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Church Divorce Reduction Dynamics: A Case of the Anglican Church, Siaya County, Kenya

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Abstract:

Divorce is a critical matter that affects society today including the church membership, particularly the Anglican Church members in Bondo Siaya County. This happens notwithstanding the church's teaching and policies on marriage as a permanent union. This necessitated the study on church divorce reduction dynamics that was carried out with a sample size of 450 respondents. The study was anchored on the functional theory of religion by Emile Durkheim, which helps to look at the role of the church in enhancing marital stability, and critical theory, which critically relooked, and church reduction divorce dynamics. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect data that was later analyzed using content and thematic analysis. The study advocated for the stability of marriage and family union founded upon Christian values and principles. The findings revealed that the church was averagely involved in two dynamic areas; conducting pastoral and family ministry marital programs and comprehensive community marriage services and pre-marital and post-marital counseling to Christian families and lowly involved in the organization of marital seminars, training, and workshops and initiating marriage fellowships and provision of marriage and family journals newsletters and other reading materials to the couples and Christian community.

Keywords: Divorce, church reduction dynamics, pre- marital counselling, marital education, pastoral family ministry

1. Background Information

The family is the foundation of society, and the family's health determines society's well-being. World Health Organization (2010) also emphasized the importance of the family by stating that the family is an important source of support and security as it provides for a safe and stable environment that nurtures the growth and development of each member throughout different stages of life from birth to old age. The sentiments of WHO are also reinforced by Fagan and Churchill (2012), who stated that the family occupies a pivotal place in every society, forming the foundation of the state, nation, continent, and the world at large. Ham (2015) holds a precaution position by stating that if the family can be destroyed, the Christian fabric in society will ultimately unravel hence the need for the church to strongly guard the family by putting up various measures. Olanyi (2015), through his study conducted in Nigeria, indicated that for a nation and a continent or world at large to be at peace, it must first be settled as a family as the sanity in the continent will never rise above that of the family. Ng'ang'a and Wesonga (2010) support the assertion by stating that marriage is the backbone of a healthy society as it is the basic unit on which society leans for proper function.

Divorce is a critical matter that affects the society today, including church membership; this contradicts the Christian and biblical teaching on marriage as stated and ordained by God (Genesis 2: 20-30). Today, families are witnessing breakages, violence, separation, and ultimately divorce, which directly contribute to lawlessness and disruption of peace and stability in society. Despite the church's pastoral stand on marital relationships in Africa, Hayedeh, Amir, and Dabagh (2014) reports that many marital challenges have been cited among Christians. Furthermore, the increased cases of divorce in Africa go even against the African people's cultures and traditions, discouraging divorce and jealously guarding the institution of marriage. Kagelo and Rakwena (2018) confirm Hayedeh's sentiment through their findings which revealed that African data on divorce rates are consistent with that of Europe and North America with respect to the negative impact of divorce on individuals.

The same worry is also recapped; a study by Copen (2012) revealed that half of the children in the United States are likely to see their parents undergo divorce before their 18th birthday. In separate studies, Kirk (2017), Hayedah, Amir, and Dabagh (2014) estimated that fifty percent of couples are likely to be divorced in the course of their marriage in the United States. In Europe, a survey by The Global Consumer Insight (2012) indicated that 50% of new marriages in most European countries end up in divorce after a short period.

Unfortunately, the purpose for which marriage and family were instituted is no longer the same. Today, families are witnessing breakages, violence, separation, and ultimately divorce factors that are directly contributing to lawlessness and disruption of peace and stability in society. To express the intensity of the divorce problem, study finding reveals that

