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Article

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SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CHALLENGES IN MARRIAGE INSTITUTION AMONG UMUNUMO CLAN IN EHIME MBANO OF IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Marital conflict is a common occurrence among couples in every society. In Umunumo Clan in Ehime Mbano of Imo State, many marriages are bedeviled with socio-religious challenges and problems such as divorce, separation, quarreling, sorrows, regrets, adultery, and parental neglect among others. Furthermore, differences in approach and preparation also constitute serious challenges in marriage institution in Umunumo Clan. In this paper efforts are made to investigate the socio-religious challenges confronting marriage institution in Umunumo Clan in Ehime Mbano of Imo State. The study employs descriptive and survey methodology. Findings from the study revealed that the institution of marriage supports and maintains social structure of the society. The study further establishes that lack of love and effective communication are some of the major challenges facing marriages in Umunumo Clan in Ehime Mbano. The study concluded that marital success results from a lot of endurance, effective communication, tolerance, patience, love and effective management of individual differences. It is recommended that pre-marital counseling should be organized for would-be couples in Mbano Community.

Keyword: Marriage, Family, Socio-religious, Institution, Challenges, Umunumo

Introduction

Marriage institution is one of the most hallowed and respected institutions of ancient time. It provides social stability, strengthens family solidarity and produces children who ultimately are recipes for population development. The marriage being one of the institutions that support and maintain the social structure of the society is therefore very important to the sociologists because of the influence it has on the survival of the society. Marriage is seen as a relationship between a man and woman. It is also closely related to kinship and family. Most societies see marriage as a socially recognized rite for the beginning of a family. Also, the institution of

marriage brings into existence affinal relations together with the consanguineal as well as putative considerations (Udoh, 2004 p.34).

The position of marriage therefore has been a crucial issue in every society because of its role as the medium of continuity. Marriage can be compared to drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just spectator. This confirms Mbiti (1973 p.17) assertion that marriage is an exciting and beautiful dimension whereby the mystery of life is propagated and handed down. It follows from the dimension of sex since without sex there is no propagation of human life. Both churches and African traditional societies emphasize the importance of marriage and regard it as a creative dimension in which one becomes co-creator with God. In different cultures, the institution of marriage is so important such that it is handled with all amount of carefulness. In many societies for instance, after puberty, the major project facing any man or woman is marriage. This cultural phenomenon called marriage has permeated the lives of many people thereby becoming a symbol of love and unity in every society. Marriage custom reflects how individuals share in the group life and the joy of living together as one people. The notion of family as part of the society presupposes marriage to which a lot of importance is attached, one of which is the continuation of the family lineage, and the other is the fact that it is the only natural and lawful means of perpetrating human life on earth. Specifically, as an institution that enhances child-bearing, it embodies certain rights and duties which are based on some laws and customs. These rights and duties are in turn very important aspects of every marriage.

But a survey of marriage institution in Umunumo Clan in Ehime Mbano of Imo State has shown a marked departure from mutual love, commitment, trust, obedience as well as contentment which aid every successful marriage. Marriages are now built on the basis of “as long as we can tolerate each other” while the popular marriage parlance of “for better, for worse” and “till death do us part” are things of the past. Marital challenges therefore, have increased drastically year by year in Umunumo Mbano. Many men and women have had to regret their decisions of getting married while some have had to blame one factor or the other for their marital regrets. Again, children who are supposed to enjoy the loving tender care of their parents are now living a miserable life all through because of the families in which they found themselves. Thus, marriage has become a mockery due to absence of spiritual growth. All these challenges are not theoretical but practical issues that every careful observer can see. Also, they are not particular to one family or home but are seen in almost every matrimonial home.

