

## **Family Life Education: A Vital Tool for Reducing Marital Instability (Divorce) Among Youths in Nigeria**

**Dr. Osaigbovo Erhatiemwononmo John**

**Dr. John Osaremwindu Ehigie**

College of Education  
Ekiadolor-Benin  
Edo State

### **Abstract**

*Divorce is a growing social problem in Nigeria. The concern for arresting this social menace is in apprehension of the negative effect it has on the individuals and the society. Though information on how to promote marital stability abound during wedding in the churches, Mosques and traditional marriages, the problem of marital instability remains with us. It would appear that the information gets too late to them, that is during wedding alone. It is necessary that these young ones are exposed to issues related to marital stability as part of school learning programme long before they attain the age of marriage and child bearing. It is perhaps in this regard that the Federal Ministry of Education approved the teaching of family life education in the Nigerian Secondary schools in 2002. This paper therefore examines the concept of population\ Family life education, divorce , causes and its effects on the society. The author avers that for a child to be a functional member of his society as well as a future parent, he or she needs to be well informed about family life education with emphasis on variables which enhance marital stability, irrespective of the fact that the child is from intact family or not. This is to enable the youths to acquire relevant and accurate information through educational instructions, since the traditional mode of checking youths' moral rectitude seems to have broken down in the name of modernizations.*

### **Introduction**

Developing societies are plagued with enormity of problems due to industrial revolution, explosion in information technology and rapid population growth rate and difficulty in livelihood in most developing countries of the world have generated new set of social problems and further complicated the existing ones. They include family separation, high rate of divorce, terrorism, food crisis and others too numerous to mention. The issue of degenerating family value which is an integral parts of family life education has been a major concern in many societies. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, family life education had been introduced in school curriculum in United States and Europe to guide youths through this stage of development (McCauley & Salter, 1995). In Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Education approved the teaching of family life education in the nation's secondary schools in 2002 after extensive stakeholders' consultations. Prior to this period, Nigerian youths depend on the media, biology and health science classes, peer groups and their imaginations for information and knowledge about family life education. The question of youth's attitude towards divorce and the attendant implications have become very crucial and of multi-disciplinary concern because of the complex nature and far-reaching consequences on the society. This is more so as family life education seems to be adopted as a handy tool for dissemination of information and strategy for revitalizing the degenerating family valve, for moral, character and attitude modification, to reduce the high rate of divorce among youths and other unpleasant consequences of mismanaged adolescent sexuality, such as teenage father\mother, force marriage and dropout of school.

### **Concept of Family Life Education**

Family life education is the process of developing awareness and understanding of population situations as well as rational attitude and behaviour towards those situations for the attainment of quality life for the family and the nation. Family life education is concerned with the study of attitudes and skills related to dating, marriage, parenting, family health and life of the family as a socio-cultural and economic unit in the society.

It is therefore an educational response which involves both cognitive and effective behaviours. The cognitive problem is the development of at least minimum level of understanding of the causes of population growth and the consequences of such growth for the individual, his community, his nation and his world. The value problem is the provision of experience which will help the individual to formulate his own attitudes with awareness of the cumulative consequences for the society of the behavior in order to contribute more effectively towards the amelioration of socio-economic and cultural welfare of the individual, the family and the nation. According to Yisa (1988), family life education is an educational process which provides for a study of the population situation in the world, with the purpose of developing in the citizens, more rational and more responsible behavior towards improving the quality of their life now and in future. The reasons for the introduction of family life education in the school system according to NERDC (1995) are born out of the desire to use education to proffer solution to population related problems because of their close relationship to social and economic progress. It enables learners to perceive the world around them by providing conducive intellectual environment to understand and prepare them for effective living. It is an educational innovation with the ultimate aim of improving the quality of life of the people. Family life education works on a prevention model, teaching families to enrich family and prevent problems before they occur. Family therapy intervenes primarily after the problems set-in (Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis). Problems are less damaging for people and less expensive for society, when they can be tackled by prevention. Family life education recognizes that all families can benefit from education and enrichment not only those experiencing difficulties. According to Bredehoft and Walceski (2003) "Family life education focuses on healthy family functioning within a family system perspective and provides primarily preventive approach". This position is most expedient as the widespread of degenerating family value and non implementation of family life education curriculum in senior secondary schools seem to be the fundamental factors responsible for the high rate of single parenting and divorce in the society.

