

Perception of marriage and divorce by married couples: Exploring the dimension and trends of divorce rate in South-East, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study investigated the rate of divorce in the South-Eastern region of Nigeria as a reflection of the perception of married couples on what is the essence of marriage and the bases for divorce. The study was conducted in two local governments areas and six communities in Anambra State South-East of Nigeria. Data were elicited through questionnaires administered on 195 respondents purposively and randomly selected among married couples in the study area. In-depth Interview (IDI) was also conducted on 45 couples. Data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The rate of divorce in the South-East; variability of divorce among groups and sections; the influence of modernisation and globalisation on the perception of couples and the impact of state intervention in marital stability constitute some of the major objectives of the study. Findings showed increasing rate of divorce; variability in divorce rates on the bases of education, social class, length of marriage and urban residence; increasing dissonance between traditional marital setting and influence of modernization values on the young couples; increasing level of empty shell marriage as reflected in the dilemma of couples towards divorce suits because of poverty, cost and complicated nature of divorce procedure to many couples. The study recommends a buoyant, stable society built on social justice that will rub off on the families as an important group in the society; a revitalisation of marriage counselling structures at the state, religious and NGO levels; and the strengthening of institutions that will be more committed to the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) than a purely legalistic orientation in the handling of marital suits.

Key words: Perception, divorce, marital instability, state intervention, empty shell marriage, marital contract, modernization/globalisation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is cultivated or solemnized under processes that cut across cultures between adults of opposite sexes (Alan & Crow, 2001). Marriage in its pristine nature is not only based on relationships that is supposedly idyllic, stable and mutually beneficial with partners playing their roles dutifully, but also a lifelong process broken only by the demise of a partner. The sustenance of a marriage and its functionality to the society is dependent on the nature of societal driven relationship patterns that are not impinged by extraneous factors (Kottak, 2006). It has been observed that the more a society is untainted by exogenous factors the more stable the marriage system (Leach, 1985).

However, the marital architecture across cultures has been impacted by factors that are not only imposed, but compelling and essentially inexorable. The range of these factors varies across cultures and societies. In Africa for instance, colonialism and its concomitants; Christian religion, industrialisation, urbanisation, education, migration and increasing involvement of women in education, wage labour and socio-economic activities as well as the intervention of modern state in marital structures have played significant roles in the dynamism of marital relations (Almond, 2006). One basic consequence of these interventions is the increasing recognition of individual desires rather than societal expectation in modern marriages. Though a feature of western societies, modernity particularly in marital contracts has been surreptitiously creeping into family system in Africa (Maciver & Dimkpa, 2012).

There has been scholarly disquieting polemics on whether changes in African marital system have engendered stability, strength and vitality albeit in a modernising way or whether the changes pervert deleteriously the course of marital values and structures in the society (Giddens & Sutton, 2013). It is argued that the changes tend to strengthen marriages because they help marriages adapt to the new realities that manifestly represent progress. Marriages are perfected as they come to terms with the inevitable realities of modernities and globalisation (Therbon, 2004). However, other studies backed with evidences and empirical findings (Adegoke, 2010; Alan & Crow, 2001) have shown that the changes have wrath disruptions and instability in marriages rather than stability. This is our point of departure in this paper.

The new changes in the society have unwittingly brought a dissonance between the core values in the African societies and modern perceptions of life, particularly among the young couples. When traditional norms clash with modern values the outcome has always been conflicts of morals and clash of identities in the marital and family circles. Increasing marital instability in Nigeria has therefore become the consequence of increasing incapacity of marriages to meet the needs of modern society. The family and marriage system provides the most profound arena for the clash of culture and the contest between the traditional and the modern.

Marital instability manifest in many ways, but three that have been scholarly recognized include the empty shell marriage, separation and divorce. The manifestation of marital instability is dependent on the nature of perception of both marriage and divorce and on the level of education and social class background of the couples (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008). For instance, empty shell marriage encourages the couples to continue to live together under the camouflage of marriage stability even as the substance of marriage has become decimated. Unfortunately, marital instability has assumed the form of empty shell among majority of couples because the perception of divorce as reprehensible and the divorcees as renegades is still pervasive (Kottak, 2006). In recent times however, perception about marriage have begun to change; stigmatization has waned resulting in the increasing perception of divorce and separation as not only ways of resolving issues in marriages but also of perfecting marriages and enhancing marital satisfaction of individual couples (Alan & Crow, 2001). This reflects in increasing rate of remarriages in the society (Giddens & Sutton, 2013)

The intervention of state in marital instability has become obvious, but grounds and conditions for divorce still remain somewhat stringent (Obarisiagbon, 2016). However, the new life style described scholarly as the dawn of post modernity and as encapsulated in the powerful move of material culture, unbridled individualism, un-curtailed permissiveness and revolutionary trends in reproductive technologies have *ipso-facto* affected perceptions about marriage, divorce and separation. Marriage is now defined in terms of personal propensities and only seems to exist so long as it satisfies the personal pleasures of the individual couples as conceptualised in their own terms. Individual's happiness and freedom are therefore the main essence of marriage (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008). Marriages that do not meet these individual requirements have tendency of failing. Issues that border on social interaction even outside the family, romance, mere incompatibility and other mundane pleasures that were considered inconsequential in the recent past in consideration of marital instability have become the hallmark of marital separation and divorce (Gittens, 1993). Trends of marital instability have therefore changed significantly across North America and Europe as well as Nigeria and across Africa.