Concept of Marriage

Like many sociological concepts, marriage has been defined from different perspectives. According to Gough (1971 p.26), marriage refers to a relationship established between a woman and one or more other persons, which provides that a child born into the woman under circumstances not prohibited by rules of the relationship is accorded full status rights common to normal members of his society or social stratum. It is a legally recognized social contract between two people, traditionally based on a sexual relationship and implying a permanence of the union. Marriage is a cultural universal, and like family, it takes many forms. For instance, who gets married, what the marriage means to the couple and to the society, why people get married (economic, political, or for love), as well as how it occurs (wedding or other ceremony) vary widely within societies and between societies. Other variations on the definition of marriage might include whether spouses are of opposite sexes or the same sex and how one of the traditional expectations of marriage (procreation) is understood today.

As opined by Bammeke (2018 p.98), marriage refers to a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognized legitimate offspring to both parents. The above definition points to one important function of marriage in most societies: the fact that it confers acknowledged social status on the offspring. This is evidently a matter of great importance in regard to such matters as inheritance and succession. Marriage creates new social relationships and reciprocal rights between the spouses, between each and the kin of the other. It establishes what will be the rights and status of the children when they are born. Marriage is a stable relationship in which a man and a woman are socially permitted without loss of standing in the community to have children. According to Beattie, apart from other marriage laws, regular and normal co-habitation, some degrees of economic co-operations are necessary. From religious point of view, marriage is a divine institution established by God Himself. It is meant to be a permanent union between husband and wife that they might be useful and helpful to each other. Children born by the woman become legitimate offspring to both parents. Moses as Israel's leader presents marriage as the deepest spiritual unity of husband and wife and monogamy as the form of marriage ordained by God. Thus, marriage is divinely ordained union between a man and a woman and which is backed up by the awareness, laws, and customs within a specific context. Okere (1995 p.75) put it more succinctly that this activity of the creatures is really caused by God only. Creatures themselves are only apparently active. Man is not active in his knowing nor doing things or work upon in his sense and intellectual. Therefore, God gave Eve to Adam as a wife. And the Lord said "it is not good for the man to be alone, I will make him a help mate. And so, a man leaves his father and mother and joins wife and they two become one body." Marriage can equally be seen as the state in which man and woman give themselves to each other in their life together and in the procreation and training of offspring together in a happy family. Therefore, in marriage, procreation, training of children and co-operation are very necessary.

Every society regulates marriage and all these regulations are termed into institution of marriage. In the institution of marriage, God himself is the author of marriage and family. Man cannot change marriage. If man does that, it will bring harm to him and the society in general. Vatican II of Roman Catholic Church supports these ideas thus: Marriage has a very important bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual member of the family and on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself and the human society as a whole. This trend suggests that marriage on the other hand is a lifetime partnership between a man and woman. The primary purpose of such partnership is to beget children and rear them, to live in mutual understanding by helping one another at all times. This means taking charge of one another's property and exercising right over it. It involves also the exercise of ownership over the body of the others exclusively. Therefore, marriage brings enhanced economic and social status to the spouses concerned. It is more economical for two people of opposite sex to live together in one household as marital partners than for each of them to live singly apart as a bachelor or spinsters. In marriage, there is shared division of labour, accommodation, pieces of furniture or utensils and domestic servants.

The sociological understanding of what constitutes a family can be explained by the sociological paradigms of symbolic interactions as well as functionalism. These two theories indicate that families are groups in which participants view themselves as family members and act accordingly. In other words, families are groups in which people come together to form a strong primary group connection and maintain emotional ties to one another. Such families may include groups of close friends or teammates. In addition, the functionalist perspective views

families as groups that perform vital roles for society-both internally (for the family itself) and externally (for society as a whole). Families provide for one another's physical, emotional, and social well-being. Parents care for and socialize children. Later in life, adult children often care for elderly parents. While interactionism helps us understand the subjective experience of belonging to a "family," functionalism illuminates the many purposes of families and their roles in the maintenance of a balanced society (Parsons and Bales, 1956 p.33). Irrespective of what form a family takes, it forms a basic social unit upon which societies are based and can reflect other societal changes. According to Fontain (2012 p.59), marriage enhances a woman's status and feeling of independence. She is now the mistress of her household and is free to run it to her taste. If she is lucky to marry a rich husband, she may find herself controlling a large household establishment, owning a number of cars, each car driven by a professional driver but in course of time, she is proficient in driving and drives her own car herself. She is most likely to accompany her husband to attend important functions. This implies that marriage elevates a woman's status. When married, she is addressed as Mrs, which means a married woman is free from the control of her parents, and now has freedom to control her behaviour. If her husband loves her, he may not like to take important decisions without asking her to make some inputs into them.

