

Research Report

Selected approaches for conflict resolution in marriage disputes in Zimbabwe

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Abstract - Realising an increase in marriages, an increase in marriage violence and a subsequent rise in marriage homicide, the study explored the possibility of taking divorce as a preferred option towards ending marriage violence and subsequent homicide. The triangulated study adopted a descriptive survey design which collected data through questionnaires that were distributed to 160 purposively sampled participants. The study followed an anti-positivist approach which relies on depth rather than width of data. Data were analysed and interpreted using NVIVO software and dyadic analysis, which provided for the analysis of descriptive and statistical data. It was the study's finding that marriage conflicts and homicide are rampant in Zimbabwe and the available resolution systems have lost relevance and effectiveness. The study, noted that while marriages are good for the development of any society, if there are irreparable differences between couples, there is need to separate or divorce under what the study calls 'just divorce'. The study concludes that 'just divorce' is basically meant to save lives while allowing divorcees to reconnect after they would have really made up their minds and addressed emotions. It takes national authorities to appreciate the essence of 'just divorce' for them to embrace it as a policy.

Key words: Marriage violence; Divorce; Marriage homicide; Family conflicts; Conflict resolution; Just Divorce

Introduction

Following an increase in marriages, an increase in marriage violence and a subsequent rise in marriage homicide (Dodo 2014; Moyo 2017; Kamhungira 2017), it has become increasingly necessary to explore means of attending to the vices in marriages. However, cognizant of the various approaches to marriage vices' resolution approaches and the corresponding outcomes, it has also become necessary to explore the possibility of taking divorce or simply immediate separation of the conflicting partners as one of the preferred options towards ending marriage violence and its subsequent homicide. This study hopes to highlight the importance of resolving conflicts in marriages by advocating for immediate end to marriages as a way of averting cases of either of the partners getting injured or murdered. This comes against a background where in Dodo (2014) study, it was noted that marriages in the Shona and other ethnic groups in Zimbabwe is used as a conflict resolution and prevention measure. Therefore, in this study, focus is now on the termination of the same marriages in order to avert conflicts. The study also realises the existence of various other means of addressing marriage conflicts and violence. The study expects that, despite the likely condemnation and criticism to the scope of the research, in the long run, given the arguments and the findings, consumers will see reason and gradually embrace the idea.

While the study borrows from sociology, it was conducted from a conflict resolution perspective; meant to find a solution to the conflicts defining most marriages in Zimbabwe in particular and other societies in general. The study also appreciates that while there are various forms of conflicts; emotional, psychological and physiological, its focus zeros on the latter with specific attention on murder. The study was conducted from a neutral and objective religious stand point; considering the fact that Zimbabwe is constitutionally a secular state which recognises all religions and beliefs as equals and which also respects diversity in cultures and traditions. Contextually, the forms of divorces looked at generally cut across all age ranges.

Background

As a social rule, people marry for procreation, happiness and companionship among other reasons. This practice has been nurtured since time immemorial and has been accepted as normal. Marriages over the years almost the world over have helped establish family names create kingdoms, mobilise wealth and open up various other

opportunities. Because of cultural belief systems, various societies approach family system management differently; patriarchal and matriarchal (Mudau & Obadire 2017). The former is where a family is headed by men and inheritance also follows male line while the latter system is where a family is headed by women who also determine inheritance distribution.

Most African family systems are patriarchal, allowing men to head the families. This is the same system that nations in Zimbabwe; Shona, Ndebele, Ndaou and other minorities do follow. With patriarchal marriages, it is expected that the husband who in this case is a man, makes decisions with little or no contribution from the wife. The wife is expected to be submissive and humble. It is therefore some of the changes in such expectations owing to globalisation and modernity that marriage conflicts are developing. In Zimbabwe, such challenges are escalating because of the high levels of literacy and education (Dodo 2014) coupled with the massive migration of Zimbabweans at the turn of the century in search of greener pastures.

Reports from various institutions in Zimbabwe; Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), judiciary services, civil society organisations and traditional leaders' forums (Kamhungira 2017) show that the rate of marriages in Zimbabwe has remained constant for a period while that of marriage conflicts and violence has drastically gone up. The same reports also show that marriage homicide cases have been on an upward trend since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. The same reports show that all the available counselling and conflict resolution systems: negotiation (*nhaurirano*), mediation (*yananiso*), compensation (*kuripa*), traditional court system (*dare*), silence (*kunyarara*) (Dodo *et al.* 2012), and uncle/aunt (*sekuru/tete*) have been applied but often failing to bear fruits. From the other end, ZRP enforces peace and counsels conflicting couples, religious organisations encourages marriages and counsels disputing parties while courts; traditional and modern try to deliver justice and discourage marriage break-ups. Over the years, all these institutions' approaches have been transformed and developed to suit modern and dynamic family challenges and conflicts. Human and material resources have been developed, upgraded and empowered to deliver the best results. However, they have not helped much in stopping marriage violence and homicide. Unfortunately, no credible and recognizable researches have been conducted in this area to find a sustainable solution.

