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Marital Instability in Students' Academic Performance in Nigeria Universities

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ABSTRACT

The study reviewed Marital Instability in Students' Academic Performance in Nigeria Universities. The study reviewed the following concepts: Meaning of Marital Instability, Marital Instability and Academic Performance of Students, Consequences of Marital Instability on Students Academics, Marital Instability and Academic Performance of Students and Consequences of Marital Instability on Students Academics. Based on the review, the findings of the study revealed that depression, nervous breakdown and consequences of marital instability relates negatively to the Students' Academic Performance in Rivers State University. However, the study recommends that: marriage counseling and seminars should be organized both at schools and at religious houses so as to sensitize couples on how marriage instability subtly creeps into families and how to avoid depression and couples must learn and acquire coping skills to enable them deal with the challenges of marriage like nervous breakdown and maintain a stable marital union.

Keywords: Marital Instability, depression, nervous breakdown, consequences

INTRODUCTION

Marital instability is defined as ongoing conflict in marriage because of communication problems, disagreements about parenting or gender roles, financial difficulties, untrustworthiness, infidelity, or alcohol and drug abuse (Kitson & Sussman, 2022). The term marital instability is a situation whereby a couple in a home is going through relational difficulties. It implies marital crisis or problems between couples that could result in marriage breakdown through separation, desertion or divorce. According to Alika and Edosa (2022), a marriage or family is structurally stable or unstable. An unstable marriage is one that is not structurally intact, as a result of quarrels, fights, separation or even divorce. Such marriages are characterized with frequent quarrels, disagreements and fights between couples in the home.

Marital instability, which simply refers to the interpersonal difficulties within the marital relationship, has many causative factors. Dessislav (2015) wrote thus: the family is the most basic unit of society and building block for national development. Just as there cannot exist any society without families or home, there cannot be sustainable development without stable families or home. Nothing man does is ever perfect, therefore, there are bound to be imperfections in marriages. Marital instability according to Amato (2021) is affective and cognitive states along the related actions that are precedent to terminating a relationship. Oyafunke (2014) referred to marital instability as the process whereby marriages breakdown through separation desertion or divorce. Unfortunately, many children today are faced with the challenges of multiple divorces or separations within their families. Parents who divorce, often go on to remarry or form other intimate relationships have higher incidence of failure.

Marital instability has become a thing associated with the contemporary family institution. This however, is not to say that it had never once occurred in marital situation of the past but that the rate at which it occurs in our present society is quite alarming. Garba, (2015), posits that the rate of divorce in town depends on economic situation. He noted that in Ibadan, rich traders entice people's wives with their money. This is common in our contemporary marital institution than before. The problem of marital instability can be traced to the rapid growth rate of urbanization and industrialization in Nigeria. The economy is growing and it requires a lot of manpower (both skilled and unskilled). This has aroused every member of the family to become one way or the other involved in the economic growth of the nation.

According to Alireza and Bagher (2016), the involvement of women in wage carrying is a threat in the family solidarity; couples hardly find time to stay together for interaction purposes. Child care which should be the responsibility of the parents is now shifted to the school and house helps. There are also some social factors that affect the instability of the marriage. The idea of managing more than one wife might lead to an end of the family. The habits that either the wife or the husband is involved in extra marital affairs which are perpetuated by some men and some women might lead to an end of the family. The habits that either the wife or the husband is addicted to smoking or drinking also lead to marital dissolution. Lack of trust in many families amongst the couples is wrecking marriages today. Peer influences also threaten the marital solidarity if care is not taken by couples. As a result of outside influences, irrational decisions are made to the detriment of one's wish and this might lead to a marital crisis. Other factors such as education, illegitimate children, religion and infertility of the wife also initiate instability in the marriage.

In another development, marital instability has been described as a situation whereby the couples deliberately decided to separate for one reason or the other. The concept of marital instability is associated with separation, divorce and widowhood. Marital instability has been observed as a contemporary social problem because it significantly affects a number of homes especially within the Nigeriansociety. The situation in most homes is such that even the children have become theburden bearers just like the popular saying that; "when two elephant fights, the grass suffers". This ugly experience often many a times leaves them emotionally and psychologically imbalance with feelings of depression, anger and even frustration as they are cut-in-between sides of their parent. These unpleasant experiences of children in the home front could significantly affect a child's concentration in school, thereby impinging on his academic performance.

