
AFRREV LALIGENS

An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies
Bahir Dar, Ethiopia
Vol. 1 (2) April-July, 2012:73- 84

ISSN: 2225-8604(Print)

ISSN 2227-5460 (Online)

**Overview of Gender Matrimonial Conflicts, Signs and
Signals of Marriage Breakdown and Various Coping
Strategies**

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Abstract

The study examines the various causes of gender matrimonial conflicts between couples, the signs and signals and various copying strategies. Couples are bound together as husband and wife. However successful and happy a marriage is, problems are bound to occur, either minor or serious the problem is helps to strengthen the relationship between couples when it is resolved. Some of the marital conflicts are as a result of the condition of the couples, their personality, their behaviours and the environment in which these couples live. Causes of matrimonial conflicts, the signs and signals of marriage breakdown due to marriage conflict and the different types of copying strategies/ managing matrimonial conflict were also identified. Therefore there is need for the following suggestions; there should be frequent campaign programme to enlighten couples on the need for harmony to reign in the family, and that couple should be loyal and trustworthy, responsible, and be able to settle their dispute or misunderstanding amicably.

Key Words: Matrimonial conflicts, marriage breakdown, copying strategies, gender, signs and symptoms

Introduction

In a family setting, there is no doubt that there will not be conflicts between couple since they come from different homes. They are bound together as husband and wife and as a couple. Since they are not from the same family, they may have different character, conduct and opinion about things which may cause matrimonial conflicts / problems. However successful and happy a marriage is, the couple should be able to identify and analyze their problems, and resolve these conflicts in a peaceful way. Problem in the family however minor or serious helps to strengthen the relationship between couple when it is resolved. Nwabuoku (2001) contended that some of the marital conflicts are as a result of the environment in which this couple lives, he went further to explain that some conflicts can exist in one country and absent in another country. Every married couple has disagreements from time to time. Learning to handle them is the key to a successful marriage. Many couples fall into the bad habit of shouting, accusing and having temper tantrums when discussing an area of conflict. It is far better to take a soft approach and choose a time when both partners are free to talk. A husband or wife may feel hurt and overlooked when in actual fact, the problem is a lack of

communication about needs. The solution might be as simple as asking for the partner to listen while needs are shared. Couples should be open and honest, and try to address issues, when they surface, doing this will keep communication channels prevent small irritations from becoming huge explosions of anger. Conflict happens in all marriages but they should always be handled constructively (Debbie 2010).

While according to armchair advice, the signs and signals of marriage breakdown are: communication breakdown, needing assurance, covering up, feeling secure, being the last to know, change in appearance or behaviour, arguments, lack of intimacy, lack of trust, being on the look out, not spending time together, and sex becoming an ordeal (<http://www.armchairadvice.co.uk/relationships/healthcheck/signsignals.htm>. (2010).

Causes of Marital Conflicts

In the study conducted by Billson (1990) and Boron (1990), it was observed that in societies with depressed economics, spouse are in the habit of abandoning majority of their roles for each other to perform. As a result, matrimonial conflict which gives rise to violence will prevail in that marriage. Nwabuoku [2001] explained that In Nigeria country and some other countries, conflicts arise in marriages as a result of infidelity, having only female children or none at all, money management and intrusion by in-law. While Akinade (1997) and Niolon (2003) concluded that matrimonial conflict can be by financial security, loyalty and infidelity, sex, privacy, children, lying, commitment, power struggle, gender roles, in-laws and friends. Marital problems which can leads to conflicts as being analyzed as follow;

Financial security

Akinade (1997) pointed out that financial security which is money is a very common aspect of conflict among young couples likewise argument over expenditures. It is very important for couples to spend money wisely and identify areas where money is needed in the home, for example building a house, car, children school fees etc. in the same vein, Nwabuoku [2001] contended that conflicts arise in marriages as a result of money management, but if couples failed to set their priority right, it may end up being the beginning of conflict in their marriage.

Loyalty and Infidelity

There is nothing in a union than the feeling of dishonesty and infidelity. Some couples often start searching outside the marriage; they believe the romance in the union has died. These changes may also be misconstrued as disloyalty or infidelity and as such start seeking the attention outside the union; if he has premarital sex definitely will have a secondary sex partner after marriage Forste and Koray 1996, Nwabuoku 2001).

Sex

Generally among women, sex is looked at as a source of marital problem among women. In the study recently conducted by Benokraits (1996), some wives reported being forced by their husband to have sex against their will. Orgasm will not occur when it is wanted or it happens quickly. Sincerely some women see sex as a punishment when been ask for by their husband and that it should be at their own will and not at the instance of their husband's will. Sexual expression should be one of the happiest; most pleasurable and most rewarding experiences in a couples life, there should be a mutual agreement as to when and how it should come up (Akinade, 2008).