Rough estimates from the media and other sources show that on average, there are 2333 registered marriages per month (Moyo 2017), 3792 reported marriage violence cases per month (New Zimbabwe 2016; Kamhungira 2017), 80 registered divorces per month and 23 reported cases of marriage related homicide per month in Zimbabwe (Kamhungira 2017). Interestingly, these figures only account for registered marriages and reported cases in a country where 84% of marriages are not registered (The Herald 2017). In light of the above statistics, there are indicators to the weaknesses and inefficiencies in the approaches being used to resolve conflicts thus requiring exploration of divorce as an option.

In cases where courts and other traditional systems have forced conflicting parties to live together, reports of bloody violence and homicide have been recorded. Sometimes, the processes required for married people to end their relationships are so taxing that they are forced to soldier on till tragedies strike. Reports show that where divorces are allowed to proceed, the two parties often move on peacefully and re-establish their lives happily (Moyo 2017; Kamhungira 2017). It has also been seen in general lives that where partners fail to clique and decide to separate, they always reconnect should they develop love again in future. This practice is seen to be allowing room for reflection, reassessment and brainstorming about the need to live together.

Methodology

The triangulated study adopted the descriptive survey design which collected data from a cross-section of appropriately placed informants. Questionnaires were distributed to 160 purposively sampled participants to elicit data which was interpreted qualitatively for clearer description of the narratives. The gender aspect was evenly considered in the selection of the participants. Besides, the 160 participants from a cross section of nationally representative institutions also ensured maximum accuracy, reliability, generalisability, objectivity, acceptability and authenticity. Participants were sampled from the following sectors; government ministries and departments, women and men's pressure groups, religious groups, traditional leaders' institutions and legal resources civil society organisations.

Deliberately, all participants were adults aged between 24 and 60 years. This was to ensure that they had some understanding of marriages and what divorces were all about. This was not necessarily to say they had experienced divorces before. Gender was evenly distributed for a balanced analysis.

The study followed an anti-positivist approach which relies on depth rather than width of data. The research considered how much contact was necessary in order to attain saturation than numbers of participants. In qualitative studies, the smaller the size of the sample, the more in-depth study is to be carried out. [Hellstrom \(2008\)](#) recommends to have smaller samples to guarantee in-depth in data collection and accuracy.

All the collected data were analysed and interpreted using NVIVO software and dyadic analysis ([Spanier 1976](#); [Kulik et al. 2016](#)), which provided for the analysis of descriptive and statistical data. The research employed the interpretive approach which requires making sense of research participants' accounts before cleaning and taking it to NVIVO. Subfolders (nodes) for pure qualitative and quantitative data were created to keep data from different areas and different constituencies of participants before sets were established in the Navigation View. It was then that NVIVO created aliases/shortcuts. Nodes were created for efficiency, accountability and reliability.

During the analysis, when data had been brought together under expressive codes and thematic ideas had emerged with all the data linked through memos, it was possible to code thematically. This helped to validate the research results. To ensure accuracy and consistency, queries were run as the analysis progressed from tree node to tree node. A Coding Comparison Query was also run to check on the percentage of agreement and disagreement between codes created.

Reliability and validity

As per [Helstrom \(2008\)](#), to guarantee objectivity in the process and total acceptability of the results, measures like; depth in research, objective explanation of the world by all interested parties, appropriate sampling mode and timing of the study were employed. The research tried to be descriptive as much as possible so that all the information could be explained. Similarly, data was collected from all relevant and responsible stakeholders as a way of ensuring impartiality and credibility.

Limitations

The study faced various challenges; first and foremost, extracting data on the statistics around marriage and violence from official data centres was hectic and that simple deconstruction and interpretation of marriage and related violence was difficult to agree on. This was mainly because various social, cultural, religious and educational backgrounds see and understand the concepts differently. Marriage and violence are interpreted differently. It was also a challenge mobilising data on a longitudinal basis. It was noted that most institutions have no deliberate long term policy of storing data on marriage violence and homicide. The study faced serious condemnation from various sectors of the society that believed that it was *unZimbabwean* to advocate for divorce as a preferred option for marriage violence. Specifically, respondents ZRX and HCX were reluctant to cooperate describing the study ‘sensitive’ and ‘of security concern’.

Delimitation

The study specifically focussed on violence and homicide often found in marriages. In the Zimbabwean context, marriage is understood as either formally registered or casual where partners just cohabit and bear children. Legally, it is called customary marriage. Violence in the study cuts across emotional, physiological and psychological and includes marital murders. While it may have been difficult gathering statistics on marriage violence given the fact that in casual unions, there are no records, the study narrowed its scope on the available data from both formal and informal marriages. Data were collected from institutions that are based in Harare albeit with a national outlook and representation.

In the study, marriage and marital are used inter-changeably to mean recognised different sex partnerships.