Concept of Family

The family can be conceptualized in numerous ways; underlying each is a fundamental idea about the structure of the family and its function in society. Some scholars define a family purely in terms of sharing a household, a collection of individuals living together. Others define the family based on kinship. According to Chibundu (2007 p.18), a family is a group of people who share common ancestors or a basic social unit comprised of parents and their children. Some scholars argued that biological kinship is the defining element of family, while opponents of this idea assert that families can be a blended collection of individuals related by marriage, adoption, partnership, or friendship. On the other hand, another school of thought, especially in the social sciences, indicates that the family is the oldest and the most basic of all social institutions ever recognized by man throughout history. This is probably because there was the necessity for kind of cooperation and complementarity among human beings to ensure production and continuity species throughout generation (Ukommi, 2013 p.45).

Basically, the family of human institution is a cluster of social values and norms, as well as activities built around the care of children and old people. Marshal (1992 p.93) defined family as a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction, and includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship and one or more children owned or adopted by the sexually-cohabiting adults. Human Social theorists have questioned the nature of family since the ancient times. The modern era has witnessed numerous transformations of prevailing concepts of family in Western society. Sociologists are interested in the relationship between the institution of marriage and the institution of family not only because families are the most basic social unit upon which society is built but also because marriage and family are linked to other social institutions such as the economy, government, and religion. For Ukommi (2013 p.45), the family refers to the basic unit of social organization in which members are constituted by marriage, blood or other social arrangement (adoption) and which relationships are structured by a dense network of social norms, rules, traditions, customs and conventions. The above definition indicates that family is a group of people related by marriage, blood as well as adoption and as a result enjoys affinal and consanguineal relationships. It is also worthy to note that marriage is

the foundation of the family and the pivot of its legitimacy. The question of legitimacy therefore draws a line between marriages as recognized and approved by society and that which is not. Whether a family is legitimate or not, the world concept of family has both the biological as well as social context.

Family is, indeed, a subjective concept, but it is a fairly objective fact that family (whatever one's concept of it may be) is very important to people in every society. For instance, in a 2010 survey by Pew Research Center in Washington, DC, 76 percent of adults surveyed stated that family is "the most important" element of their life-just one percent said it was "not important" (Pew Research Center 2010 p.87). It is also very important to society. It was in line with this that the President Ronald Reagan notably stated, "The family has always been the cornerstone of American society. Our families nurture, preserve, and pass on to each succeeding generation the values we share and cherish, values that are the foundation of our freedoms" (Zeitzen, 2008 p.91). Furthermore, Nwangwu (2009 p.104) maintains that the family performs several functions in the society which include procreation and sustenance of the human race, sexual gratification, emotional and economic support to members, socialization of the young ones, development of the individual personality and self- concept, social security and welfare, conferment of status and name among others. It is therefore pertinent to note that the family functions in a number of ways as an active agent rather than a passive medium.

Purpose of Marriage

People marry for several reasons. In recent years, scholars have attempted to outline the purpose of marriage. As rightly opined by Dopamu (2007 p.45), many people marry for procreation. Procreation is one of the major functions of marriage that brings about the birth of children and preservation of the family name. Marriage is highly revered among the Igbo people. The longing to have sons (for family perpetuation and property inheritance) and family value made marriage an important institution in Igboland. Marriage helps cultural groups to have a measure of control over population growth by providing proscribed rules about when it is appropriate to have children. Regulating sexual behavior helps to reduce sexual competition and its attendant negative effects. This does not mean that there are no socially approved sexual unions outside of marriage. Marriage fulfills the economic needs of marriage partners. According to Chibundu (2007 p.28) Marriage provides the framework within which people's needs are met. Such needs include shelter, food, clothing, safety, among others. Through the institution of marriage, people know for whom they are economically and socially responsible. Therefore, marriage is a unit of economic production. All the households constitute the greatest single economic unit in the society. Marriage is a unit of inheritance because it provides the basis for an orderly sharing of prosperity which makes one belong in the family.

