Conjugal Life Failure in Mauritius

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Abstract

Introduction: It is a common belief that marriage as an institution is gradually losing its importance because of the numerous amount of problems encountered by couples resulting into breakdown of the conjugal life. However, in reality, marriage as an institution is still going strong in the different communities as witnessed by the number of marriages celebrated each year.

Purpose: The main aim and objectives of this study are firstly to examine the marriage as an institution and secondly to take stock of the causes of breakdown of conjugal life.

Methodology: In this study use of both primary and secondary data has been made. Secondary data have been collected from internet search and books. Primary data were obtained through unstructured interview with a total of 12 respondents who are victims of broken marriages.

Findings: The majority of the respondents still believe that marriage is an important, sacred and a fundamental institution in society. Besides, the main causes leading to conjugal life breakdown are differences in the socialization process of the couple, the use of information, communication and technological devices by spouses and the absence of regular sex. Through the study, it has also been found that a new phenomenon considered as ‘solo liver’ taking place in married couples’ life.

Research Implications: The results of this study can be used by the authority, more particularly by the religious institutions, to sensitize the population about marriage and its sustainability.

Keywords: Marriage, conjugal life failure, conjugal roles, Mauritius, cohabitation.

Introduction

Although Mauritius is considered as a fast developing and modern country yet the traditional beliefs, mores, folkways, rites and rituals preserved by the conservative population from the different cultural, ethnic and religious groups help in the maintenance of sacred institutions like marriage and family. With modernization and development, such institutions are at stake given the influence of western cultural values and the growing number of alternatives and threats to marriage. Many couples are facing difficulties to sustain their married lives. The most common and often cited problems leading to failures in the conjugal life of couples include, amongst others, lack of understanding and mutual respect, extra marital affairs, alcoholism, unnecessary in-laws intervention, domestic violence, suspicions and doubts on spouses, regular tensions and conflicts, financial problems and inability to strike the balance between work and family life.

The main aims and objectives of this study are to examine marriage as an institution and to take stock of the causes of conjugal life failure.

The first part of the paper deals with the rationale behind the study and a review of literature on marriage and breakdown of conjugal life. In the second part, follows the methodology section and a description and analysis of the findings of the data collected. Finally, a conclusion based on the paper is stated.
Rationale behind the Study
Nowadays, the younger generation asks a lot of questions before getting married given the number of problems associated with conjugal life learnt through the mass media. Many of them are scared as to whether their marriages will succeed or end up as failures. Although some people informally express themselves about the issue yet no formal study has been carried out to find out the root causes of conjugal life failure. This study will provide some in depth information about the problems encountered by couples in marriages resulting into failures in their marital life.

Literature Review

Marriage and Conjugal life failure.
Macionis (2000) states that marriage is a legally sanctioned relationship, involving economic cooperation as well as normative sexual activity and childbearing, that people expect to be enduring. For Lewis (2001), marriage is a legal matter which requires a public declaration. Marriage can, in fact, be considered as a social and legal arrangement between two adults of different sexes in most of the societies. In this paper, conjugal life would mean the marital life of the couple. Thus, the social, economic, sexual, emotional relationship between the husband and wife will be considered as part of the conjugal life. Conjugal life failure will refer to the breakdown of the relationship between the husband and wife. For the purpose of this essay, conjugal life failure, marital life failure, marital breakdown, conjugal breakdown and broken marriage will bear the same meaning and will be used as synonyms.

Conjugal life and conjugal roles
Young and Willmott (1973) claim that with the development of the symmetrical family, conjugal roles, that is, marital roles between husbands and wives, become more joint. Men take more the responsibility for housework and childcare. However, Studies carried out by Oakley (1974) and Edgell (1980) (cited in Haralambos and Holborn, 2000) conclude that very few couples have joint conjugal roles. In some cases men were found to help in childcare but not much in household tasks. Boulton (1983) (cited in Haralambos and Holborn, 2000) states that even if men help in some form of domestic activities, it is the women who retain the primary roles for childcare. From these studies, it can be deduced that inequality in the division of labour at home favours men who have little amount of responsibilities over house chores. However, in this modern era, couples, particularly the younger ones, are normally expected to have joint conjugal roles where spouses have shared domestic activities. In their research on marital roles, Coltrane & Ishii-Kuntz (1992) found that when couples waited to conceive and have their first-born child those husbands did more housework than in the couples where they had their first-born sooner (www.papercamp.com/essay/.../Domestic-Labour-And-Family).

With globalization and modernization, many women have joined the workforce. In Mauritius, since the 1970’s, with the coming of the export processing zones, thousands of women entered the labour market. Nowadays, in every household, at least one woman is working. Thus, the traditional belief that man is the main breadwinner who has the economic roles and, considered as the decision maker, has considerably decreased in the Mauritian families as well argued by Lewis (2001) who states that women’s increased labour market participation highlights the importance of the effects of the decline of the traditional male breadwinner model family. Both men and women have more or less the same statuses, importance and responsibilities. Zimmerman (2001) rightly argues that values have changed in families and there is a shift from role-based obligations in husband-wife relationship to shared responsibilities.