Privacy

However, privacy is a crucial need for many couples, no matter how close a couple is, they need to respect each other's need for privacy in order to avoid conflict in their home. An example is same couples never open each other's letter, not because they are afraid but because they respect each privacy (Akinade, 2008).

Children

Children do unite the marriage but may at times serve as a common source of conflict. Akinade, (2008) asserted that couples may have different philosophies about children's upbringing, education, discipline, morals and responsibilities, the absence or presence of children and the sex in a union are also common sources of problems. The husband may want children the wife may not want, or one may want boys and the other may want girls, all these can lead to conflict, in the same vein, Nwabuoku [2001]also contended that conflicts arise in marriages as a result of having only female children or none at all.

Lying

A marriage or relationship that is built on lies is obviously standing on shaky foundation and will definitely collapse as soon as the truth unfolds itself. No matter what it takes or causes, it is better for him/her to marry you for what you are and not what you are expect to be, do not cover up or lie which may eventually put the union into trouble (Venirgas, Rosemary 2000).

Commitment

In marriage, the couples must work hand in hand, and they should be able to understand one another, recognizing love in that union. According to Akinade, (2007) couples just have to be committed to their union, nothing should take the place of each other, there should be nothing like “you know I don’t have time, or it’s not your duty or not my duty. The couples need to talk together and reason together

Power struggle

According to Berlin, G. (2004), cited by Akinade, (2008) power struggle among couples can be of various ways. It could be monetary aspect, leadership (I am the husband) it could also be how couples exercise their powers; it could be dealing with the children or household management. When both parties work, the man may still want to control the woman on how her income is spent.

Gender Roles

The gender roles may create conflict. The father or the man should know his role in the house while the woman or mother of the house should also know her role they should come together, communicate effectively and agree on issues concerning the house/home. Billson (1990) and Baron (1990) asserted that spouses device the habit of abandoning majority of their roles for each other to perform thereby leading to conflict.

In-Laws and friends

Friends and in-laws of the couple may not constitute problems between couples. But problems may emerge as a result of lack of communication, over zealous insecurity, prejudices. Particularly if the mother in-law feels she is no longer having access to his property or the wife feels her mother in-law is pock noising into their affairs or the friends think they don’t have free

access again to the couples as to when they are single. All what each individual need is understand and acceptance (Akinade, 2007). While Nwabuoku [2001] is of the opinion that marital conflict could be as a result of intrusion by in-laws:

Signs and signal for marriage breakdown

Signs and symptoms to show marriage breakdown can occur between couples after there is marriage conflict in a home, therefore the following are expected to show up.

- **Communication breakdown.** When partners no longer spend hours together and never talk about anything other than what's for dinner?.
- **Needing reassurance.** When you constantly moan about your partner to your friends or even anyone who will listen, and you ask other people what they think of your relationship more than you discuss your relationship with your partner.
- **Covering up.** When you find yourself putting on a brave face and pretending that everything is OK whilst inside you have a heavy heart.
- **Feeling insecure.** When you are always not comfortable being yourself or you worry about everything you say or up sets your partner or makes him or her want to leave you.
- **You are the last to know.** When your partner no longer talk to you about his/ her life, work or actions about things. When you question your partner about things that are evasive or dismissive.
- **Change in appearance or behaviour.** When you noticed that there is any recent change in your partner. A person who suddenly starts dressing very well, showering more often, using different cosmetics or aftershave should be a warning sign. This may indicate they are attempting to attract other people.
- **Arguments.** Some couples argue more than others, when they repeatedly argue about the same issues without any resolution. Violent or abusive arguments should be taken very seriously.

- **Lack of intimacy.** When Intimacy decline in the level of cuddling, kissing and sex from the initial heady days of falling in love, then there is cause for concern. There may be times when intimacy may decline (after childbirth etc) but it should be temporary.
- **Lack of trust.** This is when partners are constantly uneasy and suspicious of the motives and movements of the other.
- **On the look out.** When you are on the look out for other interesting potential partners or you feel that your partner is not 100% set on you.
- **Not spending time together.** When you spend your time doing something else other than being with your partner, and you seem to find excuses.
- **Sex has become an ordeal.** Is sex still enjoyable? Most of us experience fluctuations in libido, but one has to consider his/ her partners interest.
(<http://www.armchairadvice.co.uk/relationships/healthcheck/signssignals.htm>2010)

Coping Strategies / Conflict Management

According to Kolb (1986) cited by E. Enwereji, (1999) highlighted six different types of conflict copying strategies as follow;

Dyadic Negotiation

This is a situation whereby the parties aggrieved are called together by their representatives with the hope of resolving the disputes between them. In this type of negotiation interview, it is likely that one of the parties lean towards the stronger party.