divorce has become a major impediment. For instance, a study by Copen (2012) revealed that half of the children in the United States are likely to see their parents undergo divorce before their 18th birthday. In separate studies, Kirk (2017), Hayedah, Amir, and Dabagh (2014) estimated that fifty percent of couples are likely to be divorced in the course of their marriage in the United States. In Europe, a survey by The Global Consumer Insight (2012) indicated that 50% of new marriages in most European countries end up in divorce after a short period. This reality of divorce challenges the function of the church in the pastoral family ministry.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The Christian teachings on marriage emphasize that marriage is a sacrament and a covenant between a man and woman, founded on a divine origin. It is a lifelong relationship as husband and wife are to cleave to one another (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-5). It is in line with this teaching that the church has also initiated programs such as pre-marital counseling, courtship programs, and marriage and family education, together with a well-developed church teaching or policy and structure such as mother's union, couple's fellowships, all focusing on aiding Christians to realize the goals of the institution of marriage. Despite the sermons on the sanctity and sacredness of marriage, the church also incorporated the mechanism that regards marriage in her daily prayer books and church constitution. The converse is that, with all the biblical teachings and other measures put in place by the church to ensure the stability of marriage among Christian families, there still exist high rates of divorce among Christian, particularly in the Anglican Church in Bondo, Siaya County. Divorce among Christian has led to a number of problems (marriage breakages, cases of child neglect, stress among couples experiencing lots of problems) affecting families. These challenges emanating from divorce prompted this study on church divorce reduction dynamics.

2. Literature Review

Guidance and counseling programs are vital to married couples and divorcees as it creates awareness and acknowledgement of marital commitment before, during, and after marriage. It also helps couples to introspect or have inward looking approach to marriage, thereby becoming a possible solution to divorce-related challenges. Mbugua (2010) supported the assertion through his study on marital satisfaction among the couple and proposed adopting church-organized programs that are effective and built up with elements of effective communication, sexual affection, healthy relationship with children, stress-free parenthood, and dealing with the in-laws. Mbugua's recommendation prompted the need for this study, which focused on the church divorce reduction dynamics with the aim of looking at various dynamics used by the Anglican Church Bondo Denary.

The sentiments of Mbugua are reiterated by Kariuki (2017), Warren (2019), and Tsuma and Odek (2019) in different studies whose results indicated that pre-marital counseling is an effective way to increase marital satisfaction. Tembe (2010), in a different study, cited the lack of counseling in the church and the pastor's failure to intervene in marriage as a contributing factor to the marital crisis among Christians. This observation was also noted by Flynn (2016), who attributed the increase in the number of divorce cases to youth's lack of preparedness for marriage. However, the above studies revealed some of the programs that the church needs to put in place and particular topics prompting the present study, which focused on the church's divorce reduction dynamics by evaluating whether the church runs pre-marital and post-marital programs as one of the critical divorce reduction dynamics and how the members of the Anglican church rate the effectiveness of these programs, hence complementing the work of other studies.

Marital education helps treat marital distress. In a study conducted by Hook, Worthington, Miller, and Davis (2011), the result indicated that the church had begun using marriage matters education programs for their congregations. Through marriage education, couples attend marriage workshops annually, where they learn about well-functioning marriages. Omoro (2018) also emphasizes that religion is considered to play a central role in solving marital issues that are likely to develop into divorce. In line with the functional theory that informs the study, marital education programs, pre-marital and post-marital and marriage pastoral ministry determine the role played by the church as an institution in society within the confines of marriage and family union. In the realization of the above-stated objectives, they resolved to evaluate the strategies put in place to curb divorce rates among Christian families.

Family ministry is a total approach to families and outlook. The essence of family ministry is an attitude toward the family that must be integrated into every aspect of church life. Joo (2015) illustrates that to protect family life from the effect of the fall, family ministry needs to be established. The ministry involves a servant leadership style dedicated to making the church community of vibrant families. The effective family ministry will reflect positive teachings which focus on problems and conflicts while they are still manageable (Joo, 2015). Hence, this study established a ministry set aside by the Anglican Church to help build up the stability of families and to inquire further; the study will establish the ministry's mandate and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of this ministry so as to improve its effectiveness.

The church has been challenged in many instances to find ways of addressing issues resulting in divorce among its members. Oladipo (2017), for example, recommended that the church, as one of the major social institutions, should be proactive in addressing the situation of divorce to fulfill its role of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Grounded by Durkheim's functional theory, which emphasizes that there is a need for consensus and order to exist among various systems of society, the study was interested in exploring how the church, as a social institution, supports marriage and family to ensure shared values and stability as disorganization in any one of them creates religious and social problems, thus prompting the disintegration of society as a whole. Critical theory, on the other side, helped the study evaluate the effectiveness of the existing church divorce reduction dynamics to ensure they are tailored toward enhancing marital stability in accordance with Christian teaching and principles.

