

Reappraising the Causes and Implications of Marital Instability among Young Couples in Aba Urban: Issues and Remedies

Emmanuel Ugochukwu Nwakanma, Ph.D

Department of Sociology Gregory University Uturu, Abia State

Ijeoma Mercy Ogba-Amaugo

Department of Sociology Abia State University, Uturu Abia State

Abstract: Globalization and the rapid change it brings to societies have impacted on the marriage institution as much as it does to other institutions. One of the most evident and pervasive changes has been the rising trend in marital instability and/or divorce. Its growing impact is quite alarming in Nigeria. The study investigated the relationship between infidelity and marital instability in Aba urban; examined the relationship between socio-economic status and marital instability in Aba urban; found out the relationship between sodomy and empty shell marriage in Aba urban; and examined the relationship between physical abuse and marital instability in Aba urban. The population of the study was all young couple living in Aba Urban at the period of this study. Since there was no existing record of the population of young couples in Aba Urban at the period of the study, the purposive and convenience sampling methods were adopted in selecting participants for this study. 362 respondents (331 for questionnaire distribution and 31 for the FGD sessions) were selected. The study adopted descriptive and thematic methods in analyzing the data collected through the questionnaire and the FGD sessions. The findings of the study confirmed that infidelity, Sodomy, physical abuse and socio-economic status are all leading causes of marital instability. Recommendations include improvement on the nation's economy to boost per-capita income, improve household income and consequently enhance standard of living; a restructuring of the marriage contracting processes by contracting institutions in order to help the would-be partners appreciate the expectations of each other before the marriage is contracted; customary laws on marriage should be reviewed to empower and protect the women to express themselves when cultural expectations on marriage are infringing on their human rights.

Keywords: Marital Instability, Remedies, Issues.

Introduction

According to the law, marriage is a unique compact of union between a man and a woman that creates a conjugal and family life. It serves as the cornerstone of the family and unbreakable social structure whose nature, outcomes, and occurrence are guided by law and precept. Marriage's beginnings can be traced back to the time of creation (Hussanis & Adejare, 2021). According to Nwokolo (2012), marriage is a link and relationship that most frequently occur between a man and a woman and that is essential to the formation of many families. Tolorunleke (2014) defined marriage as the state of being joined as husband or wife to a person of the other sex in a voluntary and legally acknowledged

relationship. Marriage is the legally or formally recognized union of two people as partners in a personal

relationship (historically and in some jurisdictions specifically a union between a man and a woman).

It is an intimate partnership between two or more people that has been formally recognized by society, law, culture, and religion. It serves as a symbol of the couple's commitment to one another and to starting a family (Akinade, 2015). Every culture in the world accepts marriage as an institution in some shape or form (Animasahun and Fatile, 2011). The underlying presumption for its social importance is that it facilitates the establishment of families, which constitute the basic building block of human society (Esere, Yusuf, and Omotosho, 2011). According to Omoniyi-Oyafunke, Falola, and Salau (2014), marriage confers legal status on sexual encounters and reproduction for legitimate offspring and has a considerable positive impact on both physical and mental health. These advantages result from the financial advantages of being married, from the social capital effect, where the spouse offers support and aids in social networking, to the regulative effect, where marriage promotes healthy behavior. The amount of gain associated with marriage varies across couples, depending on the characteristics of each partner and the quality of the match (Waite and Lehrer, 2003; Asa & Nkan, 2017).

However, during the past few decades, marriage and family life have undergone significant changes that are causing instability worldwide (Musau, Kisovi and Otor, 2015). According to Omoniyi-Oyafunke, Falola, and Salau (2014), the fragility of the marriage relationship is a prominent aspect of today's culture and can be found in Urban areas like Aba Urban in Abia State, Nigeria. Urban family life patterns are directly related to the nature of the economy, notably how it is divided into high- and low-income sectors. Economically marginal urban populations, where unemployment is high, are more likely to register more divorce cases (Maciver and Dimkpa, 2012). Due to the multiplicity of variables that undermine marriage in contemporary urban societies, there is a high level of marriage instability (Animasahun & Femi-Fatile, 2011). Marital instability is continuously on the increase in urban areas due to unemployment, physical abuse, sodomy, and infidelity. The increase in divorce rates is one of the most visible changes in Nigeria and family lives. The consequences of separation and divorce however, are quite severe and alarming.