Furthermore, marriage is a beautiful picture of the relationship between Christ and His church. A body of believers that make up the church are collectively called "Bride of Christ". As Bridegroom, Jesus gave His life for His bride, "to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word" Eph. 25-26, and His selfless act provide an example for all husbands. At the second coming of Christ, the church will be united with the Bridegroom, the official "wedding ceremony" will take place, and with it the eternal union of Christ and His bride will be actualized Rev. 19: 7-9. The parenthood gives the individual a social status by which he can keep whether lower or higher and provide support and sustenance to the individual through his long period of need and dependency. Marriage provides intimate circle of affection and companionship. The individual is relieved from psychological insecurity and other personality problems associated with alienation. An individual without proper parental love in

infancy may grow up to be “useless” in adult life. It provides the individual with socialization. It equips the individual with knowledge, mores, ethos, and customs of the society. Marriage is a socially accepted unit within which sexual activities and parental drives are legitimized; child-birth is legitimized only in marriage.

Madu (2004 p.16) stated that marriage is the sole agent for the perpetuation of the group, carried out through procreation or bringing forth of young and new members, thereby increasing the population of the society. It cares for the young ones and protects them from dangers. In regard with the above statement of Dopamu and Madu, the researcher agrees with them and adds that people with happy marriage come from happy homes. This is because when a husband and wife pool their resources together; there is division of labour in a household among couples, the children and housemaids, if any. It is more economical for a husband and wife to live together than to live separately. Married couples have incentives to work together in a team to acquire more wealth and resources. They are happy that the members of their households are enjoying their acquired wealth. In other words, they are happy that their daily labours are not in vain. They have got children and are happy that when they leave this mundane world at the end of their lives, they will leave behind their children to enjoy the fruits of their labours and not people from outside their households, who did not contribute in any way to acquiring their wealth.

Furthermore, the Bible has a lot to say about this topic. Since the first marriage was between the first man and the first woman, it is assumed that marriage is God’s will for most people. It was instituted in the dispensation of innocence and is therefore a holy institution. The first reason that the Bible gives for the existence of marriage is simple: Adam was lonely and needed a helper. This is the primary purpose of marriage-fellowship, companionship, mutual help and comfort. One purpose of marriage is to create a stable home in which children can grow and thrive. The best marriage is between two believers who can produce godly offspring. In Malachi, God tells the Israelites that He will not accept their offerings because they have been unfaithful to the wives of their youth. This shows how much God cares about marriage being kept intact. Not only that, but He tells them He was seeking “godly offspring.” This is a puzzling passage, and has been interpreted to mean a) that godly offspring are the purpose of marriage; b) that a good marriage between two godly people will mean that any children they have will tend to be godly as well; c) God wanted the Israelites to be faithful to their wives instead of leaving them for foreign women who would produce for them ungodly offspring because of the idolatry of those nations; and d) that God Himself was seeking His own offspring (the people) to exhibit godliness by their faithfulness. In any of these interpretations, we see a common theme: the children of faithful people will tend to be faithful, too.

Ethnographic Sketch of Umunumo Clan of Mbano

This study was conducted in the five clans of Umunumo Clan of Mbano in Imo State. The Clans are: Umueze, Agbja, Umukabia, Akanumuezala and NneatoUgwumezi. The study area for this research is Umunumo in Ehime Mbano. Ehime Mbano is one of the Local Government Areas in Imo State. Its headquarters is at IsialaMbano. According to Amadi (2000 p.18), Umunumo is an immigrant town who as a result of death penalty after committing a taboo deserted their parent town Abba in Nkwerre Local Government Area of Imo State. They were said to have killed the royal cow Ehi) in Igbo and roasted it for eating, although they are not the ones who committed the taboo but their sister Umuanunu. Since their sister was asked to go, Umunumo said that there was no need for them to live in Abba therefore they should join their sister out of Abba in Nkwerre Local Government Area. Duru (2021 p.8) says that the town Umunumo occupies an

