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Editorial Note

In this issue, we continue to engage in how social and economic dynamics influence the family. The irrefutable point that the family is the basic unit of every society is made with the fervent belief that it nurtures its members and releases them to society. The failure or success of a society is intricately connected to how the family grooms its members. The inevitable conclusion is that the stronger the family in contemporary society, the better for all. In this light, Ayantayo blazed the trail by arguing that the traditional roles played by members of the family in the past have been affected by the ever-changing socio-economic factors in contemporary society. This dynamic and forward-looking social reality immediately suggests that members of the family must assume new roles that align with the demand and expectations of society. However, he argued that we must holistically develop a family based on blending treasured traditional values with contemporary dynamic values.

Alawode and Aderele examine the causes, effects, and solutions to substance abuse by members of the family. According to them, the rate at which the youth use or abuse substances has become so alarming that it requires deft musicological intervention. They argued that musicologists must take it as a point of duty to engage and minister to youth involved in substance use to restore them to fellowship with their families and Christ. Asaolu argued that although conflict is natural, marital conflict is complex and has serious implications for the family and society. Since conflict is human-made, Asaolu identified natural and potential causes of conflict in marriage and suggested that there are irreducible ethical prescriptions whose adoption and application can help to minimize conflict in the family. Salifu and Hammans's empirical exploration of drug abuse among the youth in the Dekina Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria, clearly shows that it has assumed a dangerous trend that requires urgent intervention by government institutions and the family. They suggest that ethical principles are required to address this trend through socialisation as well as the spiritual exercise of

faith. Adeola's article centers on how flexibility is a virtue that couples should cultivate to navigate traditional impositions that might negatively affect the family. He adopts a theological standpoint that argues that consistent and mutual fellowship together in the family helps prevent external infiltration into the family.

Odeleye and Adeyanju examine the necessity of resolving conflict among young couples. As part of the mandate of pastoral care ministry, pastors should ensure that their ministry intentionally cares about the health of young people's marriages. As a result of the potential consequences of failure in early marriages, the moral burden to guide and guard against unnecessary conflict in young homes must be borne by pastors by deploying their spiritual and moral training and authority. Oyedele specifically examines the roles of pastoral care in infidelity in Christian homes. He argues that one of the causes of conflict in the family is sexual infidelity by a spouse. This, he argues, can lead to the breakdown of marriage if pastoral care is not given in such a way as to ensure forgiveness. Still, on pastoral care, Adeyanju unfurls the complexities that COVID-19 imposed on communal coexistence. Social distancing affected the communal setting in that members of the community had to deliberately keep some reasonable distance to be safe. At such a moment, Adeyanju thinks that pastoral care ministry is critical in mitigating the consequences of social distancing and keeping healthy by all.

Kelechi and Oderinus's interest is in unhealthy rivalry among siblings in the family. The adverse effects rivalry has on the family call for critical attention to be paid to it. They suggest that parents must conduct themselves do not suggest that they love one child more than the other. Ogundipe returns to the role of the pastoral care unit in fostering unity and resolving marital conflict. To correctly resolve conflict, each issue that causes conflict must be examined on its own rather than deploy one solution fits all approach. This is where the dexterity of pastoral care comes in. Oluwaronke believes that Christian parenting is a critical means of mitigating social vices that

have continued to plague contemporary society. Oluwaronke itemizes and also proffers solutions to the causes of social vices that require good parenting and counseling to resolve. Victor re-examines the concept of one flesh marital bond as a quintessential measure couples need to take to resolve their conflict. The one flesh approach argues that conflict inflicts self-pain on the couples, and they should see each other as one. And finally, Ayinde explores the impacts of social media on Christian youth couples. She argues that time is essential in developing relationships in marriage. Consequently, when more time is spent on social media to neglect the spouse, conflict is bound to arise. Christian principles are thus recommended to ensure a balanced use of social media for the family's health.

I, therefore, welcome you to explore in detail the arguments and issues raised in this issue.

