

THE EFFECTS OF MARITAL SEPARATION ON CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT IN ONITSHA: A HISTO-RELIGIOUS APPROACH

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Abstract

The family remains the fulcrum of the society and marital separation is one those factors that negates the holistic development of the child which the resultant effects influences the society negatively. This research observed that marital separations in Onitsha are caused by Socio-religious factors cum marital infidelity, religious and social incompatibility, economic factors, and biological factors among others. Marital separation in other words is an enemy of the family that creates psychological imbalance, economic hardship, educational retardation, and social disharmony in the lives of the children affected. As a result of these effects the child and the society at large is endangered. Hence, this work discovered that most of the churches in Onitsha have employed many measures to avert marital separation such as marriage course, marriage counseling, religious endogamy, prayer and deliverance programmes including frequent marriage seminars and banquet which serves as an avenue to constantly educate the partners on their roles in the family.

Keywords: marriage, child's development, history, religion

Introduction

Marriage is a unique institution. It is unique in the sense; that it is an institution created and ordained by God. God wants husband and wife to live together, help each other and train their children. One of the dreams of every newly married couple is that their marriage will be the best. This is because of the pleasures of marriage namely; the pleasure of having a companion, the pleasure associated with conjugal love and the pleasure of getting children and watching them grow. These pleasures should, however not make one to forget that marriage could be a failure or success depending on how it is managed. The way married partners handle their marriage will determine the type of marital stress they will experience.

Okoye (2001) said that marital stress can therefore be seen as "a general term to describe tense situations arising from marriage and the reactions that emanate there from which are contextually emotionally-oriented" (p.37). For him, sources of marital stress could be positive or negative. Supporting this, Egbule (2009) said "that there are basically two types of stress - "eustress and distress" (p.138). Eustress is a pleasant positive stress. It makes someone to do something better while distress is bad stress that changes someone when bad things happen. Therefore causes of marital stress are both negatives and positives events that surround marriage such as divorce, marital physical fights, childless marriage, pregnancy, marital separation, outstanding personal achievement, change to new school or job, retirement and so on.

Hence the aim of this study is to discuss the effects of marital separation on child's development. High rate of marital separation experienced in Onitsha urban motivated

the researcher to find out the effects of marital separation on child's development and how to curb marital separation using religious approach especially Christian religious approach. The study will be limited to Onitsha in Anambra state. The study is expected to make Christian parents to understand the aftermath of marital separation on children as the future leaders. Marriage should be blissful and not a bizarre experience. Therefore marital separation is an aberration. Marital separation does not affect only the married partners but also their children and society at large. Marital separation probably has contributed to poor performance of children in school, child abuse and high rate of moral decadence among the children nowadays. In spite of every odd, this study is hopeful that its effects on child's development can be minimized when married partners do the right thing at the right time. It is also pertinent to note that the study will be anchored phenomenological approach. This is because phenomenological method aims to describe, understand and interpret the meanings of experiences of human life and since marital separation is all about human life experience, it becomes important that it be used to analyses the implication on child development. While methods of data collections are library research, personal communication and experiences from counseling.

Therefore in relating this theory to the effects of marital separation on child's development, the study will look at the various social, economic, religious, cultural and biological factors that constitute barriers to effective relationship in marriage so as to resolve the effects on the children which is the future of the society.

Understanding the key words:

Marital Separation

Haralambos and Holbom (2008) said that "marital separation is the physical separation of the spouses; they no longer share the same dwelling" (p.505). Expatriating on the meaning of divorce, Nmah (2012a) said that "the first is a divorce called *Menea et thoro*, meaning separation from table and bed, more accurately defined as separation" (p.66). For him in marital separation, partners in marriage live separately and cease to cohabit. This study sees marital separation as unofficial divorce. It is one of the first steps to divorce and not a permanent termination of marriage.