area of about seventeen square kilometers and has a population of about fifty-eight thousand people. It lies about twenty-six kilometers north-west of Umuahia on the Okigwe, Umuahia trunk "A" road. It is made up of ten villages namely: Ehoia, Ofeke, Alaike, Ogwara, Chima, Umuanunu, DurunaOkiri, Ezealaobom, Ofowerrenaama, and Umuaro. It is bounded in the North by Agbaja, in the east by Nzerem, in the west by Ehime and in the south by Nsu all in Mbanu Local Government Area of Imo State. Before the advent of colonial masters, Umunumo had been under the leadership of the "Ofo" holders. It was during the reign of Chief Durukwu that the colonial masters came to Umunumo about 1907. Contact with the Europeans marks the turning point of a new political era. This contact with the Europeans is the contact with education, new social administration and modernity in its gradual unfolding. With the bloody encounter the Europeans had with the people of Umunumo, they won them over and Umunumo surrendered in toto to them. The first imprints of the people's subjection were the construction of roads, the carrying of the Europeans from place to place.

Cyril (2003:86) states that the Europeans began their administration by dissolving the "Ofo" political and administrative system, whereby the "Ofo" holders rule and order are the only main fount of authority. There is a kind of overlapping among religious, political and social systems which were all under the control of the "Ofo" holders. The white people robbed the "Ofo" holders of their power and instituted the "warrant" system. Chief Egeru was the first man whom the whites handed the "warrant" authority followed by Chief Duruaghozie. However, this system was dissolved by the government with the introduction of the chieftaincy system which began with the man, Alozie. After sometime the power was handed over to a ten-man leader from the ten villages in Umunumo. The change of the individuals handling this type of power was made on three consecutive times. The government later abandoned this system in favor of the "Eze" system whereby two men Isaac and Edomobi Ogueri were selected to begin it. Later on, this system was dissolved in favor of "one-man Eze Michael Echeruo one of the ten ministers was elected to enjoy this sole authority which took effect from 30th October 1973. Unfortunately, for him, on the 5th of March 1996, death dealt a big blow on him and as a result of this, he was unable to enjoy the throne to the fullest. The throne was vacant until 2005, when Eze S. C. Okeke took over the throne. Through self-help effort, Umunumo has transcended to the top of the ladder in social, political and economic development. Umunumo Mbanu means great men of four letters. Ibe (2016 p.45) recorded that Mbanu has an area of about 169 square kms and a population of 130, 931 as at 2006 census.

Socio-Religious Challenges Confronting Marriage in Mbanu Community

Marriage breakdown is one of those serious ills that have eaten into the fabrics of our common life. A lot of factors contribute to this warped situation in marriage and family life. Many men and women have had to regret their marriages and some have had to blame one factor or the other for their marital regret. According to Ikeh (2020 p.78), one of the challenges facing marriage is parent in-law factor. Many marriages today are built on the reluctant consent of the parents of one or both partners involved. Several parents oppose the marriage of their children and this owes to a lot of reasons. Sometimes parents do not think their daughter or son is ripe for marriage. Some oppose their daughter's marriage because of where the intending groom comes from, his job, level of education, or just the stories they have heard about the young man, his family or his village. Some parents do not want their daughters to be married outside their tribe or religion. According to Gottman (1998 p.121) the inability of a married woman to have children usually constitutes a big problem to the family. This is because the chief purpose of marriage for the Africans is to provide opportunity for the unborn members of the family to

spring forth. The person who fails, for various reasons, to have children, is one of the most miserable members of the society, since he will be despised and regarded as a disappointment. For instance, the people of Mbanda value procreation so much in marriage and when infertility sets in, it is conceived of as a negation of life. Thus, Kunhiyop (2008 p.12) argues that:

Infertility is not necessarily the same as sterility. Someone who is sterile is incapable of procreating; infertility is an impairment of normal reproductive capacity that can sometimes be corrected...it is also important to refute the traditional belief that infertility was always the woman's fault. This belief led to much abuse of barren women.