Prof. Benson Ohihon Igboin
Editor in Chief

RESOLUTION OF MARITAL CONFLICT AMONG YOUNG COUPLES AND ITS MORAL CONCERN FOR PASTORAL CARE MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

Marital conflict is increasing among young couples nowadays. This is evident from the frequent report of cases of conflict involving young couples in the society. The problem often leads to grave consequences for the couples, their children, their family, and their Churches. Therefore, this paper examines marital conflict among young couples; identify causes and effects of marital conflict among young couples; discusses moral concern for the pastoral ministry to resolve marital conflict among young couples. The paper submits that marital conflict is a misunderstanding between couples that often involves the display of hatred, insult, anger, abusive words, and frequent heated arguments between the couples. Its causes include a lack of financial provisions to meet needs, wrong handling of individual differences, in-laws' negative interference, and sexual dissatisfaction. The paper submits that the prominent effects of marital conflict among young couples are incessant brawling, loss of happiness in the marriage, abandonment of sexual relations, and unnecessary animosity. The paper, however, presents the moral concern for pastoral care ministry to resolve marital conflict among young couples by offering moral guiding, reconciling approach, behavioural adjustment and spiritual nurturing. The paper recommended that young couples with marital conflict should freely consult their pastors and marriage counselors. Churches should frequently organise programmes to empower conflicted couples for sustainable family life.

Keywords: Marital conflict, Pastoral ministry, Resolution, Young couples.

Introduction

Marital conflict is increasing among young couples nowadays. This is evident from the frequent report of cases of conflict involving young couples in society. Marital conflict often leads to grave consequences for the couples, their children, their family, and their Churches. People marry with the hope of having lasting happiness. Couples start their marriage believing that the love they profess for one another would make them give and receive joy readily. They usually do not expect to be hurt by each other, at least not in the early stage of their marriage. However, it could be devastating when they enter married life and find the reality of conflict, cutting short their marital expectations.

Young couples are the couples whose marriages are between one day to ten years (1 day-10 years), not minding their biological age. Such couples are in the early stage of marriage, still trying to know, understand and adjust to each other. Marital conflict refers to disputes involving misunderstanding or disagreement between couples in the course of their day-to-day interaction. Islami (2017:1) states that marital conflict often stems from “incompatible needs, desires, goals, and interests.” Thus, young couples in churches are not immune from this problem, despite their exposure to church life and services, including sound biblical teachings.

In some cases, unresolved marital conflicts can lead to physical, psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual challenges. This paper attempts to provide solutions to this challenge from a Christian ethical perspective, aiming to curtail the challenges of marital conflict. Thus, this paper examines the resolution of marital conflict and draws moral concern for the pastoral ministry.

Overview of Marital Conflict

Marital conflict is a common challenge in society and it is a moral problem in society. Marital conflict is a threat to the sustainability of marital life. Tolorunleke (2014:21) defines marital conflict as “the state of tension or stress between marital partners.” Adepoju

(2017:12) sees it as a combination of problems like communication, alienation, or threats to the security of the marital relationship, leading to anxiety and erosion of the marital system. In Brown's (2020) view, marital conflict is a disagreement between husband and wife “that leads to power struggles, contention or personality clash.” It is important to note that “marital conflict” and “marital disharmony” appear to have the same meaning in literature. Ibeh, Obidoa, and Uzoechina, (2013:41) define marital disharmony as a quarrel in which the persons involved see a threat to their wants, interests, or concerns. It is also viewed as a battle or competition between people with competing needs, ideas, views, values, or ambitions. Going by the definition above, it is clear that marital disharmony is not different from marital conflict. The writers are in agreement with the above positions and the paper submits that marital conflict is a threat and inimical to the healthy life of the couples.

Islami (2016:23-25) clarifies that conflict arises from how individuals process information in relationships, especially when they feel the action of another person is threatening their interest. According to Runde and Flanagan (2007:65, 67), conflict is “any situation where people have incompatible interests, goals, principles or feelings.” In some cases, conflict ensues because the spouses have different values, adopt different principles and prefer different tactics for addressing issues. An unresolved conflict can grow increasingly through the levels of differences, misunderstanding, discord, and polarisation.