Ethical considerations

Relevant authorities’ consent was secured with all the institutions. Equally, all the involved participants were informed of the scope of the research and the implications thereto so that they could participate fully aware of the programme. Participants were given an information leaflet attached to the questionnaire to read prior to participating in

the study and had the opportunity to consult and seek permission from their authorities. Verbal informed consent was obtained for participation in the study. Disclosure of participants' identities was optional for confidentiality purpose. However, in the study all the participating institutions have been coded for confidentiality purposes.

Review of literature

Marriage in Africa

Most marriages in Africa and in Zimbabwe particularly come in two broad forms; polygyny and / or monogamy, with the former allowing a man to marry several wives while the latter restricts one man to one wife. However both forms of marriages follow the classical three goods of marriage as given by St. Augustine, which are; the *bonum sacramenti* (indissolubility), the *bonum prolis* (offspring) and the *bonum fidei* (unity) (Dodo 2014). Marriages in Zimbabwe can be either unregistered customary or court solemnised and yet legally recognised. However, the former is more popular as it only requires two parties living together as husband and wife to have fulfilled traditional marriage processes like dowry payment (Ndlovu 2012).

Challenges in marriages

Marriage conflict has been documented to have important implications for the psychological and physical health of spouses and their children, as well as general family well-being (Arugu 2014). It also goes beyond psychological and physiological challenges; to homicide with far reaching implications on the entire family and the immediate dependents. From a structural approach, other studies argue that marriage distress is predicated on various variables such as age, husbands' and wives' personality traits, communication approach, couples' patterns of interaction, and their problem-solving skills and resolution styles during conflict among others (Kulik *et al.* 2016; Mudau & Obadire 2017). Other studies (Gottman 1994; Gravningen 2017; Smith 2017) point out that, whereas troubled couples are more likely to engage in a sequence of swelling negativity, whereby one partner's expression of negative influence and destructive behaviours is reciprocated by the other, non-distressed couples are likely to adopt adaptive ways to exodus from such cycles. Generally, marriage challenges including violence are wide and different depending on the nature of the relationship and the backgrounds of the involved parties among others (Caughlm *et al.* 2000). There

are a lot of social, political, religious and ideological aspects to talk about when reviewing marriage challenges.

Common marriage conflict resolution approaches

In such classical studies by [Gottman \(1994\)](#) and [Caughlm et al. \(2000\)](#), it is noted that wives are more likely to soar conflict; that husbands are more probable to withdraw during conflict, and that husbands are more likely to initiate reconciliation in trying to reduce conflict. It is also generally appreciated that various societies experience different forms of conflict which are subsequently resolved differently. Some of these resolution means vary from endogenous, indigenous to exogenous with each applying depending on the level of development, civilisation and literacy.

Divorce in marriage

Generally, divorce is the dissolution of a marital union before the death of either spouse. It means cancellation of the authorised responsibilities of each party and annulling the bonds of matrimony between partners under the rule of law of the particular country or state ([Arugu 2014](#)). It can be referred to as dissolution of marriage. Divorce involves a number of issues, which range from child custody to sharing of property.

In Zimbabwe, divorces have over the years been on the rise. According to experts; [Arugu \(2014\)](#) and [Gravningen et al. \(2017\)](#), there have been various reasons for the divorces ranging from; breakdown of the extended family system, financial problems and gender equality, distance relationships, domestic violence, infidelity and lack of affection. Others are barrenness ([Arugu 2014](#)), alcoholism ([Adegoke 2010](#)), technology and socialisation, immaturity ([Rhyme 2010](#)), and extended family interference. Some scholars argue that differences in ideology and religious belief systems, lack of respect, grown apart, difficulty in sex, losing common ground and changes in circumstances ([Gravningen et al. 2017](#)) and educational attainment may also lead to marriage breakdowns.

It has been established that approximately, divorce rate in Zimbabwe has since 2000 been rising at nine percent per year ([Nemukuyu 2015](#)). This gradual rise in divorce statistics has seen an average of 2500 cases going through the courts in 2017 ([Kamhungira 2017](#)). It has also been noted that marriage violence has also gone up

remarkably. Studies have established that divorces are generally bad as they have serious effects on both the conflicting partners and their surrounding relations (Dodo 2018). Most divorces also result in the following; emotional turmoil, financial hardship, loss of friendships, challenges in creating post-divorce identity and depression. It also leads to morally defective dependents, inheritance of marriage instability by children of divorced parents (Arugu 2014), and extremism in alcoholism and sexual immorality among others.

According to Arugu (2014), though divorce is discouraged, it is no longer regarded as a sin by most religions. Some states like Nigeria have since adopted more liberal divorce laws so that people are not grudgingly tied together when there are other and better options (Arugu 2014). The generally seen liberal approach to divorce the world over has been to some extent, driven by globalisation, literacy, development and migration among others where different cultures, traditions and lifestyles are having to mix and compromise. In the process, weaker practices are getting absorbed by stronger ones while the rich also conditionally impose their belief systems on the poor. However, there are still some states and religions which have not opened up to divorce. Such states include Philippines (Hundley & Santos 2015) while on the other hand; there are also states that are on the extreme end such as United States of America Las Vegas in particular, Maldives and Britain (Smith 2017). The lowest divorce rates are mostly found in countries with big Catholic populations, such as Cambodia, Chile and Ireland, as well as Muslim countries like Uzbekistan, Libya and Bahrain (Smith 2017). Catholic Church denies its followers the right to divorce (Hundley & Santos 2015) unlike most of the Pentecostal churches that seem to make riches out of weddings and divorces.

