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Abstract

The high separation and divorce rates in young married Christian couples raise concerns concerning their physical and psychological parameters. This led to this study to find out the causes of marital conflicts and anxiety and depression among young married couples in Free Pentecostal Church Embakasi in Nairobi Kenya. The study was anchored on Bowen's family system theory. The objective that guided the study was: To find out the causes of marital conflicts among young married Christian couples. The study's target population was 600, focusing on young married Christian couples below 45 years. Therefore, the study drew a sample from the target population using Nassiuma's formulae to obtain a sample size of 86. The data was collected using questionnaires distributed by the researcher to the different respondents and collected after completion. The data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23. The data was presented using charts and tables. This study recommended that the young couples should seek psychosocial support. The study results are of significant impact to Christian counselling psychologists as they deal with marital issues.

Keywords: *Marital conflicts, young couples, Psychosocial Factors*

1.0 Introduction

Marital conflicts are a critical issue affecting many couples in the world. This leads to severe impairment of a couples' mental health. At times, these conflicts get worse to the extent of leading to divorce or separation. Usually, these conflicts are experienced in various ways, such as verbal abuse, stoic silence, open criticism, ironic comments, threats, humiliating comments, and unresponsiveness (Mbwirire, 2017). Marital conflicts have been shown to have long term negative consequences for all parties involved in marriage. Shockingly, some communities ritualize domestic violence, especially when a woman is the target. For instance, traditionally, it was thought that a man showed his wife that he loved her by beating her occasionally (Ashburn, Kerner, Ojamuge, & Lundgren, 2017). In these societies, a wife who her husband never hit would begin to doubt that she was truly loved. This "expression of affection," however, is not what we are witnessing today. The wife was never left mutilated or dead (Abransky, et al., 2016).

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In Roman times, a man had the power of life or death over his wife! (Lockard, 2007, p. 210) Whereas in America and England, the English common law gave way for a man to discipline his wife with a stick or whips that were no wider than his thumbs (Bloch, 2007). That was the origin of the “Rule of Thumb.” In modern times, the perpetuation of violence is often portrayed as usual and even erotic, especially in entertainment, such as music videos (Centre for Media Literacy, 2015). As a result, the level of marital conflicts currently witnessed may be nothing more than the continued evolution of a process that began centuries ago.

Globally, the statistics are rather startling. According to a study on the lifetime prevalence of marital conflicts by the World Health Organization, the Americas have a prevalence rate of 29.8%. Eastern Mediterranean has a prevalence rate of 37%. At the same time, Europe is at 25.4%. Southeast Asia is at 37.7% as compared to the Western Pacific, which stands at 24.6% (WHO, 2016). The same study emphasizes that in the United States of America, 38,027,000 women have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime; three women are killed daily by either a former partner or a current one. Besides, a study out by Vagianos reported that an intimate partner had killed about 18,000 women since 2003 (WHO 2015).

In Africa, the lifetime prevalence rate is at 36.6%, with Sub-Saharan Africa reporting 66.7% of women, specifically in Sierra Leone, having been subjected to severe marital conflicts (Issaka et al., 2017). In South Africa, earlier statistics showed that one in every four women experienced some degree of physical violence, with statistics likely to increase now (Jewkes, Penn-Kekana et al., 2001). A separate study has shown that every six hours, a woman in South Africa is killed by an intimate partner (Mathews, 2011).

1.1 Research Problem

The rates of divorce and separation have been increasing over the last decade. According to a survey by Kutura, (2015), 5 out of 10 women in Kenya have reported having marital conflicts in their marriages. Kutura, (2015) asserts that this is likely to increase to 7 out of 10 women by the year 2022. This is a clear indication of the rising cases of marital conflicts. Global statistics indicate an alarming increase in marital disputes. In Kenya alone, statistics show that about 48% of Kenyan women experience violence in their marriages (“Urgent Action Fund Africa” 2015). Violence is a consequence of marital conflicts. Unless this trend is reversed, so many families were rendered dysfunctional, thus affecting the society and country at large.