In a research on the "Effects of Family Structure Type and Stability onChildren's Academic Performance Trajectories", Schultz (2016) found that children in disrupted two-biological-parent families saw slower academic growth relative to non-disrupted two-biological-parent. To some degree, there is simple evidence to show that marital instability brings about social, academic andemotional problems such as stress, tension, lack of motivation and frustration. Obviously, these manifestations act negatively on a child's academic performance (Schultz,2016). Although, a lot has been done on family and the effect of a broken family, divorce and the effects of divorce and issues concerning the home which have caused damages to the lives of children (Alika and Edosa (2022) not much has been done on the effect of marital instability.

Literature Review

Meaning of Marital Instability

Marital instability is a disagreement through which couples involvedperceive a threat to their needs, interests or concern and it is also seen as a strugglebetween couples with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals (Olaitan and Akpan, 2013). Instability arises as an attempt to match the behavior and expectations of one with the behavior and expectations of the other. This is seen as a threat to the family system because it entails disharmony when husband and wife on a certain goal to pursue, it usually results to instability and confusion between them unless they come to an agreement on the goal. Marital instability is also seen as a regular occurrence in the homes of married people. When two people come together, each

partner comes with his/her individualized personal character, needs, attitudes, values and idiosyncrasies (Uwe, 2016). Therefore, marital instability in this study can be seen as a strain in marriage interaction between couples who are living together.

Marital instability has become a thing of concern in this contemporary society and this is associated with separation, divorce, and widowhood. Separation and divorce are social phenomena created by husband, wife or both, but widowhood is beyond the control of human being, it is related to death and thus universal. Separation may be in two categories: physical separation i.e. when the husband and the wife reside separately without resolving their marital tie; mental separation i.e. when the couple decides to live together in the same household but without having biological and psychological relations. It is imperative to note that when marriage is dissolved in the court of law, it is called divorce, but when its dissolved by death is called widowhood (Anima, 2018).

Marital Instability and Academic Performance of Students

An important parameter in measuring the success of students is their academic achievements. It was observed that success or high academic performance has become a huge task to accomplish by students recently. The fall in the academic performance of students in the Nigerian Universities has been of great concern to educationists, guidance and counselors in particular. Despite the guidance programs and counseling strategies mounted in schools to improve students' performances academically, yet poor performances are recorded yearly and family background and issues within the family such as marital instability may play an influencing role as it plays very important roles in students' educational attainments. It has also been observed that children (students) from marital unstable homes often score no better on academic achievement and cognitive assessments than do children from marital stable homes (Jeynes, 2018).

However, it was noted that there is an awareness of the importance of the home environment or family on students' academic performances. An undergraduate's social, economic, emotional and psychological state can be greatly affected by the home and this points back to the parents since they are the first socializing agents in his/her life. More so, findings have shown that, the experiences in living in a marital stable to living in a marital un stable home are frequently associated with declines in child well-being and academic achievement (Fomby and Cherlin, 2017).

Consequences of Marital Instability on Students Academics

Family setting and background is the key to an undergraduate's life in and outside school, it has the most important influence on their academic achievement and consists of factors such as parental practices and aspired family size, marital is beyond the control of human being, it is related to death and thus universal (Anima, 2018). Separation may be in two categories: physical separation i.e. when the husband and the wife reside separately without resolving their marital tie; mental separation i.e. when the couple decides to live together in the same household but without having biological and psychological relations. It is imperative to note that when marriage is dissolved in the court of law, it is called divorce, but when its dissolved by death is called widowhood.

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socializing agents in his/her life (Bradley and Crown, 2022). Parents therefore have important roles to play in ensuring that their children acquire the appropriate social, psychological, moral and academic development.

Consequences of Marital Instability on Students Academics

Family setting and background is the key to an undergraduate's life in and outside school, it has the most important influence on their academic achievement and consists of factors such as parental practices and aspired family size, marital instabilities, material characteristics, neighborhood, divorce cases, socio-economic status, single parenting, etc. the environment inside the home is the Basic socializing agent and effects on undergraduate's interest in school and aspiration for the future (Bradley and Crown, 2022).

