

# A Critical Examination of Broken Homes in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Marriage is an important part of man's social life; a covenant and commitment between a man and woman. At a particular stage in life, people are questioned if they are not married. Yet, some people see the cure for unhappy marriage as separation (divorce), it's often seems to be a problem than a solution; meanwhile, the society is heavily affected. Divorce remains a severe crisis; it inflicts pains on people concerned, children and the society at large. Many have seen the marriage covenant "till death do us part" as an unrealistic and obsolete phrase. Day by day majority of homes (especially in Nigeria) are faced with the threat of divorce in the contemporary society. Divorce is the order of the day; people even say it with pride without remorse. People no longer take marriage as a serious commitment for life. In view of this, the research presents a discourse on the subject matter explaining its effects on the Nigerian society.

**Keywords:** marriage, divorce, Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION: STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Divorce has become rampart in our society today, the issues of divorce are common in Newspapers, Magazines, Radio Programs and Television having taken an important aspect in today's debates; in Africa, Nigeria specifically where matured male and female without marrying is believed to be abnormal. Marriage is an institution is believed to be ordained by God. A number of people are involved in contracting the marriage vows in diverse ways both in traditional and internal approach.

A successful marriage is a source of happiness as demonstrated by the couple while the joy of many couple is the continual attainment of this happiness, at the time the love gets cold and effort reviving it proves abortive or inevitable, than there will be family divorce. It is

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sad to note that the concept of marriage is abused especially today among Nigerian men and women. Divorce has become rampant within the families of which the vows, the marriage, the crown, the merry making the dignity and honor of the day were forgotten within a short time. Sometimes, the children are also forgotten and abandoned with properties.

### *Definition of Terms*

*Marriage* is a legal union between a man and woman either in court, mosque Church and traditionally, or it can be defined as the “state in which men and women can live together in sexual relationship with the approval of their social group” (Marshall & al. 1996, 732). That is a state of being married Biblical teaching is to be permanent until death separates the couple. *Divorce* is a means whereby a legal marriage is dissolved publicly and the participants are freed from further obligation of matrimonial relationship (Douglas 1963, 16). That is putting an end to marriage by law.

## THE CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE: VARIOUS RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES

Marriage is a universal phenomenon which transcends race, tribe and cultures. Therefore, this part of the research examines the concept of marriage from the African setting (especially Nigeria) through the three major religions, Christianity, Islam and African Religion.

### *Christianity*

Marriage is a gift of God. When God brought to Adam the woman who was specially created for him, he cried out joyfully: “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (*Gen. 2:23*). This joy over a real companion is the explicit will of God: “It is not good for the man to be alone: “I will make a helper suitable for him” (*Gen. 2:18*). Marriage has been established by the Creator; it is therefore not a humanly devised institution. It existed from the beginning, as Jesus himself defined the origin and essence of marriage in *Matthew 19:4-6*: “Haven’t you read...that at the beginning the Creator ‘made the male and female,’ and said ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate. With the commandment “You shall not commit adultery,” God protects marriage and allows sexual intercourse only inside this close union (*Eccles. 9:9*).

Sexual relations becoming one flesh before or outside marriage are branded as fornication and immorality in Christianity. Marriage was instituted in the context of creation, making it an ordinance of faith. God's purpose in giving marriage to all mankind was (1) to compensate the weakness a man or woman has in being alone; (2) to establish a faithful, monogamous relation, which is essential for the successful survival of society; and (3) to create the one-flesh relationship. The biblical standard for marriage is a relationship in which a man and a woman share a lifetime commitment to each other, second only to their commitment to God. (Jackson 1976, 6)

The history of Christianity contains divergent views and interpretations regarding the subject of marriage and divorce (Ibid., 13). Many sincere theologians, counselors, and ministers have agonized laboriously on this subject, yet have been unable to come to a common understanding. Value systems constantly seem to change and divorce runs rampant, even in the church. The scripture is clear as to God's original design for marriage: i.e. that a man and a woman be united in a monogamous life-long relationship.

Summarily, Christians see the family is clearly God's creative design. It is obvious that God had a distinct plan of how the family would be structured (Genesis 2:21–25). This unit would include a husband and wife; it would also be shaped by the procreation of a father and mother. The family structure consists of lifetime marriages, parents (male and female), and children that may be born to this holy unity (Genesis 4:1-2, 5:1-2).

### *African Religion*

Marriage takes many forms in Africa. Throughout the continent, the diversity of systems reflects the traditions, religions, and economic circumstances of a wide variety of distinct cultures. Islamic laws and customs shaped the institution of marriage in North Africa and in some nations of Western and Eastern Africa. In recent years, modern life, industry, and cities have brought changes to African marriages and to the roles of men and women.