### ***Concept of Marriage***

Marriage is an important aspect of human societies which creates identity and root. It is a legal and social commitment that two people make to share their lives. It is believed to be for procreation, love, companionship, security, status, religious obligations, economic considerations and conforming to social standards. For a successful marriage, one needs to be biologically, economically, emotionally and socially matured to take on the responsibilities of marriage. The human family has become one of the most widely discussed issues in recent times. Its importance to human existence led to the United Nations declaration of 1994 as the international year of the family. The human family society is essentially developed from marital relationship. When couples are wedded, they always vow to remain in the bond of unity and love until death do them part. However, available statistics on marital breakdowns show that many couples who make such vows do not keep them to the end (National center for Health Statistics, 1994). The breakdown of marital relationship has become a global phenomenon affecting both the rich and the poor, from the royal families of princes and princesses down to the peasant farmers in the villages. These show that marital breakdown knows no bounds irrespective of the socio – economic and political status of couples in contemporary society. This assertion is sustained because most couples frequently quarrel or fight which may eventually lead to separation and divorce in some cases.

### ***Concept of Divorce***

Divorce is a crisis in the family life cycle, creating a state of disequilibrium for everyone at all generational levels throughout the nuclear\extended family system. Thus producing a crisis for the family as a whole as well as for each individual within the family. Divorce which is a total dissolution of a malfunctioned marriage is focus on as one of the variables affecting the family stability because of its far reaching effects on child's psychological, cognitive and affective development. Divorce leaves children under the care of the embattled father or mother and in some cases they are sent to their grand - parents or relatives. For a child to be a functional member of his society as well as future parent, he\ she needs to be well informed in family life with emphasis on variables which enhance marital stability or discourage divorce irrespective of the fact that the child is from intact family or not. The influence of peer group as well as social pressure to engage in unhealthy behaviours can be reduced by addressing them before the child or adolescent is exposed to the pressures, so there is need to initiate early prevention rather than intervention. Early awareness of pressures ahead gives youths a chance to recognize in advance the kinds of situation in which they may find themselves.

When children are taught resistance skills, the problem behaviours can be effectively reduced than when they are provided with the information or provoking fear of the results of the behavior. One does not need to experience divorce before an attitude towards it is formed. In the same vein a child does not need to be a drunkard before forming an attitude towards drinking alcohol, nor experience rape before forming an attitude towards the act.

A child learns through observation from home and his/her immediate environment i.e. from parents and neighbours', information from electronic and print media, peer group on family life. The effects of divorces on the family/society are child abandonment or desertion leading to high number of orphanage homes, child abuse, trafficking in children/women, prostitution and spread of human immune deficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome virus (HIV/AIDS).

Therefore, Nigerian youths must be informed and enlightened about healthy family life, perplexing rapid population growth, disease, values and attitudes needed for national cohesion, integration and unity as necessitated in the study of social studies in our various schools.

The concern for arresting this social menace is in apprehension of the negative effects it has on the individual family and the society at large. Though, information on how to promote marital stability a bound during wedding in churches, mosques and during traditional wedding. The problem of marital instability remains with the citizens, and it appears that the information gets too late to couples (that is during wedding alone).

Nigeria is presently the eighth (8<sup>th</sup>) largest country in the world in terms of population size. Her large population no doubt is putting pressure on the government and the individual families in terms of demand and supply of resources. The marriage institution is presently heavily affected by the pressure of high population growth, unemployment, and poor economic situation as it is threatened from all directions. Other sources of threat are the gradual erosion of core values attached to matrimony in the past, particularly in terms of what kind of family value (education) youths are exposed to in the family and in schools and how much influence it has on youths attitude towards marital stability and the marriage institution, especially divorce.

Consequently, this problem seems to have led to increase in the negative perception of youths about the marriage institution. In the face of adverse effects of divorce, the society is increasingly apprehensive of the ability of the marriage institution to survive and contribute to the nation's quest to develop its potentials. It becomes imperative to expose youths to knowledge on marital stability as part of school learning programme long before they attain the age of marriage and child bearing since the traditional means of checking youths moral rectitude seems to have broken down in the name of modernization. A response to this great need of the society prompted this study, using the school instructional approach. The study is concerned with whether family life education as a theme in social studies Education will influence youth attitude towards divorce.