Besides, with free secondary and tertiary education, many women have been able to acquire skills, knowledge and relevant qualifications. Such credentials give them an edge in competition for high position and promotion at work. Thus women have now a choice to marry or not to do so. On the other hand, with the available knowledge of conjugal life failure, a large number of women prefer to postpone
marriage. With modernization and changes in cultural values, cohabitation as an alternative to marriage is becoming more acceptable in modern Mauritius. Macionis (2000) describes cohabitation as the sharing of a household by an unmarried couple. Cohabitation is, in fact, a private agreement which does not have much binding and where cohabitants enjoy leeway in action and decision making. Thus, the traditional taboo is gradually becoming the norms in many families.

On the other hand, the state has come up with several legislations to protect the women from domestic violence and harassment. The authority has even facilitated the lives of the married couples who undergo difficult and unbearable conjugal life to make petitions for divorce and obtain same in a lesser period of time. Such measures are thought to have helped women from being exploited and oppressed both at work and at home.

The common sense belief is that conjugal life breaks because couples place less value on marriage and marital relationship. However, studies carried out by Parsons and Fletcher (Cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 2000) show that the rise in marital breakdown stems largely from the fact that many couples attach too much value to marriage. Spouses expect and demand too much from the married life, thus leading to tensions and conflicts often resulting into marital breakdown.

According to Haralambos and Holborn (2000), marital breakdown can fall into the following three categories. Firstly, divorce which means the legal termination of a marriage. Secondly, separation where the spouses are physically distanced and they no longer live under the same roof. Finally, there is the empty-shell marriage, where the husband and the wife share the same dwelling temporarily given that such arrangement normally ends in separation or divorce.

Methodology

Methodology is concerned with the systematic way of collecting and analyzing data to reach a conclusion (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000). All academic research requires a sound methodology. This study draws upon both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data have been obtained from books, internet search and government documents while primary data have been gained through the means of an unstructured interview mainly in the form of conversation and interaction.

Phenomenology as the Research Approach

Parahoo (1997) argues that phenomenology as a philosophy stresses the notion that only those who experience the phenomena are capable of communicating them to the outside world. Therefore, in this study, phenomenology has been preferred to as the research approach as it focuses on individuals’ interpretation of their experiences and the ways in which they express them. It was important to know about the experiences, views and opinions of the respondents’ whose marriages turned to failures.

Sample, sampling and data collection tool.

A sample is a part of the whole population. In this paper, the views, opinions and experiences expressed of only 12 respondents (5 men and 7 women), who encountered conjugal life failures, were collected through the means of an unstructured interview in the form of interaction. Out of 14 potential respondents approached, two ladies refused to participate in the interview, after having formerly accepted through telephone calls for appointment.

Qualitative researchers normally use non-probability samples as the aim of qualitative research is to understand the phenomena. In this paper, both purposive and snowballing sampling have been resorted to.
Ethical Consideration.

Given that this study deals with sensible issues which may cause harm to the interviewees, it was thought as very important to inform to all potential respondents about the purpose of the study. Informed consent is the process whereby participants are informed about any potential risks involved in participating in the research (Parahoo, 1997). All respondents were informed of their rights not to participate at any stage of the interview. Besides, they were also told that they could refuse to answer questions which they felt sensible or private. Participants were also guaranteed that they would not be identified as they did not have to give their names or signed the interview notes.

Limitation of the study

The sample used for this study is small and the result obtained should be cautiously used for generalization purpose. However, the findings give some important information. Nevertheless, a large scale research with a bigger population and a variety of research method will give better results.

Findings and Discussions

Qualitative data analysis is the process whereby researchers move from the qualitative data that have been collected into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the views and opinions as expressed by respondents (onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_QDA/what_is_qda.php). Data analysis has to do mainly with the description of facts, detection of patterns and development of explanations. Crude data collected from the respondents are analysed and discussed below. Basically, 5 questions were addressed to the 12 participants. Questions included, amongst others, profiles of respondents, views on marriage, main causes of conjugal life failure, life after broken marriage, and any advice for future couples. Depending on the rapport built during the interview process, additional questions were put to respondents. Thus, in some cases probing was possible to get further clarifications and in depth information.

A total of 12 respondents took part in the study. All the 5 male respondents and 7 female ones showed much maturity and they gave their opinions and views on their conjugal life without any reserve. The age of the 5 male respondents varied from 31 to 49 years. Two of them work in the government sector, one as an executive officer while the other as secondary school teacher. Of the remaining three males one is a bus driver, another one is a street vendor and the last one works in a textile factory. The street vendor is a divorcee who is presently living in cohabitation. His two daughters live with his former wife. The secondary teacher is in the process of a divorce filed by his wife. He does not have any child. The wives of bus driver and the textile employee live under the same dwelling as their husbands. In fact, both wives have had recourse to protection order from the court for domestic violence. The children stay in same house. The teacher is not in speaking terms with his wife for the last six months. However, they live under the same roof but do not poke their nose in the affairs of the other. Their 5 year old son lives with them.