Dildar, Sitwat, and Yasin (2013:1435), identify different types of marital conflict, which include aggressive husband, lack of cooperation, lack of spending time together, children's issues, decreased effective communication, and financial problems. The paper adds that marital conflict also includes: selfishness, role issues, changing traditional marital roles, sex issues, and infidelity issues. According to Groesberk and Swierezer (2006:230-232), marital conflict can be classified into three types: domestic violence, emotional abuse, and opinion difference. Domestic violence is when

the couple engages in physical assaults and uses expressions that threaten the security of their relationship; emotional abuse is when the couple uses vulgar, name-calling as well as dehumanising statements to inflict emotional hurt and intimidation on one another; opinion difference is where the couple express opinions that differ from the perspective of the spouse.

Akinsola (2016:23-24), also groups marital conflict into three types. He, however, used different designations: foundational, structural, and operational. Hence, foundational conflicts are the conflicts that challenge the reason for marriage; structural conflicts are the ones that relate to the influence of third parties in the relationship, while operational conflicts are disagreements that are fuelled by the differences in methods or approaches to issues. In the view of Cloud and Townsend (1999:238-270), however, marital conflict is of six types: the presence of sin in the life of one of the spouses; lack of maturity or brokenness in the husband or wife; having hot feelings without specific offence; the presence of contradicting desires; the interests of a spouse running contrary to the relationship's need; and known versus unknown problems.

Scholars have also noted that marital conflict goes through some stages. Akinsola (2016:11-12) holds that marital conflict goes through mild, severe, and critical levels. Collins (2007:326-327) highlights five stages, including the tension development stage, role confusion stage, injustice collecting stage; confrontation stage; and adjustment stage. In the view of Shoremi (2002: 32-35.), however, there are seven stages of conflict. These are the honeymoon stage, the neutral stage, the negative stage, the explosive stage, the run-away stage, the divorce stage, and the stage of marriage. The levels represent an increasing depth of the conflict. As the conflict progresses, it also gets more difficult to be resolved. There is the tendency for the couple to respond to the conflict situation with the same attitudes that brought them into it, such as shouting at each other, harshly criticising one another and name-calling. Sadly, these would only sustain the cycle of conflict in the marriage.

From the above positions, the paper identifies the following parametres to identify marriages that have marital conflict; physical fighting, violence, noticeable unhappiness, withdrawal from friends by one or both spouses, poorly catered children, verbal abuse, open criticism, ironic comments, threats, humiliating comments, unresponsiveness and technical divorce.

Causes of Marital Conflict among Young Couples

Marital conflict among young couples is a common problem today. Some causes for the occurrence and increase of marital conflict among young couples nowadays are classified into moral and psychological factors.

Moral Factors: Moral factors responsible for marital conflict include couples' ignorance of healthy patterns of handling conflict, finance or money matter, differences in faith or religious belief, lying, communication failure, in-law Interference in cross-cultural marriages where the in-laws have different cultural practices and traditions from their son-in-law or daughter-in-law. Marital unfaithfulness, lack of commitment, sexual dissatisfaction, unmet expectations when the journey begins (Ayankeye, 2010:14, and Tolorunleke, 2014:25). Unfulfilled emotional needs, infidelity, anger, dirtiness, inability to cook food, alcoholism and change in marital roles due to the current economic reality.

Psychological Factor: Psychological factors responsible for marital conflict include untamed anger, aggression, the intention to do things that would harm the other person, slander, which is speaking to damage another person's reputation; unwholesome speech, which is the use of filthy language in conversation, stress and individual difference (Ogundipe, 2015:64-65, Olagunju, 2007 and LaHaye, 1999:8-9).

Effects of Marital Conflict

The couples involved, the family, church and the society feel the effects of marital conflict in several ways and it is categorised into moral, psychological and spiritual effects.

