

## **Causes of Marital Conflicts in Relationships among Christians in the Central Division of Narok County**

**Patrick Kimani Ngigi & Micah C. Chepchieng**  
*Department of Psychology, Counseling and Educational Foundations*  
*Egerton University, P.o Box 536, Egerton*

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**ABSTRACT:** Marital conflict is a phenomena that has put the institution of marriage at a crossroad. The trend of broken marriages in on the rise despite the existence of these programs. Separation and divorce adversely affect not only on the couple but also children, who remain traumatized and are denied the chance to enjoy a close relationship with both parents. The purpose of this study was to determine causes of marital conflicts in relationships among christians in the central division of Narok County. The study used the descriptive survey research design with a sample size of 81 Christians and 10 pastors. The Christians from each church station surveyed, had attended counselling at least once on issues related to marital challenges. Purposive and stratified sampling methods were used to select 10 churches. Couples and counsellors from the 10 churches selected were involved in filing questionnaires and responding to interview questions. During piloting, questionnaires were administered to 10 respondents in the similar target population. The calculated Cronbach alpha from the pilot study was 0.80 for the pastors' questionnaire and 0.78 for the married couples, which is within the accepted reliability limit of at least 0.7. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17.0 for Windows was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics which included means and percentages were used to present the findings. The study concluded that financial problems, early marriages, alcohol, and drug abuse were the main causes of conflict in marriages in Central division of Narok County. The study recommended the need for churches in the Central Division of Narok County to step up teachings on moral values to handle infidelity and money matters which are affecting most of the Christians

**Keywords:** Marital Conflicts, Relationships, Christians, Narok County.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In most societies, marriage signifies a mutual commitment by each partner. According to the online Oxford dictionary (2013), marriage is defined as the formal union of a man and a woman, typically as recognized by law, by which they are united as a husband and wife. Tim and La Haye, (2011), state that the act of marriage is that beautiful and intimate relationship shared uniquely between a husband and wife in the privacy of their love, and it is sacred. Research is essential to find out why such a good thing is increasingly in crisis and is leading to the rise in divorce cases. Divorce is on the increase all over the world as a result of misunderstandings in marriage (Emonyi, 2006). Global statistics show very high divorce rates among European and American nations, especially those rated as first world countries. Couples in more affluent nations have a higher chance of divorce most probably because the women have more financial strength which is not the case in developing countries. According to Kenny (2013), a little-noticed trend is spreading in many of the world's emerging economies. More and more people are getting divorced. Outside of North America, Europe, and Oceania, a majority of the countries for which the United Nations has kept data saw rising divorce rates from 2011. According to a department of the UN, the divorce rate in Mexico is stated to have risen from 0.3 to 0.8 per thousand people from the late 1970s. In Brazil, where it was illegal to end a marriage 30 years ago, things have changed so much that the divorce rate is now approximately 1.4 per thousand people. The rates have also significantly risen in China, Thailand, Iran, and South Korea, which have experienced more than five times increase in divorces over the past few decades

A survey by the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM) that was done in 130 towns across Russia indicated that only 3 percent of people indicated that cramped housing conditions were the main factor leading to their divorce (Nazdracheva, 2013). Cheating was indicated as the first issue where 24 percent of respondents attributed the downfall of their marriages to infidelity, 21 percent to poverty while 19 percent blamed the inability to compromise as the leading cause (Nazdracheva, 2013). In Kenya, 29 percent of married couples admit their marriages are headed for the rocks, while 31 percent say they are not sure whether their union is a happy one or not. More than half of the respondents reported serious conflicts in their marriages at

least once a month (Karanja, 2010). Marriage was designed to be an institution where couples share life and assist one another to go through the challenges of life. By marrying publicly, the couple is seeking the endorsement, and more importantly, the support of family, community, and friends in the union. This support is particularly critical in times of disagreement or difficulty. However, despite these public weddings more and more couples are seeking to get out of the marriage institution (Karanja, 2010). The church is a significant player in most Christian weddings and therefore has an obligation to keep the couples together.