A Child

According to Nmah (2008) "A person of age of 1 and 17 should be regarded as a child" (p.84). While Obi (2010) states that: The Nigerian children and young person's law of Eastern Nigeria (1958) part 1, section 2 defines a child as any person who has attained the age of 14 years, while the Nigeria Labour Acts defines children as those who are 16 years of age and below. On the other hand, section 49 of article 28 chapters 3 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognizes a person of 18 years and above as having attained "full age" or adulthood, (p.63). From the above, this study defines a child as a person below the age of 18 years who cannot fend for him/herself.

Development

Nmah and Ammannadi (2012b) opined that 'the concept of development denotes creating conditions conducive to the growth of people's self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic system and institutions which promote

human dignity and respect" (p.53). For them it is the process of improving the quality of all human lives. The aspect of such improvement include raising people's living level such as income, consumption, 'education, spirituality, medical services, security and among others. Hence child's development means increasing a child's access to better life. It involves improvement on a child's education, socio-religious life, nutrition, moral, medical service, security and so on.

Religious

According to Uche and Agunwa (2011) religious is "an adjective of religion and it refers or relating to religion either a particular religion or religion in general" (p.36). Hence religious approach implies using religious ideas and methods to solve the problem of the study.

Onitsha as a commercial city

Onitsha as one of the major city in the South east is located on the eastern bank of the River Niger. It is located in Anambra State Nigeria and serves as the economic nerve of the state. Onitsha is well known for commerce, industry and education. It is important to note that Onitsha became great due to her acceptance of the early Church Missionary Society (CMS), missionaries who arrived at the bank of the River in 1857. With time Onitsha evolved to be the major economic center of Eastern and South western states and this explains the reason why the city and her inhabitant are religiously incline in nature and accommodate the headquarters of two major orthodox churches in the state – Anglican Church and Roman Catholic church including other Pentecostal churches. This study focuses its investigation on the effects of marriage separation on child developments in Onitsha.

Marriage as a Sacred Institution

Marriage is one of the social institutions in the society. Onwuka (2005) said that "marriage is made in heaven although ironically there is no marriage in heaven for they neither marry nor are given to marriage" (p. viii). Chiegboka (2012) said that "marriage is basic, sacred and central human institution" (p.4). According to Nmah (2012a) "Marriage could be regarded as covenant between man and woman. It is a divine agreement or sacred bond or contract involving a plurality of persons with certain goals" (p.65). A cursory look at the above definitions depicts that marriage is a sacred institution. Marriage is divine. It is an institution created and ordained by God. Ibeh (2008) defined it "as a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognized legitimate offspring of both parents" (p. 107). According to Nnonyelu (2009) "Marriage is the approved social pattern whereby two or more persons established a family" (p.81). Thus marriage is not only a sacred institution but a legitimate means by which a family is established. It is a means through which a child is given a legitimate position in the family and society at large.

Hence some people get married for sexual satisfaction and bearing of children. While some get married to have a companion. All these things are not bad but they are not the only reasons for marriage. Parents are expected to educate and train their children. They should provide the basic needs of life for their children and ensure that they attend school. They should create conducive environment for their spiritual and physical development. Therefore in the next sub-heading the researcher shall identify and

discuss the purpose of marriage. This no doubt will help the researcher to examine the role of the married partners in the family.

Purpose of Marriage

Aderibigbe (2002) said that "lots of young men have the notion that once married, no going to kitchen, no washing of cloth, no sweeping" (p.3). Simply put some people get married for them to have somebody that will help them in the domestic chores. Hence the researcher identifies the following as the reasons for marriage:

Companionship

Nee (1948) states that "on the sixth day after God created man, he said that it is not good that a man should be alone so, God made a helpmeet for man. Eve was also made on the sixth day and was brought by God to Adam" (p.3). This does not imply that Adam was not properly created, but that it is not good for him to be alone. Loneliness is bad. Husband and wife are expected to live together and help each other. No single human being is entirely complete. Man is a social animal. And interacting with each other will make life meaningful for man. Therefore one of the reasons for marriage is companionship.