3. Methodology

The study was carried out in the Anglican Church Bondo Denary of Bondo Diocese. The study adopted a qualitative research design and collected data using questionnaires and interview schedules, and this was done as recommended by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), who indicated that any research should employ instruments that will help it to collect the necessary information that it needs. For target population, sample technique, and sample size, the summary was as indicated in table 1.

Target Group	Target Population	Sample Procedure	Sample Size	Percentage %
Parish Vicars	9	Census	9	100
Divorcee's	100	Census	100	100
Church leaders	359	Purposive	36	10
Christian families	3050	Simple random sampling	305	10
Total	3518		450	

Table 1: Target Group, Target Population, Sample Procedure and Sample Size

For the Christian families and church leaders, the study adopted Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), who recommended that a 10–30% sample is appropriate for qualitative research studies. The respondent was coded as indicated in the key below.

KID – key informant divorcee, KICL – key informant church leader, KIV – key informant vicars

4. Results and Findings

The findings on strategies applied by the church in curbing divorce in Bondo Denary among Christian families were focused on four main thematic areas: the church's role in pre-marital and post-marital counseling, organization of marital seminars, training, workshops and marriage fellowships, provision of marriage and family literatures and reading materials and conducting pastoral family ministry and extended community marital programs. The researcher compiled responses from the Christian families and interview schedules with the divorcees, church leaders heading KAMA, Lay readers, Mothers union, and the Church Choir. The results from the questionnaires presented in table 2 below are followed by verbal interview narration by divorcees and church leaders.

Strategies for Curbing Divorce Practices among Christian Families	Highly Involved		Averagely Involved		Lowly Involved		Very Low		Not Involved		Mode
	5		4		3		2		1		
	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
1. Pre-marital and post-marital counseling to Christian families	86	29.7%	111	38.3%	51	17.6%	38	13.1%	4	1.4%	4
2. Organization of marital seminars, training, workshops, and marriage fellowships	12	4.2%	92	31.8%	161	55.7%	21	7.3%	3	1.0%	3
3. Provision of marriage and family literatures and reading materials	0	0.0%	42	14.5%	132	45.7%	55	19.0%	60	20.8%	3
4. Conducting pastoral family ministry and extended community marital programs	30	1.04%	131	45.3%	67	23.2%	61	21.1%	0	0.0%	3

Table 2: Strategies for Curbing Divorce Practices among Christian Families

The Christian families were asked to indicate the church's level of involvement in strategies that the church should use to curb divorce practices among its members. The results from the findings, as indicated in table 2, revealed that the church was rated averagely involved in two strategic areas: conducting pastoral and family ministry marital programs and extended community marriage services 131(45.3%) and pre-marital and post-marital counseling to Christian families 111(38.3%). However, the church was rated lowly involved in organizing marital seminars, training, and workshops, initiating marriage fellowships 161(55.7%), and providing marriage and family journals newsletters and other

reading materials 132(45.7%). Other rating levels, such as highly involved, very low, and not involved, registered averagely low ratings in various rating levels.

The church was mostly rated to be an average of 111 (38.3%) and 86 (29.7%) involved in pre-marital and post-marital counseling by Christian families, as indicated in table 2. The result of this finding was confirmed by a number of departmental leaders and Vicars during an interview with the researcher. For instance, one departmental leader admitted that her department was sometimes involved in pre-marital counseling, where they teach couples to be consistent in their roles in marriage. They also teach young women about their role in the church before they are commissioned to join the mothers' union. The departmental leader further narrates:

As a department, our role is to ensure that when women get into marriage, they stay in it; we know that there exist challenges, but we talk to our members during pre-marital counseling that they must be patient while dealing with challenges they will experience in their marital life and prioritize internal ways of resolving the issues affecting them. If a solution is not being arrived at easily, then they need to work closely with the church leadership for help...KICL3

Another respondent confirms that the church treasures pre-marital counseling to ensure marriages' stability after a wedding. Normally within the Anglican Church structure, there is preparation before marriage where pre-marital counseling services are provided to the couple; however, the program sometimes comes along with some challenges, as confessed by one of the informants.