Findings

The data were analysed by source organisation; rural and urban context; perpetrator of violence; and the literacy levels of the targeted group before it was presented thematically responding to the questions raised in the questionnaires. All the 160 completed questionnaires were thoroughly analysed using NVIVO software.

Demographic data

Demographically, there were 160 participants with 80 females and 80 males.

Table 1. Demographic Data

GENDER	MARITAL STATUS			AGE RANGE (Years)		
	Married	Not Yet	Divorced	18-24	25-39	40-+
MALE	61	18	1	10	26	44
FEMALE	50	17	13	14	26	40
TOTAL	111	35	14	24	52	84
%	62	19	8	13	29	47

How are marriages revered in Zimbabwe post-independence?

According to all the 160 participants, marriages are still a revered institution which unfortunately is being abused by the advent of globalisation, migration (urbanization) and religious belief systems. In most societies, it is an achievement for the entire family if a child marries; a sign of the value placed in marriages.

In most cases, according to religious participants, it is a celebrated process that is also communicated to all the religious spirits as part of traditional cultures. It is necessary for pro-creation besides being Godly. According to other respondents' regulatory institutions (ZRX, HCX), marriages are an institution which helps regulate society by ordering peace and development. Marriages also build relationships which are vital for growth conflict prevention and peace building. This was also echoed by all the female respondents.

According to other civil society organisations (CSO), marriages are still important in societies as they help place people according to their value, morality and importance in local areas. Sometimes, marriages help people to work towards the attainment of their goals with big families working to ensure that their families are well provided in all areas while unmarried people may choose not to work as they may not have dependents.

According to some findings from 72 participants (45%), (12 females and 60 males) there is a social belief in most Shona cultures that marriage is the ultimate institution that bestows dignity, respect and integrity in adults. This is evident in most religious institutions where married couples enjoy different status from that accorded to unmarried parties and divorcees. This is also experienced in some work places where preference is given to married people especially if they want to transfer or to be

considered for some facilities. This is common in most government institutions and security services like the military, ZRP, Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services (ZPCS) and Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). According to the security services, customary marriage is being slowly embraced into recognised marriage systems.

Twelve percent of the female respondents indicated that some of the labour approaches especially within the government and the churches were discriminatory to the unmarried group. One respondent wrote;

‘It is a disgrace. When even government institutions are seen to be perpetuating violence and discriminatory tendencies at work places’.

What are the most cited factors binding marriages in Zimbabwe?

- Cultural expectations: 146 responses (76 females and 70 males) (91%) indicated that most of the marriages in Zimbabwe are bound by various cultural expectations. Particularly participants from the religious sectors argued that societies were forcing some couples to remain in marriages even when they were not enjoying them. It was argued that culturally, there was a certain age after which one was expected to be attached and bearing children. Being single post-that culturally and socially prescribed age attracted chastisement and ridicule from the society. According to the responses, it was some of these culturally and socially forced marriages that ultimately brew conflicts in families.

- Genuine love: 134 participants (66 females and 68 males) (84%) indicated that there were some marriages that were intact mainly because of genuine and sincere love on the part of the two lovers concerned. It was indicated that especially in the rural Zimbabwe where cultural values are still being revered, it was possible to find marriages that are solely bound by love and nothing material.

- Religious influence: The reason of having marriages tied by religious influences was cited by 130 participants (80 females and 50 males) (81%). These argued that most of the Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe that are mushrooming as a result of poverty are strict about ensuring that marriages are kept intact. It was argued that most of these religious churches were a response to high levels of poverty and other social vices. This argument was most prominent from the female respondents. The same churches also believe that marriages are the most conducive forums for making profits

especially from tithes and other financial collections. According to the other 41 responses (26%), traditional religious beliefs also had some influence on how marriages are kept intact. It was reported that there were some couples that strongly believed in their cultural and ancestral belief systems that they lived together regardless of their marital challenges. One traditional leader wrote;

'Dambudziko muZimbabwe nderekuti vanhu vanofunga kuti munhu wese mukristu. Nekudaro vanoda kushandisa tsika dzechikristu kuumba misha. Dzimwe tsika dzechikristu dzatoparadza dzimba'.

(The problem with some Zimbabweans is that they think that everyone believes in Christianity. As such, they want to use biblical teachings to resolve domestic conflicts. Some of these biblical approaches have contributed towards some domestic conflicts.)

- Economic influences: There are in some instances where couples marry because either of them is financial sound. This has become common in Zimbabwe's urban areas where material wealth now defines manhood rather than love. According to 63 responses (40 females and 23 males) (39%), the use of wealth to get love has been perpetuated by the coming of modernity in Zimbabwe; where almost everything is sold for money. No women in Zimbabwe would want to live in poverty for as long as they can find financially sound men. According to the participants, this approach has also been furthered by the advent of education and professionalization of lives.

