

**DIVORCE: IT'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES ON
FAMILY LIFE IN CALABAR MUNICIPALITY C.R.S.
NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

Divorce is a widespread social problem which has been widely discussed by many social scientists and anthropologists. Our various news media have been carrying reports of divorce which causes major changes in the lives of all family members and other problems of destabilizing the societies at large. This study aims at establishing the socio-economic consequences of divorce on Calabar Municipality in Cross River State, Nigeria. Qualitative and descriptive research was conducted using structured questionnaires as data collecting tool. Descriptive statistics were gathered and presented in tables while simple percentages was used in data analysis. From the findings, it was discovered that extramarital affairs, infertility, lack of communication, infidelity and lot others contribute to divorce and its drastic consequences really affect the children in the family. Base on these findings, the results of the research suggested that premarital and marriage counseling would help to reinforce stability in marriage.

Keywords: Divorce, family life, socio-economic, marriage, relationship.

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage being the most valued and respectable social institution in Nigeria and other parts of the world is seen as an important social activity every adult must undertake (Charles 2005). Failure to do this is seen as failure in one's duty to provide for the continued existence and increase of his / her lineage. Marriage is highly valued and respected in Calabar Municipality, and in fact it is seen as a relationship that must be maintained at all cost. But the effect of industrializations, urbanization and modernization has taken its toll on the institution of marriage such that it becomes increasingly unstable. A visit to some of our customary and magistrate courts shows an enormous proportion of the population whose marriages have ended or shattered.

The effect of this marriage breakdown on individuals and the entire society is such that one can no longer pretend that it does not exist and the awareness of the effects of divorce such as emergence of other social problems cannot be overlooked. Divorce has constituted itself into a social problem all over the world today and its growing rate among the people of Calabar Municipality has made youths in the area disregard the marriage institution as they illegally grasp the rights and privileges inherent in marriage which hitherto are strictly preserved for married couples such as sexual rights and procreative functions.

Almost on daily basis, one hears about women moving out of their marital homes as a result of many and varied reasons ranging from infidelity, domestic violence and others to mention but few. The parties seem to forget or purposefully refuse to understand the impending consequences of their actions on their family. This issue has become endemic to the Nigerian society causing major disruption in the family life – cycling process. The general and normal life process in

families becomes affected with great alteration and destabilization blocking the flow of or continuation of the family development. To this end, it becomes pertinent to ask questions such as what are the factors contributing to increase divorce rate in Calabar Municipality and its impact on family life process.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the factors giving rise to increase rate of divorce in Calabar Municipality.
- To determine the various consequences of divorce on family life in Calabar Municipality.
- To find out the extent to which divorce has affected the general development of the child.
- To proffer recommendation that could ameliorate and checkmate the situation.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Divorce refers to the dissolution of marriage before the death of either spouse. It can be contrasted with an annulment, which is a declaration that a marriage is void though the effect of marriage may be recognized in such union such as spousal support or alimony and child support. Divorce is seen to be a turning point that affects a person's identity (Eleoff, 2003). Individuals no longer maintain the role of husband or wife and at the same time they must rethink changes in their roles as parents, workers, and caretakers (Ander, 2010). Rosenstock (2004) define divorce as certified action by a court of law which is needed to dissolve legally marriages that do not seem to work. Kelly (2009) observed that 95% of divorces in Nigeria are uncontested, because the parties involved are able to come to an agreement regarding children issues and properties.

Regarding causes of divorce, an annual study in Nigeria by consultant Thornton (2010) estimated the main causes of divorce based on surveys of matrimonial lawyers. The main causes in 2010 were considered to include:

- Extramarital affairs 27%
- Family strains 18% and infertility 12%
- Emotional / physical abuse 17%
- Addictions e.g. alcoholism and gambling 6%

Another survey by Wilson (2012) disclosed that 93% of divorce cases were petitioned by women and none were contested. 55% of divorce in Nigeria was marriages that had lasted 10 to 15 years, with 40% ending after 5 to 10 years. The first 5 years are relatively divorce free, and if a marriage survives more than 20 years it is unlikely to end in divorce (Morgey 2011).