One of the challenges we are experiencing today is that most couples are not ready to devote their time to fully undertake the entire program of pre-marital counseling sessions, as some only appear when their wedding ceremony is nearing. During that time, they also have minimal time as they are also struggling with wedding arrangements, which limits us from taking them through a whole session of pre-marital programs. Going forward, I think we need to sensitize church members on the value of the program and the need to adhere to the stipulated timelines so that we can properly prepare couples on marital matters before joining them...KIV1

On post-marital counseling, one of the informants admitted that, though not often, the church normally offers pastoral counseling for couples who have opened up that their marriage is undergoing challenges and needs assistance.

Usually, when it comes from an individual, I work with that individual so that the situation does not affect the larger congregation....KIV4

Another respondent also stated as follows:

I feel there is a need for the church to consider initiating couples mentorship program whereby couples are either paired or given an opportunity to select a couple they can partner with. They move along with their marital life, which will give the couple an easier time to schedule and meet at their convenient time and build one another by sharing their challenges and possible solution...KID15

Another respondent also confirmed the existence of pre-marital and post-marital counseling in the church and explained how their department partners, with parish Vicars in charge of ensuring that their members get into marital engagement, are properly prepared before marriage.

As KAYO, our major role in marriage is to encourage our members to consider conducting their marriages in church following the church stipulated guidelines, and normally when our members approach our office with plans of getting married, we present the matter to the youth pastor, who now conducts the pre-marital counseling; however, for post-marital counseling, we also assist the pastor because within us we also have trained counselors who are married as well and normally, they come in handy...KICL10

The lay readers also asserted that they conducted family ministry as it was within their mandate to do that though sometimes they find it challenging to meet every family; so, at times, they work with the cell group leaders to help them accomplish this mandate though they only concentrate on fellowship and preaching the word of God. On the other hand, the choir focuses on choir practice and fellowship and encourages one through God's word.

However, from table 2, 51 out of the 305 (17.6%) and 38 out of the 305 (13.1%) felt that either the church was lowly or very lowly involved with pre-marital and post-marital counseling to Christian families. Asking one of the departmental members to comment on the reason why some Christians still believe that the church's pre-marital counseling is not sufficient, the respondent said.

I think this is because sometimes the program takes a shorter time. I believe that pre-marital counseling should have several sessions which should run-up to one month and should be clear on the purpose of marriage and the supporting factors along the purpose of marriage, such as communication, care and support, ambitions, spirituality, financial aspects, and sex in marriage...KICL14

One of the Parish Vicars suggested that:

My take is that Christian families should focus on real marriage life rather than the wedding. A couple should consider taking time during the courtship period because sometimes Christian gives short notice for wedding arrangements, which gives a short time for counseling and personal reflection...KIV5

The study finding confirms the gaps that exist in this area which was also discovered by Tolorunleke (2014) through his study on causes of marital conflict which revealed that conflict in marriage is inevitable and thus recommended the need to make a provision for both preventive, remedial and rehabilitative counseling and intervention to the married and prospective couples to enhance marital stability in our societies. Mbugua (2010), Kariuki (2017), Warren (2019), and Tsuma and Odek (2019), in different studies on the role of pre-marital and post-marital counseling, indicate that pre-marital counseling is the only effective way of curbing marital instability among couples and recommend the need for the church to adopt counseling strategies that will mitigate divorce rates among Christian families.

On the church's involvement in the Organization of marital seminars, training, and workshops, most of the respondents indicated, as tabulated in table 2, that the church was lowly involved 161 (55.7%). A notable number of respondents also stated that the church was averagely involved in organizing marital seminars, training, and workshops; however, the approach used in the seminars and workshops required adjustment. According to one of the divorcees' confessions, most of the prayers' conferences did not yield a good result for her.

In the fifth year, I attended several prayer conferences, but nothing seemed to be changing. In 2016, when we broke up, I felt enough was enough; I had done whatever any wife could do. I had attended several prayer conferences and lost my dignity, begging for my husband's attention...KID7

KAMA department, for example, stated that their main aim as a department should be to ensure family stability; however, one of the leaders confessed that they were not doing enough in this area as the only family program KAMA is home visits.

