

CRITICAL ISSUES IN MARRIAGE FAILURE IN BENIN CITY, NIGERIA: SIGNALING THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

Marriage is a sacred institution that must be well prepared for. Failure to plan before entering the union is planning to fail after entering the union. Every wedlock is bound either succeed or fail depending on the attitudes and inputs of the spouses involved. Marriage failure is a common feature in the Nigerian society and worldwide. Using Benin City, as the central focus, Copies of questionnaire were used to elicit data from a sample comprising 60 married respondents in the metropolis for the purpose of analysis and arriving at logical conclusions. From the research some factors associated with marriage failure are infidelity, witchcraft, unfriendliness, keeping secrets, poverty and in-laws' intrusion, repeated quarrellings, unemployment, barrenness, spouse beating, religious ethnic differences and sickness. The manner in which partners in a union handle these critical issue signals matrimonial success or failure on the interim of eventually. The way forward cannot be detached from the role of the stakeholders; parents, in-laws, the government for a better counselling arrangement and most importantly the married partners themselves who must put up necessary adjustment to prevent marital failure and to cure matrimonial failure if it has already occurred in wedlock.

Keywords: Critical issues, marriage, marital failure, matrimonial success, factors associated, Benin City

Introduction

Marriage is a ubiquitous institution as it encompasses all cultures, races, ethnic groups or religious groups (Vincent-Osaghae 2007). Marriage is a union between a man and woman for life that is both voluntary and legal. In a marriage contract is exchange of estates, properties, rights privileges, roles and statuses. Beyond a legal contract, marriage is a covenant as it is entered into by agreement and vows made by the parties when entering are for life i.e. based on “till death do us part” commitment. At the time of exchange of vows

and the pledge to be committed, the man and woman involved are both required to be psychologically balanced, physically fit and emotionally stable: In short, they should be mentally alert so that none is deceived or cajoled into the ‘deal’ (Ani 2009). In marriage, each partner, male and female, unique and individual needs. These needs may be emotional, physical, and/or spiritual in nature. Each spouse’s needs adds flavor to the marriage relationship. Without a variety of individual and different needs a marriage relationship would be non-stimulating, tedious, and thereby lack flavor. The failure to properly identify and meet the needs of one’s spouse is one of the ways conflict and of course matrimonial failure occurs in marriage (<http://earnestandroline.com/marriage/Lesson1-IdentifyingSpices.pdf>). Considering the fact that men and women are imperfect people, it is logical to think that marriages will become strained at some points since it is constituted of fallible humans. However, in knowing this it should also be that these moments in marriage matter much. These moments are the opportunities for the bond marriage to grow (<http://www.squidoo.com/is-my-marriage-over-help-me-save-my-marriage>).

The sanctity of the marriage unit is portrayed in the biblical saying “marriage is an honourable thing and the bed undefiled” but the extent to which couples understand this statement still remain a controversy. Marriage failure is not accidental. It comes by wrong actions and/or omissions that are not checked and corrected. This results in chain reactions that eventually give birth to instability. Some men scold their wives without looking inward to correct their own weaknesses. However, marriage failure could be traced to some variables like barrenness, unemployment, unresolved conflicts, sustained bad attitudes, psychological factors and so on. Even as a brawling wife is difficult to handle, so it is very hard to contend with a husband who is a (tyrant) ruler, dictator and insensitive to the family needs. It is better to stay on rooftop corner or pinnacle even if one falls down, than to live with a nagging wife: It is, “Better to live alone in a tumbledown shack than share a mansion with a nagging spouse.” Equally, “it is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.” (Holy Bible, Proverbs 21:9, 19, MSG, KJV). The attitude husbands whose wives respond to them with serious misbehaviour is a factor which may eventually become amplified beyond limit to leading to repeated quarellings.

