
THE ISSUES OF BROKEN MARRIAGES IN AKWA IBOM STATE: ASSESSING THE CAUSES AND REMEDIES THROUGH SOLUTION FOCUSED AND NARRATIVE COUNSELLING THERAPIES.

By

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed the issues of broken marriages in Akwa Ibom State inclusive of the causes and remedies through solution focused and narrative counselling therapies. Divorce is a legal process through which a marriage is dissolved. Every year, currently more than a million children in the United State come across divorce between their parents. An estimate of 38% of children born of white parents and 75% of those born of black married parents will experience divorce between their parents before the age of 16. However, family therapy is a type of psychological counseling (psychotherapy) that can help family members improve communication and resolve conflicts in marriage in Akwa Ibom state. It refers to a treatment designed to help with issues that specifically affect a family's mental health and functioning. It can help individual family members build stronger relationships, improve communication, and manage conflicts within the family system. Based on the findings of the study, appropriate recommendations were made, one of which was that churches, schools and counselors should use solution focused therapy as a means to reduce broken marriages.

KEYWORDS: Broken Marriages, Causes, Remedies, Solution Focused, Narrative Counselling Therapies and Akwa Ibom State

INTRODUCTION

Marriage refers to a legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners and accords status to their offspring (Augustyn, 2021). The universality of marriage within different societies and cultures is attributed to the many basic social and personal functions for which it provides structure, such as sexual gratification and regulation, division of labour between the sexes, economic production and consumption, and satisfaction of personal needs for affection, status, and companionship. The institution of marriage is as old as the creation of man. Marriage is viewed as a religious duty with its consequence been a moral safeguard as well as a social necessity. Broken marriage is a state at which two married persons go separate ways for a period of time. Divorce according to Haveman (1999), is a legal process through which a marriage is dissolved. When it comes to marriage, separation isn't the same as divorce, even if you have a "judgment of separation" from a court. Separation means that you are living apart from your spouse but are still legally married until you get a judgment of divorce (Amato & Rogers, 1997). Although a separation doesn't end your marriage, it does affect the financial responsibilities between you and your spouse before the divorce is final. There are three types of separation: trial, permanent, and

legal. In most states, only one (legal separation) changes your legal status. But all three have the potential to affect your legal rights. According to “Marriages are made in Heaven”, but, with the flow of time and experiences as a therapist my perspective on it changed. Every marriage does not culminate in being an ever-lasting, heavenly, beautiful affair.

CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE

Marriage refers to a legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners and accords status to their offspring (Augustyn, 2021). The universality of marriage within different societies and cultures is attributed to the many basic social and personal functions for which it provides structure, such as sexual gratification and regulation, division of labour between the sexes, economic production and consumption, and satisfaction of personal needs for affection, status, and companionship. Marriage, also called matrimony or wedlock is a culturally and often legally recognized union between people called spouses. It establishes rights and obligations between them, as well as between them and their children, and between them and their in-laws (Haviland, Prins, McBride, & Walrath, 2011). It is considered a cultural universal, but the definition of marriage varies between cultures and religions, and over time. Typically, marriage is an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually sexual, are acknowledged or sanctioned. In some cultures, marriage is recommended or considered to be compulsory before pursuing any sexual activity. A marriage ceremony is called a wedding. A Marriage can be recognized by a state, an organization, a religious authority, a tribal group, a local community, or peers (Wikipedia 2021). It is often viewed as a contract. A religious marriage is performed by a religious institution to recognize and create the rights and obligations intrinsic to matrimony in that religion. Marriage is a relation of one or more men to one or more women which is recognized by customs or law and involves certain rights and duties both in case of parties entering into the union.

CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN

The institution of marriage is as old as the creation of man. Marriage is viewed as a religious duty with its consequence been a moral safeguard as well as a social necessity. Broken marriage is a state at which two married persons go separate ways for a period of time. Divorce according to Haveman (1999), is a legal process through which a marriage is dissolved. Traditionally, divorce implies, one of the partners is guilty of some violation in the marriage and that one is at fault. Most countries do not support divorce whereas others support or are in full agreement when it comes to breaking up of marriage. The dramatically increase in divorce has affected a mass number of children. Every year, currently more than a million children in the United State come across divorce between their parents. An estimate of 38% of children born of white parents and 75% of those born of black married parents will experience divorce between their parents before the age of 16. According to MacDonald (1978) divorce can be defined as the termination of a relationship, which is seen as marital relationship. It marks proceedings of a formal court and decisions made judicially. Children who experience broken homes are prone to mental trouble, poor accommodation, poor or no access to health care than those children who live with their parents. This clearly indicates that, two parents in bringing up healthy children are much better than single parents. Most children from broken homes are likely to become school dropouts than their peers who live with both married parents McLennand (1994). Children’s from broken marriages are most likely to become addicts to hard drugs and deviant.