There are several contributing elements to marital instability, which is simply defined as interpersonal issues inside the marriage. The family is the most fundamental unit of society and a cornerstone of a country's progress, according to Dessislav (2005). Sustainable development is impossible without solid families and homes, just as no community can thrive without them. There will always be faults in whatever a guy accomplishes, including marriages. Yeh, Lorenz Wickrama, Conger, and Elder (2006) defined marital instability as affective and cognitive states along with related behaviors that precede ending a relationship. Marital instability was defined by Omoniyi-Oyafunke, Falola, and Salau (2014) as the process by which marriages end in separation, desertion, or divorce.

The main debate in the newly emerging discipline of family history has been whether or not contemporary society's industrialization changed how families interacted. Family history in those fields has primarily focused on the family's relationship to changing work patterns, urbanization, altered life expectancy, increased social and geographical mobility, and loss of functions to schools, factories, hospitals, fast-food chains, and other agencies of social welfare, whether stated in terms of modernization theory, psycho-social analysis, or demography (Animasahun & Femi-Fatile, 2011). More modernization-related topics have been discussed in relation to how they affect marriage and family relationships.

Statement of the Problem

Marital instability is continuously rising in Africa and other emerging nations and is linked to separation, divorce, and widowhood (Duke-Natrebo, 2014). (Omoniyi-Oyafunke, Falola and Salau, 2014) noted that one of the most obvious shifts in African communities and family structures is the rise in divorce rates. As early experiences of parental conflict have lasting effects on the quality of the relationship between children and their parents, the effects of separation and divorce are particularly severe for children (Amato and Afifi, 2006; Sobolewski and Amato, 2007); the risk of divorce or separation is high among people who experience their parents' marital instability; children from intact families have better outcomes and a higher level of well-being than children from divorcing families (Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan, 2004). As comparison to children born into more stable families, children from divorced parents generally experience lower cognitive, behavioral, and health results (Duke-Natrebo, 2014).

According to previous literature (Duke-Natrebo, 2014; Omoniyi-Oyafunke, Falola, and Salau, 2014) where the significance of conducting research on marital instability and divorce in Nigeria has been emphasized, instability, breakdown of family and conjugal ties generally have relevant consequences on the demographic, social, and economic nature of the persons involved. In the light of the foregoing, this study was carried out to identify the causes and implications of marital instability in young couples in Aba urban, Abia State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to ascertain the major causes of marital instability in Aba Urban. Other objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To investigate the relationship between infidelity and marital instability in Aba urban
2. To examine the relationship between socio-economic status and marital instability in Aba urban
3. To find out the relationship between sodomy and empty shell marriage in Aba urban
4. To examine the relationship between physical abuse and marital instability in Aba urban.

Research Questions

To achieve the above objectives, the study will seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between infidelity and marital instability in Aba urban?
2. What is the relationship between socio-economic status and marital instability in Aba urban?
3. What is the relationship between sodomy and empty shell marriage in Aba urban?
4. What is the relationship between marital instability and physical abuse in Aba urban?

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Issues on Marital instability

There are numerous conceptual issues surrounding the causes of marital instability, but the ones that will be covered in this study's review are extramarital affairs, socio - economic status, the influence of extended families, and others. According to Ubong (2018), one of the main reasons for marital instability is extramarital sex. They contend that this is primarily the fault of the wife, despite the fact that African culture tolerates polygamy and does not typically frown upon husbands engaging in extramarital affairs. However, when it comes to the wife, extramarital affairs are always viewed with

disdain and can result in divorce. According to Ukpong (2014), the other spouse may file for and get a divorce if there is sexual incompatibility or if one spouse refuses to engage in sexual activity for an extended period of time. Onyia & Aniche (2002), Nkwocha (2002), and Kumuyi (2004) highlighted a number of factors of marital instability, with infidelity ranking highly among them.

According to Gabrielle (2014), husband's unemployment can be a major cause of divorce; economic factors appear to be one of the main causes of marital instability. In fact, financial difficulties frequently lead to the filing for divorce as a result of marital issues. Financial hardships put married couples under a lot of stress, which can result in continual fighting and poor communication. Couples with divergent spending styles or those where one partner manages the household finances may experience marital conflict that leads to divorce. Wasteful spending practices by one partner may cause conflict in the marriage (Ubong, 2018). Enang (2003) adds that another factor that may lead to divorce in marriage is early marriage. Enang contends that couples who get married for the first time when still in their adolescent years are more likely to divorce because they are typically less emotionally, intellectually, and experientially developed than they are as adults and are therefore less likely to make wise marriage decisions. In a similar vein, status changes can also result in unstable marriages. It has been noted in a study of human behaviour patterns and societal problems that certain people's way of life can be affected by a change of status on occasion (Roy, 2006). A spouse who doesn't live up to the new level of living in some situations may be divorced to allow the person to find a new partner who would fit the new status. In conclusion, Oforchukwu (2015) observed that in Nigeria, poverty and widespread unemployment have caused many incapable couples who can no longer provide for their families to dissolve their marriages.