Again, a major variable in the divorce trends has ironically been situated within the context of the efforts to strengthen marriages as it were. This results from the high value placed on marriages (Parsons & Fletcher in Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). Also, Giddens & Sutton (2013: 398) succinctly averred that , “overall, high divorce rate do not seem to indicate deep dissatisfaction but rather an increased determination to make marriage a rewarding and satisfying relationship”. The high rate of remarriages in both Western and developing societies tend to support the views of scholars that the high value placed on marriage remains the major explainable variable in trends in divorce rates. The preservation of marriage despite obvious lack of harmony seems to be governed by economic factors, but more importantly by emotional needs. Indeed

emotional and psychological as well as assured sexual fulfilment which cannot be adequately provided by other formal or informal agencies the way families can, have increased the tendency of people to remain within the families if possible through remarriages when existing marriages lack in these provisions (Bauman, 2003).

In the South-Eastern Nigeria, perceptions on marriage and divorce have been changing. This is as a result of new wave of modernity driven by globalisation and social media and manifesting in increasing levels of women education, women economic independence and wage labour, levels of industrialization and urbanisation. These factors that drive change have impacted so heavily on marriages such that family influence is waning and marriage, particularly the choice of spouse becoming an individual affair (Becker, Landes & Michael, 1999). The implication is that divorce rates have increased in recent times. The influence of family and the communities in marriage processes has in the past mitigated the extent of marital instability. However, as couples place their expectations of marital stability on the Western standards as engendered by globalisation, traditional Igbo values concerning marriages become unwittingly jeopardised, thereby creating easy avenues for couples to walk out of marriages unencumbered by societal or family entanglements (Alan & Crow, 2001).

Perceptions and trends of divorce in South-East Nigeria vary among sections and groups in the society. The variations in the rate of marital instability are reflections of adaptability and exposure to modernized life styles and global culture which tend to increase individualism and dominance of personal desires and expectations over family or community expectations and standards. The conflicts between the individual couple's expectations and standards in both marriage and divorce and the family and societal expectations and standards constitute explainable variables in divorce rates (Fletcher, in Haralambos & Holborn, 2008).

In consideration of the above issues, this paper examines the perceptions of married couples on dimensions and trends of divorce among the Igbos of the South-Eastern Nigeria. The paper seeks to interrogate the following objectives:

1. The rate of divorce in South-Eastern Nigeria.
2. The variability in the perception of divorce among levels of education, social class, age and place of residence.
3. The impact of modernity and globalisation on the perception, dimension and trends of divorce in the South-East Nigeria.
4. The evaluation of State intervention over time on rates of divorce in the South-East Nigeria.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars and demographers have articulated ideas, views and theories on what constitute marital instability and by extension divorce, including their determinants, causes and consequences. Divorces and marital disruptions occur across

cultures and the determinants, causes and consequences have been changing with the evolution of societies from tradition to the modern societies (Haviland, Prins, Walrath & McBride, 2007). Until recently, divorce or separation for reasons that border on stigmatisation, tradition, religion, economy and children in the marriage union, have recorded very few outcomes or non-existent (Kottak, 2006).

In his study of Hopi communities in Arizona, Malinowski (quoted in Haviland et al, 2007) came to the conclusion that divorce rates tend to be more common in matrilineal descent societies than in patrilineal descent societies. Thus, most matrilineal societies are also matrifocal in residence that enhances female economic position, secured homes, land and custody of children. This position insulates women from encumbrances that may militate against their freedom from the men including their husbands. However, Kottak (2006) in contrast argues that marriages in patrilineal societies; that incur huge bridal wealth will witness declining divorce rates because of the investment in marital contract. Kottak also contends that political and economic factors complicate the divorce process. Hence, marriages that are backed by groups, family and political alliances with high stakes on both parties encounter stricter divorce procedures than marriages that are individually driven and which restrict the interference of family and other groups in the society.

Sudden changes in economic system which engender urbanisation, industrialisation, migration, education and wage labour especially for women, increasing feminine culture as well as revolutionary trends in reproductive technology have put so much strain on families, such that majority of families could not adapt to the emerging economic system. The strain on families results in increasing marital discontentment which manifests in morbid divorce rate (see Gittens, 1993 and Adegoke, 2010). Also, the emergence and prevalence of nuclear family structure has divested families of the wider kinship network with consequent heavier emotional burden and concomitant increase in conflicts among family members; which invariably result in divorces and separations (Leach, 1985; Goodie, 1977).

Furthermore, increasing modernisation and globalisation dialectics have created dynamisms in the family such that the expectations and the needs of the individual spouse have been emphasized over that of the family, compound and the society (Giddens & Sutton, 2013). In contemporary societies, the inability of marriages to satisfy the personal desires of the individual couples defined in terms of romance and flexibility in allowing for marital feelings and pleasures which may be due to lack of communication, trust, loss of identity and inequality may degenerate to conflict and subsequently divorce (O'Neil & O'Neil, 1977).

Empirical studies in Ghana by Takyi & Gyimah (2001) showed that the rising divorce rates in Sub-Saharan Africa can be attributed to issues of modernization, urbanization, early marriage, matrimonial descent and infertility. This supports the view that the spread of western culture through migration,

mass media, films and internet as well as centralized governance that tend to alter traditional ways of life contribute significantly to marital instability.

Also studies by Animasahun & Fatile (2011) in Lagos, South West of Nigeria and Obarisiagbon (2016) in South-South of Nigeria showed that causes of divorce include childlessness, adultery, financial difficulties and a perception of incompatibilities of the couples. The studies also showed variations in divorce trends among such factors as sex, age, and residence indicating that females were more likely to divorce than males; the younger couples are more susceptible to divorce than the older couples and couples living in the urban centres have the tendency of divorcing than couples resident in rural settings.