Kelly (2009) revealed that the probability of divorce increases when the husband is unemployed. A wife's unemployment does not seem to have any effect. This may have something to do with the male ego, whose major source of fulfilment lies in his ability to provide adequately for the family. Unemployed males tend to be depressed, irritable, infected with low self-esteem and difficult to get along with. Ander (2010) added that lack of communication is one of the leading causes of divorce. A marriage is likely to hit the rocks when the lines of communication fail owing to the fact that couples cannot have an effective relationship if either of them would not discuss their feelings, their mutual or personal issues, their resentments and expectations from either partner. Hence divorces often happen because people rarely discuss their expectations in detail prior to marriage, are less willing to work on their marriages afterwards, and would like quick solutions rather than having to resolve issues (Okedigi, 2006).

2.1 EFFECT OF DIVORCE ON FAMILY LIFE

Divorce is one of the most stressful events a person can experience. This is true regardless of whether one is the person who sought the divorce (the leaver) or the person who was unprepared for divorce (the left). The decision to divorce is typically made with ambivalence, uncertainty

and confusion. It is a difficult step. According to Wolchik (2002), while a divorce is painful, it may just bring an end to a broken marriage that is beyond repair and end the suffering of everyone around. He explained that if a couple is seeking divorce, then it would not be wrong to presume that they were having problems and there may have been bouts of bitter quarrels between the spouses, therefore, instead of running around in circles, a divorce may come as solution and end to existing incompatibilities.

In discussing its effect, (Okediji 2006) observed that after a divorce, family relationships are never normal. There is a lot of emotional disturbance to every member affected by it and this may take a long time to truly get over the trauma and confusion about love, life and relationships. The divorce affects the housing arrangements, health and economic status. In an equation wherein children are involved, custody battles may ensue. Again, Gage- Brandon (2002) added that the children are the most affected as they are deprived of their right to have a happy and emotionally healthy family relationships. A child needs both the parents equally. Parental love and support is a key to the healthy physical and mental development of a child. When a single parent has to play the role of both and fulfill the responsibilities of each while shuttling a job simultaneously, it is impossible to do so in the long term as either the career or the parenting will take a back seat (Jirage 2012). Separation from either of the parents according to Jirage (2012) may breed a psychological problem of issues like insecurity due to abandonment, instability and uncertainty of the future causing extreme mood swings, depression, resentment, suicidal tendencies, promiscuity, substance abuse, inability to trust and/or a lack of ambition in later life (Morgey 2011).

It is possible that when a marriage ends, especially if it ends in angry conflict, parents can experience a decline in their deep feelings for their children and the extent to which they voluntarily undertake responsibilities for the children. The children are grieved for long period, often end up withdrawing and feeling isolated. They miss the usual constant emotional and financial support and other family life supports. Mitchell (2005) added that the non – custodial parent, usually the father, tends to progressively disengage from his children over the years following a divorce, both geographically and emotionally. A nurturing father – child relationship is critical for children's long term development. Without such a relationship, children may experience emotional frustrations and confusion. The gender of the custodial parent may play a

part in determining the impact of divorce on children. And as indicated earlier, inter-parental conflict has powerful direct effects on children's development due to dysfunctioning in family as a social institution. Wallerstein, (2012) found out that long term consequences of parental divorce for adult attainment and quality of life may prove to be more serious than the short term emotional and social problems in children. Disrupted family life and developments are enormous, more likely expressed in the discontentment in lives of every family member. Wallerstein, (2012) also observed the following:

- Fear of betrayal, abandonment, loss and rejection.
- Lifelong vulnerability to the experience of loss.
- Anger and resentment.
- A reduction in psychological well being. e.g Depression in young adulthood.
- Low life satisfaction.
- Reduction in the ability to develop and maintain supportive friendship and dating relationships.
- Delinquent behaviours
- Fear of repeating his or her parent's failure to maintain a loving relationship.
- Fear of commitment and intimacy

2.2 Theoretical framework

This paper focuses on the functionalist perspective in the explanation of divorce. It has its origins in the works of Emile Durkheim, who was especially interested in how social order is possible or how society remains relatively stable. Functionalism interprets each part of society in terms of how it contributes to the stability of the whole society. Society is dependent on the functionality of its constituent parts (Anderson & Taylor, 2009). Each is organized to fill different needs, must work interdependently and in harmony with other parts, each also has particular consequences for the form and shape of society (Giddens, 2000).