African marriage systems do share several characteristics. They almost always involve the transfer of dowry cash, goods or services from the groom or his family to the bride's family. This exchange is both real and symbolic, as it marks the woman's passage from one social group to the other. Thus, for Africans, marriage is a matter

between families as much as between the bride and groom, and many families arrange the marriages of their members.

The Western attitude that marriage is the union of two people drawn together by love has had some influence in Africa, especially in the cities. But African cultures emphasize that the union of two individuals must fit into the larger picture of social networks known as kinship, clan or tribal groups. Each marriage creates an alliance between or within kinship groups, and the children of the union will inherit property, rights and responsibilities from their kin (Moute Flore 1971, 37).

The African marriage rites are very important to the African peoples. The marriage rites are followed strictly and are very traditional. Marriage is the beginning of new life and when two people become one. In African Traditional Religion, marriage is a cherished fecundity and is intended for procreation. Marriage involves not only interpersonal relations but also intercommunity relations. The survival of kinship in the social structure depends on marriage; marriage always establishes very strong bonds between the individuals belonging to different families and clans, especially when children are born.

When a community seeks out a wife or a son-in-law, they look for one that lives up to their expectations. A person with good moral qualities, industrious in physical work, respectful towards their elders and a good reputation; physical attractiveness doesn't matter as much as the communities expectations. Fertility is the central requirement in marriage. There would be less of a chance of proposal if a woman or a woman in her family were suspected of being barren.

A marriage ceremony takes place over a certain period of time. Marriage in African Traditional Religions isn't simply saying a few words. Marriage is a step by step process taken on by the entire community (Hauck and Schulz 1968, 580). Other things that might slow down the wedding process include witchcraft, impotence, sterility, bad reputation, etc.

The purpose of marriage is the social reproduction of the kinship group. The entire community, including living and deceased, are involved in the marriage process (Schillebeeckx 1965, 153). There are certain rituals and taboos that must be observed in regard to marriage; respect of in-laws and the observance of distance between in-laws, just to name a few. Prayers and sacrifices are offered to the ancestors on behalf of the groom and the bride. Fertility and healthy deliveries are prayed for.

### *Islam*

In Islam, *marriage* is a legal contract between two people. Both the groom and the bride are to consent to the marriage of their own free will. A formal, binding contract is considered integral to a religiously valid Islamic marriage, and outlines the rights and responsibilities of the groom and bride. There must be two Muslim witnesses of the marriage contract. Divorce in Islam can take a variety of forms, some initiated by the husband and some initiated by the wife.

In addition to the usual marriage until death or divorce, there is a different fixed-term marriage known as *zawāj al-mut’ah* (“pleasure marriage”) permitted only by the Twelver branch of Shia Islam for a pre-fixed period. There is also Nikah Misyar, a non-temporary marriage with the removal of some conditions such as living together, permitted by Sunni Muslims.

Furthermore, Muhammad had reformed the laws and procedures of the common marriage practices that existed during his prophet hood. The rules of “marriage by agreement, marriage through consent” were reformed and a strict set of rules and regulations were put in place. The practices of “marriage by inheritance” were forbidden. Several chapters and verses from the Quran were revealed which banned such practices.

Under the Arabian pre-Islamic law, no limitations were set on men’s rights to marry or to obtain a divorce. Islamic law, however, restricted polygamy. The institution of marriage, characterized by unquestioned male superiority in the pre-Islamic law of status, was redefined and changed into one in which the woman was somewhat of an interested partner. For example, the dowry, previously regarded as a bride-price paid to the father, became a nuptial gift retained by the wife as part of her personal property. Under Islamic law, marriage was no longer viewed as a ‘status’ but rather as a ‘contract’.

The essential elements of the marriage contract were now an offer by the man, an acceptance by the woman, and the performance of such conditions as the payment of dowry. The woman’s consent was imperative. Furthermore, the offer and acceptance had to be made in the presence of at least two witnesses (Adeniyi 2009, 100). A married woman also had rights over the husband as stated by Muhammad that you have your rights upon your wives and they have their rights upon you.

Islamic marriages require acceptance, of the groom, the bride and the consent of the custodian (*wali*) of the bride. The *wali* of the bride is normally a male relative of the bride, preferably her father. The guardian (*wali*) of the bride can only be a free Muslim. The bride is normally present at the signing of the marriage contract. The *wali mujbir* is a technical term of Islamic law which denotes the guardian of a bride. In traditional Islam, the literal definition of *wali*, which means “custodian” or “protector”, is used. In this context, it is meant that the silence of the bride is considered consent. In most schools of Islamic law, only the father or the paternal grandfather of the bride can be *wali mujbir*.

