

Perceptions of Socio-Economic and Educational Factors affecting Marriage Instability: A case Study of Oyugis Town, Kenya

By

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Abstract

The breakdown of marriage unions in Kenyan society is a serious problem as is evidenced by increased marital violence, high divorce rates, numerous separations and other family problems. Even then people are still marrying and others still staying in marriage. This study investigated perceptions of Socio-economic and educational factors that contribute to marriage instability in Oyugis town, Kenya. The sample comprised 108 participants drawn from church ministers, church elders and advocates of law. A questionnaire developed by the researcher was used in data collection. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics-means and percentages. The Socio-educational factors identified as contributing to marriage instability included level of education of the couple at the time of marriage – Differences in education level of the married couple was found to enhance marriage instability especially if the wife is more educated than the husband. Socio-economic level of the married couple – this was found to enhance marriage instability especially if the wife is more economically stable than the husband.

Keywords: *Marriage instability, Matrimonial, Perception, Couple*

1. Introduction

Many marriages in Kenya are instituted through the Christian system of marriage, the Islamic system of marriage or the customary system of marriage of persons of the opposite sex which all stand for prevalence and hence the stability of the marriages. However, many of these marriages are in turmoil as is evidenced by increased marital violence, high divorce rates and numerous separations and other family problems. Even then, people are still marrying and many others still staying in marriage. UNESCO (2000) noted there are many challenges facing the marriage institution such that what used to stabilize marriage in the earlier centuries like in the nineteenth century may not necessarily apply today. It was therefore imperative to identify socio-economic and educational factors which contribute to marriage instability in this era.

According to Rarema (2009), the legal age for marriage in Kenya is 18 years and above. After the union each married couple seems to be writing its own script. This uniqueness in a way affects the larger population. In addition, marriage is a demographic event because date is set for it to happen. The cumulative of these personal decisions shapes the whole society. Whenever any marriage is instituted, the economy of the couple as well as that of the larger society will be affected and this could be a possible cause of many marriage problems.

Because marriage joins two social networks, there is bound to be problems. This is probably because of the establishment of new friends, relatives and diversified values exhibited. It was important to find out to what extent these affect marriage stability. In addition, the nature of association between education and marriage stability has not been exhaustively investigated in Kenya particularly the relative effects of education across generation of women in the light of increasing educational career opportunities of young women (UNESCO, 2000). These changes have resulted in, among other things, increased participation of women in modern economy and in salaried employment in the public sector that have profound implications for their traditional roles as mothers and wives. Given this scenario, it is possible the nature of association between education and marriage stability has also been changing over time in Kenya.

These knowledge gaps necessitated the research on socio-economic and educational factors affecting marriage instability.

Muiruri (1989), who carried out a survey on marriage stability in Nyanza, found that majority of Kenyans still prefer to stay in marital unions in spite of the many other challenges facing the marriage institution. It was therefore necessary to identify the socio-economic and educational factors that threaten this trend of stability.

Recent findings show that “Thousands of apparently single and married women (with marriage problems) fought, shoved and screamed at gates of the K.I.C.C as they scrambled for space to hear the apostle of marriage, Nigerian Pastor Chris Ojigbani. As heavens opened up, the enthusiastic women paid little attention to damage done to their hair and make-up in their attempt to outrun police who were trying to turn away the crowds from the already packed K.I.C.C plenary hall” (Nyambega, 2010, p.12). This was a clear indication that many people still lacked facts on how to get into and keep marriage stable.

Rerema (2009) noted that Oyugis Town has almost equal number of stable marriages as well as broken marriages and hence it provided a good site for the study. Oyugis Town is in Homa Bay County in Kenya. The town hosts a wide range of people; civil servants, teachers, business men and travelers. The town also has many cases of marital instability. In the year 2009, 21 marriages were divorced, and 14 marriages were separated at Oyugis Town Law court. He also noted that there were a good number of stable families, that is, in the year 2009, 42 marriages were registered at the District headquarters from Oyugis Town. Oyugis Town therefore provided the appropriate place for the study.

The research objectives were to determine whether marriage instability is affected by; level of education and socio-economic status of the married couple.

2. Research Methodology

This was a descriptive research, which was conducted using a survey design. The study targeted officers that dealt with marriage issues and were therefore expected to possess the information needed. These included church ministers and church elders for marriage counseling and advocates of law who normally handled marriage disputes. Most people in Oyugis Town whether with stable or unstable marriages, go to church. Marital problems are normally settled either in the church or in courts. There were 24 churches and each church was served by four elders and one church minister. The churches included a wide range of denominations like Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist Church, African Inland Church, Pentecostal Assembly of God, Redeemed Gospel Church, Roho Israel Church and Legio Maria Church. There was one resident law court in Oyugis Town and normally served by 10 advocates of law.

The research adopted random sampling method. The data was collected from church ministers and church elders in Oyugis Town. These were the marriage counselors and therefore were expected to be familiar with marriage problems in the town. Some data was collected from the advocates of law who were regularly serving at the Oyugis law courts and dealing with marriage disputes. A total of 108 respondents were used in data collection, which comprised of 20 church ministers, 80 church elders and eight advocates.

A questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire required the respondents to give background information about the marriage institution, what can make it stable and what can make it unstable. Most questions were close ended with a few open ended ones. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section I was used to get information about level of education factors that affect marriage stability while section II was used to get information about socio-economic factors that affect marriage stability.

A pilot study was conducted in Homa Bay town where 15 respondents were involved (6 church ministers, 6 church elders and 3 advocates). These were not part of the sample that was used for collecting data. They were obtained from Homa Bay Town, which was within Homa Bay County, where Oyugis Town was also found. The researcher took note of the trends of responses given as relates to factors affecting marriage stability and used test-retest method to establish a coefficient of .75 consistency. Descriptive statistics (means and percentages) were used to analyze data.

