DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND DIVORCE AS PREDICTOR OF MARITAL APATHY AMONG FEMALE UNDERGRADUATES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study explored domestic violence and divorce as predictors of marital apathy among undergraduate females in Nigeria. It adopted a survey type research design. The study sample comprised 200 female undergraduates. Data was collected using a self-developed questionnaire named 'Divorce, Domestic Violence and Marital Apathy Questionnaire (DMAQ).' The findings uncovered a relationship between aggressive behavior and exposure to aggressive television programs. It demonstrated a predisposition to aggressive behavior during violent television viewing. The study concluded that domestic violence and divorce as predictor of marital apathy among female undergraduates in Nigeria. To mitigate the problem, the study recommended, among others that there should be a multi-faceted approach; including rehabilitation, educational programming and sensitization of both community and school environments. These programs, such as organized counselling sessions, will not only help reintegrate the perpetrators into society but will also help the survivors to deal with the distress caused by trauma.

Keywords: Domestic violence, divorce, marital apathy, female, undergraduate.

Introduction

Marriage is popularly understood in sociology as the covenant between man and woman. The covenantal orientation supports a long-lasting and strong commitment because it stipulates mutual obligations and responsibilities of both sides. In this context, both spouses must develop and protect the purity of the marital relationship. As a result, spouses must participate consciously in the process of improving the internal disagreements and in overcoming the external influence that may

disrupt the spousal union. Theologically, marriage acts as a God ordained institution whereby upon union of two individuals as a husband and a wife, they gain the right to intimate relations and the responsibility to give birth to legitimate children recognised by the wider community (Sarker, 2007; Gour, 2006). It can thus be seen as a social contract where one of the two in one sex is matched with another of the opposite sex in order to have companionship, procreate and to manage the family life.

In spite of its fundamental importance, the modern marriage has had to face an overwhelming level of instability. Domestic violence, desertion by a spouse, legal break-up of a union, are the examples of the breakdown of the marital order. Divorce and marital breakdowns have turned out to be a prominent social phenomenon which often is the result of one or both partners failing to abide by covenant duties. According to observers, the fact that the rate of marital breakup is increasing is an indication of the wider social change.

An increasing percentage of women are finding themselves spending a significant part of their lives as single-adult female household heads, which is why their long-term socio-economic consequences are once again under investigation (Marrying & Gupta, 2009). In the African communities, cultural practices and interpersonal relationships are interlaced to offer determinants, effects and events that influence the length of marital relationships. Even though these variables continue to constitute communal fabric, current research has revealed that there has been an alarming decline in positive marital attitudes that may have far reaching effects (Borgatta & Edgor, 2009).

Marriage may be analytically characterized as a lifelong legal and social condition to which couples of unequal sexes consent, and which produces a net of mutual duty and interdependency intended to create and maintain a home. The institution is regulated by ritual and statutory frameworks and it gives the partners a common legal status that overrides the previous individual identity of each of them in that they must commit to reproductive and social obligations that are publicly approved (Govs, 2006). In its essence, marriage can be referred to as a covenant where two people make a formal commitment to be together in solidarity forever and the commitment is officially ratified by the government.

The legal marriage introduces a functional limitation of rights and responsibilities that overrides the religious and the secular statutory laws. When a marriage has been declared broken and irreparable by a court of law, the legal separation is termed as a divorce (Amina 2008). In as much as the dissolution of marriage is legally stipulated, its societal consequences become more significant considering that the family unit is the basic unit of social organization. Out of control increase in the divorce would compromise the moral and institutional integrity of the society at large (Seimeniuk 2010).

Domestic violence, otherwise known as physical violence, partner violence, relational violence, or intra-familial violence, is described as a circular and systematic process of abusive behavior or coercive control that is inflicted by one relational partner on the other in an attempt to gain and maintain control within a marriage or cohabiting partnership. Intimate partners include spouses, dating partners, and a party to a domestic partnership. Purposely violent or controlling behaviours can include monitoring medical or social appointments; limiting or monitoring the use of the telephone; forbidding of access to, or use of, personal transportation; making repeated intrusive telephone calls to a work place; forbidding the use of contraceptives; and verbal, physical or psychological attacks on partners, children, animals, friends or shared property. Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive control and physical abuse in an ongoing relationship, in which one partner repeatedly uses power to dominate and subordinate the other, and is commonly defined as marriage or cohabitation (Seimeniuk 2010).