Prevention of immoral Life

According to Agha (2003) "Marriage is ordained for the mutual satisfaction of the natural instincts of sexual intercourse and affections" (p. 97). Sexual urge is natural and cannot be reckoned as sin. It is only a sin when one satisfies it through illegal means such as fornication. Marriage is the only legal means for sexual relationship. Sex outside marriage is *iji sin*. God instituted marriage for sexual satisfaction and prevention of immoral and illicit sexual relationship. Therefore husband and wife should not deprive each other of that conjugal love or right so that they will not lead each other to the sin of adultery, masturbation and lesbianism.

Reproduction of Legitimate Children

Aderibegbe (2002) states that "Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain" (p. 6). Therefore marriage is for procreation. It is the only institution approved for the reproduction of legitimate children. Through marriage the family is established. Family is a universal institution Unachukwu and Nnonyelu (1991) said that "family is universal in the sense that it is difficult, if not impossible for any human society to exist without at least some form of family structure" (p. 14), Hence marriage is a means of maintaining human race. It was instituted by God for reproduction of legitimate children and for the establishment of family. God wants husband and wife to be fruitful, increase in number and fill the earth. Therefore married partners are expected to increase the population of the universe through reproduction. They should also give birth to the number of children they can adequately care for.

Education of Children

Peschke (2004) said that "marriage has its purpose not merely the procreation but also ^education of children" (p.500). Unachukwu (2003) defined education "as the act or process gaining knowledge" (p.214). Education is a *sin qua non* to a child's development. They had not only provided food and clothes for their children but they should make sure that their children are educated because it is one of the reasons for

marriage. Parents should teach their children moral instructions at home because they are the first people children come in contact with before their religious and school teachers.

Child Training

God instructs parents to train up a child in the way he should go so that when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6). While Okoye (2001) said that parents "are expected to train their children morally and educationally and vocationally so that they grow to be useful and good citizens of their community and not to turn deviant, liability and a menace to the community" (p.57). Child training is of utmost importance to God and the society. Therefore parents should train their child to achieve the purpose of God for marriage. Poor parental upbringing probably may have contributed to the high rate of moral decadence experienced among the children nowadays. Separated partners may find it difficult to train their children. Therefore in the subsequent sub-headings the researcher will discuss marital separation so as to find out why "married partners separate and effects of such separation on the child's development.

Marital Separation

Marriage is a sacred institution created and ordained by God. In the Christian context it is a union between a man and a woman which is expected to last for a long time. While in African context, it is a union between a man and more than one woman. One thing that is important about marriage is that it is the intention of God that husband and wife should live and train their children. In fact married partners are expected to live together till death do them part. Therefore anything that will make husband and wife not to live together is a threat to the marital vows. Hence marital separation is a breach of marital vow. For Munroe (2003) Separation is the termination of a commitment with emotional involvement" (p. 106), Okoye (2001) opines that "marital separation is associated with husband and wife who separated because they find it difficult and extremely stressful to live together and so decides to live apart for the mean time" (p.40). Haralambos and Holborn (2008) said that "marital separation is the physical separation of the spouses; they no longer share the same dwelling" (p.505).

In exploring the above, one can see that marital separation is not a permanent termination of marriage. This is because married partners are still husband and wife. They are not free to remarry even though they are not living together or relating together as husband and wife. Marital separation is against the purpose of God for marriage, it is a marital aberration. It is a dysfunctional role of husband and wife in family or marriage institution. Hence Merlon is right by contending that not all the parts of a social system perform functions essential for the survival of the system and the society. He is right by saying that a system could perform positive and negative functions. Having seen that marital separation is a marital aberration; the researcher has to find out the causes of marital separation.

Causes of Marital Separation in Onitsha

Marriage should be blissful and not a bizarre experience. Nnonyelu (2009) states that these days, spouse desert their matrimonial homes with the same speed, if not faster than they entered into marriage" (p.83). Hence reasons for marital separation in Onitsha are as follows:

Socio-Religious factors cum Marital infidelity Agha (2003) said that "many people who were promiscuous before marriage may constitute a problem to the married life if they continue the act after marriage" (p.107). He added that unfaithfulness to each other in marriage will definitely result to crisis in the family and may result to broken marriage if not carefully handled. Supporting Agha, J. I. Emeka M.U (personal communication, January 19, 2021) said that "he will never sleep with his wife because she is having extramarital sex with a lot of men and that he does not want to contact any venereal diseases". The researcher also observed that girls who had many friends of opposite sex when they were single find it difficult to spend the rest of their lives with one man. That is why they change men as if they are changing clothes.