What are the most recorded reasons for divorce in Zimbabwe?

- Breakdown of the extended family system: All the 160 participants cited rampant breakdown in extended family systems as a common cause for divorces. It was also indicated that most of the breakdowns are a result of massive migration and globalisation coming through media and education among others.

- Financial problems: It was given from the CSOs that some divorces are emanating from financial challenges and poverty in the families especially young and budding ones. It was indicated that contrary to what young partners would have anticipated, they go through completely new lifestyles defined by shortages and social and economic challenges. This is akin to change in circumstances for newly married couples. This is when partners begin to experience a different life from that they would

have anticipated during courtship. This, according to the findings is a result of falsehoods and failure to open up on one's capabilities and realities.

- Gender equality: It was indicated by 104 participants (45 females and 60 males) (65%) that the advent of globalisation dragging with it aspects around equality between men and women especially in marriages also ushered in marriage conflicts and subsequent separation. Contrary to traditional African and Zimbabwean practices and beliefs that men head families, gender equality according to the participants, demands that men and women in marriages be treated and afforded equal respect. This has resultantly led to serious marriage conflicts and divorces.

- Distant relationships: The advent of gender equality and women empowerment has led to the employment of both men and women in relationships. According to 52 respondents (23 females and 30 males) (33%), employment of women and constant transfers of employees regardless of their marital status and family responsibilities have also resulted in a number of marriage breakdowns. Distant relationships also culminate into communication breakdown; with couples either failing to constantly talk to each other or talk in a manner that always raises questions and suspicions.

- Domestic violence: According to 52 respondents (17 females and 35 males) (33%), domestic violence has become a common cause of divorces. According to the respondents, domestic violence has been on the rise partly because of gender equality arguments, drug and alcohol abuse and the effects of media on the behaviours and attitudes of the population. The respondents project that in the next 20 to 30 years (2038 to 2048), domestic violence may be the leading cause of marriage breakdowns and homicide. It was also indicated that the trend in violence was mutating that it was sometimes difficult to craft resolution and prevention mechanisms.

- Infidelity: According to 84 responses (60 females and 24 males) (53%) in the questionnaires, massive migration, women empowerment, gender equality and the effects of the media have largely contributed to marital infidelity. It was indicated that the fact that partners in marriages earned highly, it sort of removed their responsibilities and respect for their partners. Similarly, social media has gradually encouraged partners to drift apart and subsequently cheat on the other.

- Lack of affection and age difference: The study established that lack of affection in most marriages had contributed to some of the divorces. 52 respondents (33%) pointed out that some couples were getting into marriages simply to either please

their church communities or their families. Of these respondents, 44 (28%) indicated that some couples had nothing in common with regards their feelings, hobbies, likes and expectations and dreams. In most cases, such couples are just matched by their elders to satisfy either their social or religious demands. According to 40 responses (25%), there was also an element of age differences between the couples as a driving force towards divorces. It was pointed out that there are two scenarios with age differences. Either the man is too old for the woman such that they fail to see things from the same perspectives or the woman is too old for the man such that the man feels ashamed to be seen with her. In such instances, their views, expectations, likes and understanding differs in a destructive manner. However, the same responses appreciated the need for some age differences between couples. They termed this difference 'reasonable' enough to keep them intact and appropriate.

Closely akin to the above argument is the reason that was raised by 40 participants (20 females and 20 males) (25%) to the effect that the recent marriage trend has also contributed to divorces. What the respondents termed recent marriage trend was a phenomenon where people were marrying at younger ages before they realised that they would have missed some growth and development stages in life. According to the 40 responses, there were some men (boys) marrying at around 20 to 24 years of age to girls of almost the same ages. Because of immaturity, lack of wisdom and experience and lack of adequate and appropriate household material, the couples fail to connect and soon decide to break up. In some cases, they are fooled into marriage by the fact that they will be earning enough for their survival, they will be living on their own and that they will be exposed to lots of immorality and uncensored media material.

- Educational attainment: Thirty-six responses (10 females and 13 males) (23%) indicated that differences in levels of educational attainment had also played a role in some divorces. With the advent of globalisation and modernity, social statuses, built around one's profession and income, were taking a serious position in most marriages especially in Zimbabwe. According to the responses, this was most prevalent when the woman was more educated than the man counterpart. There are some men who feel challenged and threatened if their wives get more educated than them.

What are the most applied conflict resolution methods in marriage disputes?

With regards to the most applied conflict resolution methods in the studied marriage disputes, the study established that generally, seven approaches were prominent. It was noted that violence as a resolution method was the most employed measure with 100 responses while the uncle/aunt methods had the least with 16. It was established that negotiations, religious means, mediation, homicide and avoidance had the following responses: 80, 64, 56, 28 and 24 respectively. Only three participants indicated that they applied none of the available measures in times of disputes.