If the conditions are met and a *mahr* and contract are agreed upon, an Islamic marriage ceremony, or wedding, can take place. The marital contract is also often signed by the bride. The consent of the bride is mandatory. The Islamic marriage is then declared publicly, by a responsible person after delivering a sermon to counsel and guide the couple. It is not required, though customary, that the person marrying the couple should be religiously qualified.

The Qur'an tells believers that even if they are poor they should marry to protect themselves from immorality. The Quran asserts that marriage is a legitimate way to satisfy one's sexual desire. Islam recognizes the value of sex and companionship and advocates marriage as the foundation for families and channeling the fulfillment of a base need. Marriage is highly valued and regarded as being half of one's faith, according to a saying of Muhammad. Whether marriage is obligatory or merely allowed has been explored by several scholars, and agreed that “If a person has the means to marry and has no fear of mistreating his wife or of committing the unlawful if he does marry, then marriage in his case is *must ahabb* (preferred).”

Marriage is an integral part of a Muslim's life, indeed it is too important in our religion Islam that it is considered to be one half of one's Faith. Islam is not like the other religions that support and promote monasticism or celibacy, but it is a just religion and it takes the middle way in sexual relations, it neither allows it freely, nor does it condemn it like the other certain religions. Marriage is a great virtue and a means of salvation in our religion (Islam). It is our religious duty and a moral safeguard. Marriage is a contract made by male and female to live together as wife and husband and a tie that strengthens their relationship. It is because of this holy tie that families are established in our societies and communities. Moreover, it is the lawful

and legitimate way to indulge in intimacy between a man and woman. (Olatundun 1999, 23)

### EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON HOMES IN NIGERIA

Divorce as a matter of fact breaks the bonds, which once united two individual and their family. Marriage is a big step in life, in which a person plans as a career or even business, certainly you either fail or succeed. This bond dissolution can occur as a result of extra marital practices by either of the partners, early marriage, and a solution where either of the spouses is not ripe enough for marriage before getting married.

There are many people who are affected by any divorce case which include the children, family members, church, friends, and couples, to mention but few. This section discusses majorly how divorce has affected several homes in Nigeria.

#### *Parents*

Divorce can be accompanied by an almost endless range of emotions, anxiety, guilt, fear, sadness, depression (sometimes accompanied by thought of suicide), anger, bitterness, and frustration. Since divorce involves the loss of a love. However, it is more psychological. It involves the tearing away and the death of a part of oneself. Like all grief reactions, the pain and sense of sadness seem greater at holidays, anniversaries and other special times of the year.

Often, the divorced parent must cope with the behavioral, academic (school work), and emotional effects of the divorce on the children. Preoccupied with issues like these, one's work often suffers. Quality and quantity of output may decline, efficiency can drop, and relationship with colleagues may suffer (Durkin 1995, 10). The consequence of broken family to the parent is caused by death and other reasons apart from divorce. When they lose their children, they develop grieve and anxiety. Their mental suffering adversely affects their health. There are some parents lost their health and eventually died. There the breaking of the family is great lost for each and every members of the family.

In anytime, anywhere and anyhow, divorce is not healthy for the family life. But it happens. Divorce is claimed to be the main reason behind broken family. The common disputes between a husband and a wife can be financial issue, sexual misunderstanding, early marriage, teen pregnancy, education, health problem, etc. When the parents get

divorced, usually either of them or sometime both of them leave home. Then the absence of either or both the parents will affect the family administration, then family become broken. (Ibid., 12)

Divorce is the hardest challenge that can happen to a couple especially if they have kids. It is painful for the husband and wife to finally end their marriage but they are two matured individuals who are strong enough to handle changes in their lives. The impact of this turn of events in a family's life is more devastating on the children. (Macleod 1991)

### *Children*

Children are the ones who suffer most of broken family. The immediate effect has been shot upon them. When a couple split up, it is the children that are greatly affected scarring them physically, emotionally and socially. Children are supposed to grow up in a healthy family where they could receive love, care and concern from their parents. However in the broken family, from where children would get such love and care? It is, therefore, children of the broken family are normally growing up with having low and bad manner.

Researches have proven that several children who make problem, rivalry and discontentment in Nigerian schools or other gathering place are usually from the broken family. Most of children admitted in the Remand home, or other social centers due to some serious mistakes are brought up from broken family where there is no proper administration and proper living standard. Broken family is followed by financial problems generally. That is why; there are more tendencies for children to do stealing and robbing.