Religious and Social incompatibility

Okoye (2001) said that "marriage between people of different religions cause a lot problems" (p.50). This means that the couples will experience blissful marriage if they share the same religious faith, and worship together. Religious incompatibility is one of the major causes of marital separation. In a traditional Igbo society, it is not the man who marries a woman will follow the woman to her church or whichever religion she belongs to but the woman. And where the woman finds it difficult to do so, it will lead to marital misunderstanding which may make the couple to separate if not properly handled. This is not far from the causes of marital separation in Onitsha and surroundings. On other hand age differences create a lot of problem in any relationship. According to George (2003) "If you are not married, the differences in your ages may not mean much to you , until you get married and. begin to live in the same house with him, that is when problems will begin" (p.44). This is one of the reasons for social incompatibility as it affects both friends and married partners.

Economic factors

Economic factors like search for money, unemployment, poverty and husband or wife being extravagant causes marital separation. Most married partners separate because of search for money. In this situation, husband and wife are not separating because of marital misunderstanding but because of money making. One of them may decide to live away from the family in order to make money for the family. This type of separation is common among men. From the researcher's simple observation, it came to light that some married men in Onitsha are not living with their wives because of the type of job they do. This is because Onitsha is a commercial city where many of the inhabitants are business men of international repute. However making money is good but husband and wife should know that it is not the ultimate. This type of separation may lead to unfaithfulness and divorce if care is not taken.

Another economic factor to marital separation is unemployment. Unemployment is a serious social problem that affects the individual concerned, the family and the society. In the family, it is one of the major causes of marital separation. For Agha (2003) a period of unemployment may cause separation, nagging with the wife, and the wife losing confidence in her husband. Nkiru Aniagor (personal communication, February 19, 2021) said that "her husband is staying at the village while she is living with her parents at Onitsha because her husband is not doing any serious thing to earn a living". She maintained that she cannot afford to take care of him and pay their house rent with her petty business. Akin to this is when the woman is the breadwinner. In this situation,

the woman has the power to do anything she wants because she makes the money for the family. Some women in this type of position do not even take care of the family. They go out very early in the morning and come back late in the evening. This is prevailing in Onitsha as a result of the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria.

Biological factors:

Fertility/ impotence

Nnonyelu (2009) Said that the "major aim of marriage is to have children. Where the goal becomes unattainable due to infertility on the part of women or impotence of the man such marriages are threatened" (p.84). Chiegboka (2012) said that: Africans marry for the purpose of children and especially male child for the continuation of the lineage and generations. A childless wife is a dishonor and seemingly a curse and creates a lot of problems, tensions and instability to the marital bond. In most cases it leads to the option for polygamy and end of the marriage bond where polygamy is rejected, (p.27).

This implies that infertility and inability to give birth to a male child is a serious problem to as Africans. In most cases it leads to polygamy and adoption or permanent termination of the marriage especially where the man refused to adopt a child or to marry two wives. Women who found themselves in such situation feel rejected. They are also ridiculed by their neighbours. Most of them suffer psychological pain. Therefore marital separation is a serious problem that is urgent attention because it affects the family, the church and the society. Its effects on child's development in Onitsha shall be highlighted in the next sub- headings.

Effects of Marital Separation on Child's development

For Munore (2003) separation is unofficial divorce with same effects as divorce while Agha (2003) said that "children from broken home suffer mostly. Apart from their psychological, physiological, sociological and economic problems, they also suffer lack of parental care" (p.111). In exploring the above, marital separation has the same effect as divorce. It affects every body in the family the church and the society as a result of the following:

Educational effects

Education and training of a child starts at home. Ibeh (2008) opines that "parents play a critical role guiding children into those gender roles deemed appropriate in the society" (p.70). Therefore parents are expected to train their children so that they will be useful to them and the society in the future. It is their responsibility to send their children to school and provide all the necessary things they need in school. But where married partners separate; they will find it difficult to train their children. Marital separation contributes to the poor performance of children in school.