Covey (1999) states, marriage is like the flight of an airplane. He notes that a pilot has a plan on his route long before he takes off. They have fully planed precisely where to pass in order to arrive at their destination in the shortest time possible. However, during the flight, wind, rain, turbulence, air traffic, human error, and other factors act upon the plane. Throughout the trip, there are slight deviations from the flight plan. He notes the pilot's strength lies in his ability to stick to the vision, the plan and the ability to get back on track. The church counseling programmes principal aim is to ensure that despite the many hiccups that occur in the institution of marriage, those in it can cope and move forward and eventually prevent a break-up. Narok county has a very low divorce rate compared to the more significant rate for Kenya. The 2014 report by the Kenya Bureau of statistics puts Narok divorce rate at 0.295%. However, it is important to note that the divorce rate in rural areas of Narok county and Narok town are significantly different with the latter having a much high rate. Rural Narok has a very high number of polygamous marriages with 69,619 persons in polygamous marriages (KNBS 2014). This might have contributed positively to low rates of divorce owing to the fact that there is limited interaction of the man with each wife and thus fewer chances of conflict. This was one of the pertinent issues that guided the research to be done in this county. The main reason why the research was focused in central division of Narok county is that there are more monogamous marriages with the urban setting than rural settings.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Factors Causing Conflicts in Marriages**

When marriage is young, couples always have something to talk about, and even when they do not, the silence is a comfortable one. When people get married, there is the exciting honeymoon stage. Many people make the mistake of assuming that life will always be like this. They forget that roses, though beautiful and a joy to smell and touch, come with thorns, which must be handled with care (Winnie, 2011). Many marriages end up on the rocky path, and when handled wrongly they end up breaking. People enter marriage when they have not been prepared well. Muriithi (2008) states that people enter marriages with the notion that they know everything that they need to know about their partners. They therefore fail to leave room for their partners to teach them or tell them about their specific needs and how they want those needs met. This one-sided approach often leads to conflict, as they are not open to new information that they learn about their partners whom they assumed they knew very well. In order to understand the extent of the problem, it is imperative to look in depth at some of the factors affecting the marriage institution. Some of the factors affecting marriage include, infidelity, financial problems, poor sex life, early marriage, stress, alcohol and drug abuse, and spouse abuse (Muriithi, 2008).

#### **2.1.1 Infidelity in marriage**

According to Popenoe (2002), trust is the cornerstone of a healthy deeply satisfying marriage. In a trusting relationship, partners are expected to be honest with each other. The couples' words and actions are not shadowed by deceit, and therefore they do not sacrifice a partner's needs for their own selfish gain. The greatest cause of loss of trust in marriage today is infidelity. Often, couples become stuck on the most obvious violation of trust, infidelity. This might cause them to overlook other problems in their marriage. When a couple's sexual life is unsatisfactory, it produces much stress in their relationship. Men who are averse to sex increase tension in the home and this tension is often followed by unkind and selfish expressions or conduct that can be disastrous to a marriage. In many cases, unfulfilled sex life leads to infidelity or divorce (Tim & La Haye, 2011). According to Emonyi (2006), a spouse who is devastated by a partner's lack of commitment, disinterest, immaturity, demands, violence, and abuse will be pressurized by these marital problems to seek a more accommodating sexual partner. Frequent disagreements between couples also usually lead to infidelity. When the act of seeking sexual satisfaction elsewhere is discovered by the other spouse, the result is always extremely devastating since the partner feels betrayed and can no longer trust the spouse. Matters have become worse with the advent of HIV and AIDS since the risk that goes with infidelity is now very high. Popenoe (2002), states that there are usually three reasons for marital infidelity. It can be a symptom of something wrong in the marriage which is not just about sex. It can be a result of two people growing and changing so much that they are no longer in love or compatible, or it can be the self-indulgence of one partner who feels he or she is entitled (Popenoe, 2002).