The major gap in the reviewed literature is anchoring the issues of marriage and divorce on the family, the compound and society rather than on the individual couples. This study however is centred on the rate and dimension of divorce as a consequence of the individual partners' perception of what should constitute the minimum standards of marital relations; and what should be the threshold of the conditions for marital stability or instability as evaluated by the individual spouse or the couple.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper adopted descriptive survey methods which involved sample of married couples from two local government areas of Anambra State. Using purposive sampling method, Awka North and Aguata Local Government Areas as well as six cities and communities of Awka, Mbaukwu, Nise, Ekwulobia, Oko and Umuona representing three cities or communities per local government were selected for the study because of their accessibility to the researchers at the time of the study. Again, purposive and random sampling methods were used to select 195 respondents into the study. Purposive sampling was used to isolate the married (including the divorced, separated or widowed) while the random sampling was used to select the isolated respondents into the sample. The selection of participants for the study was based on those that returned the consent forms that were earlier distributed to those that are in marriage or had been married in the study area. The selection of the sample was made proportional to the local governments and the communities. Thus, Awka, Mbaukwu and Nise in Awka North LGA had 38, 31 and 31 participants respectively, while Ekwulobia, Igboukwu and Umuona in Aguata LGA had 36, 33 and 26 participants respectively.

The field work for the study lasted for three months between August to October, 2021. Data for the study were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires were carefully structured to reflect the socio-economic and demographic characteristics as well as the four objectives of the study; and were administered through face-to-face interaction. The In-Depth Interview (IDI) was conducted on 45 respondents who were assumed to be well informed on the

issues of discourse in the study. The administration of questionnaires and interviews were done in the offices and residences of the participants depending on the more convenient to the participant.

The interviews were both manually and electronically recorded and were transcribed in order to present clearer appreciation of issues pertaining to the study. The study also sourced data from the secondary sources specifically from the population bureau, courts, NGOs, journals and Newspapers.

It is imperative to state here that the collection of data through interview and questionnaire were done with full consent of the participants. Only those that filled the consent form were selected into the sample. The reason for the study was explained to them in the way they appreciated. Option for withdrawing from the research exercise was available to the participants at any point in the research.

The primary data were subjected to scrutiny through editing to minimize errors and gaps while the secondary data were subjected to content analysis to ensure validity and reliability of data. Data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Findings were represented in themes as reflected in our objectives. Quantitatively data were presented in frequency distribution tables, histograms, bar-charts and other graphics. The analysis were structured to integrate the specific objectives of the paper and conclusions and recommendations arrived at reflected the analysis of the data.

Methods Combination

The Intendment For The Use Of The Mixed Method Which Is Sometimes Called The *Method Combination* Or *Triangulation* Is The Inherent Mutual Complementarity Of The Combination Of Qualitative And Quantitative Approaches In The Elucidation And Analysis Of Data In Research (Pawson, 1999 Quoted In Haralambos & Holborn, 2008). Using Quantitative And Qualitative Methods Simultaneously Enhances The Capacity Of Obtaining Objective Data Through Questionnaire Without Jettisoning The Inner Deep Subjective Feelings Which May Sometimes Become Emotional Or Sentimental But Which *Mutatis Mutandis* Enriches The Data For The Research. Participants In The Research Who Are Sometimes Part Of The Researchers By Inference Are Allowed To Express Themselves Freely, Unencumbered By The Restrictions Associated With The Questionnaire Methods. This Unhindered Expression Can Only Be Elicited From The In-Depth Interviews (IDI) And Focussed Group Discussion (FGD) In The Process Of Research (Bryman, 2016). Blending The Two Methods As Reflected In The Unstructured Interview Complementing The Questionnaire In This Research Endeavour Will End Up Producing A Better Research Result And Conclusion. This Why Many Sociologists And Indeed Social Scientists Have Come To Terms Methodological Pluralism Because “The Obvious Way Forward Is Likely A Fusion Of The Two Approaches So That Their Respective Strengths Might Be Reaped” (Bryman, 1988 Quoted In Haralambos And Holborn, 2008).

IV. FINDINGS

Selected socio-economic and demographic characteristics of participants

Table 1: Showing the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	101	51.8
Female	94	48.2
Total	195	100
Age		
25-34	56	28.7
35-44	67	34.4
45-54	39	20
55-64	22	11.3
65 and above	11	5.6
Total	195	100
Education		
Primary	43	22
Secondary	77	39.5
Tertiary	75	38.5
Total	195	100
Religion (Denomination)		
Catholic	83	42.6
Anglican	87	39.5
Pentecostal	35	17.9
Total	195	100
Residency		
Urban	137	70.3
Rural	58	29.7
Total	195	100
Length of marriage		
1-9	45	23.1
10-19	68	34.9
20-29	41	21
30-39	30	15.4
40 and above	11	5.7
Total	195	100
Occupation		
Public/Civil servant	62	31.8
Business	47	24.1
Professional	35	17.9
Farmers/Artisans	51	26.2
Total	195	100

Source: Field work, 2021

Our findings as revealed from table 1 above showed that majority of our participants 101 (51.8%) were males, while 94 (48.1%) were females. The age range of our respondents is from 25years to 72years with 123 (63.1%) being within the age bracket of 25-45 years, while those within the age range of 45-64 years constitute 61 (31.3%) of our respondents. The rest of our respondents 11 (5.6%) are 65years and above. Our findings also indicated that majority of our participants 77 (39.5%) had secondary level education, while 75 (38.5%) had tertiary education. Those with primary level education constitute 43 (22%) of the participants.

All the participants in the study are Christians with 83 (42.6) as Catholics, 77 (39.5%) as Anglicans while 35 (17.9%) are Pentecostals. The residential status of our respondents is distributed as 137 (70.3%) as urban dwellers while 58 (29.7%) as semi-urban dwellers. It is important to state that the areas

covered in this study do not have strict rural setting in terms of physical structures and behavioural patterns.