African culture that favours gender discrimination has in some way contributed to the chaos that many Nigerian marriages experience especially in wife abuse. In this light, Aina (1998) pointed to the dominance of patriarchy in the Nigerian family where husbands dictate for wives relating to the upkeep of the home and in most cases they have the final say in issues relating to child bearing, child rearing and general conduct in the home. When a

woman ‘misbehaves’ tradition empowers the man to correct his wife, some men beat up their wives repeatedly to injury. This implied that just as children are reprimanded and beaten, women are treated in like manner seemingly, and men are not to be hit by their wives even when they misbehave. Women who are marginalized by their spouses and the society become unruly, yet interference from the families of either of the spouse could end up having negative effects on the marriage.

Statement of the Problem

In a marriage union, the presence of togetherness based on love and submission cannot be overemphasized as rudimentary. Whereas solution lies in the simple injunction “husbands love your wife... wives submit to your own husband (KJV: Holy Bible, Ephesians 5, 25, 22), spouses are not always willing to carryout this humble assignment. Hence marriage failure is rampant because there is a deviation from love and submission which is the strength and staying power of marriage.

Working together in mutual love and submission makes-up for lapses and the factors that influence matrimonial failure. Accordingly, with this marital atmosphere individual weakness of either partner can be transformed to strength, such that the individual becomes better of thereby bringing stability to the marriage. The Nigerian wife’s status is inferior and this reflects in her behaviour daily, it makes demand on her to speak respectfully to the husband and to wait upon him, she should not defy the husband’s instructions nor go out at night without his permission (Odetola and Ademola 1987, 114). The husbands are expected also to give kind treatment to their wives but because of certain conceptions about marriage, husbands tend to be lords, expecting too much from their wives. When the wives fail, they are reprimanded harshly and even dealt with and when wives can no longer endure they sue for a divorce.

Some husbands go physical by regularly punching their wives leaving them battered from time to time, thereby giving them pain and aches that may embitters them for life. In this kind of atmosphere, marriage success cannot thrive. Our African culture encourage infidelity in husbands because polygamy and bigamy had been the lifestyle of Africans, with this at the back of their minds, men neglect their legal wives for other women. On the other hand, it is seen as a taboo if a woman goes after other men. Against this backdrop, unforgiveness, slander, inferiority complex, aggression and of course external influence emerge signaling the existence critical issues that lie beneath failed marriages. It is however pertinent to examine these critical issues in marriage failure and the way forward for which this paper is concerned.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this paper is to investigate critical issues in marriage failure in Benin City, Nigeria: Signaling the way forward. Particularly, it focused on;

- examining the main factors associated with marriage failure in Benin City
- recommending applicable solutions for resolving marriage failure in Benin City

Literature Review

Marriage is a sacred institution and the parties to the agreement need to handle it carefully since the success or failure of any marriage has consequences. For a marriage to succeed, the man and wife must patiently adhere and cooperate with each other (Ani 2009). However, in the modern world, the meaning of marriage has become more complicated as is manifested in high divorce rates and remarriages and many children are not raised in the traditional family unit (www.onelove.com). A marriage may be in crisis if one or more of the four purposes of marriage namely childbearing, sexual satisfaction, companionship and economic satisfaction are not satisfactorily achieved (Tikumah 2009,72). Crisis is a crucial time, the turning point in a marriage, that is a decision moment that varies from person to person according to individual experiences and the way people view situations (Westlake 1969 cf. Ani 2009). The way a particular crisis situation among married couples is handled determines greatly whether marital failure occurs or not. Westlake also added that anything that disturbs the mutual sympathy and love between a husband and wife creates serious tension and if happiness is not attained the marriage is regarded as a failure.