Economic effects

A child requires a long period of maintenance before he can be able to fend for himself. Therefore it is the duty of the parents to provide the basic needs of life such as clothes, food and shelter. But marital separation makes it difficult for parents to take adequate care of their children. That is why some children are subjected to hard labour nowadays. E C. Okafor (personal communication, January 20,2021) said that while she allowed

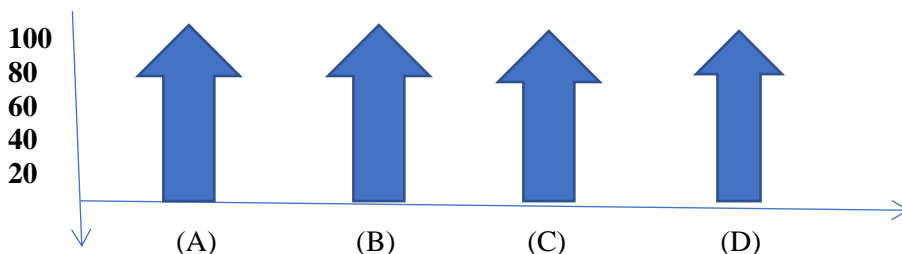
her daughter to hawk sachet water after school is for her daughter to help her raise money for their daily bread since their father is not taking care of them". No wonder, in Upper Iweka, Main Market, Ochanja and other markets in Onitsha you usually see children hawking on daily basis. This researcher finds out that over 85% of the children who hawk in Onitsha, their parents are not living together. This depicts that marital separation affect children. It deprives them of parental care and love and makes them to start generating income for the family too early.

Socio- Religious effects

The family is the first agent of socialization. It is in the family that a child learns how to interact with the people for the first time before going to school or church. The child also learns how to respect his parents and the elderly peoples in the family. It is also the duty of the parents to teach the child how to read the bible and how to perform other religious activities like prayer, and worship songs. Okoye (2001) said that "they are expected to train their children and educationally and vocationally so that they grow to be useful and good citizens of immunity and not to turn deviant, liability and a menace to the community" (p.57). Marital separation has made some children not to attend church on Sunday just their parents are no longer attending church. While some children are very good in use of abusive words just because their parents are cursing each other all the time. The researcher also observed that many children in this town are good in keeping malice and fighting. In fact they see fighting as the best approach to defend themselves whenever they are provoked.

Psychological effects

Every individual has emotions and the kind of events one experiences will determine how the person will relate to other people. When a child experiences unpleasant events all the time it will make him to be unhappy while pleasant events makes a child to be happy. Emery and Forehand (1996) said that 'feeling of hurt and pain, sadness and anger are particularly intense among children and parents shortly after the marital sparation" (p.65). In Onitsha urban, marital separation is one of the reasons why children see father or mother as a bad person. For instance some children who are living with their father alone see their mother as a bad person while those who are living with their mother also have the same impression about their father.



(This shows the effects of marital separation on child development in Onitsha, it is an outcome of interviews and interaction from selected people from various groups. Sixty persons were chosen. A stands for educational effect, B - economic effect, socio-religious effect while D – Psychological effect)

This reflects that the negative effects of marital separation on the development of the child are very detrimental to the holistic well-being of the society. Among the effects,

the psychological trauma on the child is the greatest percentage which shows the reason why most children affected by marital separation finds it difficult to cope in school and the wider society. They are mostly abusive and wild thereby causing nuisance in the society.