### ***Causes of Divorce***

Causes of divorce can be different and for reasons. An unsuccessful marriage is a maladjusted marriage. It involves resolving conflict. Epstein and expectations are found to be among the factors causing unsuccessful marriages. Couples whose marriages are unsuccessful are usually disappointed, distrustful hostile and distressed. Similarly Imogie (2004) observed that marital happiness tend to show that there is a definite relationship between early marriage and subsequent unhappiness and divorce. It has also been observed that overall adjustment in marriage is tasking for teenagers who are not cognitively fit to face the marital relationship. There is therefore high rate of marital breakdown among young married couples. Similarly, the studies of Hong (1974) and Okoro (1994) as cited by Osaigbovo (2012) opined that underage in marital relationship thwarts the couples' educational and vocational plans. It also ties down the husband in his struggle to get ahead in his vocations.

Another major cause of divorce is that a couple gets wedded too quickly and they have not spent enough time with each other getting into wedlock. Marriage is a life- long responsibility and it needs to be handle maturely and with great care (Obi, 2008) Finally, is an integral part of every marriage and if one of the partners fails to consummate or is not able to perform the act, the other partner has every reason to file for a divorce if he/she is not satisfied. Generally speaking married couples always strive hard to ensure that their matrimonial relation is devoid of collapse and wreckage. But if the relationship becomes sour and the spouses develop aversion to each other and fail to sustain love among them then dissolution becomes unavoidable.

The Islamic law (shari'ah) takes a very reasonable stand and view of such an intolerant situation and instead of compelling the couple to stay together in a life of hell; it permits them to separate in an amiable manner under a peaceful and conducive atmosphere. Allah is abhorrent to divorce even though He legitimized it to the universal Muslims. Prophet Mohammed is reported to have said of all things that Islam has permitted, the most hated is divorce and it is the most hated by the Almighty Allah.(Abu Dawud: Miket, 11,695). Therefore the right can only be exercised when there are sufficient compelling circumstantial and logical reasons to do so.

**Childlessness:** This is another cause of conflicts in the home as Uwaomakeze (2008) states that a childless marriage is a source of grievous disappointment and sooner or later leads to serious trouble between the husband and wife if not properly handle could degenerate to separation or dissolution of marriage. According to Abraham (2007), it is children that cement the union of a man and a woman together and make it an intimate and lasting one. A marriage couple in our society especially among the Edos can tolerate each other in spite of all their short-coming if their union is blessed with children. However, the union is always a very unhappy, unbearable and short-lived one if it is childless because the purpose of marriage is to bear children that will sustain the family lineage.

### ***Effects of Divorce on Youths***

Divorce can devastate children, regardless of their age as they navigate their way toward adulthood. Youths are highly insecure, perhaps even more so than when they were children. Youths need the anchor of family stability as ever before (Awake, 1997). At the very time in life when youths are learning to forge mature friendships, divorce teaches them to be skeptical of such values as trust, loyalty and love. Later, as adults they may avoid close relationships altogether (Newman, 1991) while it is common for children of all ages to act out their pain, adolescents are more likely to do so in dangerous ways, including delinquency, alcohol and drug abuse. This is not to say that youth whose parents divorce are doomed emotionally or otherwise. They can be successful, if they have a relationship with parents. Admitted, this is not always possible, especially if a parent has abandoned the family or in some other way blatantly irresponsible or even dangerous. However, it is naïve to think that divorce will always be as some might say, "better for the children or that it will put an end to all tension between spouses. In fact some find that they have to deal more with their "intolerable" spouse after the divorce than before and on much more volatile issues as financial support or child custody. In such cases divorce does not end family problems; it emotionally betrothed combatants who have not been able to negotiate a truce with peace." Not only does this deprive youths of their parents, since mother and father always seem caught up in one skirmish or another but it also encourages them to put one parent against the other in order to get their way. This might have influenced Newman's (2009) conclusion that "it is better to get rid of the problem and keep your spouse than to get rid of your spouse and keep the problem"

Divorce people are more at risk to be hospitalized for psychological disorder, high suicide rate, car accidents, more physical illness culminating in death and more problems with substance abuse. Bloom (1978). Divorce at old age is characterized by Loneliness, even when the marriage has been unsatisfactory to each for many years. It is hard to find renewed meaning in life at this stage of life. Perhaps this influence Holmes and Rahe (1967) conclusion that scale of stressful life events, divorce ranks second only to the death of spouse.