Two things are deduced from the above observations. Firstly, it is noted that infertility is sometimes an impairment that may be corrected. Secondly, it has been traditionally believed that infertility is always the fault of the woman but this has over time proven to be a false belief. This false belief has led to the unnecessary abuse of some women. Such women are often regarded as monstrosities and generally look upon *aschiojoo*. Most times the woman is accused of having lived a reckless life and may have had series of abortions in her younger days. This may or may not be true. Therefore, she is constantly nagged by her mother-in-law. No wonder most women prefer not to have mothers-in-laws; they go to the extent of wishing their prospective mother-in-laws dead. How could they wish the mother of their husband dead? Such wishes could boomerang in the future as their own daughters-in-law could wish them dead too. Mother-in-law would like the son to have a second wife in order to have children.

Again, in Umunumo Clan in Ehime Mbanda, people always go extra miles to proffer solution to the shame of infertility. Even Christians sometimes consult native doctors in a bid to solve this marital problem because any childless marriage is a source of disappointment and becomes a big problem between couples. However, many of the physical causes of infertility in both men and women such as impotence, problems with ejaculation, hormonal problems, diseases and vaginal infections, and others can be corrected by medical procedures or by medication. It is therefore instructive to note that although the problem of infertility is distressing, couples and their families as well as community should bear in mind that marriage is not defined by procreation but by the loving, permanent, committed and trusting union of a man and woman who have come together to live a life pleasing to God. Children are wonderful gifts from God, but when they do not come, couples should not respond to infertility in ways that displease God. Instead, they should seek God's grace to help them deal with it. More so, both the husband and wife should undergo a thorough medical examination to determine whether a physical problem is preventing conception and child-bearing. Such problems can sometimes be treated by modern reproductive technologies. Furthermore, it is a common custom in most societies that marriage should follow in order of seniority. The eldest son or daughter is expected to get married first before the second, the third, and so on as the case may be. It has been observed that many men find themselves in situation of either to postpone the idea of marriage until their eldest have tied the knot or to go ahead with marriage without the blessings of their families. And in the case where the situation applies to a girl, most of her suitors would prefer to leave her and marry outside such tribe if they cannot wait for her elder sisters to get married first. Because of this, couples sometimes quarrel over the issue of their children not marrying on time and will be blaming each other. This is a problem in the society because it brings about disintegration in marriage since sometimes the younger ones who have the opportunity of getting married will be impatient in waiting for the elder siblings to get married before them.

Apart from this, divorce is one of the major challenges facing marriages in Mbano community. Divorce has generally been frowned at particularly in the African society. It is a term used in reference to a separation that occurs in marriage. Shields (2004 p.63) considers divorce as the dissolution of the bond of marriage. It brings a marriage to an end and makes persons who were previously husbands and wife no longer so. Similarly, Kunhiyop (2008 p.12) sees marriage from the African perspective to be a union not only between the man and woman, but also a union between communities, clans, etc. This signifies that when divorce takes place, it is not only the unity between the man and the woman that is separated, but also the unity of communities stands nullified. Dada (2016 p.88) has equally identified “childlessness” as one factor that causes a quick divorce in marriage”. This is never an exception in the community of Mbano. In Mbano community, one of the most important reasons for getting married is traditionally for procreation and thus, any marriage (no matter how satisfactory a wife may be in all other respects) is likely to face either divorce or the marrying of additional wives for the sake of producing children. When divorce takes place, it generally brings social and religious disunity among families in the community who previously were united because of the bond of marriage. This disunity can sometimes end up in hatred, quarrel, fights, bitterness, anger, and in its extreme case, it can lead to the death of community members.

