conflict that culminates in divorce of unhappy married people.

Effect of Divorce on the Quality of Life of Family Members

No matter how divorce is viewed, the fact is that it exerts some influence on the quality of life of family members. As Lauer (2002) rightly explained all family conflicts diminish the quality of life. Physical and emotional difficulties may result from serious family conflict. There is also an extra problem of adjusting to a broken home. The problem of adjustment to new and ambiguous roles results in the step family also. Children academic performance in school is negatively affected. A child from a single parent home cannot perform as well academically as others from a two-parent family.

Aside the above effects on the quality of life of the people, it has been observed that several kinds of deviant behaviour such as stealing, drug abuse, bullying and rape have been associated with divorced families. Individuals who came from broken homes tend to have a variety of difficulties that can be referred to as maladjustment, antisocial behaviour, interpersonal problems and self-esteem problems (Gelce and Straus, 1988; Hamptom and Gele, 1994; Browne and Hamilton, 1998; Snyder and Sickmund, 1999; United State Bureau., 1999).

Other negative effects of divorce on the quality of life of the Nigerian family according to Mezieobi and Okpara (2007) include:

i.   poor nutrition or malnutrition;
ii.   higher incidence of illness and poor medical attention;
iii.   substandard living;
iv.   withdrawal from social participation;
v.   having low self esteem or image;
vi.   may quit schooling or drop out of school;
vii.   engendering disrespect for the family head;
viii.   generating regular conflict between husband and wife;
ix.   make children of the family loose respect and loyalty to their parents;
x.   the boys in the family may take to the streets as street or area boys with possibility of becoming maladjusted;
xi.   the girls in the family may opt for sex sell - making themselves, available to any man for paid sexual relationship for a chicken change;
xii.   inability to undertake full parenting responsibilities;
xiii.   loss of parental discipline and control;
xiv.   the woman in anger robbing the husband of convivial bliss or withholding sexual interaction with the husband;
xv.   frictions in the family beclouding understanding, creativity, right or positive thinking;
xvi.   family members resorting to going cap in hand begging for alms.

Aside these, the family inmates also experience some socio-psychological difficulties. These according to Mezieobi (1995) include:

i.   alienation, loneliness, depression, disillusionment, adjustment problems, dependent behaviour of overprotected children.

ii.   the children lose the essential ingredients required for father/mother-child relationship essential for their proper personality development such as co-operation, support, affection, security, guidance, achievement motivation, parental care.

iii.   reduction in the frequency of the marital sex and its associated extra marital sex may lead to the contraction of infections and deadly sexual diseases.

iv.   inadequate or absence of free flow of communication or enforced family communication breakdown which engender, among other things, unvoiced feelings of displeasure, insensitivity to each other's feelings, aggravated resentment, all of which culminate in active-aggressive fighting as shouting, hitting out or passive fighting such as leaving the room, sulking or staying silent.

v.   displaced aggressive behaviour occasioned by absence of communication in the home or the family.

vi.   labeling a family negatively for its public nuisance value in its pronounced family instability.

vii.   remarriage in some cases

viii.   children divided parental loyalties, maladjustment and indulgence in delinquent acts.

ix.   absence of opportunities to remarry may lead to post marital sex, promiscuity for sexual gratification and its resultant illegitimate children with maladaptive problems and psychosomatic ailments (p74).

The Way Forward

There are several ways couple can avoid divorce in the family.

(a)   Accommodation. This is a conscious attempt by one or more members of the family to neglect their needs and focus on satisfying those of the others. This involves self-sacrifice which is a manifestation of self esteem disorder. It is always the reflection of the desire to ensure that there is personal and family harmony, and also to preserve the relationship at one's cost. This is the common practice among women who have many children. They decide to stay intact instead of divorce in the interest of their children.

(b)   Collaboration: In this case both the husband and wife could work together to find solution that is satisfactory to both parties. It is a situation where the husband, the wife and even the children win, depending on the situation; and the parties involved are satisfied with the solution they have arrived at peacefully.

(c)   Compromise: Compromise as a management strategy involves finding a reasonable mutual acceptable solution to family conflict that will be acceptable to both parties. Here the parties are assertive and partially cooperative. It is often necessary where both parties are incompatible.

(d)   Problem-solving: Problem solving as a strategy for managing family conflict involves the willingness to comprehend the problems that gave birth to the conflict and to solve the

problems. This is used when both parties need lasting solutions to their conflicts. It is also used when both parties see conflict as opportunity to improve an existing relationship.

(e)   Avoidance is another management strategy of family conflict. In this situation, the wife, husband or child/children ignores the conflicting issues or even denies the significance of the issue in their life. It is a very simple way of ignoring the problem and ensuring that peace reigns in the family.

(f)   Legalized system threat marriage in which couple contacts to many per specific period of time and decides whether to continue with the marriage is another management strategy for family conflict.