Brandson (2016) asserted that education is frequently utilised as a stand-in for female empowerment in discussions of socio-economic position. However, Isiugo-Abanihe (2013) discovered that the link between female education and divorce was occasionally shown to be positive. This is likely due to the non-linear nature of the influence of education, with the lowest divorce rates among women with little or no education. According to research by Tilson and Larsen (2014) conducted in Ethiopia, women with no formal education and those who had participated in literacy programmes had lower divorce rates than those with only primary education. Women with secondary and higher education had divorce rates that were 0.63 percent higher than those with only primary education. Education in Nigeria is strongly correlated with the frequency of divorce and separation among women who are sexually active. According to Adedokun (2015), educated women are more likely to accept novel views about marriage, which accounts for the high divorce rate among women of reproductive age.

In Africa, particularly in Nigeria, in-laws are extremely important in family matters. As a member of the family, parents, siblings, in-laws occasionally have disagreements with either the wife's or the husband's family. Some in-laws start the argument, and as it progresses, one or more family members may encourage for a divorce. If one of the married couple is influenced by what they are told, the marriage will end (Abdullahi, 2021).

In Nigeria, many married couples report experiencing marital instability. According to a study done in the city of Ilorin by Dada and Idowu (2006), the rate at which married couples experience marital instability is rather frightening. Simply due to the influence of several influencing variables, interference by in-laws is one of them, many families have been and some are still seriously at war with themselves (Idakwo, 2002). Mothers-in-law should receive special attention since they are more involved with married children and children-in-law (Fingerman & Hay, 2012) and have greater interaction with the marriage than fathers-in-law (Willson, Shuey, & Elder, 2013).

Mothers-in-law elicit more intense emotional responses than fathers-in-law (Willson, 2013). Many traditions in Nigeria hold that mothers have a responsibility to take care of the new baby and the

mother. A nagging, overbearing, and irate mother-in-law can make the wife's house during this period into a living nightmare through her intervention in a variety of matters that often aren't her issue. Illiterate mothers have been shown to experience this frequently (Olofintoye, & Faluyi, 2018). People may have both optimistic and pessimistic expectations about their future in-laws after the wedding. According to Dada and Idowu (2006), brides and grooms may carry anxieties that the other party would be nosy and judgmental, which can lead to conflict and instability in the marriage. This anxiety may be based on stereotypes and media representations of mothers-in-law.

Empirical Reports on Marital Instability

There are a number of studies conducted by previous researchers in relation to the marital instability and its effects. Below are some of these related empirical works:

According to the research by Lehrer (2006) titled "Determinants of Marital Instability," the impact of several factors on marital instability was examined using data from the 1982 National Survey of Family Growth done in the United States and the theoretical framework developed in the economic literature. The results of this study indicated that characteristics that can undermine marital stability include education, socio-economic position, and religious affiliation, age at marriage, premarital birth, fractured families, and place of residence.

1000 couples from the Ijaw, Ilaje, Yoruba, and Baribas were studied in Tolorunleke's (2014) research titled, *The Causes of Marital Conflicts among Couples in Nigeria: Implications for Counseling Psychologists in Zuba, Abuja*. The results of his research indicated that marital instability is caused by a number of important elements, including communication, cultural background, family type, educational level, childbearing, religious affiliation, kind of marriage, income, and age of marriage.

For Better or Worse:

Social Dimension of Marital Conflict in Ghana was the subject of a study by Abane (2003). The study employed Cape Coast as a case study and found that marital conflict is on the rise, according to data from FIDA (Ghana), the Department of Social Welfare, and some media accounts. Interviews and a focus group discussion were used to gather data, which was then analysed using descriptive statistics. In the study region, varieties of elements were categorized into five interconnected categories that were related to marital conflict. These include the spouse's personal characteristic, variables affecting domestic family life, societal factors, socio-economic considerations, and structural inequality causes.

In their 2010 study by Mustapha, Mburza, and Goni, titled "The causes of divorce among spouses in Maiduguri metropolis, Bomo State: Implication for counselling," 600 divorcees were selected at random from the city's four wards. According to the research, impotence/infertility, poor nutrition, infidelity, sodomy, promiscuity, poor feeding, and poverty are the main causes of divorce.

