

Social Dimensions of Marital Conflict in Kenya

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Abstract

Data from FIDA (Kenya), Maendeleo ya Wanaume, Faith Based Organizations (FBO), Non Government Organizations (NGO) and media reports suggest that destructive marital conflict is on the increase in Kenya. This paper presents the findings of a study into marital conflict in Kenya using Anglican Diocese of Maseno North as a case study. Primary data for the study were collected through interviewing and a focus group discussion and this was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Destructive Marital conflict in the study area was perceived to be related to a wide array of factors which were grouped into five interrelated categories. These are: socio-economic factors, socio-cultural factors, personal attribute of spouse, domestic family life factors and factors of structural inequality. Out of these groups the most important factors identified by respondents included the following: low income (money); disagreement over roles and responsibilities of spouses, irresponsible alcohol drinking, gambling and pilfering; maltreatment of children, step children and other relatives; interference from in-laws and other kin. The data indicated that psychological battering was common and employed by both spouses. About a third of females indicated they had been victims of physical abuse yet kept their abusive relationship because they were constrained by a network of social, cultural and economic barriers. Respondents' perception of gender relations in society informed their relationship to the opposite sex and this they carried over into marriage to influence the marital conflict behaviour of spouses.

Keywords: Social Dimensions, Marital, Conflict

Introduction

Africa continues to be devoured by various types of conflicts (Adedeji, 1999). According to Deng, 20% of the sub-Saharan population lives in countries that are at war with themselves (Deng, 2005). The continent now accounts for more war-related deaths than the rest of the world combined as a result of poor leadership (Human Security Report, 2005). Leadership has challenged many people from virtually all walks of life and organizations including churches because of the complex nature of situations that leaders have to handle (White *et al*, 1964). This corroborates the findings which established that the amount of conflict and by implication peace in any organization is majorly determined by the influence of its leadership (Engle *et al*, 1986).

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There has been contention in the last three decades that families are in destructive conflict (UN, 1989). This has resulted in conflict management experts in family relationship meetings at the national and international levels (De graft Johnson, 1994). The nature of family conflict can be grouped into two fold (Parillo *et. al.*, 1989). The first is the product of a shift from the trustee family in which absolute control resided in the patriarch, to the atomistic family in which emphasis is placed on the protection of the rights of family members; rights which are protected by the state apparatus and seen to take precedence over the maintenance of the family unit. The second source of alleged family conflict is the loss of family functions which have been taken over by other alternative institutions and therefore no longer offer psychological advantages for its members (FIDA Kenya, 2011).

A number of issues have been raised in connection with marital conflict. The first concerns the state of relations in marriage (Greenstein, 1995). In particular, marital relations have been discussed in terms of stability, satisfaction and adjustment. Ingredients for stability and satisfaction have been identified as love, sexual fidelity and spousal communication (Benokraitis, 1996); age at marriage, religious and cultural homogamy or heterogamy as well as premarital cohabitation (Wright *et. al.*, 1994).

The latter also stress life cycle transitions, health changes, influence of children and other family members and alcohol use as impacting on marital relations. Marriage and family life are very important in the lives of all people. In Kenya, most individuals are expected to marry and procreate. Unions of all kinds between men and women are common for the purposes of founding families of procreation. These include; religious, cohabitation and customary. Whatever the nature of the union, spouses experience conflict from time to time (Ilumoka, 2010).

This article examines the nature and scope of marital conflict and the extent to which it has been influenced by societal perceptions of gender inequality in the Anglican Diocese of Maseno North.

Marital Conflict

Marital adjustment connotes the submerging of spousal interests for the common good of the marriage. Spouses can manage conflict so that they feel satisfied with one another and with their marriage (Scanzoni & Scanzoni, 1988). Marital adjustment assumes that marital couples complement one another and ignore gender inequalities (Strong *et. al.*, 1983).