Furthermore, good family life education is a strong strategy for managing family conflict. This has the advantages of:

(i)   Changing the negative attitude about single-parent families and the legitimacy of violent behaviour as well as breakdown the harmful ideologies about the good family.

(ii)   change some norms e.g. Reduce family size by engaging in monogamous marriages which has the following merits on the children:

(a) aspire children to higher levels of education.

(b) be more confident of children academic ability.

(c) attain higher develop of children education.

(d) be more involved in school activities of children; and

(e) enjoy a greater variety of intellectual and cultural activities such as music, dance, travel and reading (Lauer, 2002).

Mezieobi (1995) also outline the following as the essence of family life education in schools which can invariably act as good conflict management strategies in the family that can avoid divorce;

a)   Commence early in school to orient school clients to the family types, their constituents and the place of each individual in the family unit to its satisfying existence, happiness and stability.

b)   Sensitize children of the factors that occasion family instability, family stress and the avoidance and ameliorative therapy.

c)   Orient future generation of Nigerian citizens to the values of family stability thereby goading them on how to pursue desirable family life behaviour.

d)   Imbue the school clients with the knowledge that human beings are the architects of family instability and its disorganization; and

e)   Humanize learning by discussing family life problems. (p79)

In addition to the above conflict management strategies in the family, the establishment of counseling services is essential. This body will help especially the young to understand and appreciate the need for conflict resolution, mate selection, avoid disorder, sexual disorder and sexual diseases. It will also help them have the need for family planning and management strategies

for behaviour modification; appreciate the need for marital adjustment as well as understand the functions of marriage.

Money, the popular adage has it that is the root of all evils and the researcher add that it is the source of joy and happiness in the family. No family will experience real peace if there is no money in such a family. In the light of this, the researcher recommends the adoption of twelve tidbits on how to manage family finance in order to enhance peace in the family.

1. In the pervasive glut in the world of work in Nigeria which has fanned unemployment which solution has defied the theories, postulations, projections of experts and government efforts, it would be a miracle to expect any welfare packages or social security payments to cushion the financial tensed situation in Nigerian families.

2. Because of the indispensability of money in the effective upkeep of any family, persons who want to venture into the beginning of a family must be physically mature in terms of attaining the marriage age as well as ensuring some financial independence via good jobs.

3. The financial involvement for the good or quality living in the family is enormous. To this end, a couple beginning a new family should give serious and realistic consideration to its family size – small family size should be less financially burdensome to manage than large family size.

4. For the family to be financially independent, frantic efforts of the parents and indeed their children should be geared towards attaining a desirable social status with emphasis on achieved status which according to Dressler (1969) entails standing stiff competition with others and making individual efforts.

5. Since the family today is no longer a productive unit- producing only for its subsistence, but a consuming unit, the family must cooperatively work together to ensure its financial success via money making and its control.

6. All money-caused frictions and quarrels and fights in the family should be avoided and prevented. These entail some appreciable level of understanding, tolerance and accommodation on the part of a couple.

7. Families must tailor their purchases and expenses to their income bracket without indulging in intra family deceit. To do this successfully means effective planning of the use of available money and prudent spending. This will reduce financial indebtedness and financial bondage particularly when inflationary trends have made repayments almost impossible.

8. Food waste should be avoided or at best considerably reduced. Food is at times in the families left to sour, rotten and is thrown away. This is mismanaged money. All families should become intelligent consumers with a minimum of waste, destruction and willful damage of material things.

9. In order to maximally utilize family finances to the advantage of family, and effectively manage money, well thought out financial planning is the magic wand. Nass (1978) succinctly made this point when he observed that "financial planning is the key to money management in the family, no matter how much or how little money one may have".

10. Given the financial difficulties which many families are today contending with, the ability of both partners in a family to earn money will cushion the size of the families' financial quagmire.

11. No matter the emerging equalitarian family pattern particularly in the United States where the couple share responsibility and activity about equally (Dressler, 1969) the Nigerian families are yet to attain this level particularly in financial matters. The man still plays the dominant role in financial earning and in its management. The Nigerian woman, should however, be allowed some financial decisional freedom in areas of feminine desirability, particularly those who earn income.

12. Affluent families that are likely to have discretionary income (surplus money which is available after the family necessities have been paid for or taken care of) and very high net income – these elude the very poor families – should develop good consumer habit, engage family savings in a bank, or banks, stocks or bonds and undertake lifetime investment.

CONCLUSION

The family as the cornerstone of the society is expected to provide stability, support and continuity to the world. Family conflicts are quite natural and inevitable and divorce is not always the last resort. Marriages could still workout even at the brink of collapse if couples learn to tolerate each others' incompatibilities. It is undoubtful that divorce diminishes the quality of life of family members. Both physical and emotional difficulties may arise from divorce with untold hardship on the children. Considering all the options to a healthy family life, divorce, is therefore, not an answer to family instability.

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