Usorh, Ekot, and Inyang (2010) recruited 13,117 civil officials as respondents in their study 'spousal communication patterns and marital stability among government servants in Akwa Ibom State'. Their research's findings showed that couples' communication styles varied. It was revealed that marital stability and communication style were significantly influenced by educational background.

Additionally, Animasahun and Fatile's (2011) studied 250 married men and women in Lagos, Nigeria on marital instability. The conclusion of their research showed that there was no significant difference in marriage instability between couples with polygamous family backgrounds and couples with monogamous backgrounds, or between couples with different social statuses, or between couples with different marital communication styles. Marriage instability did not differ significantly amongst spouses with various careers or occupations. Marriage instability did not differ significantly between spouses with various educational backgrounds.

Theoretical Framework

The expectancy violation theory, put forth by Burgoon (1993), which contends that people have expectations about how others should behave in a particular situation, serves as the study's framework of discussion. Some expectations depend on the person, the connection, or the circumstance. Other expectations are based on norms of appropriate social and cultural behaviour. An anticipation breach happens when a partner's actions diverge from these expectations. According to this notion, people react in unexpected ways and may even engage in conflict.

For instance, the wife might be asked, "Where are you coming from?" by the husband. "What do you mean by that inquiry," the wife replies. Because he wasn't expecting such a response, the husband will likely be upset, which could result in conflict and indicate that there has been an expectation violation. Burgoon (1993) discovered that because of this, intercultural marriages result in mismatched expectations because of the partners' disparate cultural backgrounds. Therefore, he suggested that a better understanding of marital interaction, particularly in intercultural marriages, can be attained through the effects of cultural expectations in group members' marriages, as well as through positive or negative violations of expectations for the couple that are derived from their background and used to determine mate choice.

According to this view, the causes of marital instability among young couples in Aba should be looked for in response to expectancy violations. This means that a marriage will be stable if both spouses are aware of what the other expects and adhere to those expectations. However, when partners are unaware of what is expected of them or are aware but choose to go against it for any reason, instability is produced. Other interdependent relationships, including in-laws, may be the source of this breach rather than the spouses themselves.

Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. This allowed the researchers to study a large population at a relatively less time and guaranteed the generation of extensive data (quantitative and qualitative) using questionnaire and Focused Group Discussions (FGD). The population of the study was young couples in Aba Urban of Abia State, Nigeria. With the nature of the city and no accessible record of the population of young couple, the researchers stratified the city into Aba North and Aba South, which are the two local government that make up the metropolis. From each of the local governments, three villages were purposively selected to include; Aba North: Uratta, Eziana and Umuola-Egbelu; Aba South: Asaeme, Ohabiam and Ndiegoro. Then, the purposive and convenience sampling methods were adopted in selecting participants for this study. Only married individuals were selected from offices, houses or shops to respond to the questionnaire or FGD. 350 four-point Likert scale-based research questionnaires were distributed, while 4 sessions of FGD were held. The FGD questions were structured semi-open-ended questions. 331 questionnaires were returned out of the 350 distributed. In the FGD sessions, the first session had 8 in attendance, second session 9, third session 7 and fourth session 7, making a total of 31. Therefore, the total number of respondents was 362. Descriptive and thematic methods were used to analyze the data. The respondents during the FGD sessions used English and Nigerian Pidgin English. The responses in pidgin English were reported verbatim and interpreted in a bracket.

Data Analyses and Discussion of Findings Demographic Data of Respondents

Table 1 Socio Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Group	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age	20-29	98	27.1	27.1	27.1
	30-39	194	53.6	53.6	80.7
	40-49	70	19.3	19.3	100
	50 and above	-	-	-	100
	Total	362	100.0	100.0	
Gender	Male	172	47.5	47.5	47.5
	Female	190	52.5	52.5	100
	Total	362	100.0	100.0	
Marital status	Married	302	83.4	83.4	83.4
	Separated	44	12.2	12.2	95.6
	Divorced	16	4.4	4.4	100
	Total	362	100.0	100.0	
Level of education	No formal education	4	1.1	1.1	1.1
	Primary education	63	17.4	17.4	18.5
	Secondary education	109	30.1	30.1	48.6
	Tertiary education	122	33.7	33.7	82.3
	Others	64	17.7	17.7	100
	Total	362	100.0	100.0	
Number of Children	None	10	2.8	2.8	2.8
	1-3	218	60.2	60.2	63
	4-6	111	30.7	30.7	93.7
	6-9	20	5.5	5.5	99.2
	10 and above	3	0.8	0.8	100
	Total	362	100.0	100.0	
Living with Extended family member	None	99	27.3	27.3	27.3
	Mother-in-law	97	26.8	26.8	54.1
	Father-in-law	25	6.9	6.9	61
	Sister/Brother-in-law	111	30.7	30.7	91.7
	Others	30	8.3	8.3	100
	Total	362	100.0	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork, 2022.