Using dyadic analysis (the actor–partner interdependence model), ([Spanier 1976](#); [Kulik et al. 2016](#)) the study looked at the impacts of the strategies taken by married partners on evaluations of marriage life as reflected in the forms of violence and respective preferred conflict resolution approaches. Data on this were largely derived from the civil society participants.

The findings revealed that negotiation (80) [50%] (30 females and 50 males) and subsequent violence (100) [63%] (25 females and 75 males) were the most common strategies employed by most spouses, whereas avoidance (24) [15%] (10 females and 14 males) and aunt/uncle (16) [10%] (six females and 10 males) avenue were the least common strategies in resolving marriage conflicts. Alcoholism and drug abuse were also cited by the participants as some of the new approaches to addressing marriage conflicts and violence.

Civil society and religious institutions supporting [Arugu \(2014\)](#) indicate that most often, divorces present opportunities for growth and positive change. According to [Arugu \(2014\)](#), [Hundley and Santos \(2015\)](#) and [Smith \(2017\)](#), some couples hang on to marriages that may not be showing any prospects for growth and development until they are forced into new relationships. While it is not encouraged for people to divorce, there are times, according to respondents HCX's statistics and MPX, when divorces become the last resort. Divorces are sometimes seen as restorative means of joy, happiness and love in some couples.

Table 2. Average Marriages in Zimbabwe/province

Province	Households (2013-2017)	
	Number	Marriage percentages
Manicaland (Manland)	410 082	13.4
Mashonaland Central (MCent)	263 923	8.6
Mashonaland East (MEast)	326 825	10.7
Mashonaland West (MWest)	345 223	11.3
Matabeleland North (MNorth)	160 912	5.3
Matabeleland South (MSouth)	154 875	5.1
Midlands (Midl)	359 572	11.4
Masvingo (Masv)	338 153	11.1
Harare (Hre)	534 106	17.4
Bulawayo (Byo)	165 345	5.4

N.B: In brackets are the short versions of the provinces listed in the Tables 1 to 5. (Source: Author)

The findings show that marriage statistics in provinces vary. Harare, Manicaland, Midlands, Mashonaland West, Masvingo and Mashonaland East top the list with; 17.4%, 13.4%, 11.4%, 11.3%, 11.1% and 10.7% respectively. On the other hand, these are at the bottom; Matabeleland South, Matabeleland North, Bulawayo and Mashonaland Central provinces with the following percentages; 5.1%, 5.3%, 5.4% and 8.6% respectively. Notable in the statistics minus Bulawayo is that the existence of major towns in a province determines the figures and their respective increase.

Table 3. Statistics of official marriages in Zimbabwe per province per year from 2013

Yr	Hre	Byo	MCent	MEast	MWest	Manland	Midl	Masv	MNorth	MSouth	Total
2013	1301	1013	209	318	378	370	305	301	189	181	4565
2014	1212	1032	522	310	274	370	302	310	180	140	4652
2015	1771	1080	410	307	389	371	311	279	181	190	5289
2016	1401	1121	587	327	391	328	299	310	185	207	5156
2017	1410	1220	590	331	388	372	312	328	194	370	5515

(Source: Author)

In Table 3, the figure shows that statistics of official marriages in Zimbabwe categorised per province and per year also differ. While 2013 had a high figure (4565), gradually the figure reduced before it slightly went up in 2017 to 5515. The figure also shows that Harare, Bulawayo and Mashonaland Central provinces had the highest figures of marriages in Zimbabwe during the period under review.

Table 4. Frequency of marriage violence in Zimbabwe per interval

Yr	Hre	Byo	MCent	MEast	MWest	Manland	Midl	Masv	MNorth	MSouth	Total
2013	1417	1310	297	190	162	146	156	490	141	151	4460
2014	1210	1311	210	281	177	140	176	483	219	228	4434
2015	1425	1280	390	271	260	256	231	510	246	241	5110
2016	1372	1301	395	388	252	266	359	691	237	340	5601
2017	1420	1312	410	397	382	343	460	692	356	358	6130

(Source: Author)

From the data collected, statistics of marriage violence across the provinces and over time were recorded and analysed. It is shown that from 2013, there has been a surge of 27% (from 4460 to 6130) in the recorded cases of marriage violence as reported to the law enforcement agents including traditional leadership institutions. The rise in cases has been steady and gradual with Harare, Bulawayo and Masvingo recording the highest figures while Matebeleland North and South and Manicaland recorded the least cases. The respondents indicated that the increase in Harare, Bulawayo and Masvingo was largely due to economic challenges coupled with issues to do with women's demands for equality. For the provinces that recorded the least statistics, it was attributed to their adherence to traditional practices of managing marriages.