Marriage is a social institution buttressed by law, social support and expectations, as well as the potential for spousal support and relationship-specific investments – and yet, half of all marriages dissolve (Musick and Bumpass 2007, 5). Again, despite the potential benefits of marriage, are clearly not experienced equally or persistently for many marriages as factors supporting marriages vary across marriage unions and may be absent altogether in some (Musick and Bumpass 2007). The absence of supporting factors in a marriage may however signal failure. In a purely African setting, the status of a wife in her husband's family remains shaky and unpredictable until she begets a child. She becomes really secure after the birth of a male child. At this stage she is specially welcome as a responsible housewife in her husband's extended family. The birth of the child gives her the title– *wife*, prior to this time she may simply be referred to as a wife only in anticipation (Obi 1970). The fate of a sterile woman in eastern Nigeria is a very hard one as she is commonly made the object of conversation and ridicule by some of her female neighbours so if an occasion for a quarrel

arises, she gets the most painful telling off such that her women rivals would call her barren sterile monster who has her maternal organs for mere decoration, Obi also added.

Some Issues in marriage failure

This sub-section of this article examines the main factors associated with marriage failure. These factors constitute critical issues that this paper focuses on. According to Diehl (2012), Marriages fail because the stresses of life on the outside overwhelm the weaknesses on the inside. He added that marriages fail for very predictable reasons: selfishness, brokenness, and ignorance. In marriage, each partner, male and female, have their own unique and individual spices which are commonly referred to as needs. These needs may be emotional, physical, and/or spiritual in nature. Each spouse's needs adds flavor to the marriage relationship. Without a variety of individual and different needs a marriage relationship would be non-stimulating, tedious, and thereby lack flavor. A failure to properly identify and meet the needs of a spouse is one of factor which is contributive to matrimonial failure (<http://earnestandroline.com/marriage/Lesson1-IdentifyingSpices.pdf>). Furthermore, this online source has the following to say about the factors influencing marriage failure:

Couples fail to make each other happy and they become frustrated because their needs are not being met. Because the woman “feels” like he doesn't care she becomes frustrated and begins complaining. “Why don't you do this for me and Why don't you do that.” Complaints progress to nagging.... The husband becomes frustrated because of the nagging.. He doesn't understand the wife's cry for her need for attention, therefore, he shuts down from her emotionally. Couples deliberately hurt each other. Failing to care can progress to failing to protect. Couples hurt one another through words- like an email, once you send it out, you can't get it back- and actions – a wives often lock down what he desires the most-SEX- click! click! Now the Days of Wine & Roses have turned into the Days of Thunder & Lightening. We will look more at the failure to care, which is directly caused by not meeting needs. A growing marriage understands that part of God's design is to meet their needs through one another as husband and wife. In order to do that, we must be willing to share openly with one another. Your spouse may not be thinking the same thoughts as you. Often times they do not handle situations the way you would handle them. Everything from the every day driving route to the way the toilet tissue rolls over or under could be different. Being different doesn't compromise the potential of the relationship. Being different is a SPICE of relationships. In marriage, the needs of the husband are often

different from the needs of his wife. As a matter of fact, his top emotional needs usually do not match any of her top emotional needs. It is important for each spouse to understand each others needs and seek to meet them.

In addition to the above quotation on the nexus between lack of understanding individual needs and marriage failure among couples, the paper further suggests the way forward referring to a biblical passage:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself (Phillipians 2:3); do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. The inability to develop a real interest in understanding each other's needs is source of trouble. Also, realize, just because your spouse does not treat you or respond to you the way you need to be does not mean that he/she does not care and is not treating you the best way he/she knows how to. That is why it is so important for both spouses in a marriage relationship to be sensitive and lovingly communicate what emotional needs have "need" of more attention. First and foremost, we must identify the needs of men and women in marriage. Notice they are very different.

More specifically, some critical issues influencing matrimonial failure are

Childlessness: This is critical issue in marriage failure as barren couples may become unhappy with their union and women are often blamed in Nigeria even though medically men may be contributive (Obi 1970; Tikumah 2009). Generally in Nigeria and particularly Benin City, children are accorded a priceless worth since procreation is perceived to be the essence of marriage, hence childlessness is viewed as a calamity and a curse (Vincent-Osaghae 2007).