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents which include age, gender, marital status, level of education, number of children and living arrangement. The table shows that majority (53.6%) of the respondents are in age bracket 30-39, followed by those in the age bracket 20-29 (27.1%), and those in age bracket 40-49 (19.3%). There were no respondents from 50 years old and above, probably because the research is interested in young couples. The table shows there were more

female respondents (52.5%) than male (47.5%). The table reveals that more of the respondents were married (83.4%), while 12.2% were separated, and 4.4% were divorced. For level of education, 1.1% have no formal education, 17.4% are with primary education, secondary school certificate holders constitute 30.1%, and those who attained tertiary education were 33.7%, while 17.7% of the respondents have other levels and forms of education. The table shows that for number of children, a high percentage (60.2) of the respondents have 1-3 children, followed by those who have 4-6 children (30.7%). Those who have 6-9 children were 5.5% and those with 10 and above children make 0.8% of the respondents. Furthermore, it was observed that those living with none of their in-laws make up 27.3%, those living with mothers-in-law were 26.8%, with fathers-in-law 6.9%, with sisters/brothers-in-law 30.7% and those living with other relations make up 8.3%.

Results and Discussion of Findings

Research question one: What is the relationship between infidelity and marital instability in Aba urban?

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage Score on the Relationship between Infidelity and Marital Instability in Aba Urban

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	REMARK
		F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	
1	There is rapid increase in the number of cases of infidelity among young couples in Aba Urban	94(25.9)	104(28.7)	82 (22.7)	82 (22.7)	AGREED
2	Marital instability among young couples in Aba urban is as a result of lack of trust	76 (20.9)	85(23.5)	107 (29.6)	94 (25.9)	DISAGREED
3	Infidelity is one of the major causes of divorce	91 (25.1)	120 (33.1)	80(22.1)	71 (19.6)	AGREED
4	Divorce rate in Aba Urban is high	90 (24.9)	118 (32.6)	83(22.9)	71 (19.6)	AGREED
5	Marital instability among young couples in Aba Urban is often as a result of the wife cheating on the husband.	80(22.1)	95 (26.2)	109(30.1)	78 (21.5)	DISAGREED
	Average % Response	(23.8)	(28.8)	(25.5)	(21.9)	AGREED

Source: Fieldwork, 2022.

From the table 2 above, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between infidelity and marital instability in Aba Urban. This decision is arrived at based on the weight of response as seen that average % response agreed to a positive relationship between infidelity and marital instability variables is 52.6%, while 47.4% disagreed. The variables considered were rapid increase in the number of cases of infidelity among young couples in Aba Urban; lack of trust among young couples in Aba; divorce as a result of infidelity; husband cheating on the wife; and wife cheating on the husband. The study revealed that there is rapid increase of divorce and infidelity among young couples in Aba urban. Interestingly, it was also observed that lack of trust may not necessarily on its own cause marital instability. In addition, FGD sessions further generated the following responses:

"...lack of trust doesn't just start; something leads to a woman losing trust on the husband. So, if you want to know what is really going on, ask the woman why she no longer trust the husband"

(34yrs single mother of two children)

In a similar response, a 42 years father of three children, living with wife and wife's sister had the following to say:

"...the thing is, trust is cultivated, groomed and nurtured. I trusted my wife from the beginning of our marriage, but since her sister came to stay with us, her ability to manage our small income reduced, and that's how my trust on her reduced but I don't think I can divorce my wife because I don't trust her, the only thing that will make me divorce her is infidelity"

Therefore, it could be concluded that in as much as lack of trust may not lead to marital instability, some other factors that cause mistrust can, especially when combined with lack of trust.