Empowered women through employment are seen as a source of marital conflict. This is seen either to upset the traditional expectations in marriage while decreasing a husband's marital satisfaction. Economic conflict in the form of financial difficulties, unemployment, and poverty tend to increase marital instability (Greenstein, 1995).

Domestic violence in Kenya tends to increase in the months when children are going or joining Schools, Middle Colleges and Universities this is due to the high costs of fees which leave the couples with less to spend. Another cause of marital conflict has been the role of significant others more especially in-laws and other extended members for example the case of the late Wambui Otieno and the Umira Kager clan on the burial place of the late S.M.Otieno (Ojwang and Mugambi, 1989). Depending on the level of interference that a husband allows, it is noted that mother in-laws have the potential to make or break marriages (Machera, 2000).

The impact of marital conflict are physical, psychological and social but more often effect come as a combination of the three. The physical abuse as those experienced by wives only and the effects are seen in the form of bruises, teeth bites, scars and swollen faces. Psychologically women worry over divorce and disappointment, they are bitter, helpless, frustrated as well devastated (Razavi, 2010). As a result of their experiences, such women feel alienated within their marriages.

While women socially feel embarrassed and would want to sever social ties with both family and friends, husbands determine to establish their superiority sometimes by marrying another woman (Atinmo, 2000).

Theoretical Framework

Conflicts are not only a major challenge but also a source of stress to the parties, groups or communities locked in the disagreement or conflict (Ross, 2007). On this basis, a theory widely used by American communities in search for solutions to a wide range of stressful community conflicts, problems or challenges will be adopted for this study. This theory was developed in America in 1966 by Lazarus and hence named as the “Lazarus stress theory.”

Lazarus Stress Theory

Psychological stress defines an unfavorable person-environment relationship; its essence is process and change rather than structure. We alter our circumstances, or how they are interpreted, to make them appear more favorable an effort called coping (Lazarus 1966; Lazarus *et al*, 1974). Traditional approaches to coping had emphasized traits that is, stable properties of personality. But coping as *process is a person’s* ongoing efforts in thought and action to manage specific demands appraised as taxing or overwhelming (Lazarus, 1966 & 1981; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Lazarus & Launier, 1978). Although stable coping styles do exist and are important, coping is highly *contextual*, since to be effective it must change over time and across different stressful conditions (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Coping affects subsequent stress reactions in that, if a person’s relationship with the environment is changed by coping actions the conditions of psychological stress may also be changed for the better. A number of replicable findings about coping can be deduced from the work of Lazarus, which was adopted in our work.

Coping is complex, and people use most of the basic strategies in coping in every stressful encounter; Coping depends on appraisal of whether anything can be done to change the situation. If appraisal says something can be done, problem-focused coping predominates; if appraisal says nothing can be done, emotion-focused coping predominates; Coping strategies change from one stage of a complex stressful encounter to another; The utility of any coping pattern varies with the type of stressful encounter, the type of personality stressed. Therefore, the operation of the Lazarus Stress Theory is such that a community faced with a particular challenge for example a conflict tries out or tests different alternative ways to solve or address it. From the many tried or tested alternatives, the community finally adapts and adopts the best alternative as the solution to the conflict, challenge or problem. This can be summarized diagrammatically as indicated below