Infidelity and sexual dissatisfaction: Sexual dissatisfaction is often a critical issue forwarded in discussing failed marriages because When there has been a decrease in sexual attraction or desire in a marriage its a danger signal (<http://www.squidoo.com/is-my-marriage-over-help-me-save-my-marriage>). The issue of sexual dissatisfaction is even a factor influencing marriage failure as Tikumah (2009) observed that it is a problem stronger than childlessness because it could lead to sexual dishonesty among spouses which in turn can lead to extramarital affairs, bigamy and polygyny.

Educational mismatch: When there is a wide educational gap between between spouses, their approaches to life will be at variance a problem may arise as the less educated person may be more superstitious, traditional or conservative and there may be difficulty in reasoning together and when these disparities exist in a wedlock it is often difficult to

maintain peace and stability (Ekiron 2003), so failure may likely result since the spouses are not at par in intellectual or rational thinking levels.

Economic issues: When there is sustained lack or impoverishment in a marriage, either spouses may give-up hope since many need in the home such as unpaid bills, feeding, health, educational, and other needs may lie unmet. In some cases, a spouse may abscond to an unknown destination because of abject poverty. This may result when the bread winner is unemployed or dismissed from his job as is sometimes the case with husbands and Tikumah (2009:73) subscribed to this view when he stated that it is the Nigerian man's responsibility to find food, clothes, shelter and other essential needs of the entire family as well as to pay children's school fees. He added that where a man is unable to live up to these economic and financial responsibilities due to poverty or carelessness, then the home is said to be in a state of economic dissatisfaction and this may lead to a marriage may breakdown or failure.

Premarital cohabiting: This trial marriage hypothesis regularly fails to find confirmation in empirical studies. Various studies have shown that couples who cohabited before marriage show a higher risk of failure and divorce (Bruderl et al. 1999). The widely accepted trial marriage hypothesis maintains that premarital cohabitation reduces the risk of divorce because the partners can test if they are compatible. This mechanism can be described more precisely with the help of arguments from family economics (Becker et al., 1977; Becker, 1991 cf Bruderl et al. 1999).

Conflicts manifested in arguments frequent quarrellings and fightings: Often arguments over small things, that blow up into really big issues quickly. Sometimes even becoming emotional, mental or even physically involved disputes (<http://www.squidoo.com/is-my-marriage-over-help-me-save-my-marriage>). Spousal abuse is a possible consequence of this kind of social and emotional environment in the home of which women and children are the major victims, being an attempt to gain power and control over the victim (Adeniyi and Olawale 2009). Lastly, negative emotional psychological states may result on the spouses, in-laws and friends as consequences of a failed marriage but the children from such failed relationships often suffer severely. The first people a child comes in contact with are the parents. The family has a distinct and most important moral role in the behavior of a child and the early and formative years of a child are spent in the home, within this period, the salient aspects of culture are passed unto the child (Busari 2011:112). If the family so influences the child's development, then what will become of the child born into a failed marriage family? This

may have unhealthy psychological consequences relating to emotional deprivation and instability and abuse.

Materials and Methods

Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. The primary data were obtained from a cross-section of married indigenes in Benin City. Sixty (60) copies of questionnaire were administered on sixty (60) married persons of 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49 and 50+ years of age. They were culled from various communities within Benin City with a stratified random sampling procedure. The studied area was divided into strata comprising major areas or communities. Based on the rule of thumb, Ekehuan, Erhunmwunse, Evbuotubu, G.R.A. and Ugbor areas were selected for the purpose of studying marriage failure existing among couples resident in them. Convenience sampling technique was however used to select respondents in the six strata. The survey method through the questionnaire was used to elicit information from respondents. The questionnaire contained close ended questions.