In Igbo tradition, it was forbidden for a woman to get pregnant before marriage. Obi (1989 p.25) opines that traditionally, marriage comes before pregnancy but in recent times, there seems to be a turn in the tide as people appear to have made a shift to pregnancy before their marriage. Pregnancy out of wedlock is still considered unacceptable in Umunumo clan marriage was considered in the traditional Umunumo clan. Although there seems to be a shift in this traditional value thus bringing about the constant desire and persistence of getting pregnant before marriage among intending couples. This has been a problem in Umunumo in that the religious and moral values are lost to the waves and influence of global changes. Today in Umunumo, people no longer see nor are they ashamed of getting pregnant before marriage; because for them, this is the best way of testing fertility so as to take necessary precaution to avoid making the mistake of marrying a couple who is not fertile. Being that pregnancy before marriage is a breakdown of traditional values, the researcher is of the opinion that intending couples should not always be in a haste of testing whether they are fertile or not since they will surely be living together forever. Moreover, in African context, it is traditionally required for a woman to be submissive to the husband in matters pertaining to the home because the man is always considered as the head of the home. In Umunumo Clan in Ehime Mbano, obedience of the wife to the husband is paramount. While making deliberate decisions in the house, for instance, the wife’s decision(s) is expected to be in line with the husband’s desires and his advice should not be taken lightly. In the society of today, this seems to be unusual because of the fast and increase in women’s education, new gender roles, and labour force participation. This has led to the problem of struggle for equality among spouses. Some women in Umunumo Clan in Ehime Mbano today seem not to be submissive to their husbands and this is clear in that some of them are constantly flouting their husbands’ orders, and sometimes going as far as taking crucial decisions in the home without consulting their husbands. To this end, the researcher believes that women irrespective of their educational exposure, should not consider submission as a way of being subordinate to their husband but should always see submission to their husband as a way of showing love and respect towards them.

Another great challenge confronting marriage institution in most societies is expensive marriage procedure. For instance, Umunumo clan has a peculiar expensive marriage procedure where a list of items must be presented before the marriage can take place. Aside from the

physical money to be paid, these gift items can sometimes cost up to five hundred thousand naira and it gets more expensive if the girl is a bachelor degree holder or more. This has led to a collapse in a lot of courtships after the man realizes that he cannot meet up with the requirements of marriage due to the expensive marriage procedure from the lady's extended family. Because of this, if the marriage ever takes place, the husband will not be happy with his wife because of the high bride price that his in-laws required from him. Thus, it is instructive to state that expensive marriage procedure should be avoided or curtailed in order not to scare prospective suitors away from marrying from. Infidelity has been a way of describing marital unfaithfulness, disloyalty, and betrayal. This crime is either perpetuated by the wife or the husband and is often generally depicted with the term "extramarital affairs". Marshal (2002 p.79) has observed that often, dissatisfaction with sex is one of the causes of spouses entering into extramarital affairs. What they are not getting at home they look for it elsewhere. That is to say, the inability of one spouse to satisfy the other can lead to infidelity. Thus, any sexual relation outside of the marriage union is sinful and is identified as "adultery". The term "adultery" refers to any sexual intercourse between a married person and a partner other than the lawful husband or wife. This is further seen as a breach of marriage contract. In Mbano, this act is a threat to married couples. Husband and wife's cheating is perceived to be a generational issue. Ekeopara (2011 p.32) mentions that cheating seems like a deed passed on from one generation unto the other. Some of these men and women grew up in polygamous homes. Again, majority of Igbo men and women are proud of money *ego*. Some men in Igbo community believe themselves to be lords, commanders, or heads at all times even in their homes. They always fall dominant in their relations. So, they can do whatever they like because it is a man's world. Thus, they feel alright having mistresses outside their marriages. To some of them, marriage is a means to have someone they trust give and raise up their kids properly and they are free to do anything else and should not be questioned.