### **2.1.2 Financial Problems**

According to Emonyi (2006), financial strain or disagreement, misuse of family resources and other monetary issues may cause serious problems in marriage leading to divorce. The current burden of bringing up a family is proving an enormous financial and emotional task for many spouses, who sometimes may seek divorce to escape these responsibilities. The number of women gaining employment is also on the increase, and with women getting better-paying jobs, the idea of the traditional woman who sits in the kitchen is slowly fading. However, many men have refused to embrace this change as a positive one. More marriages are in crisis as men view the woman's superior financial power as a threat to his role as the head of the family. Divorce statistics have reached an all-time high as nuclear families split, and step families born of them struggle with divided loyalties, co-parenting, and the emotional wounds that accompany separation (Emonyi, 2006).

### **2.1.3 Early Marriage**

According to Emonyi (2006) physically and mentally immature spouses find the demands of marriage overwhelming because they are unprepared for the union. They usually blame each other when difficulties arise in marriage. Often such persons discover that they want to live the youthful life that they missed out on when they were young. Teenage marriage will more often than not end in divorce. Many young people enter into marriage due to unplanned pregnancies. This kind of marriage has, therefore, a poor foundation. The reasoning capacity of the couple which is too young and immature is also wanting. Rukwaro (2003), states that a person who is fueled by the desire to have sex sees marriage as a logical avenue. This causes people who are immature and incapable of having a healthy relationship to begin living as husband and wife. The fact that they came together simply for sex means that they are not prepared for other challenges that come with marriage and this may eventually lead to serious problems in the marital relationship.

### **2.1.4 Poor Sex Life**

Sex is an important aspect of marriage. Kimathi (2003) states that for a person to enjoy love-making, one need to know that sex in marriage is satisfying, beautiful and something to look forward to. Sex can also be fun. Having a healthy attitude is therefore important. There are many factors that can cause sexual problems in a marriage. This could be due to lack of interest on the part of one or both partners, lack of trust and even cultural factors. Cultural factors like female genital mutilation could lead to reduced sex urge on the part of the wife. Rukwaro (2003) states that some cultures that encourage clitoridectomy or genital mutilation, do it so that the girls' desire is limited and she can hence can maintain chastity and virginity. Such practices tend to deprive women of sexual enjoyment. When a woman has no interest in sex, the husband is bound to be frustrated and may seek sexual satisfaction outside the marriage. This can also lead to separation as the man may feel that a marriage without conjugal rights is of no importance. Sex is described as exciting and pleasurable, yet too much or too little of it in a marriage may lead to problems between the couple. Many times, one partner will, for some reason, want to withhold sex, probably as a means of getting back or punishing the other (Smith, 2012). Withholding sex can be just as bad as or maybe even worse than terrible sex. A partner will feel cheated and may resort to alternatives which can destroy a marriage.

Too much sex on the other hand can do the same damage. When two persons decide to get married, the topic of sex must be on the list of meaningful conversations. They should discuss their likes and dislikes and yes, the frequency. This does not say that the arrangements a couple agreed on initially have to remain the same throughout their lives, what it does is give an idea of a partner's comfort level (Smith, 2012). Rukwaro (2003) notes that Dyspareunia (painful intercourse) is another problem facing sexual relationships in marriage. Causes for dyspareunia can be both physical and psychological. Physical causes may be due to a woman having the two lips (Labia Majora and Labia Minora) not completely separated hence there is no single vaginal canal. This makes coitus very painful. Other physical causes may be infections like vaginitis, scarring during delivery, endometriosis or other sexually transmitted diseases. Psychological causes of dyspareunia may include intense fear or distaste for sexual relations.

### **2.1.5 Stress in Marriage**

Stress caused by issues within the family is also a major cause of marital problems. Boss (2002) who did extensive studies of family stress, concluded that many families in crisis are not sick families, but are simply facing a greater volume of stress than they or most other families, can handle. She states that families today are under more pressure than those of the past, which has caused many couples to separate if they don't know how to handle stress. When stress is poorly handled, partners vent their frustration on one another which often leads to violence and possible separation. Stress is often aggravated because one or both partners are unwilling to discuss an issue or simply do not create time for one another in order to discuss these issues. Modern families are too busy looking for money leading to less time for sharing. Often, such families find it a waste of time to sit

and discuss issues that might have easily been solved by talking. Unresolved issues will always lead to stress for one of the spouses or both.