TYPES OF MARRIAGE BREAKAGE

When it comes to marriage, separation isn't the same as divorce, even if you have a "judgment of separation" from a court. Separation means that you are living apart from your spouse but are still legally married until you get a judgment of divorce (Amato & Rogers, 1997). Although a separation doesn't end your marriage, it does affect the financial responsibilities between you and your spouse before the divorce is final. There are three types of separation: trial, permanent, and legal. In most states, only one (legal separation) changes your legal status. But all three have the potential to affect your legal rights.

- **Trial Separation:** If you and your spouse need a break from the relationship, one option is to live apart while deciding whether to divorce a "trial separation." Legally, not much changes during a trial separation, all marital property laws still apply, (Beach & Tesser, 1993). For example, a court will treat the money you earn and the things you buy during the trial separation as property acquired by a married person. That will often mean that the property is jointly owned by you and your spouse (depending on your state's rules about property ownership). If you and your spouse separate but hope to reconcile, it's a good idea to write an informal agreement about the rules of your separation. For example, your trial separation agreement might address:
 - whether you'll continue to share a joint bank account or credit cards
 - how you'll budget your spending
 - who will stay in the family home
 - how you'll share expenses, and
 - If you have kids, how and when each of you will spend time with them.

If you ultimately decide to divorce, you might be able to use this trial separation agreement as a starting point for creating a marital settlement agreement that means you and your spouse determine that there's no hope of reconciling, your trial separation becomes a permanent separation.

- **Permanent Separation:** When you live apart from your spouse without any intention to reconcile, but you are not divorced, the law considers you permanently separated.
- **How Permanent Separation Affects Your Rights:** Depending on the law where you live, a permanent separation can change property rights between spouses. For example, in some states, assets and debts acquired during a permanent separation belong only to the spouse who acquires them. Once you are permanently separated, each spouse becomes solely responsible for any debts they take on. Similarly, spouses who are permanently separated are no longer entitled to any share of property or income acquired by the other.
- **Why the Date of Permanent Separation Matter:** Because the spouses' rights to each other's property and obligations for debts change significantly as of the date of a permanent separation, spouses often hotly dispute the exact date their separation became permanent. For example, if your spouse left in a huff and spent a month sleeping on a friend's couch, but you didn't discuss divorce until the month had passed, the date the separation became permanent might be unclear.
- **Legal Separation:** In some (but not all) states, you can legally separate from your spouse by filing a petition (request) in family court. Being legally separated is legally different from being divorced or you're no longer married, but you're not divorced either, which you can't marry anyone else. A judge who grants a petition for legal separation will enter an order that includes specifics about property division, alimony, and child custody and support. In this way, a legal separation order is similar to a divorce decree. If the spouses decide to divorce

after a legal separation order is in place, they could choose to use some or all of the terms of the order in a marital settlement agreement. People choose legal separation as an alternative to divorce for a variety of reasons, such as:

- religious beliefs
- A desire to keep the family together legally for the sake of children
- the need for one spouse to keep the health insurance benefits that you lose with a divorce, or
- A simple aversion to divorcing despite the desire to live separate lives.

An important note: If you're considering a legal separation instead of divorce so that you can keep insurance benefits, check the insurance plan before making the decision. Some consider a legal separation the same as a divorce for purposes of terminating health benefits.

CASE OF MARRIAGE BREAKAGE

Interpersonal dynamics, including communication breakdown, infidelity, and irreconcilable differences, often contribute to the unraveling of a marriage. A study by Amato and James (2010) highlights how factors like poor communication and lack of commitment can escalate marital dissatisfaction, ultimately leading to divorce. Additionally, Gottman's research (1994) underscores the significance of ongoing conflicts and the inability to resolve them as precursors to marital breakdown. Societal influences, such as changing norms and economic stressors, play a role in shaping the institution of marriage. Economic hardships, for instance, have been linked to increased divorce rates (Cherlin, 2010), emphasizing the interplay between broader societal trends and individual relationship outcomes. Psychological aspects, such as personality differences and mental health issues, further contribute to the complexity of marriage breakage. Research by Whisman and Uebelacker (2006) highlights the impact of depression on marital satisfaction and stability. Understanding the case of marriage breakage necessitates a comprehensive examination of these interconnected factors, recognizing the intricate interplay between personal, societal, and psychological elements. It is essential to approach this issue with sensitivity, recognizing the unique circumstances of each marriage and acknowledging the varied factors that contribute to its breakdown.