Domestic violence has no demographic limits as it can affect both races, age, sexual orientation, religion, and gender, and it can be either physical, sexual, emotional, financial, and psychological (Office of Violence Against Women 2007). The phenomenon is conceptually associated with terms like spousal abuse, battering, and intimate partner violence; it entails systematic, coercive and harmful behaviours that one partner inflicts on the other in the context of an intimate relationship, most often, in marriage. The acts of physical aggression, including hitting and slapping, as well as biting, shoving, and using objects as projectiles, sexual coercion, emotional maltreatment, overt and covert control, intimidation, stalking, neglect, and

economic subjugation are all encompassed by the operational definition (Seimeniuk 2010).

These behaviours create long-term tension resulting in conflict cycles that often lead to marital breakup, separation, or the ultimate violence of homicide, often in the dyadic pattern of one partner killing the other. This trend is also indicated by statistical data in the mid-1990s where the United States Census reported an increase in divorce rates (1994), other studies reported an increase in single-parent households (Bledsoe 1993; Blankenhorn 2003) and the continued occurrence of wife battering (Olarinmoye 1998) in the present-day Yoruba society.

The modern social environment has made the fallout of divorce a social concern, escalating personal encroachment of the financial domains, spurring an increase in competition, and spreading other systemic strains. Onyia and Aniche (2002) listed an extensive list of factors that lead to the breakdown of marriage, such as infertility, poor intimacy, default of dowries, polygamous relationships, unending tribal gossip and factions, decreasing commitment, infidelity, communication gaps, desertion, drug addictions, inability to arbitrate fights, inconsistent types of abuse, disjointed personal and career goals, incompatible expectations of household and financial roles, unyielding intellectual inability, erratic mental stability, radical ideologies, and differences in faith, cultural In response to this collection, Linus (2012) proposed a more sympathetic view of the marital urgency of women, as he stated that social norms force early marriages and that the stigmatization of older women who are not married only increases the pressure to comply. Such conditions tend to force women into marriages that are bound together by vows and not by love and some women find the need to cut the courtship stage on the basis that omitting it simplifies the relationship. Where these phenomena meet, a number of poor families with dwindling resources and social capitals now have a disturbing readiness to bargain the destines of their daughters by letting dowry go in exchange of financial support, little educational investment or occasional financial remittances which previously were non-existent.

Imposing individuals into an unwanted and surprising marriage, the society sets up a stage where the marriage, by its very aspect, is beyond the control of the individuals; when the participants realize that the consent was not effective, the marriage is, as a matter of fact,

doomed to fail, to the detriment of the children, whose growth and development are left to suffer the results of such an illegitimate marriage (Price & McKeniy 2008).

Various global data sources merge on the fact that in some family systems, violence reaches acute and sustained expressions and that the behavior of children in these systems portrays the trauma caused by the violence. Domestic violence which is defined as abuse that takes place in marriage, courtship, kinship or cohabitation is simply a tool of power exercise and control by one partner over the other partner. It includes physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and psychological acts, threats, and omissions. This behavior is included under this definition when it intimidates, manipulates, humiliates, isolates, frightens, coerces, blames or injures the victim. Domestic violence cuts across the lines of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, and gender, and thus it is a salient and dislocating trauma to any individual who is exposed to it (Siemienuk, Krentz, Gish, Gill 2010).

Statement of the Problem Domestic violence and abuse are not limited to the physical manifestation of bodily harm and also include endangerment, criminal coercion, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, trespass, and a range of harassment. Epidemiological and sociological studies have proved that social, racial, religious and economic classes perceive and experience domestic violence in stratified ways. In the United States, estimates show that 4.8 million women and 2.9 million men experience violence that is condoned in the marital or cohabiting structures. In many nations of the Global South, however, including Nigeria as part of the Western African region, the phenomenon takes endemic proportions. In most of these cultural systems, domestic violence is not only condoned but it is justified as a traditional right. In systematic surveys, one-third to two-thirds of women of reproductive age report having experienced physical, sexual, or psychological abuse, and the abuser is most often a spouse, intimate partner, or paternal figure. In addition, girls are often forced into early marriages and face death or serious physical punishment in case they tried to get out of the forced marital relationships.

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant contribution of domestic violence and divorce as the prediction of marital apathy among female undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Ondo State.

2. Domestic violence will not significantly correlates to marital apathy among female undergraduates in tertiary institution in Ondo State.

3. Divorce will not significantly correlates to marital apathy among female undergraduates in tertiary institution in Ondo State.

Research Design: For this study, the design chosen was descriptive in nature, employing a survey method, whereby a questionnaire was administered to collect information from a sample population to generalize findings for the entire population.