In agreement with previous studies (Onyia & Aniche, 2002; Nkwocha, 2002; Kumuyi, 2004), the study revealed that many young couples in Aba Urban are going through divorce processes due to infidelity. This was also confirmed during the FGD sessions where a high percentage of the respondents across the genders agreed that they can't continue in a marriage when infidelity is confirmed. Also, the variant of infidelity popularly known in Nigeria as 'cheating', where the partner can just have a fling, one-night stand or any short sexual escapade with another person other than the married partner, was also looked at. The result of the study shows that marital instability in Aba urban is more often as a result of the husband cheating than the wife cheating. Excerpts from the FGD show as follows:

"...the truth remains that in Africa as a whole, and Igbo land especially, our culture makes it easy for the man to cheat and go free, so, they often cheat..."

(30yrs mother of one child, living with the husband and husband's cousin)

"...but it's obvious, even the men know they cheat more, they only use culture to subdue us to accept infidelity as their right" (40yrs mother of four children, living with only the nuclear family members)

In response, the male respondents were indifferent in their responses as reflected in the few excerpts below:

"...no be say men no dey cheat, but women dey cheat kwa. Na only say them wan make we dey pity them, so them go talk say na we dey cheat pass..." (... it's not like men don't cheat, but women cheat too, it's just that they (women) like to be pitied, so they claim that men cheat more) (45yrs single father living with an only child).

From the above findings, we can therefore conclude that Infidelity is one of the major causes of marital Instability in families and it is very much on the increase in recent times which may also be the reason why divorce rate is high in Aba Urban.

It argues along with Tolorunleke (2014) that cultural background can also influence marital instability as it is observed here that the Igbo culture makes it easier for the men to cheat.

Research Question Two: What is the Relationship between Socio-economic Status and Marital Instability in Aba Urban?

Table 3: Frequency and Percentage Score on the Relationship between Socio-Economic Status and Marital Instability in Aba Urban

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	REMARK
		F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	
1	Financial status is an important factor in marriage	90(24.9)	108(29.8)	92 (25.4)	72 (19.9)	AGREED
2	Poverty breeds disrespect and disagreement among married partners	89 (24.6)	112 (30.9)	85(23.5)	76 (20.9)	AGREED
3	Unemployment status of a partner brings contempt and misunderstanding	92(25.4)	119 (32.9)	78(21.5)	73 (20.2)	AGREED
4	Poverty is a major cause of divorce	100 (27.6)	108 (29.8)	93(25.6)	61 (16.9)	AGREED
5	Husbands lack trust for their working wives	82(22.7)	93 (25.7)	100(27.6)	87 (24)	DISAGREED
	Average % Response	(25)	(29.8)	(24.7)	(20.4)	AGREED

Source: Fieldwork, 2022.

In table 3, the data reveals that the relationship between socioeconomic status and marital instability is expressed in the place of financial status being an important factor in marriage; the place of poverty in respect and agreement between the partners; respect and understanding when a partner is unemployed; the place of women being bread winner in marital instability; and trust of husbands over their working wives. The findings of the study reveals that financial status is a major factor in marriage in Aba urban, which accounts for why unemployment status of a partner will breed contempt and misunderstanding. Also, poverty is seen to be a source of disrespect and disagreement which is said to be so especially when the man is poor. The following excerpts from the FGD reveal more.

“...my oga suppose feed us na, so, if him no get money wetin him wan take feed us?” (...my husband is supposed to care for us (wife and her children), so, if he is poor, how will he be able to do that?)

(39yrs mother of four children, living with her husband, children and her own mother).

Another respondent, a man of 45years (widower, living with her mother and three children) responded to the unemployment status of a partner as follows:

“...if a man is unemployed, he shouldn't expect any kind of respect from the wife, because the wife expects you to go out and make money for the family's upkeep. The only time I had issue with my late wife was when I once lost my job...”

Further, the data reveals that a woman being the bread winner of the family leads to marital instability, especially if the husband is poor and unemployed. Women expect their husbands to be the provider, and therefore lose respect for the man when he is not able to handle such responsibility. The man on the other hand trying to claim his rightful position as the head of the family, demands his respect; this may begin to introduce friction and misunderstanding in the relationship. Nevertheless, it was observed contrary to an existing stereotype which believes that men don't trust working women.

Majority of the male respondents believed that a working woman is an asset and great help to the family as the following excerpts describes.

“...I don’t have any problem at all, allowing my wife to work. After all, when she is working, I will have fewer problems to solve...” (49yrs father of four children, living with his wife and children only).

“...the only kind of man that will not trust the wife simply because she is working is the kind of man that should not be trusted. ...I say so because, if you trust yourself in place of work not to misbehave, why then would you not trust that your wife won’t misbehave too?” (42yrs father of two children, living with his wife and children four extended family members).