Many of the participants 73 (37.4%) had married for 10-19 years, while 48 (24.6%) had married for between 1-9 years. 44 (22.6%) of our participants had spent between 20-34 years in marriage, while 30 (25.4%) of our respondents had been marriage for above 35 years. The civil and public servants in our study constitute 62 (31.8%) of the participants while those in business are 47 (24.1%) with 35 (17.9%) being within the professional occupational category. The professionals are considered as those in self-employment that render services to clients as lawyers, doctors, pharmacists, accountants, surveyors etc. The artisans and the farmers make up 51 (26.2%) of our respondents. (See appendix 1 for details).

Trends in divorce rates in the South-East Nigeria

Over the years, marital instability has increased in various ways particularly through separation and divorce. The Crude Marital Dissolution Rate (CMDR) in the South-East as at 1995 was 11 per 1000 with the Crude Divorce Rate (CDR) at 5 per 1000 and Crude Separation Rate (CSR) at 6 per 1000 married couples in the South East. As at 2018, the Crude Marital Dissolution Rate (CMDR) stood at 29.5 per 1000 with Crude Divorce Rate (CDR) at 13 per 1000 and Crude Separation Rate (CSR) at 16 per 1000. The figure below show the Crude Marital Dissolution Rate in South Easter Nigerian States, 1995 and 2018

State	CDR (1995)	CDR 2018	CSR 1995	CSR 2018	CMDR 1995	CMDR 2018
Abia	9.7	13.5	13.3	17.2	23.6	28.4
Anambra	9.5	13.7	13.2	16.2	22.7	28.2
Ebonyi	8.4	12.5	13.8	17.5	22.3	27.3
Enugu	9.3	13.1	13.2	16.9	22.5	28.5
Imo	9.0	13.2	13.2	17.3	22.2	27.5
Total	45.9	66.7	66.7	85.1	91	139.6

Source: National Population Commission, 2021.

The above table shows that the average rate of divorce among the South-Eastern States in 1995 stood at 9.8 per 1000 while by 2018 the average rate of divorce stood at 13.34 indicating an increase of 3.5 per 1000 and growth of 70%. Also the average rate of separation and marital dissolution in 1995 was 13.5 per 1000 and 18.2 per 1000 respectively while in 2018 the average rate of separation and marital dissolution were 17.2 and 27.9 respectively. This shows a gross increase of 4.7 per 1000 and 10.7 for separation and marital dissolution between 1995 and 2018 respectively. The trend in marital breakdown in our study area may not be as exponential as in the Western Europe and North America or even as compared to some parts of Nigeria, but the increase is obviously significant considering the level of perception of marriage and divorce among the couples in the study area.

In confirming the increasing level of divorce overtime in the South-East of Nigeria, one of our IDI participants argued that

Due to the fact that people now chose their spouses and live their lives as families without involvement of families and relatives unlike in the past; little misunderstanding may lead to marital problems. Young couples these days may be, because of western influence walk out of marriages without qualms over little quarrels.

Variability in the perception and rate of divorce on the levels of education, social class, length of marriage, sex and place of residence

In addressing this objective on the basis of relationship between the perception of couples and marital breakdown, the participants` views on the following issues were considered.

Table 4 below reflects the participants` views on the relationship between marital breakdown and the indicators as listed below

i. The more educated the couples the higher the tendency of divorce

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	117	60
No	63	32.3
Undecided	15	7.7
Total	195	100

ii. Divorce occurs more where both spouses are wealthy than where one or both spouses are poor

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	103	52.8
No	72	36.9
Undecided	20	10.3
Total	195	100

iii. The longer the number of years couples stay in marriage the lower the tendency of divorce

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	127	65.1
No	61	31.3
Undecided	7	3.6
Total	195	100

iii. Women are more likely to engage in divorce than men

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	109	55.9
No	78	40
Undecided	8	4.1
Total	195	100

iv. Divorce occurs more among couples in the urban areas than the rural areas

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	132	67.7
No	56	28.7
Undecided	7	3.6
Total	195	100

Source: Field work, 2021 (See appendix 1 for details)

Table 4 above indicate that 117 (60%) were of the opinion that the more educated the higher the rate of divorce while 63 (32.3%) were opposed to the idea with 15 (7.7%) undecided. It is affirmed that couples with tertiary education suffer marital disruption than couples with lower levels of education. One of our IDI participants in concurring with the view asserted thus:

The divorce cases we have recorded in our area are those who call themselves educated ones; the reason being that they know too much about so many things, such that they cannot condone attitude that do not meet their expectations from each other

The participants also showed from table 4 that marriages in which women are not only gainfully employed but also of considerable economic independence have greater tendency of marital dissolution than marriages where one of the spouses, particularly the women are dependent. This is shown by the 103 (52.8%) respondents that responded in the affirmative on the above question while 72 (36.9) had contrary view with 20 (10.3%) undecided. Our IDI participants affirmed the position of our quantitative data with one of them aptly stating

Very few resourceful women who can fend for themselves and their children including providing education and housing can afford to take nonsense from anybody or suffer undue indignities in the name of marriage

In the same vein, our participants from the table 4 indicated that 127 (65.1%) agreed that the older the marriage the more stable the marriage while 61 (31.1%) of the participants were of the opinion that the younger marriages had less marital troubles. 7 (3.6%) of the respondents were undecided. This is affirmed by the revelation that the majority of the respondents 128 (65.6) indicated that remarriages are more stable than the first marriages.