KAMA is currently involved in-home visits, where they visit the KAMA members for morning fellowship breakfast. During this breakfast fellowship, they pray with the family and discuss their project; however, matters of marriage have not been our focus though it is within their mandate...KICL18

Mothers union also are mandated to conduct monthly meetings and fellowships where family management is taught; they also have conferences done at the provincial level. However, the challenge they face is that not all members attend this meeting as required. They also conduct door-to-door visits during which they offer love baskets to families and conferences done at the provincial level.

Normally during the mothers union week, as indicated in the church calendar, we conduct a home visit to mothers fellowshiping with them and also visit less fortunate families and even extend our hands in giving material support, but the only challenge we have noticed when it comes to matters of marriage is that some mothers are not ready to open up during this meeting to discuss what their marriage is going through, so it makes it difficult for us to help them; that is why I think if the church can create more couple programs and session for couples to share the experience; it can be of help because, during that time, it will only be couple sharing with one another, not official visiting families...KICL11

The choir department normally encourages one another through bible teaching through their family fellowships; however, they have not introduced programs that deal with family life. They mostly do fellowship and choir practice as head of Sunday services.

I also feel that even within the choir department, we need to not only assemble for choir practice only, but also need to have a retreat where we can share our experiences, particularly those who are married because the issues of divorce affect us much and this even affects our fellowship and ability to do well in the department and even in that forum we can also have an opportunity to educate the potential couple who are in the choir and are about to get married on how to prepare for marriage and what to expect as they prepare to get to marital life...KICL6

The lay readers asserted that they do not deal with the matters of marriage directly. However, they do it under pastoral care, preaching, and more challenging cases are forwarded to the church counselors.

Now that marriage challenges continue to affect the unity of the Christian family and its impact felt by the entire community, I would suggest that during the church education week, which is stipulated in our church calendar, there is a need for us as leaders to prioritize the theme of marriage and divorce and invite experts who have knowledge on this area to help our Christian with the knowledge in the area of marriage and family stability...KICL4

One of the KAYO members also admitted that there is a need for the church to intensify more training, workshops, and seminars on marriage because what is happening to marriages today, if not addressed, there will be no stable families in the future.

Marriage problems are real; you find even among youths, people get married in a colourful wedding which drains them financially and even their friends who are involved in the organization of the wedding, but after two to three years, the couple is living apart; this really affects our members. I propose that there is a need to have more frequent seminars and workshops, and this approach should be more interactive so that youths can have an opportunity to deeply discuss these issues affecting marriage and even develop other best strategies to help address the problems surrounding marriages today...KICL23

The above narration by the KAYO member means that there is a need to emphasize the Christian principles of marriage to couples before marriage, as indicated by Lewis (2014), who emphasized that through the marriage covenant, the one flesh in every marriage between a man and a woman is a re-enactment of and testimony to the very structure of humanity as God created it. The augment that is further supported by Davie(2019), who stated that the permanent union in marriage mirrors God's permanent and unbreakable covenant with his people; hence, human beings are not free to renegotiate or redefine marriage and family in any way but are called to preserve and respect what was divinely instituted. The church is not doing enough to teach the values of courtship though it is a very important stage of marriage as it lets the couples get time to know one another before getting married. One of the divorcees witnessed that she did not really understand what was really to look into during courtship:

During my courting and engagement process, my eyes were full of rose-colored glasses, which could not allow me to dig deep into another aspect of this man's lifestyle...KID6

The above confession attaches much evidence that some couples get into marital problems immediately after the honeymoon because they did not fully understand one another before marriage.