Gottman and Ogelu (2007 p.59) maintain that in Igbo Community, the position of a wife in her husband's family remains shaky and unpredictable until she begets a male child. Once a male child arrives she becomes really secure and now gains her respect in the society, among her folks and most importantly in her husband's family. Male preference is therefore one of the major challenges facing marriage in Umunumo clan. This is because according to the people the male child is very important to the family; he would inherit the family's properties. It is believed in Umunumo as well as most African communities that only the male children can succeed their father and also inherit his properties after his death. Also, it is the believe that only male children take care of the family since female children are seen as belonging to another man. In cases where there is male child preference over female, it becomes a problem for married couples who are blessed with only female children. Although the male children have been traditionally believed to be the most appropriate in maintaining family lineage and properties, it should be noted that with the emancipation of women in the present generation, many women have proven that such traditional belief is no longer applicable. In the researcher's point of view, couples should understand and appreciate the fact that children (whether female or male) are gifts from God to bless their marriage. They should also train them up (whether male or female) in godly ways so that at the end, the child will become a point of reference and blessing to the family.

Again, the real family tension has over time been more frequently between the wife and her mother-in-law in traditional Umunumo clan. Invariably, the difference between the two women's opinions, personalities, and life views become evident the more they spend time together. The problems of both is usually how much money to spend, issues of values, jobs,

where to live, how to live, attachments on her son's or daughter's property, money and children. The core of the tension is a tough battle between the two women for the husband's love. The wife is watching to see whether her husband backs her or his mother. The only way out of this tension is for the husband to side with his wife against his mother. This may sound harsh, but one of the basic tasks of a marriage remains the establishment of a sense of wholeness between husband and wife. Apart from this, incompetence is another major challenge confronting marriages in Umunumo Clan in Ehime Mbano. Incompetence of the wife can manifest in her inability to cook, inability to be neat, inability to be organized, take care of the family, and do other domestic chores. In Umunumo, it is expected of the female folks to be able to prepare their local delicacies such as *Ukwa*- Breadfruit, *Ofe Onugbo* bitter-leaf soup, *Ofe Ukazi* - Okazi soup, etc. This is always meant to equip them for marriage because failure or inability to prepare these local delicacies for the husband can become a problem in the marriage. When a woman is incompetent or unskillful in cooking, for instance, those traditional foods to the satisfaction of the husband's appetite, it forces her husband to go outside in search of satisfaction to his appetite and this in turn creates a gap in the marriage union. Finally, marriage has always been a platform of showing love and commitment. Love and commitment create a sense of oneness in marriage. Where love and commitment are lacking, there is sure to be chaos. In Umunumo, one of the problems facing married couples is lack of love and commitment wherein couple although living together as husband and wife, are totally living separate lives from one another. Kunhiyop (2008 p.72) stated that marriage is a fundamental human institution ordained by God, who intended it to be a permanent relationship between a man and woman. In such ordination, God also intends that in this permanent relationship, love and commitment should be nurtured but however, this has not been the case with some couples in Umunumo clan.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that successful marriages are not those in which there has never been challenges but those in which conflicts have served useful purposes. Although marital conflicts are inevitable, they can be managed or prevented from resulting to partial or total collapse of homes. This will depend largely on the couple's mutual understanding and handling. However, marital success results from a lot of endurance, tolerance, patience and effective management of individual differences. Again, in order to foster marital stability and satisfaction, couple should learn to be fair, objective and realistic when dealing with their partner's behaviors. Couples need to create a nurturing relationship in their marriage. This can be done by communicating their feelings of love, admiration, likes and dislikes to each other.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward for the prevention and control of marital conflicts:

- i. Government should provide adequate preventive, remedial, and rehabilitative counseling interventions through marriage and sex guidance in Umunumo Clan in Ehime Mbano.
- ii. Religious bodies should organize pre-marital counseling for would-be couples in order to help them understand themselves and each other before marriage. They should be exposed to some of the problems that could lead to conflicts and how to manage them.
- iii. Government at various levels (Federal, state, and local councils), religious bodies e.g. Churches, Mosques, and nongovernmental organization (NGOs) should organize regular seminars and workshops for couples on issues that have to do with conflict resolution and marital harmony.

- iv. There should be training and re-training of conflict resolution mediators/facilitators by government at various levels. Training should be based on the comprehensive conflict resolution strategies.

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