### ***Conclusion***

Nigerians has traditionally maintained relatively strong family ties although urbanization and industrialization have considerably weakened family ties in contemporary Nigerian society. The traditional family values still posit substantial influences on individuals' behaviours.

Family life education seems to be widely accepted as a curricular intervention for information and guidance of youths in the development of the right attitudes and values towards maintaining and sustaining marital stability. This is premised on the understanding that acceptable sexual behavior and orientation would emanate from the formation of appropriate and responsible attitudes and values towards family life education. Exposure of youths to family life education is therefore perceived by scholars in the field as a panacea to the prevailing risk behaviours and its unpleasant consequences. Some of the advocates include SIECUS (2004), Okeke (2004), Nwagbara (2004), Aggleton (2000), Beamish (2003), Khan & Pine (2003).

The position of these advocates of family life education curricular intervention seems to be informed by the fact that majority of youths often resort to their peers, media and other sources for information and knowledge about family life in societies where sex talk is a taboo and sanctionable. Furthermore Social Studies curriculum for senior secondary schools whose contents are heavily loaded with family life topics should be implemented to enable the youths acquire accurate information through school instructions since the traditional mode of checking youths moral rectitude seems to have broken down in the name of modernization.

Finally, parents should educate their children on acceptable family values in their community. This is aimed at reducing risky behaviour as strategy for the high rate of divorce among youths and high school dropouts as a result of unwanted pregnancies. Children need to be aware of the various factors that influence the experiences they have at this stage of their lives, and that only youths who are aware of the option, will have the capacity to practice safe and responsible sex.

### **References**

- Ahrons, C. R.(1980) Divorce: A crisis of family transition and change family Relations.
- Beamish, J. & Lina T. A. (2003) Adolescent and Youth Reproductive Health in Morocco: Status, program, policies and issues. Washington D.c. Policy project.
- Bloom, B. L, White, S.W, & Asher S.J. (1978) marital disruption as a stressor: A review and analysis Psychological Bulletin June.
- Briscoe, C. W., Smith, J.B, Robins, E., Marten, S. G & Gaskin, F (1973) Divorce and Psychiatry disease. Archives of General Psychiatry. 29.
- Glick, P.C.(1984) How American families are changing. American Demographics Jan.
- Glick, P. C. (1948a) Marriage, divorce and living arrangements :Prospective changes . JOURNAL OF Family Issues. MARCH. Cycle. CH.15.335-369.
- Khan, A. & Pine, P.(2003) Adolescent and Youth Reproductive Health in Pakistan : Status, Programs, Policies and Issues. Washington D. C., Policy Project
- McCauley, A. and Salter.(1995) Meeting the need of Young Adults Population Reports Vol. 28, No 3.
- Neuman M. Gary (2009) The Impact of divorce on Adolescents. Awake P.18.
- Nwagbara, C. (2004) "Developing the Adolescent Population through Gender Neutral and Sexuality Education in Schools" Nigerian Journal of Curriculum Studies Vol.11, No.2.
- Holmes, T. & Rane, R. (1967) The Social Readjustment rating scale. Journal of Psychosomatic Research 11. Tzer, Cc.
- Yuko Kawanishi (2009) You can meet the challenges of youth. Awake Sept.
- SIECUS Report (2004) Issues and Answers. Facts Sheet on Sexuality Education. Vol.2 No. 6 Aug/ Sept.
- Okeke, E. C. (2004) Gender and Sexuality Education: Bridging the Gap in Human Resource Development. Nigerian Journal of curriculum studies Vol. 11. No. 2
- Osaigbovo, J. E (2012) Influence of Family life Education on Students' Attitude toward divorce and its implications for Social Studies Education.
- National Centre for Health Statistic (1984) Births, Marriages, Divorces and Deaths,U.S, 1983 Monthly. Vital Statistics Report, 32, no.13. DHHS Pub. NO. ((PHS) 84-1120. Public Health Service, Hyattsville, Msd., March 26 11, Washington.