Our IDI respondents also affirmed that older marriages are more sustaining than younger marriages. A participant that happened to be a divorcee said that “my marriage would not have disrupted today if I have had the experience I have now”. Another participant who is in her second marriage opined, “I have seen far worse situation in this my second marriage than in my first marriage and yet I have remained in this marriage. Experience indeed matters in marriage”.

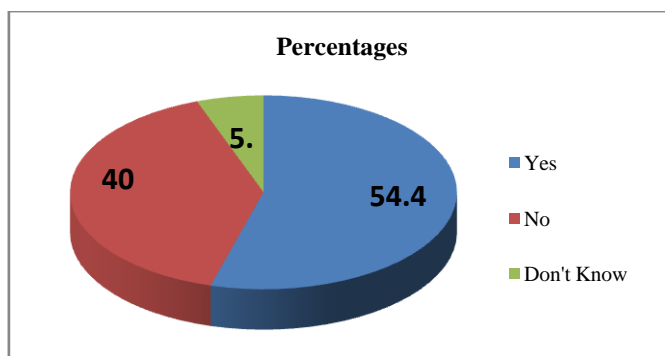
Again, the table 4 above indicate that 109 (55.9%) respondents were of the opinion that divorce occurs among

women than men with 78 (40%) of the respondents holding contrary opinion and 8 (4.1%) undecided. In the same vein, our participants` responses showed a positive relationship between urban residence of couples and divorce rate. 132 (67.7%) of the respondents affirmed high rate of divorce among couples that live in the urban areas while 56 (28.7%) respondents answered that couples in the rural areas record more divorce than those in the urban areas. One of our IDI respondents, a female has this to say

Nobody cares a hoot if one is single or married, separated or divorced. It is all about hustling, survival and creating relationships that matter (in or outside marriage) and for as many times as possible. The important thing is your happiness and convenience

Impact of modernisation on the perception and trends of marital instability

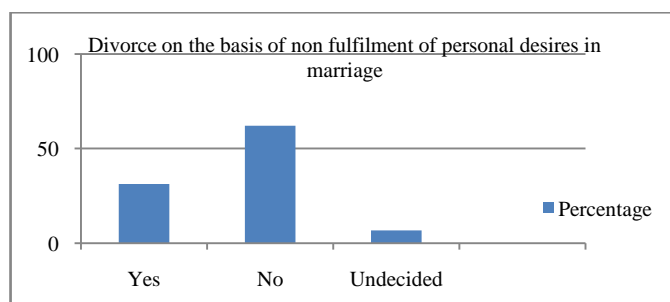
Figure 1 depicts the perception of marriages fulfilling personal desires



Source: Field work, 2021

Figure 1 showed that 106 (54.6%) concurred that marriage should fulfil personal desires as against 78 (40%) that opposed while 11 (5.6%) were undecided. Some of the personal desires as listed by the respondents included: economic well being, personal liberty, unencumbered pursuit of professional careers, communication and trust and personal interaction if possible outside the marriage. However, majority of the participants, 121 (62.2) as shown by figure 2 below would not leave the marriage if these desires are not met. Only 61 (31.3%) were positive in their answers, while 13 (6.7%) were non committal.

Figure 2: Divorce on the basis of non fulfilment of personal desires in marriage

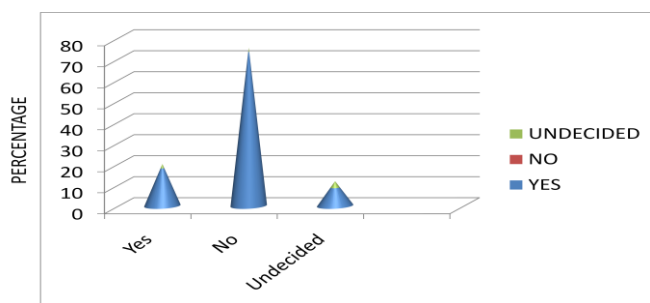


Source: Field work, 2021 (See appendix 1 for details)

Our IDI respondents toed the same line of remaining in marriage even when personal desires are not met in marriage. One of the participants succinctly espoused Though non-fulfilment of marital feelings may be bases for marital incompatibility and strong grounds for divorce; however, this line of action remains alien to our style. Infidelity, violence, economic reasons etc still remain reasons for marital instability. We are yet to get to the point in our marital perception where open marriage system determine the stability of our marriages

Figure 3 below also indicated that majority of the respondents 143 (73.3%) would not accept their spouse in extra-marital relationship as a condition for stabilising their marriages. 35 (17.9%) respondents were positive in their answers while 17 (8.7%) were undecided.

Figure 3: Condoning extra marital relationship in marriages



Source: Field work, 2021

It is argued that open marriage is not yet our way of life at least for now. One of the IDI participants put it thus “For me this is not possible; well I can pretend I did not see anything, but not to make it open. *Haba*, this is downright unacceptable. I will rather file for divorce than face this kind of abomination”.

State intervention and marital stability

The perception of our respondents on the impact of State intervention in marriage and the family on the rate of divorce and separation are varied. State interventions come through marital regulation, marriage acts and judicial decisions or precedents. The basis of contention revolve around the length of time for divorce suits to be disposed off, legibility for divorce suits, complexity or otherwise of divorce processes and cost of prosecuting divorce. Pros and cons on the impact of state in curtailing or exacerbating divorce in the South-Eastern Nigeria among our participants as shown by table 5 below are almost at par. For 88 (45.1%) of the participants, the state policies on marriage have engendered easy and accelerated divorce procedure, thereby making divorce accepted way of resolving marital problems; while for the 85 (43.6%) of our respondents, state regulations and policies are not only strangulating in its complicated processes and prohibitive in its cost, but has ingeniously discouraged potential divorce prosecutors; compelling spouses to stay in their marriages willy-nilly even when there are genuine grounds for marital dissolution. The incapacity to secure

divorce is compounded by the economic, social and traumatic conditions of single parenthood in a developing society. The remaining 22 (11.3%) did not take any position on the matter. The table below reflects the above analysis on the impact of state intervention in marital affairs.