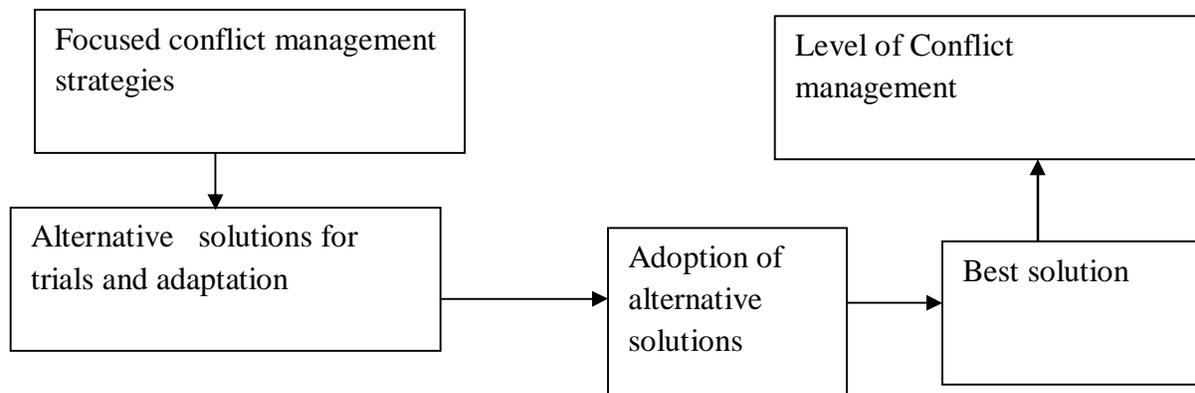


Figure 1: Lazarus stress management theory (1966).

Based on Lazarus stress theory, conflict between the leadership and the congregation in the Anglican Diocese of Maseno North is the challenge whose cause was to be established. Since scholars are in agreement that there is no one particular leadership style that can be used in managing all types of conflict, Lazarus Theory (1966) was deemed appropriate because the conflicts had different causes in parishes and therefore, several different styles had to be tried to come out with the one yielding acceptable results. Therefore, this research sought to examine the nature of marital conflicts experienced among the Christians within Maseno North Diocese.

Social exchange, symbolic interaction and feminist are three theories that deal with marital relations and have an ultimate goal of examining the satisfaction of spouses as well as the stability of the marriage. Social exchange views the marital union as rewarding since its benefits outweigh any perceived costs. The most solid marriage is perceived to be one in which both spouses experience what has been termed maximum joint profit (Scanzoni and Scanzoni, 1988).

Symbolic Interaction explains marital interaction from the viewpoint of the actors involved. Spouses perceive events in marriage from two different and often contradictory realities, each spouse perceiving facts and situations according to his or her own needs, values, attitudes and beliefs (Glenn, 1987).

Feminist rethinking has concentrated on factors that generate conflicts and struggle within families (Scanzoni & Scanzoni, 1988). With differences in power and conflicting interests either between spouses or between spouses and children, gender and generational conflict arise (Glenn, 1987). Such power differences have been embedded in an ideology and system of patriarchy (Ferree, 1983) which determines through various institutions, women's role and subordinate position in society relative to men. Patriarchy is seen as a system of male domination or social stratification in which rewards and opportunities are handed out according to systematic structures and expectations which are designed to benefit men who hold power and who maintain the status quo. It is therefore a form of social exploitation. Patriarchy is also a form of social ideology of values and norms often embedded in law, religious beliefs, political and economic practices which support the perpetuation of gender discrimination against women.

Research Design

This study utilized a case study research design. This design was appropriate for the study because it consisted of a detailed and intensive analysis of a single case, ACK Maseno North Diocese. This design was appropriate for the study because the nature of data required was supposed to be collected in only one round. A case study research design is appropriate for studies where the nature of data required does not need time series over several rounds of data collection (Kothari, 2007; Casely and Kumar, 1988). A case study research design is applicable where and when a researcher uses different categories of personnel at ago (Kasomo, 2007). This is applicable in this study because it covered married men and women at different levels or hierarchical positions within the Anglican Diocese of Maseno North.

Location of the Study Area

The study was undertaken in Anglican Diocese of Maseno North which is one of the largest Anglican dioceses in Western Kenya. Administratively, it cuts across Six Counties namely; Kisumu, Siaya, Vihiga, Kakamega, Bungoma and Uasin Gishu (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). The inhabitants are agro-pastoralists and the crops they grow include; kale, maize, cassava, tea, coffee, and sugarcane (Kenya Census 2009, <http://www.cbs.go.ke>) and the livestock are cattle, goats and sheep (Sinaiko, 1995).