Meditation

In the case of meditation, a committee representing both parties would be set to review the case and make recommendations, this recommendation may not be binding due to conclusion and judgments made by one of the parties without considering the other party (Akinade, 2008). While Merki, (1996) concluded that mediation is the practice of resolving disputes with the aid of an impartial third party. In the past, people who could no longer tolerate unpleasant family situations might ask older family members, clergy or

community leaders to help, when outside professional are involved, they would learn to adjust to their new life.

Binding Intervention

This is when a third party will arbitrate in the aggrieved case, make a ruling / pronouncement that will be binding on both parties.

Deliberate Avoidance

This is inform of defense mechanism, but does not solve the situation, because the aggrieved person just decide to manage the conflict temporary but will not be happy.

Confrontation

Here, one of the aggrieved partners takes the first step to resolve the conflicts by open confrontation without involving any body.

Defusing

This technique uses longer time in resolving issues because of lobbying, investigations and sense of good reasoning that is made use in resolving and managing conflicts between spouses.

While considered other methods of resolving marital conflicts, according to Shepherd, (2003) cited by Akinade (2008), are four common techniques couples often use to end conflicts.

Submission

The problem ends or goes when person submits or agrees with the other for example saying “okay if it’s your wish that your mother should move in with us, it’s all right by me”.

Compromise

This is a situation a third party or any of the couples suggests a point and it is taken. For example, it is okay if you say mother is coming to say with us. But she must stay in the guest house/room

Standoff

This is when the argument is dropped without resolving it by the couples.

Withdrawal

Here the couples decide not to continue with the argument.

Nwabuoku (2001) identified the following strategies for managing matrimonial conflicts.

- Couples should draw out interesting activities that would be beneficiary for them to participate together.
- Couples should cooperate together, they should share out responsibilities and perform their responsibilities assigned to individual
- Couples should accept situations as it is particularly giving birth to only female children husbands are always found of this conduct
- Couples should remain faithful to one and the other, speak out their mind and become loyal to one another.
- Couple should be able to settle disagreement without inviting the third party such as friends, in-laws and relatives. This is contrary to Merki, (1996) which stated that mediation is the practice of resolving disputes with the aid of an impartial third party that in the past, people who could no longer tolerate unpleasant family situations might ask older family members, clergy or community leaders to help. When outside professional are involved, they would learn to adjust to their new life.

Other ways of coping with or preventing matrimonial conflict are stated below

- Do not remark one another in the presence of others (children, families, visitors etc.).
- Do not consider yourself always that you are right in everything. Try also to reduce jealousy to minimum. Be attentive, be able to listen and hear the spouse.
- Never generalize even apparent defects of the spouse, have conversation only about concrete behaviour in a concrete situation.
- Couples should try to find time, at least sometimes, to have a rest from each other; this will help to remove emotionally psychological oversaturation with dialogue. And Constructive ways of managing matrimonial conflicts is the ability of spouses to understand, forgive and concede. One of the conditions of the conflict end between loving spouses is not to achieve a victory

<http://www.loveiscomplicated.info/2010/05/prevention-of-matrimonial-conflicts-conflict-resolution-between-spouses>)

- Couples should approach the problem gently, listen to what their spouse says and communicate well; their marriage will be strengthened on an ongoing basis (Debbie 2010).
- Couples should try to speak with dignity, respect and love with one another, try to be compassionate, kind with humility, this helps to suppress the ability to insist on being right in any disagreement. A loving apology to your partner, a good communication involving listening with the ability to share and understand ones feelings and a habit of expressing appreciation will win respect and help to build a trusting relationship in the family. This will help to prevent separation between the couples (Watchtower, 2008).

Conclusion

Matrimonial conflict has been identified as a major threat to couples, which may lead to divorce if care is not taken. When there is divorce or separation in a family, the life's of the children will be in jeopardy, this can affect the children academically, morally and spiritually.

Recommendation

Therefore there is need for the following recommendation.

- (1) There should be frequent campaign programmes on marriage to enlighten couples on the need for harmony to rain in the family
- (2) Couple with conflict in a marriage should examine themselves and search for changes they can apply into the marriage to make peace rain.
- (3) They should be loyal and trust one another, but should not doubt each other.
- (4) Couple should settle their disputes or misunderstanding amicably without allowing third party.
- (5) Couple should try to be responsible in the family and have the family interest as number one in their mind.
- (6) Couple should believe that they are joined together as one and they should not be scattered or separated.

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