Table 5: showing state intervention and exacerbation of marital instability

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	88	45.1
No	85	43.6
Don't know	22	11.3
Total	195	100

Source: Field work, 2021 (See appendix 1 for details)

The positions of our IDI participants were also sharply divided. Defending the positive position vehemently, one of the IDI respondents contended State provision of marriage act, has made marriage dissolution where there is glaring marital incompatibility less acrimonious and violent because it is within the confines of the law. I had no choice than to file and obtain a divorce when it became apparent that my marriage with my former partner was sliding dangerously. Even if I have to remarry; I have to be more careful this time. One's happiness should be paramount in any relationship.

However, another respondent with a contrary view and with a ting of frustration asserted “What I am passing through in this marriage is such that I would have called it quits by now; but for the fact that I don't have the money to hire lawyers which from inquiries I'm told would cost close to one million naira”.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Our findings showed an increasing trend in divorce rate in South-East. The rate may not be as steep as in the Western societies and even among the lowest in the regions in Nigeria, but still significantly and impactful on marital relations. The rate of divorce in the South-Eastern region Nigerian as at 2012 put at 11-19.9 per 1000 and 29.5 per 1000 for Crude Rate of Marital Dissolution for couples and forever married respectively. This concurs with the studies by Ntoimo & Akokuwebe (2014) showing the CRD in Nigeria at 11 per 1000 as at 2012 being the average across the region of Nigeria; and Iwunze-Ibiam (2019) showing divorce rate of 14% in Nigeria as at 2018.

The reasons for the rise in marital breakdown is shown to be the waning of traditional influence of parents and family members including the kindred in the choice of spouse and in the running of the family; the western induced perception of the educated urban couples that marriage is not a lifelong affair but a contract that meets the needs of the couples and the immediate family; and the increasing perception of the couples in the South-East that separation and divorce should be the easy ways of resolving marital problems. This is in tandem with the empirical studies in Sub-Saharan Africa by Analdo (2004) and Tayo & Gyimah (2007) that the rising

rates of divorce and separation are attributable to modernisation, urbanisation and increasing feminine assertiveness with rising women education and economic independence. Also the studies of Adegoke (2010) in the Western Nigeria showed that the disappearance of traditional values and support in preference for Western values of individualism and impersonality in marital relations tend to increase the rate of marital breakdown.

Our findings on variability among the groups in the society showed that the educated couples are more amenable to separation and divorce than the couples with less education. 117 (60%) respondents most of whom are with tertiary education certificates affirmed the assertion. Education raises consciousness of the individuals to the import of the situations around his environment and the potential opportunities that can be elicited from the situations. For the educated, marriage is meant to meet minimum standards and should guarantee enough freedom for the pursuit of personal goals. The knowledge of the process of marital dissolution and the capacity to utilise such processes confer on the educated couple the irreducible opportunity to use divorce and separation to resolve marital problems in less acrimonious ways. This is in line with Maciver & Dimkpa (2012) opinion that women empowerment and change in life style that reflect their level of western education and which tend towards western values increase the tendency of seeing divorce as a veritable way of solving marital problems. Adegoke (2010) also argued that dwindling influence of traditional institutions in the life of couples which invariably increased the rate of divorce was enhanced by the opportunities provided by western education.

Socio-economic status of the couples is shown to play a part in divorce and separation. The responses show that 103 respondents agree that divorce rates are higher among wealthy couples than couples presumed to be poor. Economic independence of couples, particularly women increases confidence of ensuring that marriages that do meet minimum standards are rather abandoned than endured. This is more pronounced where the couples have the wherewithal to execute complicated divorce procedure. Once a spouse realises he or she can fend for his or herself, the choice of staying alone with greater happiness than together with less happiness is higher. Thus, Haviland et al (2007) argued that divorce rates are correlated with a secure female economic position in terms of security of land, homes and other resources. Studies by Goody (1977), Kottak, (2006) and Giddens & Sutton, (2013) showed that increasing wage labour for women which engenders dual careerism no doubt facilitates a decision for divorce. Our findings also showed that 127 (68.1%) of our respondents are of strong opinion that the higher the years in marriage the higher the possibility of the marriage enduring or sustaining. Older couples elicit experience and live with situations that ordinarily would cause younger marriages to break. Some of the divorcees today believe that with hindsight their marriages would have survived the issues that truncated their marriages. This

explains why remarriages have become more sustainable than first marriages. A study conducted by Ntoimo & Akokuwebe (2014) on marital stability in Nigeria indicates that the rate of divorce is higher in marriages of less than ten years than marriages with more than ten years.

Also, our studies show that divorce rates are higher among the female than men, with 109 (55.9%) of the respondents affirming the position. Women are seen to be more emotional and more committal to marital values than men. The recourse to the marital problems becomes a way of saving themselves from emotional wreck that may result from continuous stay in the marriage. Ardayigio-Schandorg (1999) opines that women are more likely to resort to divorce than men because of the value the women place in marriage and the commitment they place in their expectations of the marriage. Marriages among urban couples tend to dissolve easily compared to marriages among rural couples as affirmed by our respondents with 132 (67.7%) concurring with the view. The urban dwellers are not only more educated and exposed but are influenced by western values that increasingly perceive marriages as a contract that must meet the expectations of couples as encapsulated in the conditions of the contract. The breach in the conditions of the contract (that is meeting the expectations of marriage) results in the breakdown of marriage through divorce and separation. Moreover life in the urban area is impersonal and people care less about what their neighbours do so long as the actions do not undermine their own life. Thus, divorces or single parenthood face less or no stigma in the urban areas which makes it easier for people to walk out of marriages without fear of societal opprobrium or backlash. As argued by Haralambos & Holborn (2008) that in modern societies, one of the basic changes in marriage and family is the shift from the idea of marriage as a lifelong affair to one existing so long as it satisfies the pleasures of the partners in the marriages.