Marital conflicts undermine the well-being of family members. Young Christian couples entangled in marital conflicts may suffer from high levels of anxiety and depression besides experiencing corroding their Christian faith. These couples cannot perform at work to their highest potential, hence lowering productivity. Depressed young Christian couples may have challenges with parenting and providing for their families. This may result in a lower socioeconomic status.

Although people have conducted so many studies on the institution of marriage, there is limited research on the causes of marital conflicts among young Christian couples, specifically studies addressing anxiety, depression, and socioeconomic status. This study, therefore, focused on the causes of marital conflicts among young married Christian couples in Free Pentecostal Church-Embakasi, Nairobi County, Kenya.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Bowen's System Family Theory and the Social Exchange Theory. Murray Bowen developed the Family Systems Theory. It is based on eight concepts that are used to explain the different dynamics within a family. This theory focuses primarily on the influence of the nuclear family on an individual's behaviour (Nichols & Schwartz, 2010). The family systems theory is composed of eight interlocking concepts. These are as follows:

The differentiation of self

This is the individual's capability to make independent decisions and to stand by them regardless of the pressure exerted by family members. To balance emotions and reasoning, an individual who is not differentiated does not have an autonomous identity from the rest of the family.

Emotional triangles (Triangulation)

This is a three-person relationship pattern of interaction. It occurs when two people have a problem, and a third party can come in to help diffuse the anxiety building up. It is a pivotal building block of larger emotional systems.

Family projection process

This is whereby parents who have not been able to differentiate pass on their tensions and anxieties to their children. Bowen argues that these genetic tensions can impair the children and increase their vulnerability to more clinical signs (Bowen, 1978). This also explains the aspect of conflictual dyads in the family.

The nuclear family emotional process

This is described by four patterns that determine how problems develop in a family. These are the presence of marital conflict, dysfunction of either spouse, a child's possible impairment, and emotional distance when a relationship becomes too intense (The Bowen Centre, 2016). The nuclear emotional process can be broken into two areas: the nuclear family itself and the emotional system that governs it. It can be triggered by marital conflicts, reactive distances, and so on, as per Bowen.

Multigenerational transmission process

When parents are not able to differentiate, they pass on their emotional problems to the next generation. Furthermore, with a pair of siblings in a family, one is more highly differentiated than the other. People usually marry other couples of similar differentiation levels (Bowen, 1976). A person with less differentiation who marries is expected to have more intense emotional processes. The third-generation child was to come less differentiated.

Sibling position

Bowen agrees with Walter Toman (1976) that the place of one in the family impacts one's personality and behavioural patterns. The older children are more responsible and dependable, while the middle is lost in between and the last born being carefree and dependent. This influences relationships, as people develop characteristics based on their birth position. Firstborn children tend to lean towards leadership, while younger children tend to be comfortable with being followers.

Emotional cut-off

By emotional cut-off, Bowen means ‘the process of separation, isolation, withdrawal, running away, or denying the importance of the parental family’ (Bowen, 1978). This is whereby an individual in a family completely disconnects emotionally. This is often done by physically relocating far from the family of origin or by drastically reducing the emotional connection with family members. This is due to unresolved emotional issues that cause tension and anxiety to the individual concerned (The Bowen Centre, 2016). The theory has been proven to be a helping resource for most families (Galindo & Mills, 2016).

2.1 Empirical Review

Anxiety can be defined as a feeling of nervousness and stress, which is associated with the stimulation and activation of the person (Gould et al., 2002). It can also be defined as an imbalance between the demands of the environment and the demands of a person (Cox, Martens, & Russell, 2003). On the other hand, depression is a disorder attributed to real or imagined object loss (Sadock & Sadock, 2003) and, in this context, the loss resulting from conflicts in marriage. The prevalence of depression among couples with marital problems is shocking, with a study conducted in Karachi, Pakistan, among households with marital conflicts reporting a prevalence of 34% (Hamirani, Sultana, Ibrahim, Iqbal, Sultana, 2006). Another study conducted in Bangladesh in 2011 noted that the prevalence of depression among families with marital issues coupled with antenatal issues stood at 18% (Nasreen, Kabir, Forsell, Edhborg, 2011).