### **2.1.6 Alcohol and Drug Abuse**

Laurer and Lauer (2000), state that alcohol abuse ranks high on the list of marriage stresses. Some experts have even called alcohol abuse the foremost national health problem. Alcohol abuse causes problems due to misuse of funds meant for family budget. Also, people who engage in too much drinking end up being extremely irresponsible and rarely meet their family obligations. Many people have been noted to have a heightened sense of self-importance which leads them to violence when their demands are not met. Alcohol abuse is the improper use of alcohol such that the consequences are detrimental to the user and the family. According to Caba (2013), alcohol abuse can wreak havoc on a relationship, and could ultimately lead to divorce. According to a recent study funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, a marriage is more likely to dissolve if only one spouse is a heavy drinker, as opposed to both. Researchers from the Buffalo Research Institute on Addictions (RIA) determined that married couples that drink heavily are just as likely to stay together as married couples that don't drink. This research provides solid evidence to bolster the commonplace notion that heavy drinking by one partner can lead to divorce. Dr. Kenneth Leonard, Director and lead author of the study, said in a statement. "Although some people might think that's a likely outcome, there was surprisingly little data to back up that claim until now."

### **2.1.7 Spousal Abuse**

The United States department of justice defines spouse abuse as including "all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence" that may be committed by a person who is a family member or a person that has been an intimate partner or spouse, irrespective of whether they lived together. Every married couple will eventually face one or two hurdles in the area of communication and when this happens a conflict will eventually arise. Conflicts happen when there is a clash of ideas and each person feels that their ideas are either not being appreciated or that they are being totally ignored (Muriithi, 2008). This is likely to lead to spouse abuse.

Spouse abuse is not just the issue of a man beating a wife or vice versa. It can be viewed in two ways. First abuse is more than physical. Verbal abuse can be as damaging as physical abuse. Researchers define verbal attacks as including such things as insults, swearing at and threatening the partner. Women are likely to suffer greater physical injury from men than vice versa. Women also suffer more emotionally than men do from abuse. It is important to note that emotional abuse can be as damaging as physical abuse. Meyer (2014) states that emotional abuse is used to control, degrade, humiliate and punish a spouse. While emotional abuse differs from physical abuse, the end result is the same. A spouse becomes fearful of their partner and begins to change their behavior to keep their partner happy. The happier their partner, the less domestic violence the spouse has to suffer. By the time a spouse identifies the true problem they have begun to feel as if they are crazy. They will doubt themselves and their sense of reality, because emotional abuse is meant to cause the victim to question their every thought and behavior. some tactics that an emotional abuser will use include: isolating a spouse from friends and family, discouraging any independent activities such as work; taking classes or activities with friends, accusing their spouse of being unfaithful if she talks to a member of the opposite sex, expect her/him to partake in sexual activities that he/she is uncomfortable with to prove their love, withholding sex as punishment instead of communicating openly their displeasure, constantly criticising the spouses weight, their looks, and the way they dress, and if the spouse does not give into the control they are threatened, harassed, punished and intimidated by the abuser.

### **2.1.8 Divorce and Separation**

Divorce is the termination of a marriage or marital union, the cancelling and/or reorganizing of the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage, thus dissolving the bonds of matrimony between a married couple under the rule of law of the particular country and/or state. Divorce laws vary considerably around the world. In most countries, divorce requires the sanction of a court or other authority in a legal process, which may involve issues of alimony (spousal support), child custody, child visitation / access, parenting time, child support, distribution of property, and division of debt. In most countries, monogamy is required by law, so divorce allows each former partner to marry another person. Where polygyny is legal but polyandry is not, divorce allows the woman to marry a new husband.