Therefore, it goes to say as portrayed by previous studies (Abane, 2003; Mustapha, Mburza and Goni, 2010), that socioeconomic status has lots of influence on marital instability. In addition, to the previous findings, this study adds that women feel disappointed and frustrated when they are the bread winners

Research Question Three: What is the Relationship between Sodomy and Empty Shell Marriage in Aba urban?

Frequency and Percentage Score on the Relationship between Sodomy and Empty Shell Marriage in Aba Urban

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	REMARK
		F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	
1	Many couples in Aba urban are only enduring their union	93(25.6)	105(29)	102(28.2)	62(17.1)	AGREED
2	Many marriages in Aba urban lack love and substance because of bestial practices	88(24.3)	117(32.3)	81(22.4)	76(20.9)	AGREED
3	Homosexual practices are rubbing many young couples in Aba urban the unity of marriage	73(20.2)	78(21.5)	119(32.9)	92(25.4)	DISAGREED
4	Gay relationships are more rampant in Aba urban than Lesbianism	82(22.7)	93(25.7)	100(27.6)	87(24)	DISAGREED
5	Lesbianism is more rampant in Aba urban than gay relationships	99(27.3)	118(32.6)	83(22.9)	62(17.1)	AGREED
	Average % Response	(24)	(28.2)	(26.8)	(20.9)	AGREED

Source: Fieldwork, 2022.

The analysis on the relationship between sodomy and empty shell marriage as seen in table 4 above shows a significant relationship between the two variables. This conclusion is made based on the weight of response where 52.2% of the respondents agreed that sodomy leads to empty shell marriage in Aba urban. The study reveals that 54.6% of the respondents agreed that many couples in Aba urban are in an empty shell marriage since they are only enduring their union instead of enjoying it; 56.6% agreed that many marriages in Aba urban lack love and substance because of sodomy practices; and 59.9% agreed that lesbianism is more rampant in Aba urban than gay relationships. Nevertheless, it is interesting to find out that homosexual practices as a single factor is not responsible for marital instability in Aba urban.

However, to the best of the researchers’ knowledge there is paucity of research on the relationship between sodomy and empty shell marriage. This study has filled that gap in finding a significant link

between sodomy and empty shell marriage. This entails that sodomy practices such as bestiality, homosexuality, pedophilia and others are silent factors contributing to marital instability. The study queried further during the FGD sessions for more details on why those factors have been ignored, the responses are as described in the following excerpts.

“...who no get wahala for him house? If my oga come like him fellow man pass me wetin I go do? I go just dey pray make God deliver am” (...is there anybody without issues in their marriage? If my husband prefers gay relationship to our marriage, what should I do? I will just be praying that God may deliver him) (40yrs mother of four children).

“...it’s not like anybody enjoys evil, but when you consider the consequences of watching your dirty linen in the public by filing for divorce and compare it with enduring a husband who is interested in young girls, you just endure and hope for better” (41yrs widow living with four children).

A 32yrs old man, living with his wife, two children and four extended family members had this to say, when asked what his reaction will be if he finds out his wife is practicing lesbianism:

“...I will find out from her in private why she is doing it, and find a way of making her to stop if it is possible” ...the reason I won’t just divorce her is because it will affect our children and my integrity, so either we solve it or we endure it”

When asked further if they won’t file for divorce, majority of the respondents agreed that divorce is not the best option, especially when there are children in the marriage. Their major reason was around the effect of divorce on the children, and the fact that you don’t even know the next person you will end up with. So, it’s best to just keep enduring and hoping things will get better. Therefore, it is concluded that sodomy leads to empty shell marriage as a variant of marital instability.

Research Question Four: What is the Relationship between Physical abuse and Marital Instability in Aba Urban?

Table 5: Frequency and Percentage Score on the Relationship between Physical Abuse and Marital Instability in Aba Urban

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	REMARK
		F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	
1	Physical abuse is on the increase in families	90(24.8)	105(29)	100(27.6)	67(18.5)	AGREED
2	Domestic violence is a major cause of divorce	90(24.8)	117(32.3)	80(22.1)	75(20.9)	AGREED
3	Physical abuse leads to empty shell marriage	92(25.4)	119(32.9)	78(21.5)	73(20.2)	AGREED
4	A woman suffering from physical abuse is exposed to psychological trauma	93(25.7)	100(27.6)	87(24)	82(22.7)	AGREED
5	Wife battering leads to marital instability	95(26.2)	115(31.8)	87(24)	65(17.9)	AGREED
	Average % Response	(25.4)	(30.7)	(23.8)	(20.4)	AGREED

Source: Fieldwork, 2022.