A study by Holmes (2014) maintains that people who are depressed are often unduly self-deprecating and harbour angry thoughts about themselves. A marriage characterized by marital conflicts exposes the couples to encounter problems in developing clear representations of sound and healthy relationships, thus plunging into depression. Depression can, therefore, be viewed as an outcome of a continuing struggle that a depressed couple undergoes to try and uphold emotional contact with preferred objects. It involves a spouse feeling reliant upon relationships with others and lamenting over the marital relationship's actual loss or anticipated losses. When couples find themselves in such a situation, they experience intense fears of abandonment and dreadfully struggle to maintain direct physical contact with the need-gratifying object. Depression can also occur in a marriage situation in which a spouse gets feelings of inadequacy, thus seeing themselves as a failure to the extent of the spouse redirecting anger to themselves (Holmes, 2014).

Sadock and Sadock (2003) pointed out that depressive symptoms are purported to be facilitated by faulty and maladjusted thinking patterns. Thus, couples predisposed to depression have a negative view of themselves, perceiving the world as hostile and demanding, and conceptualize the future to be characterized by anticipation of suffering and disappointment (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Therefore, depressed couples seem to harbour negative cognitions that form causal factors of depression (Holmes, 2014).

Though not very common, marital, or unwanted pregnancies may result in an increased risk of depression among family members (Hamirani, Sultana, Ibrahim, Iqbal, & Sultana, 2006) as the couple was not prepared psychologically, socially, and financially to have a new baby. Not only does marital conflict affect couples but also children. It has been shown that children of depressed mothers are at an increased risk of contracting cognitive deficits (Sohrpreston & Scaramella, 2006), emotional dysregulation, and reduced social competence (Cornish et al., 2005). Also, children of depressed mothers are more vulnerable to developing

common psychiatric disorders such as depression and anxiety and negative affect, behavioural problems, and overall impairment in functioning (Goodman et al., 2011; Weissman et al., 2005).

Anxiety is one of the psychological disorders most common among adolescents (Costello, Mustillo, Erkanli, Keeler & Angold, 2003). Earlier studies indicate that the prevalence rates range from 4% to 25% (Boyd, Kostanski, Gullone, Ollendick & Shek, 2000). It is most likely that the prevalence could be higher due to the internalized nature of its symptoms (Tomb & Hunter, 2004). Consequently, the preference may even be higher among couples experiencing marital conflicts.

Research indicates that anxiety predictors during a period characterized by marital conflicts include a low sense of self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, and a little maternal or paternal income (Sayil et al. 2006). Additionally, the presence of anxiety during pregnancy in a troubled marriage significantly increases a woman's chances of contracting an anxiety disorder during the first seven months after birth (Grant et al., 2008). Families experiencing marital conflicts thus experience high levels of anxiety due to the facing of several challenges and a life full of uncertainties.

3.0 Research Methodology

The research design that was used for this study is a descriptive survey research design. According to Chandran (2004), a descriptive survey research design is appropriate for describing and portraying an event, situation, group of people, community, or population. Moreso, Best and Khan (2006) add that it is a non-experimental design that seeks to answer the study questions by analysing the relationship between variables. The study was conducted in Free Pentecostal Church-Embakasi, Nairobi County. The church is within the Embakasi Central sub-County. It is situated about 8 kilometres North of Nairobi Central Business District. This study aimed to find out the prevalence of couples aged below 45 years of age experiencing marital conflicts. The study then proceeded to find out if there was an association between conflicts and mental wellbeing. The study also included church elders and pastors in the study. Therefore, 10 pastors, and 12 church elders formed the target population for this study alongside the 578 church members. The sample size was calculated on the population of 600 using Nassiuma formulae.¹ N=population size; n=sample size; C=Coefficient of variation which is $\leq 30\%$; e=margin of error which is fixed between 2-5%. The study sample was calculated at a 30% coefficient of variation and a 3% margin of error.

$$n = \frac{NC^2}{C^2 + (N-1)e^2}$$

$$n = \frac{600(0.30)^2}{(0.3)^2 + (600-1)0.03^2}$$

$$n = \frac{54}{0.6291}$$

$$n = 85.8 = 86$$

¹(Nassiuma, 2000, p. 60)

Table 1 Sample Size

Category	Frequency	Percentages
Pastors	1	1.7%
Church Elders	2	2%
Church Members	83	96.3%
Total	86	100%

4.0 Results and Discussion

To answer the research question, the respondents were asked to rate frequency statements on the causes of marital conflicts among young married Christian couples; minimal sexual relationships, inadequate satisfaction, irritation by partner, and crying caused by partner.