Sampling

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to obtain the sample of respondents. The study area was clustered into thirteen zones out of which eight were randomly selected. Fifteen respondents were purposefully selected from each of the eight zones to give a total sample size of 120. Respondents were purposefully picked from occupational groups common to the study area. These are farmers, housewife, professionals, self employed, clerical and administrative groups. Out of the 120 targeted, 107 or 90% were interviewed. The findings are in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents by Occupation and Gender

Occupation	Female	Male	TOTAL
Farmers	13	05	18
Housewife	09	00	09
Professional	13	15	28
Self employed	22	07	29
Clerical	03	07	10
Administrative	05	08	13
TOTAL	65	42	107

Data Collection Instruments

Primary Data

The research used both quantitative and qualitative research methods and because of the nature of the research topic, structured questionnaires and *in-depth interview guide* developed by the researcher was used to collect primary data.

Focus Group Discussion

One focus group discussion was held. It consisted of ten (15) persons (9 females and 6 men) who were identified either as victims or aggressors. They were contacted through respondents to the questionnaire. The group shared personal experiences, and was probed for the underlying cause of conflict and battery in marriage.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires as tools of research are widely used to get information about current conditions and practices to make inquiries concerning attitudes, behaviors and opinion (Lovell & Schmidt, 1988). Married men and women were administered with questionnaires with closed ended questions to obtain both personal and specific information (Philip, 2003). The structured questionnaires are suitable because, they are easier to administer because each question item is followed by alternative response for choice. They are also economical in terms of time and money and are in a form that is easily analyzable (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2002).

The questionnaire consisted of four sections. Section one solicited information on the background of the respondents. This involved their age, sex, marital status, ethnic background, religion, highest level of formal education attained and occupation. Section two elicited information on marital conflict sources as well as the incidence and prevalence of battery. It also covered aspects of respondent's culture that were either assumed to promote marital success or encourage discord and battery.

In Section three, respondents were asked for their perceptions of gender relations in society and factors that engender those perceptions. Section four sought information on the role of spouses and society in minimizing marital conflict.

In-Depth Interview Guide

Interview method is often superior compared to other research tools, certain confidential information can be divulged that would otherwise have escaped the researcher and a follow up can be traced on un-clear issues (Koul, 1993). The in-depth interview guide was meant to collect data from married men and women about causes of marital conflict. The five groups were sampled and each allotted with one in-depth interview guide. In-depth interview guides, are designed to discover underlying motives, feelings and desires of the subjects. The guide is useful because it explores the needs, desire and feelings of the respondents (Kothari, 2004). In addition, it is used to supplement the questionnaires used in the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010). Ten people were purposefully selected for the in-depth interviews. These were two male and four female Anglican priests, two professional marriage counselor and two elders. These respondents were tasked to explain some of the responses collected from the field.

Secondary Data

The research was formed through the analysis of secondary data such as books, journals, news papers, Conference proceedings, Government/corporate reports, theses, dissertations, Internet and magazines were critically analyzed. Secondary analysis is analysis of data by researchers who will probably not have been involved in the collection of data (Bryman, 2004).

It is concerned with analyzing already collected data within another study (Sarantakos, 2005). Secondary analysis allows for the examination of existing data yet can produce new and more detailed information, including the emergence of conclusions that differ to those in the original report (*Ibid*, 297). The advantages of secondary analysis is that it is of high quality data, an additional strength of secondary analysis is quick and easy to access materials such as documentary research is largely free of the restrictions (Bryman, 2001). Difficulties faced in primary data research, the researchers do not encounter rejection, non-response, bias, or any other respondent-based problems (Sarantakos, 2005). The data collected was in relation to objective of the research.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The respondents comprised 65 females and 42 males with a mean age of 41 years and the modal age falling within the 40-49 age group. Ninety five respondents (88.8%) were married, 7 (6.5%) were single and 5 (4.7%) separated. Respondents from the study area were mainly Luyha ethnic tribe represented 79% of the sample. The sample was predominantly Christian (97%). In terms of education, 38% had form four certificate; 45% had obtained the middle college certificate and 17% attained university education.