Participants and Sampling

The population included all female undergraduate students from Ondo State. A sample population of two hundred female undergraduates was selected from all the universities in the state. Female undergraduates were selected using a stratified random sampling technique which ensured all respondents had an opportunity to be chosen for the study.

Instrument: The research instrument was structured into two sections. Section A captures the demographic data of the respondents while Section B comprises twenty (20) items designed to gather information relevant to each research question formulated on a four-point Likert scale.

Data Collection: Data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistic.

Result and Discussion

Hypothesis One: There is no significant contribution of domestic violence and divorce as the prediction of marital apathy among female undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Ondo State

Table 1: Contribution of domestic violence and divorce as the prediction of marital apathy among female undergraduates.

VARIABLE	X	SD	N	DF	P	r.cal	r.tab	Decision
Domestic Violence	8.3400	2.8038	109	98	0.05	0.820	0.567	Rejected
Marital Apathy	23.8700	5.6347	91					

Table 1 shows the results that indicate that r.cal = 0.820 z > r.tab = 0.567 at 0.05 level of significance and this rejects the null hypothesis, that is, domestic violence and divorce are not predictors of marital apathy among female undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Ondo State. Therefore, the results show that there is a significant relationship between domestic violence and divorce as predictors of marital apathy among the above female undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Ondo State.

Hypothesis Two: Divorce will not significantly correlate to marital apathy among female undergraduates in tertiary institution in Ondo State

Table 2: Divorce will not significantly correlate to marital apathy among female undergraduates in tertiary institution in Ondo State

VARIABLE	X	SD	N	DF	P	r.cal	r.tab	Decision
Divorce	6.7200	1.859	109	98	0.05	0.807	0.0567	Rejected
Marital Apathy	23.8700	5.6347	91					

As indicated in table 2, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between divorce and marital apathy among the female undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Ondo State is rejected. The difference between the value of r.cal, 0.807, and r.tab, 0.567, has a significance level of 0.05. It can therefore be concluded that divorce and marital apathy are highly related among female undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Ondo State.

Discussion of Findings

The literature review shows that in Ondo State, marital apathy among female undergraduates who are in tertiary institutions is greatly influenced by domestic violence and divorce. This conclusion is in line with Ganley (1989) who defines family violence as consisting of physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and violence against property or pets. Any exposure to any form of family violence, whether intentional or not, has the potential to create life-threatening experiences, and create a sense of vulnerability, helplessness, and in the worst

cases, utter terror. As a result, family violence often leads to divorce or breakage of affective bond in the family. This is supported by Okiki (2013) who notes that most families have been torn apart due to family violence either through legal divorce or personal separation.

Findings of the current research also show that there is a high relationship between domestic violence and marital apathy among female undergraduates in the Ondo State tertiary institutions. This observation is in line with the statement by Gate Way (2014) that domestic violence has long-term consequences, and their effect grows as the person ages and varies depending on the developmental stage. Children who witness domestic violence have higher risk factors of academic performance, attention, and cognitive functioning; weaknesses in verbal, motor, and executive-functioning tasks; and higher likelihood of developing pro-violence attitudes.

Also, the statistics show that divorce has a salient effect on the degree of marital apathy among female undergraduates living in Ondo State. According to Graham Berman (1994), over half of the school-going children in shelters of victims of family violence exhibit clinical levels of anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder, and, unless the situation is addressed, such children are at increased risk of delinquency, failure in school or dropping out of school; they experience problems in relationships. Empirical findings indicate that children react to distress by withdrawal of behavior, mutism, regression into infantile behaviors (including over cuddling, abnormal consumption, or prolonged sleep), and, in older children, negative affect overtly.

Conclusion

The current study has the following conclusions, which are aligned with its research questions. Undergraduate women who have experienced domestic violence have significantly more school discipline violations, as well as significantly lower academic performance in mathematics and reading. These students have negative spillover effects on their peers that results in poor performance on standardized tests and increased discipline issues among their peers. The correlation between academic problems and violent experiences is well supported by the previous research with young children that proves the chronic abuse to be harmful to mental score results, language achievement, visual-motor coordination, and attention and memory operations. These mental consequences of violence and maltreatment are most vivid in

the sphere of school integration and further academic performance.

Recommendations

1. The existing literature proves that family violence is a common phenomenon. As a result, there is a need to sensitize and educate the society about family responsibility so as to reduce interpersonal aggression.

2. There should be a multi-faceted approach; including rehabilitation, educational programming and sensitization of both community and school environments. These programs, such as organized counseling sessions, will not only help reintegrate the perpetrators into society but will also help the survivors to deal with the distress caused by trauma.

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