Moral Effects: Moral effects of marital conflict include domestic violence, revenge, verbal or physical attacks, enmity, hatred, grudges, use of diabolical power to fight one and another, withdrawal, desertion, separation and divorce, poor parental care for the children, divorce, poor academic performance of children in the school, violence and gang activities (Olagunju, 2007, Collins, 2007:324, Familusi, 2019:23, Agomuo, 2020). Collins (374:366) agrees that marital conflict leads to sex problems in marriage. He, however, observes that, sometimes, it is sexual problems that lead to marital conflict but, “more often, marital conflict or drifting apart comes first.” The author further notes that lack of sexual intimacy can cause further deterioration of the relationship and immoral practices such as masturbation, pornography and infidelity. Marital conflict can lead to a lack of sexual interaction. Some spouses may not even express sexual desires to the spouse for years. Where marital conflict reigns, the family would not progress as expected because the couple would not cooperate or unite to pursue common goals. The writers are aware of a situation where the husband and wife were pursuing individual building projects. The slow pace of the two projects was a testimony that their lack of cooperation was not helpful. Marital conflict can affect couples physically by impacting their health and physical well-being.

Psychological Effects: Psychological effects can include anger, depression, guilt, low self-confidence and anxiety, reactions like fatigue, headaches, tense muscle, stomach upsets, psychological agony and pain, health impairment, untimely death, despair, hopelessness, confusion, susceptibility to depression, especially by girls, emotional instability, and vulnerability to drug abuse (Okafor, 2013:32-33, Olagunju, 2007:34-35).

Spiritual Effects: Marital conflict affects couples spiritually. Conflict situations affect couples' commitment to one another and God. Some spouses withdraw from church out of shame and the depressive influence of the crisis in the marriage. Retarded marital growth and spiritual drains, such as the inability to pray or enjoy fellowship with

God because of unforgiveness, guilt and bitterness, reproach, and shame in society, are shreds of evidence of the spiritual effects of marital conflict. Ayankeye (2021:3), states that a breakdown of the cordial relationship between husband and wife can disturb them from sustaining spiritual activities like praying together, studying God's word together, observing family devotion, or attending worship services together. Thus, this sort of spiritual decline is common in many marital conflicts among young couples in society. The tendency for marital conflict to affect the spiritual life of young couples in the church is an important reason for pastoral ministry to do its best to curb the prevalence of the problem.

Marital Conflict Resolution among Young Couples

The African view of marital conflict and its resolution is evident from the concept of marriage in the African cultural setting. Culture plays a significant role in marital conflict and its resolution. An understanding of the cultural context is crucial to the understanding and resolution of marital conflict. The cultural view of gender differences in Africa often contributes to marital conflicts. Thus, disputes among young couples may be triggered by the culture of gender stereotypes in their background. Malek (2022) notes that, whereas gender culture varies with time and individuals, some fundamental differences between males and females can easily engender conflict. For instance, gender role from an African perspective determines how each person sees themselves and their relationship with their spouse. Nwoye (2000:77), notes that most sub-Saharan African countries have a patrilineal system that builds the family economy around the male partner. "Gender roles are learnt by children from the time they are young.

According to Dildar, Sitwat, and Yasin (2013:1433), one can classify couples' responses to marital conflict as either constructive or destructive. A constructive response can improve the relationship, while a destructive response can worsen dysfunction and further stress in the marriage. Islami (2016:570) highlights two conflict theories: the first views conflict as a negative occurrence because it

leads to destructive confrontations. The second theory views conflict as a positive phenomenon because it can serve positive purposes when it leads the couple toward steps that can reduce the stress in the marriage. Dildar, Sitwat, and Yasin (2013:1433) also express that marital conflict can result in renovation and facilitate intimacy if adequately handled.

Indeed, Cloud and Townsend (2014:231) urged couples not to see marital conflict as their enemy. They counsel: “make conflict your ally, not your enemy. It is the iron that sharpens your marriage (Proverbs 27:17).” An essential factor determining whether the conflict becomes negative or positive is the conflict resolution style adopted by the spouses. As Islami (2016:571) notes, “conflict in itself is not destructive or negative,” what makes or mars the relationship is the couples' approach to the marital conflict.