Results

Data were analyzed based on gender and respondents' perspectives of sources of conflict in marriage, attitude towards spouse battering, constraints to leaving abusive relationships and perceptions of gender relations. Respondents were asked whether they approved the use of physical violence by either spouse in an effort to resolve conflict in marriages. Their responses showed no significant differences which implied that the spouses respondents disapproved the use of force. Again they were asked to check from a list of conflict sources.

The responses showed there existed significant differences in the sources of marital conflict reported by male and female respondents. This means that male and female respondents prioritized conflict sources differently such that what is regarded as a conflict source for one is not regarded as such for the other.

Respondents were also asked whether they knew some abused wives who still kept their marriages and reasons for their continued stay in the abusive relationships. They enumerated a number of constraints such abused women face which made it impossible for them to leave. A test of significance revealed that there was no significant difference existing in the responses given implying that the spouses perceived the same set of constraints to prevent women in abusive marriages from leaving. Finally, there was no significant difference in how spouses' respondents perceived gender relations in the society.

Causes of Marital Conflict

A total of 89% of respondents were aware of marriages which had conflicts. About 81% of these respondents claimed they knew spouses who still stayed within abusive marriages. Five main categories of marital conflict sources were identified. These were conflict based on personal attributes of spouses, domestic family life, socio-cultural practices, socio-economic and structural factors. The last category of factors was believed by respondents to influence how people relate to the opposite sex and this attitude is carried over into marriage. Tables 2,3,4,5, and 6 present the respondents reported causes of marital conflict. Male respondents mostly cited personal attributes of spouses as the main source of conflict in marriage, and female respondents cited issues in domestic family life and socio-cultural factors. The causes of conflict in marriage according to the respondents in descending order are presented in Table 2

Table 2: Spouses Characteristic as Conflict Source by Gender

Individual Characteristics	Female	% of female respondent n = 65	Male	% of male respondent n = 42	Total
Adultery	21	32	27	64	48
Annoying Characteristics of Spouses- lack of personal hygiene, stealing, gambling drunkenness	45	69	31	74	76
Wrong acquaintances	19	29	14	33	33
Living beyond means of spouse	09	14	15	36	24

Annoying Characteristics of Spouses scored 76(89%) by all respondents and was the highest source of conflict in the family. Seventy four 31(74%) of male and 45(69%) of female respondents confirmed this. In this category, respondents cited behaviour such as lack of personal hygiene, stealing, gambling and drunkenness. Respondents' concurred that women by their socialization were not to engage in most of the habits numerated above. Respondents observed that some of these behaviours dissipated scarce family resources.

Table 3: Socio-cultural Source of Conflict by Gender

Socio-cultural Conflict Source	Female	% of female respondent n = 65	Male	% of male respondent n = 42	Total
Conflict by in-laws and other relatives	53	82	21	50	74
Co-wife rivalry	27	42	09	21	36
Cultural heterogamy of spouses	26	40	07	17	33
High education of female spouse	07	11	03	07	10
Religious fundamentalism	00	14	04	10	13

Conflict caused by in-laws, other relatives and the extended family was blamed by 74 (69%) respondents for causing discord between spouses. 53 (82 %) female respondents than 21 (50 %) male respondents affirmed this. According to respondents, in-laws from the man's side tend to interfere with decision making and dictate how households should be run, the number of children spouses should have and what property should or should not be acquired. When a man of means does not share his wealth with family members, they may interfere in his marriage and blame their daughter-in-law for their son or brother irresponsibility. This is so because within the Luyha community, better off members are expected to share the benefits of their education by taking care of economically disadvantaged relatives; it is argued that the successes of any family member have been made possible through the investment of other family members.