Table 5. Statistics of official divorces in Zimbabwe per province at given intervals

Yr	Hre	Byo	MCent	MEast	MWest	Manland	Midl	Masv	MNorth	MSouth	Total
2013	1420	1281					151	162			3014
2014	1521	1298					181	168			3168
2015	1523	1388					178	153			3242
2016	1678	1590					193	166			3627
2017	1698	1591					198	171			3658

(Source: Author)

Divorce statistics established in the study are for four provinces; Harare, Bulawayo, Masvingo and Midlands only because they are the provinces with High Courts where marriages are dissolved as per the constitution of Zimbabwe. What is clear in the trends is an increase (average 21%) in cases of divorces from 2013 (3014) till 2017 (3658). The increase corresponds with what [Nemukuyu \(2015\)](#) and [Smith \(2017\)](#) argue about divorces which is contrary to [Hundley and Santos \(2015\)](#). Nemukuyu commenting on the rise in divorces in Zimbabwe cite a general change in the way people live due to modernity and urbanisation.

Table 6. Statistics of marriage homicide in Zimbabwe per province at given intervals

Yr	Hre	Byo	MCent	MEast	MWest	Manland	Midl	Masv	MNorth	MSouth	Total
2013	51	43	14	9	9	10	13	21	12	12	206
2014	44	38	14	14	14	15	15	13	13	9	189
2015	48	43	15	14	16	16	14	12	12	14	204
2016	53	45	15	17	17	17	15	15	11	12	217
2017	55	45	17	16	16	16	16	16	15	14	226

(Source: Author)

Partners have always been dying from marriage violence only that in the present day, people are more educated and empowered to report to law enforcement agencies and other pressure groups. However, the study statistics indicate a clear increase of

homicide reports over time from 206 in 2013 to 226 in 2017. There is a steady annual increase of 9.7%. Harare, Bulawayo and Masvingo provinces top the list.

The disaggregation of the driving factors is as follows; civil society organisations and government ministries and departments' respondents cited knowledge and empowerment about human rights. Women and men's pressure groups argued that it is about opportunities to report and a genuine increase in the cases or availability of reporting mechanisms. On the other hand, religious groups and traditional leaders' blamed modernization and the advent of 'the women's rights movement' for marriage homicide cases.

Other dispute resolution approaches

Involuntary adjustment to nature is an aspect that was established in the study. It was indicated across all the participants (148) [93%] (70 females and 78 males) that most people had seen and to a large extent, accepted the change that they had gradually adopted and adapted in-order to fit into the new dispensation. This is similar to what [Gottman \(1994\)](#), [Gravningen \(2017\)](#) and [Smith \(2017\)](#) have posited regarding the adoptive stance that couples in conflict may take. The same argument also justifies some divorces as 'just and necessary divorces' in the interest of saving lives, progress, more opportunities and change. Over time, globalisation coming through migration, employment and diaspora tuition among others had fused various cultures, religions and traditions creating a 'blended' approach to both marriage and conflict resolution and prevention in Zimbabwe.

Discussion

What is evident from the statistics of formal marriages across the provinces is that Harare being the capital city with a variety of influences towards marriage has the highest figure while Matebeleland South has the least. This may be to some extent linked to cultural belief systems and the influence of South Africa on the youth and young adults. SA is a ready job market for most of the young adults from this region including Bulawayo, and Matebeleland North provinces. From the figures showing official marriages per province and per year, it is deducible that over time, couples who registered their marriages decreased. While specific reasons for the decline cannot be identified, what is clear is a direct relationship with a corresponding level of conflict

and increase in divorces. Notably, major cities like Harare and Bulawayo are expected to record the highest in terms of marriages because of the existence of institutions that drive people into marriage like churches, CSOs, and competition owing to population density. That hypothesis only applies to Harare and not Bulawayo. However, with regards to the other provinces that have more towns with some population density, the hypothesis seems to be applying well.

Generally, civil society and religious institutions supporting [Arugu \(2014\)](#) indicate that most often, divorces present opportunities for growth and positive change. It was revealed that while it is not encouraged that conflicting partners divorce, there are instances when it becomes the last resort. However, no matter how divorce is condemned and discouraged, in light of the surging cases of violence and marriage homicide over the recent years, it may be prudent to separate or out-rightly divorce people thereby exposing them to new and unexplored opportunities that they would never have dreamt of. Sometimes, partners in marriages are stuck in some unproductive and stagnant projects and commitments wasting valuable time instead of exploring other possibilities. Often times, it is only after one has moved on and explored the world that they discover their capabilities and strengths. Such cases of excellence post-failed marriages were noted from the civil society institutions' responses.

According to respondent ZRX, customary marriage is being slowly embraced into the system. This shows how the institution has begun to realise the importance of marriages and how flexible the same system could be in the lives of the people. Marriages should be institutions to facilitate the lives of humanity and not the other way round.

The gradual increases in marriage figures across the provinces may be an indication of the people's appreciation of the laws and their need to safeguard the welfare of their spouses in the face of inheritance conflicts. The marriage rate increase is also seen to be corresponding with the rate of marriage divorce. This may also be an explanation to early marriages or the issue to do with human rights' literacy which allows couples to make decisions from a wide base of options. It is also interesting that there is an increase in the rate of marriage homicide and violence across the provinces and time. What the study has not been able to tell is the influence of the rises in Masvingo provinces and not any other provinces. For Harare and Bulawayo, they may

be cases of population density, unemployment and poverty and intense competition and to some extent, the influence of globalisation.