CAUSES OF FAMILY BREAKAGE

According to "Marriages are made in Heaven", but, with the flow of time and experiences as a therapist my perspective on it changed. Every marriage does not culminate in being an everlasting, heavenly, beautiful affair. Sometimes the strands of the marital relationship just break off for reasons known and at times, unknown. It's been seen that a lot of couples have been struggling to save their marriage, some tend to be successful in it, while others just fall apart. When this happens, its aftermath exerts great maladies in the form of psychological imbalance, societal stereotypes, and physical discomfort and so on. The list is endless and the pain associated with it too. So, what forces someone to break the marriage vows and move out? In the views, Mohammed (2013), multiple and interlocking reasons that lead to broken marriages:

- **Infidelity:** Unfaithfulness characterized as "a mystery sexual, sentimental or passionate association that abuses the dedication to a restrictive relationship, (Buunk, 1987). One may contend that treachery once in a while happens without individual/relationship attributes that may likewise add to separate. While 25% of divorced people report that a life partner's treachery was the essential driver of their separation (Kelly & Conley, 1987), people who isolated or separated after disloyalty tend to credit their breakups to various reasons beside betrayal. Reasons like savagery and family question.
- **Spousal Violence:** Spousal abuses are mostly dominated in marriages and relationships. Emotional, physical verbal and sexual abuse is common in such relationship (Perry (n.d.),

(2001). Normally both genders are capable victims of spousal abuse. While the majority of men are not violent, some men learn express their anger or insecurity through violence this is done by beating their partner.

- **Lack of Communication:** Communication is seen by (Esere, 2008), as any procedure in which individuals share data, thoughts and sentiments which include not just non-verbal communication, individual peculiarities and style. Communication is fundamental in all human life particularly the marriage relationship. Absence of communication in relationship and marriage are viewed as a noteworthy explanation behind conjugal separation.

EFFECTS OF FAMILY BREAKAGE

Family breakage, often in the form of divorce or separation, has profound and multifaceted effects on individuals, particularly children. Research consistently indicates that children from broken families may experience emotional distress, including heightened levels of anxiety and depression (Amato, 2001). The disruption in family structure can lead to a sense of instability and insecurity, impacting a child's overall well-being (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Academic performance may suffer, as children from divorced families often exhibit lower achievement and increased behavioral problems compared to their peers in intact families (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

Moreover, the long-term consequences of family breakage extend into adulthood, influencing relationship patterns and mental health outcomes (Amato & Keith, 1991). Adults who have experienced parental divorce may face challenges in forming and maintaining stable relationships, potentially contributing to a cycle of relationship instability (Amato, 2010). While these effects are common, it is essential to acknowledge that individual experiences vary, and factors such as the quality of post-divorce parenting and support networks can mitigate some of the negative consequences (Amato & Afifi, 2006). Understanding and addressing the complex dynamics associated with family breakage is crucial for promoting resilience and positive outcomes for individuals and families.

SOLUTION FOCUSED THERAPY

Solution focused therapy (SFT) refers to a future-oriented, goal-directed approach to solve human problems of living. Solution focused therapy focus on the client's health rather than the problem, on strengths rather than weaknesses or deficits, and on skills, resources and coping abilities that would help in reaching future goals (Murray, 2021). Solution focused therapy is a form of psychotherapy or counseling. This form of therapy focuses on solutions to problems or issues, and discovering the resources and strengths a person has, rather than focusing on the problem like more traditional talking therapies. According to Solution-Focused Therapy Institute (2020), Solution focused therapy is a short-term goal-focused evidence-based therapeutic approach, which incorporates positive psychology principles and practices, and which helps clients change by constructing solutions rather than focusing on problems. In the most basic sense, solution-focused therapy is a hope friendly, positive emotion eliciting, future-oriented for formulating, motivating, achieving, and sustaining desired behavioral change. Good-Therapy (2021) stated that solution-focused therapy places focus on a person's present and future circumstances and goals rather than past experiences. In this goal-oriented therapy, the symptoms or issues bringing a person to therapy are typically not targeted. Solution-focused therapy refers to an approach to psychotherapy based on solution-building rather than problem-solving.