Otite and Ogionwo (2019) emphasized that parents are the most important agents for the child at the very early stages of development. This is because the family is the place where the child is first socialized in preparation for the larger society. They further noted that; the family as a representative of the larger society is the place where the child learns the real behavior patterns, values, attitudes, norms etc. of the society. Therefore, any form of disorder in the family in the form of marital instability will imply a faulty socialization process in the home which will obstruct a child from gaining these advantages as well as affect the child's subsequent relationships in the society. The relevance of all these studies lies in the ability to direct our mind to the various consequences of marital instability.

Marital instability potentially confers several short-term and long-term disadvantages on children from such homes. On the short-term, it reduces financial resources in the home due to disrupted cooperation in the financial involvement or commitment of both spouses. This may lead to poor investment of time and resources in children such as the payment of children's school fees which may have serious implications for the academic achievements and attainment of children as well as for the economic situation in the home. Because marital stable homes typically have more available time to spend with and resources to dedicate to children, marital stable homes may be better in the long run at fostering child development academically and monitoring child behavior than marital unstable ones. According to Fomby and Cherlin, (2017), reoccurring marital problems among parents could produce a series of short-term crises that could reduce a child's capacity for physical, emotional and mental (academic) development. Even if no crises ensue, marital instability could undermine a child's sense of security and trust which could, in turn, affect the child's emotional development.

On the long-term, marital instability tends to undermine child well-being. Marital instability in the home may lead to emotionally stressful events for children; declining parent-child interaction (relationships to key parental figures), a severe disruption of habit which can undermine and disrupt family roles and routines such as changes in children's routines. And consequently, disruptions in children's perception and expectations about family life, which may create long-term stress and conflict in a child's life (Clements, 2020).

On an article titled "Help for Children of Divorce", written in June (2015) edition of Awake magazine; it was pointed out that older people handle marital instabilities little than younger ones. When students who are teenagers or young adults witness their parents have marital issues or problems, they may suffer a deep disillusionment that bitters their view of marriage and other institutions such as school. Some conclude that all relationship is unreliable, deemed to unravel someday in betrayal and infidelity; some turn to drugs, some descend to sexual promiscuity, some run away from home, and others turn to criminal acts. Also, in the April 1994 edition of the same magazine, it was mentioned that children of unstable homes were said to have high rate of delinquency and anti-social behaviors than those children from intact homes, and the rate of admission of these children to psychiatric hospitals may be twice as high as for children of intact homes. It can therefore be asserted that marital instability is the most leading cause of childhood depression. Similarly, a National Youth Survey that was carried out by Uwe (2016), found out that youths from unstable homes were more delinquent or had more delinquent acts within the society than youths from intact homes, it was also found that more than half of the offenders in that survey were living with parents having issues.

Students who go through trauma of marital issues between their parents in their homes hardly concentrate or focus in school. This makes them dull and disconnected from the activities in school as they are

emotionally hit by what is going on in their homes. They hardly focus and listen to the lecturer teaching or copy down notes in class. All these leads to them failing whole fully in tests and in examinations; it could also cause them to drop out of school.

Students from unstable homes develop bitterness and hatred towards parents due to what they cause them in school. This may lead them to indulge in prostitution, armed robbery or even street fighting. It may create financial problem, which makes it difficult for their good upbringing. It also leads to frustrate the students and misdirect their destiny if adequate care is not taken. Also, students suffer a great deal from marital instability in their homes; they get nervous disorders and various kinds of upsets of one sort or another, they feel that they are living in a dangerous world (Russell, 2013). Furthermore, he said that it fills them probably first with horror, then with a kind of indifference and later on with an impulse to initiate.

CONCLUSION

Based on the review, it was concluded that, depression, nervous breakdown and consequences of marital instability relates negatively to the students Academic Performance in Rivers State University. It was still concluded that marriage is meant to be permanent but different trends result to changes in marital values causing marital instability which is an act of break down, disagreement or conflict between a couple in a home. Consequently, the study revealed lack of motivation and inspiration from parents to study, poor performance in exams as consequences on the academic performance of students. Although, among all these factors, marital infidelity was seen as the most prominent factor responsible for marital instability, while educational attainment was seen as the least factors.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of this research work, the following recommendations were made:

1. Marriage counseling and seminars should be organized both at schools and at religious houses so as to sensitize couples on how marriage instability subtly creeps into families and how to avoid depression.
2. Couples must learn and acquire coping skills to enable them deal with the challenges of marriage like nervous breakdown and maintain a stable marital union.
3. Couples should ensure the registration of their marriage, so that if marital instability results to separation or divorce, help can be gotten from the Law Enforcement Department.

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