The study shows that domestic violence has been on the rise since the turn of the millennium partly because of gender equality arguments, drug and alcohol abuse and the effects of the media on the behaviours and attitudes of young people. The study projects that from around 2038 to 2048, domestic violence may be the leading cause of marriage breakdowns and homicide. In that regard, it becomes necessary to look at the separation of marriage partners as a way of saving their lives and the welfare of those around them. Given the statistics and the developing trends in marriage violence and homicide, it is inevitable that divorce will become an option in resolving violence and marriage homicide in Zimbabwe. The study has also shown that negotiation (80) [50%] and subsequent violence (100) [63%] were the most common strategies employed by most spouses in resolving marriage conflicts in Zimbabwe.

Unlike in the classical studies by [Gottman \(1994\)](#) and [Caughlm \(2000\)](#), the study has established a change in marriage circumstances that are affecting marriage conditions. Aspects like globalisation, education, migration, gender equality and women empowerment have shifted how parties in marriages now see life and responses to conflicts. It was also established in the study that there were cases of divorces owing to people marrying at young ages before they realise other missed development stages. The study established that in Zimbabwe, most couples who marry below the ages of 24 years are exposed to early break-ups as they rise in their professions and experience wider sexual lives. Besides, some parties in marriages are just violent that they cannot live with partners. Under such circumstances, there is need for assisted divorces in what the study calls 'just divorces'.

From the homicide statistics in the study, it is easy to deduce the fact that endogenous conflict resolution and prevention means that have been in use in Zimbabwe have over the period lost relevance. Ultimately, most couples no-longer refer to the aunt/uncle nor the negotiation and mediation systems that used to be very effective and efficient in most Zimbabwean societies. Instead, these couples have either turned to the church elders or out-right violence for quick solutions. Unfortunately, church elder approach suffers from its lack of close biological relationship that the aunt/uncle approach offers. The former approach is distant and loosely binding.

Involuntary adjustment to nature is also another aspect that was exposed in the study. According to findings from both the regulatory authorities and civil societies, there are instances when people have to adjust their lifestyles often abandoning their regular habits and interests. According to data from respondents HCX and ZRX, divorced people have to involuntarily adjust to new lives primarily for the children and other extended families. This fits well into the arguments by [Gottman \(1994\)](#), [Gravningen \(2017\)](#) and [Smith \(2017\)](#).

Recommendations

Divorces like any other social institutions should be respected as life regulatory elements. However, it must never be used to curtail the freedoms of humanity. Therefore, people may only get into marriages if it is good for them. If it is not, they must never be forced, lest they suffer and sometimes lead to marriage homicide. If anything, society must be exposed to the realities of life and begin to appreciate the fact that gradually, modernity and globalisation are bringing in changes. One of the several changes is the inevitability of divorces and involuntary adjustment nature.

Marriage is generally a union where trust gradually develops over time as couples sacrifice own interests for the good of their partners ([Gottman 1994](#)). Similarly, salvaging a marriage requires abandoning pride, selfishness, being able to forgive and reject bitterness among others. But in this age of education, wealth accumulation, pride and gender equality and globalisation, who is ready to sacrifice his or her own space and standards for the purpose of saving marriage? In the absence of a definite response, it therefore becomes necessary to opt for divorce as the best solution to all the cited challenges and cases of violence in marriages. Over time and with the deepening of the effects of the modern media, divorce becomes a choice defined by joy and hope where partners see emancipation and self-sustenance. Over time, divorcees can choose to reconcile by way of re-proposing, remarrying and re-committing themselves if need be rather than force themselves in hurtful, hopeless and destructively bloody marriages.

In light of the surging cases of violence and marriage homicide over the recent years, it may be prudent to separate or out-rightly divorce people thereby exposing them to new and unexplored opportunities. It must be appreciated that divorces can lead to

various paths; new paths, misery and poverty or unbelievable opportunities. Given the marriage and divorce trends in Zimbabwe, divorce is soon becoming the best option of addressing marriage conflicts and it will not be hurting anymore.

Conclusion

The study seeking to establish some of the causes of divorces and the subsequent possibility of helping marriages in distress to break was indeed an eye-opener. Having collected data from 160 participants across all the most relevant institutions around marriages, families and law enforcement agents, the study established an array of influences to the breakdown of marriages in Zimbabwe. It also established some of the reasons for getting into marriage before the same people finally break-up. It was the study's finding that marriage conflicts and homicide are rampant in Zimbabwe. Respective causes of the conflicts and homicide were also noted. The study however, noted that while marriages are good for the development of any economy and society, sometimes if there are irreparable differences between couples, there is need to separate under what the study calls 'just divorces'. These are basically meant to save lives while allowing divorcees to reconnect after they would have really made up their minds and controlled their emotions. The study recommends that there be assisted divorces responding the prevailing socio-marital environment.

Conflicts of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest

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