Minimal sexual relationships

Figure 1: Minimum Sexual Relationships

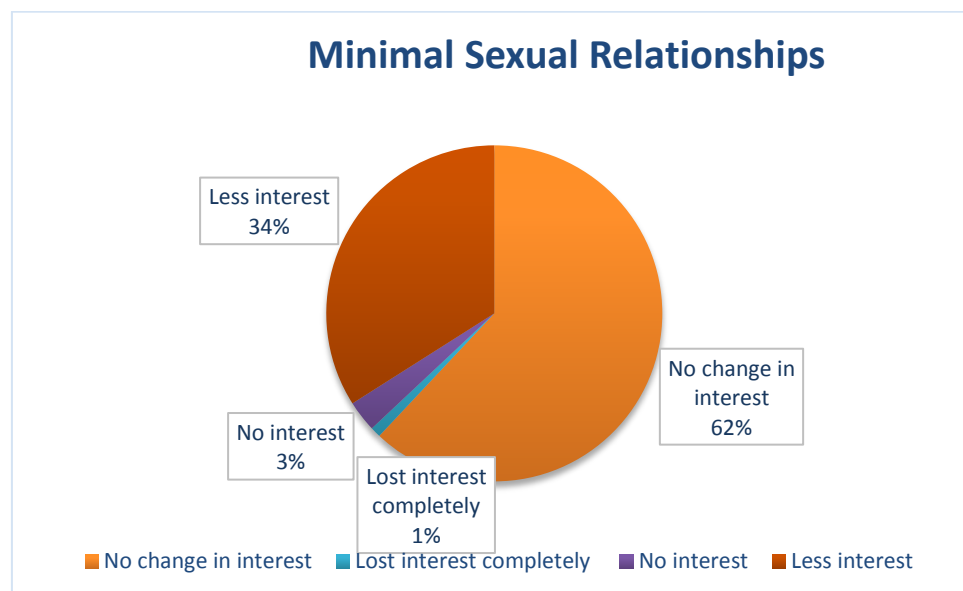


Figure 1 reveals descriptive analysis results for a minimal sexual relationship. The findings portray that failing to note any recent change in couples' interest in sex was rated at 62%, less interested in sex than they used to be 34%, having almost no interest in sex 3%, and having lost interest in sex completely 1%. This implies that 62% of the respondents had not noticed any change in their sexual relationship.