A broken home can make a child insecure. Insecure, in a sense that he no longer had a complete family he can call his own. For a child's mind, a family is composed of a father, mother and children. And living without either his father or mother will create fear and insecurities in him. This feeling of insecurities will even trigger if he is around his friends who are living a normal, complete and happy life. This is especially true in school events where the parents' presences are required. There are plenty of school activities that involve the parents and seeing scenes like these will even make him feel ashamed of his family situation.

The insecurities, self-doubt and lack of confidence in a child can eventually make him uninterested in school. More often, those who are out of school are products of a broken home. Sometimes a child's

reaction on his parents' announcement of a divorce is not visible. He keeps to himself the pain, shock and anger he feels. This in turn makes him vulnerable to anger, depression, revenge, alcohol, crimes, drugs and so on. He makes these as his outlets. Too much depression, alcohol addiction and drug dependency, if left untreated, can make him mentally ill or can turn him into a criminal. He may even attempt to kill himself if he can no longer handle all the misfortunes which he thinks is killing him softly. Although, let's say, one parent is still guiding his child, sometimes the traumatic effect of a divorce is just too much for a child to handle that he may even lost interest in life itself.

Slowed academic development is another common way that divorce affects children. The emotional stress of a divorce alone can be enough to stunt your child's academic progress, but the lifestyle changes and instability of a broken family can contribute to poor educational outcomes. This poor academic progress can stem from a number of factors, including instability in the home environment, inadequate financial resources and inconsistent routines. (Epstein 1998, 22)

Divorce affects children's social relationships in several ways. First, some children act out their distress about their broken family by acting aggressive and by engaging in bullying behavior, both of which can negatively affect peer relationships. Other children may experience anxiety, which can make it difficult for them to seek positive social interactions and engage in developmentally beneficial activities such as teen sports. (Christenson and Roberts 1998, 92)

#### *Religious Establishments (Notably the Church)*

Religious establishment also receives its own dose(s) in many ways. The couple(s) may decide to leave the church (or even mosque) reducing the membership instead of increasing it. If the couple(s) happens to be a worker/ officer in the religious establishment, it will create a gap and psychological in balance for the system to cope with. Meanwhile, if the couple(s) remain that may affect the finance catering for their needs unbudgeted for as a result drawn drain the church purse unnecessarily because they must be catered for. (Onuzulike 2003, 32)

For years, divorce rates have been climbing as we move more and more into the "me" mentality of post-modernism. In recent years the cool thing has been to point out that Christians in Nigeria divorce more often than non-Christians, though, there have been some that argue with that assessment these leads to the fact that, churches in Nigeria

has been rate of a high level of divorce. The Researcher is always puzzled though by the way churches in Nigeria handle the situation of divorcing couples (Audu 1997, 5). Divorce in Nigeria Churches is really a sticky quagmire of options of right and wrongs. (Fine & MacPherson 1994, 219-246)

### *Society*

Broken family is a major problem of the society that should be given enough attention.

The behavior of family setup affects the social, economic and political aspects of a country. More broken families produce more negative affects in the society. Society is built up with communitarian life of the people who live there in. However just and pleasant society will last on the strength and capacity of mutual care to each other.

There should be proper living standards. In the mean time, society used to have serial problems of robbing, killing, raping, stealing, disturbing others, making some noise, etc. It is said that all these societal problems are coming out of people who do not get proper teaching at their home; usually those are broken families.

Also now that divorce occurs between the couples, their family members cannot deny that they know them not. There is an adage that says, "It is the person that you sleep with that your body falls on." They may have to put up their family members or send their children to siblings. There may be a situation whereby they will have to depend on them for one's assistance or the other which is not prepared for by the sibling(s). Financial burdens, inconveniences, change of their artilleries, stress. Even if the couples have same of their relations with, they also have to find their way(s) (Rolfe 2008).

## **CONCLUSION**

From the findings, the following conclusions were reached: divorce is a vice that affects and threatens the success of a home in Nigeria. In order to curb this vice, everyone has his/her role to play. Individuals (spouses) should try as much as possible to fight for their marriage in a godly manner. Of a truth, the case of divorce is increasing devastatingly; yet, intending couples should see the need for pre-marital counseling. Divorcees must find a way of reconciling their differences. The cost of divorce and its effects on spouses live, siblings, religious establishments, colleagues and especially innocent children who mostly suffer in Nigeria, reveals that it is of no use.

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