The various styles Dildar, Sitwat and Yasin, (2013:1436-437) explained are: avoidance style is where there is a denial of the conflict, and the persons involved try to dodge their role or responsibility in the conflict; competitive style is where the partners seek resolution on their terms without consideration for the other party's need; adaptation or accommodation style is the non-assertive style where spouses try to consider the issues from the perspective of their partner and allow for peace by disregarding their own need; collaboration is where the spouses choose to cooperate toward reducing the stress in the marriage by expressing concern for one another, prioritising the relationship and the other partner's goal; and compromise is where one person accepts to settle for less and expects the other partner to also do for peace to reign in the relationship.

The submission of Islami (2016:570-572) agrees with that of Dildar, Sitwat, and Yasin (2013:1433-434) on the view that couples with constructive conflicts usually adopt constructive styles like accommodation (or adaptation), collaboration (or cooperation), and compromise. In contrast, destructive conflict is common in couples who adopt negative techniques like avoidance and competition (or rivalry). Akinsola (11-12) affirms that a constructive approach to marital conflicts would lead to a transformation of such conflict. In other words, conflict transformation entails seeing marital conflict as

an opportunity to develop. Such couples engage in interaction that leads to understanding, change and intimacy. However, apart from the aforementioned resolution methods, the writers added additional resolution of marital conflict from the perspective of pastoral care ministry. Pastoral leadership resolves marital conflict among young couples through different pastoral care functions, which are guiding, sustaining, healing, reconciling and temporary separation when the couples involved cannot resolve their marital conflict.

Moral Concern for Pastoral Ministry

Pastoral ministry, by nature, is a ministry of care. Pastors as shepherds seek to offer care and support for the parishioners in all areas of their lives, especially where the members have struggles that challenge their peace and usefulness to themselves, their families, and the Church. One of such areas is marriage. This section draws moral concern for the pastoral ministry of every Church to address the challenge of marital conflict. These moral concerns are considered as proactive strategies for achieving the resolution of marital conflict among young couples in the context of Church setting. These moral concerns are considered to help young couples whose marriages have been affected by conflicts.

Moral Concern for Education on Family Life

Education occurs in the context of guiding and equipping the young couples with biblical insights for the sustainable Christian family. The paper submits that young couples will gain insights into what to do to overcome the challenge of life facing their marriage through education. Thus, the pastoral ministry should educate the concerned couples to enable them to understand the nature, causes, and effects of their marital challenge and what they can do to amend the situation. The pastoral ministry should carefully guide young couples on matters of family life. According to Ogundipe (2015:81), guiding involves facilitating spiritual and mental growth in people or enabling them to grow independently. Pastors' role is to assist troubled people in making confident choices between some options of thought and action when such decisions are viewed as affecting the

present and future state of the soul. Based on the reflection on the above position, the paper submits that pastoral care ministry of the church should carefully and deliberately lead and direct couples who have marital conflict toward the right attitudes and actions that would facilitate a peaceful resolution of the conflicts and bring about happy coexistence as husband and wife.

Studies have shown that marital conflict is a normal and inevitable experience in marriage. Tolorunleke (2004:21) submits that conflict in marriage is a natural experience. Marital conflict is unavoidable and essential for the running of the marriage relationship. Thus, conflict is unavoidable in a normal marital relationship and couples cannot avoid it completely. Therefore, the pastoral care ministry of every Church should empower the concerned couples to face or handle their marital problems by themselves, without having to always depend on the pastors, friends, in-laws and anyone else to solve their problems for them.