Functionalist theory as applicable in this context looks at how the family unit creates stability and solidarity in society. However divorce is seen as a 'social dysfunction' because the primary purpose or functions of family is cut short bringing in disorganization into the social system. When one part of the system is not working or is dysfunctional, it affects all other parts and creates social problems, and in this case could include prostitution, deviant behaviours, crimes and other social vices. From this perspective, disorganization in the family as a part of social system also produces a corresponding disorganization in the whole system.

2. Methodology

This study adopted the survey method to aid data collection and employed questionnaire and interview techniques. These strategies were useful in eliciting the desired data from the target population under study. One hundred (100) respondents consisting both married and divorced adults took part in the study. Study area, Calabar Municipality was divided into 10 wards using the cluster sampling technique and 10 respondents from each ward were drawn using convenience sampling method to make a total of 100 for the study. The elicited data was presented in tables and analyzed using simple percentage%.

3. Data Analysis

Table 1: Social Characteristics of respondents

a) SEX	Number of respondents	Percentage %
Male	35	35%
Female	65	65%
Total	100	100%
b) AGE		
20 - 29	30	30%
30 - 39	26	26%
40 - 49	44	44%
Total	100	100%
c) MARITAL STATUS		
Married	53	53%

Divorced	27	27%
Widowed	20	20%
Total	100	100%
d) OCCUPATION		
Trader	24	24%
Civil Servant	45	45%
Business	20	20%
Unemployed	11	11%
Total	100	100%

Source: Field survey

Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant influence of divorce on family life.

Table 2: Showing respondents views on causes of divorce.

Variable	Yes	No	Total
Infidelity of partners	55 (55%)	45(45%)	100
Unemployment of male spouse	70 (70%)	30 (30%)	100
Infertility of female spouse	37 (37%)	63 (63%)	100

Source: Field survey

The survey in table 2 indicates that respondents were aware of the diverse causes of divorce within the community. Most mentioned factors included infidelity of partners (extra marital affairs), 55% of the respondents believe this to be one of the causes of divorce.; unemployment of male spouse, 70% of respondents said ‘yes’ to this as a cause of divorce among the community people; infertility of female spouse also was seen as a cause of divorce but only 37% said ‘yes’ while 63% of the respondents disagreed.

Table 3: Showing respondents views on effect of divorce on family life.

Variables	Yes	No	Total
Children are most affected	89 (89%)	11(11%)	100
Divorce impose problem on the society	91 (91%)	9 (9%)	100
Divorce is detrimental to normal family developments	73 (73%)	27 (27%)	100 (100%)

Source: Field survey

From table 3, findings showed that all respondents were aware of the negative effects of divorce on family life. 89% of respondents agreed that children are the most affected by divorce; 91 respondents believed that divorce is truly detrimental to normal functioning and development of families. Findings from indepth interviews conducted further confirmed the unstable condition of families brought about by divorce. Children within these families suffer great deal of set-backs both in their up-bringing, educational and social supports. Often times the children are exposed to hard and uncertain conditions in life which in the long run exposes the girl- children to promiscuous living and boys to street living becoming nuisance to the general environment. Moreso, the divorced people are also affected by the trauma of separation, they tend to be less motivated and unhappy with their jobs and most time experience unsatisfactory life.

4. Conclusion.

Having established the influence of divorce and its crippling effects on family life among the people of Calabar Municipality in CRS, Nigeria, the study recommends that couples and even unmarried young adults undergo thorough and frequent marriage counseling that would help iron out issues of compatibility and ward off unnecessary conflicts. Faithfulness in relationship is emphasized whereby both parties devote their physical and emotional beings to their marriage and avoiding extra-marital affairs. Most importantly, both parties must be actively involved in the economic sustenance of the family, communicate and share financial responsibilities to relieve stress.

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