The major finding in the study is the influence of modernisation and globalisation in the perception of marriage from being a family and societal affairs to being individual affairs that concerns couples; and perception of causes of divorce from being societal or institutional to individual idiosyncrasies. Our respondents concurred through 106 (54.6%) of them that marriages should fulfil personal desires. Some of the personal desires include personal freedom, unhindered pursuit of personal career interest, romantic love, equality in marriage, open communication and fulfilment of marital feelings even outside the marriage. In most countries in the modern world according to Therbron (2004), intimate relation has become more open and less bound up by tradition. Kottak (2006) also argued that in contemporary societies, romantic love is necessary for a good marriage. When romance fails, so does the marriage. Giddens & Sutton (2013) further averred that in recent times, a good marriage relationship is based on open, emotional communication or other forms of intimacy.

However, non fulfilment of personal desires as enunciated above have not for now been the primary cause of divorce in the study area though it is still a major cause of marital instability. 121 (62.2%) of our respondents still believe that the major causes of divorce still remain issues such as infidelity, violence, childlessness and economic well being. The implication of this situation is that empty shell marital relations remains dominant as an instrument in resolving marital instability that border on open marriage system. Nobody for instance will accept extra-marital relationship openly as a way of sustaining marriage. 143 of the respondents abhorred allowing their partners in extra-marital relations though they may feign ignorance of such extra-marital relationship to avoid divorce in their marriage but not to openly condone it. This disagrees with O`Neil & O`Neil (1977) argument that marriage is sustained if it remains open; that, individuals can develop intimate relationship outside the marriage. Our findings however, agree with Kottak`s (2006) assertion that economic ties and obligations to kids, along with other factors such as concerns about public opinion, single inertia and sometimes stereotypes may keep marriage intact even after sex, romance and/or companionship fade.

Perceptions about the impact of state intervention are along social class and education level cleavages. State interventions in marriages come in form of legislative Acts that regulate marital dissolution procedures in terms of desertion, annulment and divorce. The distribution of respondents showed that 88 (45.1%) and 85 (43.6%) supported and opposed the view respectively that state intervention exacerbates rather than reduce marital breakdown. Grounds for divorce have been made less complex and less cumbersome over the years. Following the British family law Act of 1986 that assert the irretrievable breakdown of marriage as perceived by any of the spouses constituting strong grounds for divorce; Nigeria also considers irreconcilable differences (incompatibility) of spouses rather than matrimonial offences as grounds for divorce. Section 15 (2) of the matrimonial Act, (CAP) (2004) as amended listed some conditions as grounds for divorce. They include: 1. Where one spouse (the respondent) cannot reasonably be expected to live with the other partner; where one partner engages in deeply disappointing or heinous act; where the respondent has refused to consummate the marriage; where there is continuous separation for two years; where there is a desertion of marriage by one couple for one year; where there is strong evidence of adultery against a partner among other conditions (Iwarime-Jaja, 2011).

Unfortunately perceptions of marital instability as conjectured by the spouses are in tandem with some scholarly views. Gideon & Sutton (2013) argued that the relaxation of grounds, procedure and time of divorce increased the rate of divorce exponentially in major parts of the world, particularly in the western societies. However, this position contradicts the situation in the study area where the decision to divorce is often mediated or subdued by some unpleasant forces among which are legal complications, the ambiguity of divorce status

and the cost of divorce which may likely be devastating for those with modest income or members of the lower class.

Limitations

The major limitation in the course of this study is the difficulty encountered in the designing and the development of sampling frame from which our sample respondent can be selected. Sampling frame is defined by Haralambos & Holborn (2008) as a list of all the sampling units. In our study, sampling frame constitute the list of all the ever married persons (still in marriage, separated, divorced and widowed) in the study area. However, the Nigerian poor record keeping capacity made the eliciting of these data from the requisite agencies difficult. For instance, getting the statistics of married couples from the National Population Commission overtime was difficult as there was no updated record for the information. This is also the situation with Registrar of Marriage offices across the study area.

Again many marriages in Nigeria are conducted outside the state designated areas of marriage solemnization which are the marriage registrar`s offices and the certified places of worship by the marriage registrars. The marriages solemnised outside these places of worship are therefore not recorded as part of statistics of marriage. The implication is that the record of marriages from these agencies is not comprehensive, reliable and valid and may therefore not pass for authentic sampling frame for research endeavours. This limitation was overcome by the researcher through the adoption of purposive sampling technique to be able to select adequate number of respondents for our study.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study set out to investigate how the perception of divorce and essence of marriage impact on the rate of divorce and separation among couples of Igbo people of South-East of Nigeria. The study established that increasing rate of divorce reflected trends in changes in the perception of marriage and divorce resulting in the exposure to modernisation and globalisation encapsulated in western values. Though the dimension and the rate of divorce may not be as high as the western society, the rate is still significant as to show concern for stake holders in the family and society. The study also established that the rate of divorce is higher among the educated, richer, and urban based couples as well as the female spouses and the younger couples in the South-East.