All completed questionnaires were retrieved promptly. The criterion was, provided that respondents were married before or at the time of the survey, were residing in the studied area at the time of the survey and they voluntarily consented. Data collected were based on questions concerning factors that are associated with marriage failure: Possible factors included repeated quarrels, infidelity/extramarital affairs, spouse beating, ethnic and religious difference, illiteracy of spouse, intrusion from extended family, barrenness, unemployment, sickness, unfriendliness/lack of communication, keeping secrets, witchcraft/cultism and poverty/financial lack. Secondary data were obtained from past researches indicated in previous online articles, seminar notes, published books and unpublished but completed case studies. However, the researchers did ensure they were of relevance to the studied problem.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This section presents data on frequency tables and a chart along with subsequent discussions. Also, the stated hypotheses have been tested. Included are bio-data of respondents and data on the research objectives Findings from the field indicate that there are many factors associated with marriage failure in Benin City, Nigeria. The table below presents socio-demographic data on respondents' age, sex, marital status, religion, occupation and level of education.

Table 1: Socio-demographic data of respondents

DATA	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Age		
20-24	3	5
25-29	8	13.3
30-34	13	21.7
35-39	11	18.3
40-44	14	23.3
45-49	2	3.3
50+	9	15
Sex		
Male	28	46.7
Female	32	53.3
Marital Status		
Married	41	68.3
Separated	9	15
Divorced	6	10
Widowhood	4	6.7
Religion		
Christian	35	58.3
Muslim	19	31.7
Traditional	6	10
Educational Level		
Primary Six	15	25
S.S.C.E.	16	26.7
O.N.D./N.C.E.	14	23.3
H.N.D.	3	5
Bachelors degree	10	16.7
Postgraduate	2	3.3
Occupation		
Trading	30	50
Teaching	12	20
Fashion	1	1.7
Banking	4	6.7
Civil servant	7	11.7
Student	2	3.3
Unemployed	4	6.7

The table above expresses the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents in percentages: From the distribution, all respondents were adults. Among the age brackets, 40-44 had the largest proportion (23.4%), followed by 30-34 (21.7%) and 35-39 (18.3%). Also, 15% of the sample of respondents was of age 50 and above while 13.3% of respondents were between 25-29 years of age. But just 5% of respondents were between 20-24 years and ages 40-44 represented only 3.3% of the sample.

More female respondents (53.3%) than male respondents (46.7%) were present in the sample. However, there were no unmarried or single respondents in the sample as 68.3% of respondents were, still married as at the time of the survey; 15% were separated, 10% were

divorced, and the least proportion (6.7%) were widows/widowers hence, their perception of marriage failure was informed by their marital experience. 58.3% of respondents were Christians, 31.7% were Muslims and only 10% held traditional beliefs.

On respondents’ educational level, highest in the sample those with Senior Secondary School Certificate (26.7%) followed by those with primary certificate (25%), Ordinary National Diploma and/or National Certificate in Education grouped together (23.3%), Higher National Diploma (5%), bachelors degree (16.7%) and postgraduate (3.3%). On respondents’ occupation, 50% of respondents were trading, 20% were teaching and 11.7% were in the civil service. Also 6.7% was in the banking sector; equally 6.7% was unemployed while 3.3% were students and 1.7% was into fashion design at the time of the survey.

Table 2: Perception on the Critical Factors Associated with Marriage Failure in Benin City

S/N	FACTORS ASSOCIATED	FREQUENCY			
		YES	%	NO	%
i	Repeated quarrels,	30	50	30	50
ii	Spouse beating,	13	21.7	47	78.3
iii	Infidelity/extramarital affairs,	60	100	0	0
iv	Religious difference	7	11.7	53	88.3
v	Ethnic difference	4	6.7	56	93.3
vi	Illiteracy of spouse,	6	10	54	90
vii	Intrusion from extended family,	49	81.7	11	18.3
viii	Barrenness of either spouse,	16	26.7	44	73.3
ix	Unemployment of either spouse,	21	35	39	65
x	Sickness and other health problems	4	6.7	56	93.3
xi	Unfriendliness/lack of communication	58	96.7	2	3.3
xii	Keeping secrets	56	93.3	4	6.7
xiii	Sorcery/witchcraft/ cultism	59	98.3	1	1.7
xiv	Poverty/severe lack	49	81.7	11	18.3