Inadequate satisfaction

Figure 2: Inadequate Satisfaction

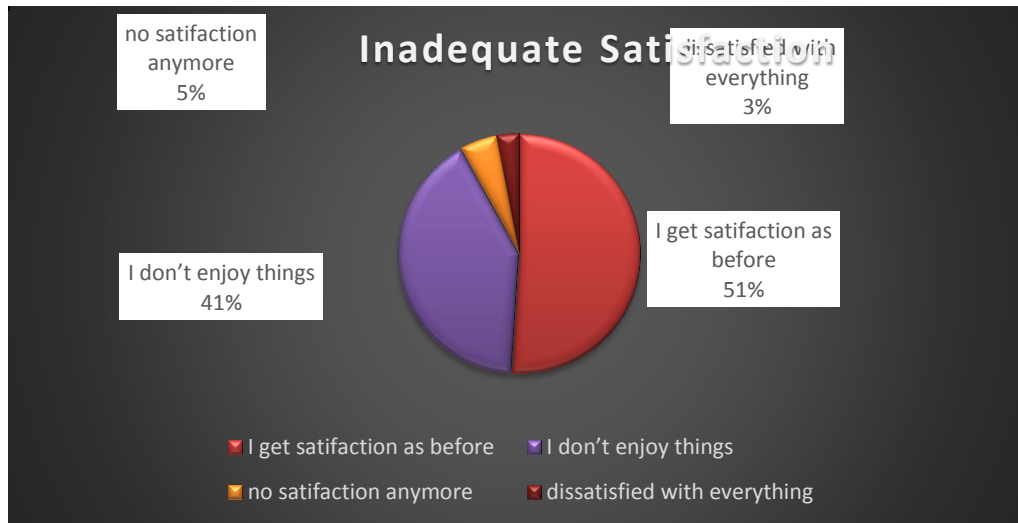


Figure 1: Inadequate Satisfaction

Figure 2 reveals descriptive analysis results for inadequate satisfaction. The findings show results from the respondents as follows; I get as much satisfaction out of things as I used to 51%, I don't enjoy things that I used to 41%, I don't get real satisfaction out of anything anymore 5%, I am dissatisfied or bored with everything 3%. This implies that 51% of the respondents get much satisfaction out of things as they used to.

Irritated by Partner

Figure 3: Irritated by Partner

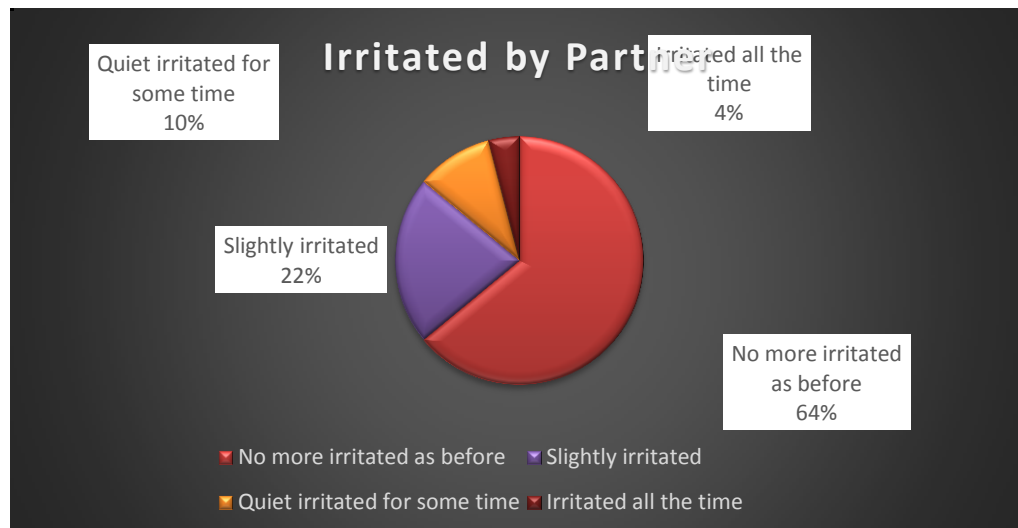


Figure 3 reveals descriptive analysis results for irritated by partner. Out of the rated statements, the findings show I am no more irritated by things, than I was 64%, I am slightly more irritated now more than usual 22%, I am quite annoyed or irritated a good deal of the time 10%, and I feel irritated all the time 4%. This implies that 64% of the respondents were no more irritated by things like they were before.

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Crying caused by partner.