3. Results and Discussions

Table 1: Effect of Socio-economic Status on Marriage Stability

Level of socio-economic status favouring stable marriage	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Husband high, wife high	14	13
Husband low, wife low	14	13
Husband low, wife high	3	3
Husband high, wife low	77	71
Total	108	100

The findings show that socio-economic status of marriage partners influence marriage stability. Majority (71%) of the respondents perceive that stable marriages have husbands of high socio-economic status and wives of low socio-economic status.

The respondents felt that most marriages (69%) remain stable only when husband is economically stable. They also felt that 23 percent of marriages remain stable when both husband and wife are economically stable. This finding is in agreement with Anastasia's (2008) research finding. Her study was based on "backing marriage" in United Kingdom where she found that the significance of marriage today is what it represents: stable circumstances or the ability of couple to meet their financial obligations. She also found that unmarried families (through none marriage and divorce) are concentrated in low income areas because the pre-requisite for stability are missing employment and education. She found out that marriage does not create stability; it signals it. The results are in agreement with this statement but only true for men and not necessarily for women.

The study also sought to identify the level of education factors that influence marriage stability. The findings are as shown in the table 2.

Table 2: Education Level and Marriage Stability

Education level of couple	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Both Primary Education	0	0
Both Secondary Education	25	23
Both College Education	0	0
Both Graduates	6	6
Different education level	77	71
Total	108	100

According to the respondents, majority (74%) of divorced or separation cases come from marriages where wives are graduates and husbands non-graduates. They also felt that 21 percent of divorced or separation cases come from marriages where both husbands and wives are graduates. The respondents noted that there are very few cases of divorce or separation (2.5%) where husband is a graduate and a wife non-graduate or both husband and wife being non-graduate. The findings generally show that the higher the level of education of the marriage partner the higher the tendency to divorce or separate.

According to the respondents, majority of people (85%) are likely to postpone getting into marriage for the sake of getting education first. However, a few respondents felt that 15 percent of people are likely to postpone education in order to get married first. The findings are similar to Jejeebhoy's (1995) findings on the analysis of 51 studies based on a number of data sources, mostly the world fertility surveys and demographic and health surveys (DHS). He had also found out that education is a single factor most strongly related to the postponement of marriage.

The findings of a study by Lasthaeghe *et al.* (1989), on Nuptility regimes in sub-Saharan Africa, men and women marry and remain in marriage for the same reasons with core as sexual attractiveness, education similarity and emotional stability in that order. The research findings however, gave a slight difference in the ranking. According to the respondents, majority of Kenyan couples (70%) marry and remain in marriage in order to get emotional stability. The reasons for marrying and remaining in marriage in order of priority are: emotional stability (70%), sexual attraction (15%), intelligence of mate (4%) and educational attainment (1%). The findings show that educational attainment is not key in making marriages stable.

The study also sought to identify whether occupation is a pre-requisite to marriage or not. The findings are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Occupation and getting into marriage

Occupation as pre-requisite to marriage	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	67	62
No	41	38
Total	108	100

The findings help to fill in the gaps that were left by Bahr (1978), on the study of sex role attitudes, female employment and marital satisfaction, in Canada. Bahr (1978) suggested that further research be done to establish if occupation is a pre-requisite to marriage.

According to the respondents, majority of marriages (61%) are stable when both husband and wife are employed. The respondents also perceive that 33 percent of marriages are stable when husband is employed and wife is unemployed. The respondents think that no marriage seems to be stable when wife is employed and husband is unemployed. They also perceive that only six percent of marriages are stable when both husband and wife are unemployed. These findings help to give the answer to the question left by Bahr (1978). The family scholar asked whether or not the employment of wife might affect marital satisfaction. Marriage stability is an indicator of marital satisfaction.

The findings can be used to complement, the findings by Ahitur *et al* (2004). Their studies were based on "job stability, earnings and marital stability" in America. They found that job stability promotes higher earning and marital stability, but marital stability increases job stability and earnings. In the Kenyan situation, 50% of the respondents felt that married people tend to be stable in their job performance.

Respondents' opinion show that majority (75%) of divorce cases are from marriages where wives are employed and husbands are not employed. They also think that 12 percent of divorce cases come from marriages where both husband and wife are jobless. Very few divorce cases (four percent) come from marriages where husband is employed and wife not employed. These findings agree with the findings of Theodore (1985) in the University of Texas at Arlington. This was carried out in the analysis of the combined general social survey for 1972-1983. He used the findings to estimate propensity to divorce. He found out that male professionals and technical workers do not have the propensity of divorce. For female

workers on the other hand, professional and technical workers had a high propensity to divorce among non-firm workers.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

From the findings, the following conclusions were made:

- a) Level of education of a couple influence marital instability. For the marriage to be stable, the husband should be more educated than the wife. There are high chances of divorce or separation if the wife is a graduate and the husband is a non graduate. The higher the level of education of the marriage partners the higher the tendency to divorce or separate.
- b) Socio-economic status of couple influence marital instability. For marriages to be stable husbands should be of high socio-economic status and wives of low socio-economic status. Marriage should take place only when husband is economically stable, if it is to lead to stable marriage.

In order to have a stable marriage, stakeholders (ministry of education, teachers, Parents, marriage counselors like church ministers and church elders) are supposed to take note of the following recommendations listed:

1. In marriages where the wife is more educated than the husband is more likely to lead to marriage problems like divorce or separation and therefore such prospective partners should be discouraged.
2. For a marriage to be stable the husband and the wife should be employed and stay together most of the time.
3. The factors affecting marriage stability should be included in the Kenya Secondary Schools' curriculum so that the youths get adequately prepared for the marriage institution.

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