The study explored the relationship between physical abuse and marital instability and the data reveals as shown in table 5 above that majority of the respondents (53.8%) agreed that many physically abuse is on the increase; 57.1% agreed that domestic violence leads to marital instability; 58.3% agreed that physical abuse leads to empty shell marriage; 53.3% agreed that a woman suffering from physical

abuse is exposed to psychological trauma; and 58% agreed that wife battering leads to marital instability. With this physical abuse factors measured and their relationship weighed, the average percent response reveals that 56.1% of the respondents agreed that there is a significant relationship between physical abuse and marital instability.

Further emphasis on the relationship between physical abuse and marital instability were seen from the responses during the FGD sessions. The respondents were queried on whether physical abuse is on the increase in the families, and the following excerpts summarize the trend of their answers;

“...well, the rate at which men abuse their wives in recent time is quite alarming. Every day, you hear of someone killing his or her partner...there is a serious trouble in the land affecting families” (41yrs husband living with a child, wife and mother and sister-in-law).

“...why won't people abuse their partners? The economy in Nigeria is so frustrating and that is enough reason why abuse is on the increase in families...” (29yrs mother of a child, living with mother and two extended family members).

“...I think it's all a matter of upbringing, family background and self-esteem. I can't imagine a man laying his hands on me without seeing himself in police custody the next minute...abusers don't report their cases to the police ” (35yrs mother of two children, living with only husband and children).

Therefore, the study concludes that physical abuse is on the increase and one of the major causes of divorce in Aba Urban, Nigeria.

Policy Implications

None of the studies on causes of marital instability have identified sodomy as one of the causes of marital instability nor dealt effectively with the empty shell variant of marital instability. This study therefore, has not only explored the causes of marital instability, but have found out that sodomy is also a major cause of marital instability which interestingly causes majorly the empty shell variant of marital instability. The study also finds that the effect of sodomy on marriage leads to empty shell marriage due to cultural believes.

Therefore, there is need for customary laws to address the cultural believes and practices which make the wife endure her marriage in order to avoid societal stigmatization. Such customary laws should be able to empower the woman to speak up and be protected when the culture is infringing on her human rights.

The result of this study also suggests that the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) laws are not very effective. This implies a possibility that some people enter straight marriage relationship to hide their true identity from the law, and consequently infringing on the right of the partner. Therefore, there is need to review the LGBT laws in order to protect the rights of the heterosexuals in their dealings with the LGBT, especially in the face of the African culture.

Areas of Further Studies

The issues around the empty shell marriage call for many questions:

Why would a man or woman remain in a marriage if the love is not there?

Why would a woman remain in a relationship where she is physically abused?

Why is it difficult for the physically abused woman in Africa and Igbo land especially, to speak up?

These questions and more makes it necessary to carry out furthers studies on the following areas:

1. The extent to which culture has contributed to increase in domestic violence in Nigeria

2. The influence of cultural and religious factors on empty shell marriage

Conclusion

The contract of marriage is a special one with many expectations, which according to the expectancy violation theory, when violated brings consequences in the form of marital instability. The theory has been confirmed in the results of this study, that the frustration experienced by a partner for not achieving his or her expectations in the marriage is what introduces the friction that is otherwise known as instability. A wife who is expected to be loved and cared for, that is now receiving beating from the husband will no longer happily perform her wifely duties, and more conflict will erupt that may lead to divorce in the long run. A husband, who expected to have his wife all to himself but later discover that she is interested in lesbianism, may end up in physically abusing her as a way of expressing his frustration.

Nevertheless, some of these expectations have been violated in many marriages, which have led to empty shell marriages or divorce. Therefore, from the findings of the study, we conclude that the causes of marital instability in Aba urban does not only include infidelity and other socioeconomic factors as have been emphasized by previous studies. The study has added that sodomy is a major cause of marital instability, especially the empty shell variant.

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. To settle the socioeconomic factors that lead to marital instability, the nation's economy should be made good enough to improve on the per-capita income, which will enable household's income to increase and living standard of the citizens enhanced.
2. Institutions in charge of contracting marriages should restructure their processes to include counseling sessions, in which the partners to be would be made to reveal their expectations from the marriage to their partners. This is believed to help the partners assess and confirm if they can fulfill the expectations of the would-be partner.
3. The legislators and the judiciary arm of government should look into the customary laws around marriage and make laws that empower and protect the woman to speak up and be defended when the cultural expectations are infringing on her human rights.

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