Figure 4: Crying Caused by Partner

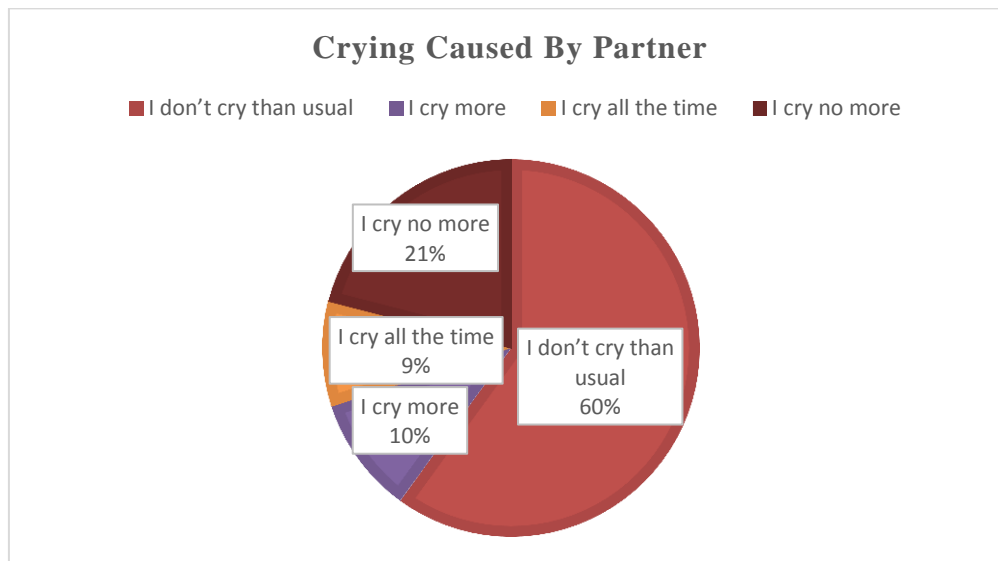


Figure 4 reveals the descriptive analysis results of crying caused by partner. The findings reveal that 60% of the respondents rated I don't cry any more than usual, 10% I cry more than I used to, 9% I cry all the time now and 21% I used to be able to cry, but now I can't cry even though I want to. This implies that 60% of the respondents do not cry any more than usual.

Regression Analysis Results: Causes of Marital Conflict and Mental well-being

In response to this study's research question, how does causes of marital conflicts influence mental well-being among young married Christian couples in Free Pentecostal Church-Embakasi, Nairobi County, Kenya? This study formulated one hypothesis (H_{01}) that was tested. The study run a regression test to measure any significant relationship between causes of marital conflict and mental among young married Christian couples in free Pentecostal Church – Embakasi.

The test was done at a confidence level of 95% ($\alpha = 0.05$). The statistically significance was used to measure if the null hypothesis (H_{01}) would be rejected or fail to reject. If testing the hypothesis revealed a $p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$, then it meant the null hypothesis was rejected. This meant that there is a relationship between the causes of marital conflict and mental well-being. However, in cases where the $p\text{-value} \geq 0.05$, it meant that there is a variation. Thus, implying that there is no relationship between causes of marital conflict and mental well-being. The null is retained - fail to be rejected.

Table 1: Regression analysis for causes of marital conflict

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1 (Constant)	1.460	.154		9.458	.000
Causes of Marital conflict	.648	.086	.666	7.576	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Mental well - being

In Table 2, the regression analysis results reveal a positive and significant relationship between causes of marital conflict and mental well-being. This is portrayed by a regression coefficient of .666 and a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the p-value of 0.05.

4.1 Discussion

The study investigated the causes of marital conflicts that influence mental well-being among young married Christian couples in Free Pentecostal Church. The findings showed that there were no minimal sexual relationships among the young married couples, felt satisfied, not irritated by partner; did not cry more than usual. From this result portrayed above, the findings reveal there is no evidence of any relationship between cause of marital conflict and mental well-being. The regression results established that there is a positive and significant relationship between causes of marital conflict and mental well-being. The multiple regression results showed a negative and significant relationship between causes of marital conflict and mental well-being among the young married Christian couples in Free Pentecostal Church. Further, it revealed through the regression coefficient that there are no relationships between causes of marital conflict and the mental well-being of married couples of Free Pentecostal church.

5.0 Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the psychosocial effects of marital conflicts on the mental well - being of young married Christian couples at Free Pentecostal Church-Embakasi, Nairobi County, Kenya. The study found out that minimal sexual relationships, irritation by partner, marital conflicts, miscommunication affect the marital relationship. Further, the regression in the result concluded that there was a positive and between causes of marital conflict, levels of depression, levels of anxiety, and socioeconomic factors with mental well-being of young married Christian couples. Additionally, in the multiple regression the study concluded a positive and statistically significant relationship between levels of depression, socio-economic factors and mental well - being.

6.0 Recommendations

Based on current research findings, the researcher recommends that couples need psychosocial education to enhance their sense of self, motivation, and right attitude towards marriage to boost their mental wellness.

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