Moral Concern for Separation

Marriage, like any other form of relationship, involves individuals with different ideas, expectations, and preferences. These are bound to clash at one point or another. Thus, one can state that conflict is a normal, and inevitable occurrence in marriage. However, when marital conflict cannot be handled, it can lead to damage to life and property. Marital conflict is severe and causes irreparable loss to the family, children, and society. When all strategies fail to resolve the marital conflict between the couples, and there is a danger that threatens the life of another partner, pastoral leadership should encourage temporary separation. This is to provide an opportunity for the concerned couples to realise their mistakes and adjust. Similarly, this period helps the church, family, and friends intervene in matters. The journey of marriage is lifelong, and the marital oath is until death does them part. However, when couples are unable to resolve their marital conflict and this is generating domestic violence, it is ethically imperative for them to separate. Hence, separation among the couple is ethically permissible to save life and ensure peace for the

concerned individuals. Time is significant in conflict resolution; it helps certain individuals to rethink and retrace their steps.

Concern for Reconciliation

Conflict creates a gap between people. In marriage, conflict pulls couples apart and contradicts what the marital bond ought to be. Reconciling, therefore, involves putting people whose relationship has suffered strain back on friendly terms. According to Oyedele (2011:36-37), reconciliation may take the form of facilitating expressions of forgiveness, administering discipline through correction or warning, or encouraging confession, repentance and amendment. Therefore, from a Christian ethical point of view, the pastoral ministry of the Church should re-establish cordiality in marital relationships broken by conflict.

Moral concern for Effective Pastoral Ministry

The hurts people suffer when they feel they have been unfairly treated over matters they consider important can create wounds in them. That can cause damage to the persons affected as well as their relationships. It can bring about impairment, deterioration, weakness, disability or inefficiency in the marriage. In such a situation, the pastoral leadership should minister to the concerned individuals to overcome the impairment by restoring soundness and helping the person to rise above the reality of the situation. The pastors should assist young couples with marital conflict to reconnect better and stronger ways than before their crisis began.

The pastoral ministry should provide a person with needed nourishment to enable such a person to forge ahead correctly. Sometimes, restoring a situation to the previous status before the crisis is impossible or difficult. Therefore, pastoral ministry should try to help the hurting person endure the current state or transcend the circumstance. Therefore, pastoral ministry is to help people recover by instilling hope and confidence.

Pastoral leadership helps open people's eyes to what God wants them to be or have and helps them build the capacity to attain that level. This goal is achieved through caring actions like visitation to the

troubled person(s), prayer, preaching, teaching, discipleship, etc. In the Church, the pastoral care ministry is to help the conflicted couples recognise and develop their capacity to understand and manage their problems by themselves.

Moral Concern for Behavioural Adjustment

Marriage is an institution ordained by God. It is a relationship that involves a man and a woman who are of different backgrounds, exposure, knowledge, experiences and upbringing, to mention but a few; hence, there is a need for adjustment between the two so that their view about issues can almost be the same and avoid conflict. Behavioural adjustment is the ability to modify ones' behaviours, opinions, exposure and needs to have cordial relationships between two individuals. For the young couples to resolve their marital conflict amicably, there is a need for behavioural adjustment among them. There should not be losers and winners among the couples, but they should be ready and willing to let it go and have a sustainable family.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Marriage, like any other form of relationship, involves individuals with different ideas, expectations, and preferences. Marital conflict is inevitable among Christian couples. The paper identifies the following parameters to identify marriages that have marital conflict physical fighting, violence, noticeable unhappiness, withdrawal from friends by one or both spouses, and poorly catered children, verbal abuse, open criticism, ironic comments, threats, humiliating comments, unresponsiveness and technical divorce. The causes for the occurrence and increase of marital conflict among young couples nowadays are classified into moral and psychological. The couples involved, the family, church and the society feel the effects of marital conflict in several ways and it is categorised as moral, psychological and spiritual effects. Marital conflict resolution is the process of settling and dispel amicably arguments or disagreement that came out between couples to have a sustainable home.

The paper however presents the moral concern for pastoral care ministry to resolve marital conflict among young couples. The paper recommended that young couples with marital conflict should freely consult their pastors and marriage counsellors for education to handle their marital conflict. Churches should frequently organize programmes to empower conflicted couples for sustainable family life. Young couples need to seek education regarding sexual relations, communication skill, emotions, and parenting from the pastoral care ministry as strategies for stabilizing their marriage. Churches should frequently organize programmes to empower conflicted couples for sustainable family life.

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