Divorce should not be confused with annulment which declares the marriage null and void, legal separation or de jure separation (a legal process by which a married couple may formalize a de facto separation while remaining legally married), or with de facto separation (a process where the spouses informally stop cohabiting). The reasons for divorce vary, from sexual incompatibility or lack of independence for one or both spouses, to a personality clash (Wade, 2008). Divorce is now so easy to obtain and so accepted socially that

many embrace it as the obvious way out whenever a marriage hits turbulence. At the first hint of trouble, partners sometimes head for the divorce court without waiting to see if there is another way round their marital problem (Hession, 2006). More and more marriages are in trouble because the couples do not want to travel the hard road of looking for a solution. They want a quick fix to the situation and divorce often offers the quickest fix. Today we have more sociology, more psychology, and more sex therapy than we have ever had before. We have more books, magazines, articles and seminars, and still people are getting divorced at incredible rates (Sherman, 2002). Despite the mountains of information available, people do not put it into use to try and save their troubled marriages. The number of couples seeking divorce or simple separation is on the rise.

### **III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

To establish the causes of marital conflicts in relationships among Christians in the Central Division of Narok County.

### **IV. RESEARCH QUESTION**

What are the causes of these marital conflicts in relationships among Christians in the Central Division of Narok County?

### **V. METHODOLOGY**

The study used the descriptive survey research design with a sample size of 81 Christians and 10 pastors. The Christians from each church station surveyed, had attended counselling at least once on issues related to marital challenges. Purposive and stratified sampling methods were used to select 10 churches. Couples and counsellors from the 10 churches selected were involved in filing questionnaires and responding to interview questions. During piloting, questionnaires were administered to 10 respondents in the similar target population. The calculated Cronbach alpha from the pilot study was 0.80 for the pastors' questionnaire and 0.78 for the married couples, which is within the accepted reliability limit of at least 0.7. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17.0 for Windows was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics which included means and percentages were used to present the findings.

### **VI. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### **Conflicts in Marital Conflicts**

In the second objective of this research the, researcher sought to establish the causes of conflicts in marital relationships. The marriage institution has existed since the times of Adam and Eve. Kibera (2012) states that Marriage is a serious affair that is threatened today by a widening array of conflicts. It requires constant work to keep the fire of love not only alive but burning; so long as there is love there is strength. The study sought to establish the reasons as to conflicts occur in a marriage. Table 1 outlines some of the causes of marital problems according to the respondents.

**Table 1:** Causes of marital problems in Narok Central Division according to the couples.

<b>Cause</b>	<b>Frequency (f)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Money	20	29.1
infidelity	17	25.5
Alcohol-drugs	17	25.5
Domestic violence	12	18.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>100.0</b>

According to the respondents, money issues are the most significant cause of conflicts in marriage, which 30% identified. This concurs with findings in the United States, that no matter how much a person makes, fights about money are the most significant contributors to divorce (Janer 2013). The next 25.5% of the respondents noted infidelity while a similar number agreed that alcohol and drugs as the contributor. Issues brought about by relatives were stated as the least cause at 1.8% while domestic violence reflected on 12% of the respondents as the main cause of conflict.

Infidelity has the second highest ranking as the main cause of conflict in marriage because it shows betrayal of trust. Once trust is lost it is very hard to regain. Sexual intimacy is a major component in keeping the marriage together. Once this is interfered with by introduction of a third party in the circuit, then the circle of trust that exists between the couples is broken. This leads to unsatisfied sex life in both or one of the spouses. In the US, a national survey found that the most common reason given for divorce by 73% of the respondents was lack of commitment. Other significant reasons included too much arguing (56%), infidelity (55%), marrying too young (46%), unrealistic expectations (45%), lack of equality in the relationship (44%), lack of preparation for

marriage (41%), and abuse (29%). (People often give more than one reason, so the percentages add up to more than 100%). As noted in Table 12, physical or emotional abuse and alcohol or drug abuse, and financial mismanagement, are among the top negative behavioural reasons identified by women who encountered conflicts in marriage (Enright, 2004). In fact, Ostermann, Sloan and Taylor (2005) confirmed that a discrepancy in the amount of alcohol spouses consume is associated with problems between spouses. When the presence of negative behaviour is coupled with the absence of positive behavior, the combination can be devastating, even causing separation or divorce, such as reflected by the 17.9% divorce rate in Narok Central during this study (Table 5). Similar factors have also been observed to cause marital conflicts on most parts of Kenya (Onyango, 2013; Mobegi, Mokoro and Kears, 2016) and Africa (John, 2010).