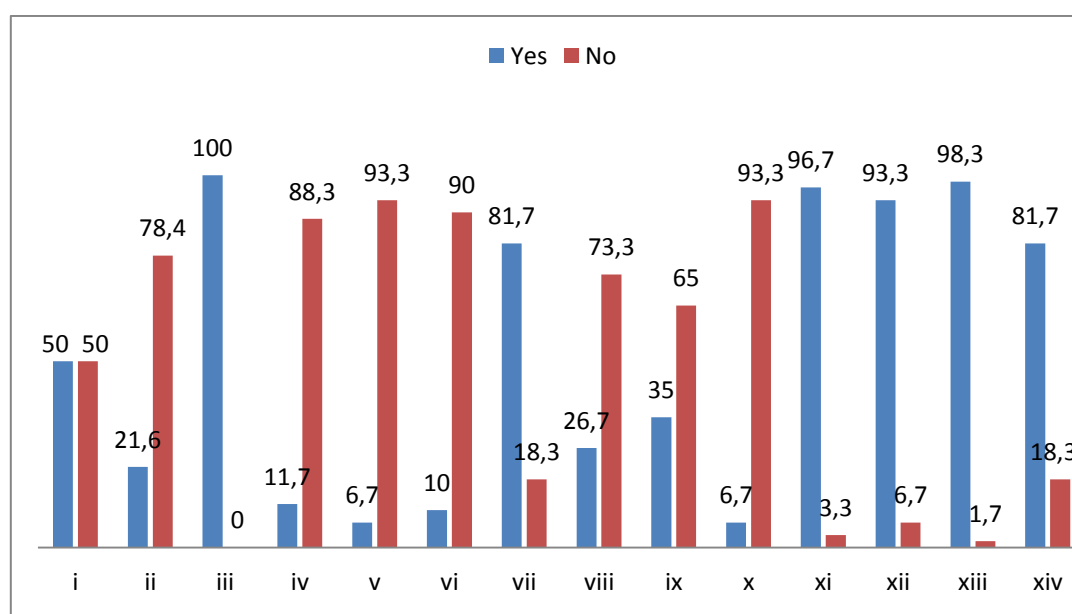


Figure 1: Critical Factors associated with marriage failure in Benin City

The table and chart above presents the perception of respondents on the possible factors that can lead to marriage failure. Each item in the distribution is captured in the corresponding bar with their heights showing the percentage extent of agreement or disagreement to the listed factors. There were multiple responses to the factors can cause a marriage to fail, hence all the listed factors are associated a failing marriage. Specifically, all respondents (100%) ticked “yes”, corresponding to the highest bar on the chart; 98.3% opined that sorcery, witchcraft/ and/or cultism can contribute to marital failure; following this is unfriendliness/lack of communication among spouses (96.7%), developing the habit of keeping secrets (93.3%), poverty or severe lack (81.7%), intrusion from extended family (81.7%) were all high in respondents opinions. Notwithstanding, repeated quarrelling stood midway at exactly 50% of the sample, while unemployment of spouse stood at 35%, barrenness of either spouse at 26.7%, beating up a spouse at 21.7%, religious difference at 11.7% and illiteracy of either spouse at 10%. In addition, both ethnic difference and sickness with other health problems were the least in the respondents’ opinion, standing at 6.7% and corresponding to the lowest bars on the chart.

Conclusions and Recommendation

From the findings of this study, it is clear that there are various critical factors in marriage failure in Benin City for which there is need to signal the way forward. In an order of decreasing influence these factors include: infidelity or extramarital affairs; witchcraft or membership of secrete cult; unfriendliness or lack of communication among spouse; keeping secrets; poverty or severe financial lack and intrusion from extended family. (Both perceived as having equal influence); repeated quarrellings; unemployment of both spouses; barrenness of either spouse; beating up your spouse; religious differences; ethnic difference and sickness or other health problems facing either spouses (both factors perceived as having equal influence).