Table 4: Domestic Family Life as Conflict Source by each Gender

Indicators of unstable family	Female	% of female respondent n = 65	Male	% of male respondent n = 42	Total
Spouses roles in marriage	23	35	14	33	35
Inadequate house budget	40	62	24	57	64
Treatment of nuclear and extended family members	49	75	20	48	69
Sex and reproduction	26	40	19	45	45
Decision making on marital issues	17	26	12	29	29

Uncivilized treatment of nuclear and extended family members was cited by 69(64%) of respondents. More females 49(75%) than male respondents 20(48%) identified this as a problem within marriage. Respondents observed that spouses may object to their children being disciplined by their partners. In the case of step children, the source of conflict was identified to center on the kind of disciplinary action a step parent takes against them. It was evident that stepchildren embark on petty rivalries with their stepparents on behalf of their own biological parents. Wives complained bitterly about husbands' comparative goodwill shown towards their relations and children.

Inadequate house budget was cited by 64 respondents as a source of domestic conflict. Sixty two per cent 40(62%) of female versus 24(57%) of male respondents identified this as a source of conflict. Wives desire to live beyond their means and attributed their demand on the high cost of living while husbands blamed their inability to give more on the low income and commitments such as remittances to extended family members.

Conflict over discharging Spouses roles in marriage cited by 35(33%) of respondents. This comprised 23(35%) of female and 14(33%) of male subjects. Comparatively, there was not much difference in the proportions of males and females who identified this variable as a source of conflict in marriage. Traditional norm of men as providers and women as home care takers are deeply rooted in the social consciousness. Hence respondents observed that traditionally husbands are expected to provide adequate house budget for basic needs. Respondents observed that while there is expectation by husbands for support from income earning wives, on the other hand, wives also expect husbands to be involved in household activities. These expectations are seen by respondents to challenge traditional beliefs about responsibility for family and housework and certainly contribute to marital conflict.

Adultery on the part of either spouse was identified by 48(45%) respondents to cause marital conflict. According to respondents, adultery results into mistrust which leads to most marriages being incompatible. Respondents were in agreement that adultery was one of the ways in which family limited resources are wasted. Husbands got by their wives in extramarital affairs, verbally and physically assaulted their wives. But when it was the wives were found to have extramarital sexual relations, they would be physically assaulted and at times be chased from the matrimonial home. Comparatively, more male respondents 27(64%) than female respondents 21(32%) viewed adultery as a source of conflict within marriage. It is plausible that most female have accepted the cultural dictates of polygyny and thus do not out rightly condemn it.

Forms of Marital Violence

37% female respondents reported themselves as victims of marital violence. No male respondent owned up as a victim although respondents generally agreed that male victims also existed (FIDA Kenya, 2011). There was consensus that acts such as slapping, kicking and hitting of a spouse constituted violence. There was however doubts as to whether forced marital sex which some claimed to be husband's right in marriage, constituted sexual violence. 93% of respondents indicated that they had revenged against acts of their partners to 'discipline' them, but failed to see these disciplinary acts as forms of psychological punishment in marriage. These include such acts as locking them out, communication breakdown, secretly monitoring the movement of the other spouse, withdrawing essential services like cooking, laundry and sexual relations.

Acts of violence in conflict situations revealed that they are sometimes triggered by wives in order to claim compensation during customary arbitration and they were also triggered to demonstrate to society a wife is loved by her husband. Whatever the source of conflict, 87 per cent of respondents disapproved the use of destructive conflict and abuse in marriage. Of the 9 per cent who approve of the use of violence in relationships, high sentiments were displayed on the issue with respondents citing factors such as laziness, late serving of meals and dissatisfaction with sex as some of the grounds for beating ones wife.

Table 5: Socioeconomic Factors as a Conflict Source by Gender

Socioeconomic conflict source	Female	% of female respondent n = 65	Male	% of male respondent n = 42	Total
Unemployment of male spouse	17	26	09	21	26
Unemployment of female spouse	07	11	03	07	10
High income status of female spouse	06	09	02	05	08

Socio-economic implication of marital violence is the fact that socio -cultural definitions tend to distort the levels of marital violence in this study. It is very probable that a number of respondents did not concede to being victims or aggressors since for such people certain acts of violence are to be expected in marriage and therefore normal.