A major aspect of the study is that the influence of modernisation and globalisation in the perception of marital relations by couples conduce rather more into empty shell marriages than on separation and divorce. The open marriage system which allows for the fulfilment of personal desires and expression of marital feelings even outside the marriage though strong ground for divorce have rather led to bottled up grievances and unexpressed feelings. The implication is that in South-East Nigeria, couples are compelled to willy-nilly stay together even when the bases for marriage in a modern global environment have long faded. Marriages now face

violence, traumatic experiences, paranoid and even depression among the couples in the South-East of Nigeria. Thus poverty, stigma and opprobrium, patriarchalism and undue influence of extended families have presented their own dilemma of sorts for couples in the face of inexorable modernisation of family lives. This has stalled opportunities provided by state intervention through legislative acts for the resolution of issues around marriages in which couples have become incompatible in modern societies. Unfortunately, accumulated grievances and unaddressed unpalatable experiences faced by couples snowball unwittingly into marital instability that lead to incipient divorces and separation among the couples in the South-East of Nigeria.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In consideration of the above situation, we recommend as follows:

1. Stable marriages constitute one of the manifestations of stable societies. Thus increasing separation and divorce rates are symptoms of deep rooted societal problems. Improving marital quality through efforts towards a buoyant economy, full employment, provision of amenities and family support will not only reduce marital instability but create a congenial atmosphere for peaceful productive families in the society.
2. Marriage should be meant for the physically, socially and psychologically matured people. Much of the data on marital breakdown have been recorded among very immature couples in different dimensions who cannot handle traumatic experiences nor cope with trying circumstances as couples or as families.
3. The need for marriage counselling by the religious organisations and professional marriage counsellors have become imperative so as to encourage couples to be more open, to communicate and become more trustworthy in their relationship. This is because bottled up unexpressed grievances may likely result in unpleasant consequences that may lead to marital breakdown
4. There should be strong advocacy by NGOs, stake holders and state actors to eschew as much as possible violence, economic deprivation, inequality and denial of expression among couples to reflect the modern and globalised life of contemporary societies. This will reduce recourse to divorce and separation.
5. The courts and other state agencies dedicated to the adjudication of divorce suits should as much as possible aim at exploring mechanisms for healing the problems among couples through alternative dispute resolution rather than undue legalism in executing divorce prosecutions. Thus families in divorce suits may end staying together stronger when their

disputes are extra-legally resolved unless where it is absolutely shown that the dissolution of the marriage is the best option.

Future research

The findings from our study show the pervasiveness of empty shell marriage. We therefore suggest further research on the relationship between empty shell marriage (a form of marital instability) and the sustenance of marriage system in the South-East of Nigeria. Secondly, it has become imperative to interrogate the finding that despite being the most urbanised among the regions, the South-East ranks lowest in the divorce rate among the Nigerian geo-political zones; though there is overall increase in divorce rate across the country. This constitutes the heuristic value in this paper.

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Appendix 1**The administration of the questionnaire in the research****Socio-demographic characteristics**

1. Age:	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and above
	56(28.7%)	67(34.4%)	39(20%)	22(11.3%)	11(5.6%)
2. Education:	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary		
	43(22%)	77(39.5%)	75(38.5%)		
3. Marital; status:	Married	Divorced	Separated		
	113(57.9)	18(9.2%)	25(12.8)		
4. Denomination:	Protestant	Catholic	Pentecostal		
	87(39.5%)	83(42.6%)	35(17.9%)		
5. Residency:	Urban	Rural			
	137(70.3)	58(29.7)			
6. Length of marriage:	1-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40 and above
	45(23.1%)	68(34.9%)	41(21%)	30(15.4%)	11(5.7%)
7. Occupation:	Public/civil servant	Business	Professional	Farmers/Artisans	
	62(31.8%)	47(24.3%)	35(17.9%)	51(26.2%)	

Variability in the perception of divorce among levels of education, class, sex, length of marriage and place of residence

8. The more educated the couples the higher the tendency of divorce	Yes	No	Don't know
	117(60%)	63(32.3%)	15(10.3%)
9. Divorce occurs more where both spouses are wealthy than where one or both spouses are poor	103(52.3%)	72(36.9%)	20(10.3%)
10. The longer the number of years couples stay in marriage, the lower the tendency of divorce	127(65.1%)	61(31.3%)	7(3.6%)
11. Women are more likely to engage in divorce than men	109(55.9%)	78(40%)	8(4.1%)
12. Divorce occurs among couples in the urban than the rural areas	132(67.7%)	50(28.7%)	7(3.6%)

The impact of modernity and globalisation on the perception, dimension and trends of divorce

13. Should the choice of spouse in Marriage be left for the family or only for the potential couples	The family	The spouses
	68(34.9%)	127(65.1)
14. Should marriage be between only	The couple	The extended family

the man and his wife or should the extended family be involved	143(73.3%)	52(26.7%)	
15. What matters to you in marriage	Personal desires	Family/societal needs	
	139(71.3%)	56(28.7)	
16. Should marriage fulfil personal desires of the couples	Yes	No	Don`t know
	106(54.6%)	78(40%)	11(5.4%)
17. Should the fulfilment of personal desires be the basis for divorce	61(31.3%)	121(62.2%)	13(6.7%)
18. Would you allow extra-marital relation to stabilize marriage	35(17.9%)	143(73.3%)	17(8.7%)
19. Do you think divorce is the way to resolve marital instability	78(40)	102(52.3%)	15(7.3%)

The State intervention in marriages and rates of divorce

20. Would you say that the easing of divorce procedure and cost reduction increased divorce rate	Yes	No	Don`t know
	99(50.8%)	83(42.5%)	13(6.7%)
21. Did the State intervention engender Quick divorce procedure	85(45.1%)	85(43.6%)	22(11.3%)