NARRATIVE THERAPY

Narrative therapy is a psychological approach that seeks to adjust the stories one tells about one's life in order to bring about positive change and better mental health. It considers people the experts on their own lives and views them as separate from their problems (Vinney, 2019). Narrative therapy seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach to counselling and community work, which centers people as the experts in their own lives. It views problems as separate from people and assumes people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of problems in their lives. Narrative therapy, emerging since the 1980s, has been defined as a postmodern-feminist-constructivist approach that entails the co-construction of real, imagined, or possible stories of the past, present, or future. The shift from problematic stories to more adaptive ones leads to greater empowerment and enables clients to more successfully manage their lives (Seligman, 2006). Narrative therapy capitalizes on the question and storytelling tendencies. The goal is to uncover opportunities for growth and development, find meaning, and understand better. Narrative therapy is a form of therapy that aims to separate the individual from the problem, allowing the individual to externalize their issues rather than internalize them. It relies on the individual's own skills and sense of purpose to guide them through difficult times (Narrative Therapy, 2017). Narrative therapy separates people from their problems, viewing them as whole and functional individuals who engage in thought patterns or behavior that they would like to change.



Figure 2: A Diagram Showing a Narrative Therapy

Narrative therapy is a form of psychotherapy that seeks to help patients identify their values and the skills associated with them. It provides the patient with knowledge of their ability to live these values so they can effectively confront current and future problems.

SOLUTION FOCUSED THERAPY AND MARRIAGE

Solution focused therapy is a collaborative and non-pathological approach for therapy emphasizing on finding the solution by the client with the help and collaboration of the therapist (Davarniya, Zaharakar, & Nazari, 2018). Solution focused therapy has been able to significantly reduce couple burnout in the posttest stage and in the follow-up stage. Solution focused therapy can be used for reducing marital problems among couples. Marriage is one of the most important needs which nearly affect all the aspects of human life. The history of marriage is as old as all history, and by the emergence of human on earth, love and affection, marriage and marriage conflicts have all existed. A good and successful marriage, on the other hand, has a significant impact on human mental health. It's possible that the couple will overcome burnout (Bahrami&Rezvan2004). Burnout is a painful physical, emotional and mental condition, which affects those who expect to have a dreamy love which brings a meaning to their life. One of the effective therapeutic interventions for helping the couples who struggle with couple burnout is solution focused therapy. Solution focused therapy is one of the branches of postmodern approach in the family therapy domain which solves

the problems by focusing on problem-solving, change and attention to the solutions (Becvar, & Becvar,2003).

One of the effective therapeutic approaches in the field of marriage problems and conflicts is solution-focused therapy. The therapist can help couples identify "exceptions," or times when the problem does not exist. These exceptions can then be used as stepping stones to future solutions. Furthermore, discovering remedies begins with your first phone call to the therapist to schedule an appointment. A solution-focused therapist would likely encourage couples to think about their objectives and how they want their marriage to evolve (Stupart, 2017). Solution-focused counseling encourages couples to consider possible solutions to their marital problems. Good communication` is critical to develop a healthy, satisfying marriage relationship. Solution-focused therapy could help couples to enhance their attending and listening skills, and so improve your communication patterns.

NARRATIVE THERAPY AND MARRIAGE

Marriage is a significant milestone for a family and necessitates the couple's affection, commitment, emotional relationship, conflict resolution skills, and spirituality (Masters, 2008). Many therapeutic strategies have been employed to improve marital life, among which is narrative therapy. Narrative therapy has a postmodern approach to the issues related to couples. In this outlook, marriage conflicts are caused by narratives full of problems that change cognitive processes and coping strategies by shaping the identities of couples. These narratives enslave the person in dominant stories that overwhelm all other narratives and do not allow him/her to consider horizons, results, and events that include his/her merits (Abedi, 2006). According to this point of view, problems are seen as stories that people have agreed to tell themselves (Blanton & Vandergriff-Avery, 2001). Narrative therapy is an attempt to facilitate the process of collaborative rewriting of couples' problematic narratives that shape their relationship. The treatment process is to examine how people analyze the story of their lives, with the central emphasis on creating new positive meanings in life (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2015). When narratives are used as a way of better understanding the couple's marriage, they increase individual potentials for the development of marriage relationships.

CONCLUSION

- Solution focused therapy is one of the therapies used in reducing marriage breakage.
- Adoption of narrative therapy is one of the strategies used in reducing marriage breakage.

RECOMMENDATION

- Churches, schools and counselors should use solution focused therapy as a means to reduce broken marriages.
- They should use narrative therapy as a means of reducing broken marriages.

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