Although no direct question was addressed on the age of the female respondents yet they are believed to be between 20 and 50 years of age. Out of the 7 female respondents, 4 work in the government sector, one works in the textile industry and two are housewives. All of them have children except one housewife. The textile worker is a divorcee since 10 years and stays in her own home with her three children. Two of the employees from the government sector have left their husbands and one stays with her parents since three years and the other is cohabiting with another man. Their children stay with them. The other respondents live under the same dwelling as their husbands but they rarely communicate with them.
When participants were asked to give their views on marriage, surprisingly the majority of them considered it as a sacred thing. Nevertheless, they all blamed their spouses for their difficult conjugal life. Only the street vendor considered marriage as a curse. He said that he suffered much during his married life as his wife always created all sorts of problems for him. He was given several warnings from the probation office as his wife often reported him. He was regularly beaten by his in-laws and once he was admitted to the hospital.

The main question on the causes on conjugal life failure received a variety of answers. The most common causes of marital breakdown for the male respondents were too much of unnecessary and repeated interventions from the in-laws, more particularly the mother-in laws and the unmarried sister-in-laws. Male respondents also included misunderstanding on the parts of their wives for actions done by them. For instance, the secondary teacher stated that his wife often misinterpreted his relationship with a woman colleague at work. He was blames for infidelity and extra marital affairs which was untrue according to him. He said that his in-laws are responsible for asking his wife, whom he loves, to file a case for divorce. The bus driver and the executive officer blamed their wives for the excessive use of mobile phones and internet chat. The Executive officer said that his wife is beyond control regarding the use of the technological devices. The bus driver stated that he once caught his wife sending a lovely message to a man. When queried about her action, she threatened him. After months of tensions and conflicts his wife reported him to the probation officers at the district court and a protection order was issued against him. His relationship with his wife has deteriorated since then. However, he cannot leave her because of their two years’ daughter. He said that he prefers to keep quiet and suffer.

On the other hand, the majority of the female respondents held their spouses responsible for the difficulties encountered during their married life. Their conjugal life has failed because of factors like in-laws interference, financial problems, domestic violence and verbal harassment. However, the answers received from the two female government employees and the textile worker were different. None of them could adapt to the ways of living of their husbands and those of their in-laws. All of them blamed their spouses. The textile employee said that she could not tolerate her husband because of verbal harassment and the use of foul words. She had to end her marriage legally. Two of the government employees stated that they could no more accept their husbands regularly having parties at home with all sorts of drinks and undesirable relatives. They had to do all the preparation for the provision of food. They were fed up with such daunting tasks and their husbands did not listen to them. Their husbands said they were brought up to enjoy life. According to the respondents, they were neglected by their husbands. Given that they had no other alternatives, the ladies preferred to go for separation. For one government employee, her husband was addicted to computer usage for the past four years. The whole night he would sit in front of his personal computer. She said she could no more tolerate being neglected and she decided to leave him. She says she is happy now as she is cohabiting with a good man who always listens to her and who also looks after her 7 years old daughter very well.

On the question as to how they feel after undergoing the breakdown of the conjugal life, all the male respondents felt discouraged and they said that they have lost confidence in relationship. However, the street vendor is of a different view. He argued that he felt very happy that his first marriage ended. The only regret he had was that his two daughters do not live with him. The bus driver stated that his wife has made his life a hell and he regrets having gone for a love marriage. Regarding the female respondents, from the answers received, it was found that most of the women felt that their husbands cheated them. However, the textile employee and one of the government workers said they do not regret that their conjugal life failed.

Respondents were finally asked if they had any advice that they would like to give to the unmarried younger generation. Most of the answers received were similar with the exception of a few. Younger generation needs to know their partners well before embarking on marriage. The women respondents were of the view that girls should visit and stay in the house of their future in-laws before getting
married. Thus, they can make better and informed decision after taking stock of ways of life of the future husbands and their relatives. However, the views of most of the men were different. Three out of the five respondents consider marriage as a lottery. For them not all people win.

From the analysis of the data, it could be seen that in addition to the already known causes of conjugal life failure, factors like difference in socialization of men and women leading to different ways of life in married life and the absence of regular sex by the fact that spouses lay too much of emphasis on leisure like entertainment, parties and computer usage are interesting to be noted. Further studies on these two issues need to be carried out to understand their roles in conjugal life of couples. Moreover, another outcome of the study is the fact that spouses encountering conjugal life failure prefer staying under the same roof and have no intention of complete separation or having recourse to divorce. Thus, spouses choose to live alone under the same dwelling while suffering. Consequently, such a phenomenon like ‘solo liver’ in couple life needs further research.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, it has been found that marital life is not devoid of problems and difficulties. However, Marriage is still valued and considered as a sacred institution. The description and analysis of the data collected has revealed that, in addition to the already known factors responsible for conjugal life failures, issues like the absence of regular sex, differences in socialization process and the use of information, Communication and technological devices also account for marital breakdown. One of the important outcomes of this paper has also been an understanding of the phenomenon of ‘solo liver’ where one or both spouses suffer in loneliness while the married life continues in public eyes. The results of the research may give some food for thought to religious authorities and even the policy makers to work out strategies that will strengthen family life and marriage.

**References**