From the forgoing, some factors listed above ranked equally. For example poverty or severe financial lack ranked equally with intrusion from extended family at the fifth place, while ethnic difference and sickness or other health problems of either spouse ranked equally at the eleventh place based on the respondents’ perception. It should be stressed from this angle that when spouses in a wedlock or marriage institution are financially stable, faithful to each other, as well as give their family moral and emotional support, matrimonial failure is likely to dwindle among married couples. As husbands communicate with wives amicably in unmixed openness and trust, working hard for economic support and deemphasizing all unnecessary intrusions from parents, siblings and other in-laws Shunning repeated

quarrellings and bickering, marriage unions stand the chance of being succeeding. This has not been so as observations reveal that many marriages in Benin City have accumulated unresolved disputes in which in-laws have stepped in unnecessarily, but often to no avail.

Hence, it appears that many marry for the fun of consummation or procreation or due to unplanned and premarital pregnancy: This can be a predication for the factors of barrenness, infidelity and unresolved differences which are contributors to marital failure. In addition, marriages where a partner focuses on the wealth or financial status of the other spouse may experience failure if unforeseen poverty or unemployment (especially of the bread winner) occurs. There is an obvious need for a more rigorous marital and pre-marriage counseling for married and for intending partners.

The way forward is signaled in further recommendations in subsequent paragraphs

- Firstly, partners in a marriage union should work hard at keeping to their marriage vows especially with regards to fidelity. They should be faithful to each other in building up a healthy home. Accordingly there is need to put up with each other in love and understanding no matter the existing strain in the home knowing that no condition is permanent.
- The existence of mutual understanding should be emphatically stressed as spouses should seek to give their best to keep the wedlock. Moreover there should be openness and trust among couples, effective communication and the enhancement of friendliness should be worked out. Here, husbands should learn to take their wives out weekly especially for leisure at weekends. This would help instill true unity against the backdrop of disunity and failure.
- Again, couples should learn to live within the limits of their financial capacity in an attitude of contentment. Following this, there should be proper and careful management of domestic income. However, when there is lack or relative lack, spouses should unanimously work at discovering a better and/or supplementary means of raising extra funds and reducing overhead costs. Nevertheless, this should be carefully thought-out and implemented in order to avert possible conflicts.
- When disagreements and problems occur, couples should address persisting issues and sort things out together avoiding the unnecessary intrusion of third parties, especially in-laws. Notwithstanding, the advice of parents and other in-laws should be taken as suggestions that would be scrutinized for acceptability.

- The government needs to prioritize on marriage counseling centres especially at the grass root or the local government levels: Marriage counselors should be trained and employed with a mix of psychologists, guidance counsellors, social workers, medical practitioners, and lawyers with necessary referral services. Such centres should be well funded and workers well paid.
- Divorce should not be taken as first consideration, when married couples encounter major or minor disagreements, conflicts or problems. Instead, they need to explore all other non-terminal avenues toward resolving crises. Therefore when a marriage is failing, partners should patiently seek out remedies rather than breaking up– since the original idea of marriage is “*till death do us part*”. The judiciary through the law court should seek to make divorce more difficult to obtain especially cases based on flimsy reasons while investigations are done by counsels to ensure the best legal decisions are taken.
- Parents/guardians should work at ensuring that their children are properly brought up such that they acquire desired behaviour and virtues that will sustain them when they grow up and eventually get married.
- During courtship, unmarried individuals should spend time to understand their partner’s personality or character, regarding their weaknesses and strengths, likes and dislikes as well as failures and prospects in order to make well informed adjustments– where necessary in avoidance of matrimonial failure during wedlock.

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