Despite the statistics above, it is still possible to fix many of these problems and lower the divorce rate in Narok Central Division. Couples can learn how to avoid destructive arguments and solve their differences better; they can create more realistic expectations for their marriage; and they can create more equal partnerships (Doherty, 2011). Tim and La Haye (2011), states that when a couple's sexual love life is unsatisfactory it produces much stress in their relationship. Men who are disinterested and women who are averse to sex increase the tension in the home; this tension is often followed by unkind and selfish expressions or conducts that can be disastrous to a marriage. In many cases, unfulfilled sex life can lead to infidelity or divorce. In this context we can safely conclude that infidelity is often caused by unfulfilled sex life.

Alcohol and drug abuse were also noted as a major cause of conflict in many marriages. Excessive drinking of alcohol may be a way of trying to run away from the reality of another problem either in the marriage or within the family environment or place of work. Drug use and alcohol not only leads to financial difficulties but often to violence when a spouse seeks answers on why the other has been drinking. In the study, most of those that indicated alcohol as the main problem are the young people. This means the young due to their limited experience in marriage, tend to take to drinking more often when problems arise in marriage instead of facing the problem.

In Table 2, the main causes of conflict in the marriage according to the pastors in Narok Central Division of Narok County are given.

**Table 2:** Causes of marital conflicts according to pastors in Narok Central Division.

<b>Cause</b>	<b>Frequency (f)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Infidelity	10	9.8
Domestic violence	25	24.5
Money issues	31	30.4
Alcohol-drugs	17	16.7
Issues caused by relatives/friends	19	18.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.0</b>

According to pastors, money issue at 30.4%, causes the most significant problems in marriages. This also agrees with the opinions of couples in marriage as the number one cause of conflict in the marriage. However, on the second issue, the pastors indicate domestic violence as the number two most significant problem in marriage at 24.5%. This could be because the spouse that reports the problem just state they were beaten by the spouse but the pastors failed to establish the reason for the fights. The pastors indicate third aspect at 18.6% as being issues from relatives which according to Christians is the least of their worries. The possible explanation for this different view is the possibility that the pastors were not sincere since they did not want to show their congregation as falling in sin or having major problems like infidelity and drugs which are usually demonized by most churches.

Most pastors were very careful in the questions that they answered claiming they raised ethical issues in counseling and protection of the privacy of clients. The researcher can safely state that lack of communication, money issues, domestic violence, and alcohol had a strong appearance in the response of both the married couples and the pastors. Marriages are often in conflict when couples refuse to agree on certain aspects of their relationship. Breakdown in communication or deviation from the norms that govern the institution of marriage frequently birth conflicts in any relationship. Some marriages experience conflicts from the onset, particularly those relationships started unintentionally by factors such as unwanted pregnancy, cohabitation, financial constraints or value differences (Knox and Schacht, 2010).

Generally, several researchers have identified the characteristics of marriages most likely to encounter frequent conflicts (Thompson 2008; Muriithi, 2008; Amato and Hohmann-Marriott 2007; Clarke-Stewart and Brentano, 2006). Among the top ten more significant associations include: courting less than two years, having little in common, early marrying at age 17 and younger, differing in race, education, religion, social class, age, values, and libido, infidelity, having a cohabitation history, having been previously married, having no children

or female children only, having limited education, and living in an urban residence causing more anonymity and less social control in urban environment. Some of these critical parameters were also evident in this study. Muriithi (2008) states that the issue of pre-marital counseling should be considered more seriously. The church should come up with new ways to attract young couples to seek pastoral pre-marital counseling. Pre-marital counseling prepares couples to effectively handle turbulences in the marriage. It enables them to realize although they are in love, conflicts are bound to occur since they are two completely different people with different approaches to life and emerging issues.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that financial problems, early marriages, alcohol, and drug abuse were the main causes of conflict in marriages in Central division of Narok County..

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that is need for churches in the Central Division of Narok County to step up teachings on moral values to handle infidelity and money matters which are affecting most of the Christians.

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