The church also advocates that in case of marital problems, a discussion should be made, and if dialogue fails, further consultation from other members such as elders and church leaders should be done. This is, however, experiencing some challenges, as confirmed by one of the Vicars who testified that:

There are many challenges we experience, but to single out some of them, there is a mismatch between the state laws governing marriage institutions, civil society advocacy laws, and policies which, at some point, are never consistent with what we teach, for example in the church we treasure dialogue, reconciliation, while within some civil society bodies, the advocate for divorce and sharing of the already accumulated resource hence living children in trouble, there are also many rights which are highly emphasized in the society today...KIV1

The church was doing poorly in the Provision of marriage and family literatures and reading materials. Most of the Christians interviewed had low ratings as shown in table 2, 132 of 305 (45.7%) said that the church was lowly involved, while (55)19.0% and (60) 20.8% claimed that the church was very lowly involved and not involved respectively in the provision of marriage and family literature and reading materials. The finding of this study indicates that the Anglican church of Bondo denary needs to put in place education plans as recommended by Hook, Worthing, Miller, and Davis (2011), which advocated for churches to initiate marriage matters education programs for couples where they can learn more about well-functioning marriages.

Majority of the church members interviewed pointed out that the church was averagely involved in conducting pastoral and family ministry marital programs.

The church offers pastoral counseling for couples who have opened up that their marriage is undergoing challenges and needs assistance. Additionally, the church also offers pastoral home visits where the priest can identify marriages that are undergoing challenges through close sharing with the couples on their role in marriage...KIV3

More focus should be on the youths and Early Sunday School ministry to instill in them the knowledge of God that will make them rooted Christians who value Christian principles.

My take is that our children's ministry must now take up the challenges facing marriages seriously and also redesign their Sunday school and youth curriculum to incorporate matter of family life to enable our children to grow up knowing God's design for marriage and family because if they grow up properly rooted with this teaching coupled with good role models and mentorship, we shall have helped them greatly...KIV1

Christian families should focus on real marriage life rather than the wedding. A couple should consider taking time during the courtship period because sometimes Christian gives short notice for wedding arrangements which gives a short time for counseling and personal reflection on family life teaching to ensure the marital stability of their children.

Prayer should be given prominence in instances where consistent marital conflict is being experienced, and the couple should be given time to reflect on their marital journey to identify areas that they have not done well during which counseling services should be offered to the couples...KIV5

Mother union, as a department within the church, teaches young women how to manage their marriages. Through lay readers, the parish Priest is able to know some couples that need help at the cell and church level as they interact more closely with families within their area of service.

One of the lay readers said, 'Some cases are always referred to the few professional counselors we have within the church though the church does not have enough expertise and lacks an office for the counselor within the church structure.' The sentiments of the lay reader are in tandem with the recommendation of Tsuma and Odek (2019), which suggested that the church should adopt counseling as a strategy to mitigate divorce rates among Christian families.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The church was found to be conducting pre-marital counseling; though rated averagely involved, as shown in table 2 (38.3%), there was sufficient evidence of its existence. Additionally, in conducting pre-marital counseling, the church, through its department, was found to be employing collaboration and partnership within the church structures. However, one of the reasons cited by those who rated the church to be lowly involved in this area was the short pre-marital counseling session which they felt was inadequate to handle issues affecting marriages today.

A number of couples were also found to be focusing on the wedding and not the real issues that will affect their marriage after the wedding, as some confessed not to have taken engagement and courtship seriously. For post-marital counseling, the major challenge was that some couples were not ready to open up while experiencing marital challenges, making it difficult to come to their help.

On the church level of involvement in the organization of marital seminars, workshops, and training, the church was lowly involved, as shown in table 2 (55.7%), as most of the respondents felt that there was the need to diversify the approach used to in order to make them more adaptable to current problems facing marriage and family union.

The church was found to be lowly involved (45.7%), as indicated in table 2 in Provision of marriage and family literature and reading materials.

The church was found to be averagely involved in conducting pastoral family ministry and extended community marital programs (45.3%), as shown in table 2.

5.2. Recommendations

The church, through its departments, establishes family meetings which should be scheduled within the church calendars when families meet, fellowship, learn from one another by sharing life experiences, and take breakfast and lunch together.

There is a need for induction and training for various departmental church leaders and members on how challenges facing families can best be handled within the department.

Young people should be grounded properly on the biblical principles and values of marriage that they should cherish as they get into marital engagement, as suggested by one divorcee:

The church is to institute family ministry, concentrating on family matters and moulding marriage through a family visit and continuous teaching on the marital role and how couples can best live together in harmony.

Seminars and workshops should be intensified in the church more regularly, and some of the topics targeting some of the marital challenges facing couples today should be included in the discussion.

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