One of the findings is that victims of abuse within marriages appeared trapped and therefore could not escape for various reasons. Such reasons include; children in marriage. The primary concern of disenchanted wives is that as soon as they leave the relationship, one of two things could happen. Either child maintenance would be stopped if they leave with their children, or a new wife would treat them badly if they are left behind. Second, there is the fear of a remarriage; or if the present marriage is not the first attempt, there is the desire to see it work at whatever cost. Other reasons cited have been a lack of desire to break marriage vows, economic dependency on husbands, acquisition of joint property and extended family intervention.

Table 6: Sources of Marital Conflict by Respondents

SOURCES OF CONFLICT	FEMALE	MALE
Personal Attributes of Spouse	98	83
Domestic Family Life	103	75
Socio-cultural Practices	87	24
Socio-economic Factors	31	16

Gender-relations and Marriage

The analysis of respondents' perception of gender relations in society revealed interplay of two issues. The first relates to respondents' perception of the daily occurrences in their lives and the second deals with their perceptions of what ought to be practiced as culturally defined. Arguments on perceptions of gender equality centered mainly on Christian religious teachings as well as daily observances.

These two factors, together with aspects of Kenyan culture, the nature of the educational system and religious teachings were also given as accounting for unequal gender relations in society.

Respondents reported their experiences of having been socialized as children to accept the headship and control of the man of the household. They were either given preferential treatment as males or discriminated against as female in the areas of housework and education. Female respondents indicated that as children they were socialized in family matters, how to be of service to the family and not to count the cost. The male dominated nature of the Luyha culture was also cited. References were made to the fact that folktales, folksongs, traditional or highlife music, proverbs values and practices either tend to belittle, devalue or marginalize females while holding males in high esteem. Finally, the nature of the educational system before the current reforms was blamed for doing a lot of disservice to females as education tended to entrench gender discrimination through reading material and choice of subjects.

Together, these were seen to have helped to instill feelings of superiority and inferiority in males and females respectively, feelings which have been carried over into marriage. Husbands for instance are seen to invoke tradition or religion to justify their expectation of and demands for subservient or obedient behaviour from wives, while wives insist that times have changed to the extent that the modern wife should not be expected to play second fiddle to their partners.

Discussion of Study Findings

Marital conflict is an issue confronting spouses in the Anglican Diocese of Maseno North. There is a clear indication that spouses failed to subsume their rights and interests for the common good of the marital relationship. Spouses employed both physical and psychological forms of violence to resolve problems. Whilst husbands used physical violence as a show of their masculinity and power, wives mainly engaged in psychological abuse.

Traditional stereotypes of men as providers and women as primary care givers are deeply rooted in the social consciousness. Hence expectations of husbands to be the sole sponsors of household expenditure have been used by wives as a yardstick to measure the performance of husbands. This supports Glenn's (1987) position that marital discord grows out of differences in socialization of spouses. Besides, the fact that wives expect husbands to help with childcare and domestic chores because they now find themselves in paid employment raises questions about responsibility for family and housework. These are expectations that challenge traditional role expectations and greatly have contributed to conflict in marriages (Scanzoni, 1987).

Gender relationships; instill feelings of superiority and inferiority in marriage to create discord and conflict. Thus husbands can take unilateral decisions on behalf of their families and physically 'punish' their wives if the latter complain. Gender ideologies and relations may well be seen as the foundation upon which social relations and by extension marital relations are constructed (FIDA Kenya, 2011).

Conclusions

Traditional values and cultural practices have a great impact on marital discord within the study area. Perceptions of gender inequality in social life generally have been carried over into marriage such that husbands assume more power over wives in almost every aspect of marriage. Almost all spouses irrespective of gender go through some form of psychological abuse but it is only wives who are physically abused in conflict situations. Finally, spouses find it difficult to quit their conflict riddled marriages because there are concrete reasons that prevent them from leaving.

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