Histo- religious Approach to Marital Separation

Religion gives answer to the ultimate problems of human existence such as the issue of death. It encourages man in the time of crises and assures man of God's protection in "day activities. Yinger (cited by Nmah, 2012a) defined religion "as a system of beliefs by of which a group of people struggle with these ultimate problems of human life". This means that religion gives answer to the problems of human existence like **poverty**, childless marriage and marital separation That is why people who are educated and uneducated, rich and poor troop to prayer and healing houses for prayers, healing and solutions to their problems. And considering the fact that most of Onitsha inhabitants are affiliated to one or more Christian denomination; it becomes imperative that the church will play a great role in ensuring the this social menace is minimized. In the church, both the church leaders and other elderly women will be a great instruments in addressing the problem of married life. Guthrie (1957) said that "Christian matrons assist the younger women in the discipline of family love, not of course as interfering busybodies, but as humble advisers on problem of married life" (p.193). Therefore it is apt to use religious approach especially Christian religious approach to address the issue of marital separation in Onitsha. Church leaders are not keeping quiet on the issues of marital distress such as divorce, trouble with in-laws, marital separation and childless marriage. Most of the churches in Onitsha urban such as the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Deeper Life Bible Church and Mountain of fire and Miracles Ministries have employed many measures to avert and reduce high rate of marital separation experienced in this town. Such measures are as follows:

Marriage Course

This is a sort of marriage school organized for will be marriage partners who are preparing for their church wedding. During this programme, the man of God will enlightened them on the principles of a blissful marriage. The couples will also have the opportunity to ask questions on any aspect of marital life. This type of school helps the couples to build a happy family so as to avert marital separation, marital fights and divorce. Marriage course is common to all the churches in Onitsha but the duration for the course depends on how the church wants it. In the Anglican Church in Onitsha and Roman Catholic Church, the course last for 3 months; while in some other churches it may not reach three months.

Marriage Counseling

Nwoye (cited by Anuka, 1999) defined marriage counseling "as that aspect of counseling practice which is directed at helping the couples to discover the differences in their union, and to learn those missing inter personal skill they need to enrich and improve the emotional situation in their marriage" (p.249). This type of counseling may be carried out when the couples have not separate and when they have separated. Doing the counseling before the marital separation is easier than after the separation. Nwoye maintained that marriage counseling is a sensitive exercise that involves the

third person intruding into the relationship of married partners. For him, the counselor should avoid any hasty decisions; this is because experiences have shown that real matters of marital conflict do not come to the fore in the early sessions of the counseling exercise, but later on, when the couples must have mustered enough trust and confidence in the counselor to tell him the whole truth about their problems. In most of the churches in Onitsha the counselor is usually the priests, church leader or the pastor and after the counseling, the pastor will lead the couples in prayer.

Prayer and Deliverance

Some church leaders in Onitsha do not only pray for such couples. Some will give them some prayer point to be praying at home. Others will tell them to enrol for deliverance. For instance a member of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries Onitsha C. Moujekwu (personal communication, February 3rd, 2021) said that "in such case that the pastor may not only give the couples prayer point but will also encourage them to go for deliverance". For her, sometimes the church will organize prayer meeting for all the married partners and the unmarried in the church.

Religious Endogamy

Religious endogamy occurs when married partners are from the same religious group. Some churches in Onitsha like the Roman Catholic Church and some Pentecostal churches encouraged their members to marry each other. A member of Deeper Life Bible Church Nworgu Ikem (personal communication, February 17th, 2021) said that Deeper Life members are encouraged to marry each other to avoid marrying non-born again Christians". This means that some churches in Onitsha encouraged religious endogamy so as to avoid marital separation especially the one caused by religious incompatibility.

Summary

The study aimed at investigating the effects of marital separation on child's development in Onitsha and how to curb the problem of marital separation using histo-religious approach especially Christian religious approach. Marital separation is a marital aberration because it is the purpose of God that husband and wife should live together and train their children. For the purpose of the study, the researcher adopted Mertonian theory since Merton maintained that not all the parts of a social system perform functions essential for the survival of the system and marital separation on the other is a dysfunctional role of husband and wife in the family. The data employed in this study were both primary and secondary data. Primary data come from simple observation and personal communication while secondary data come from text books and journals. Based on the analysis the following principal findings came to light; that high rate of marital separation in Onitsha are due to marital rights, marital infidelity, infertility, social and religious incompatibility, search for money among others. That marital separation has a tremendous effect on child's development. It affects the child educationally, religiously, economically, and psychologically. From the data analysis, it also came to light that most of the churches in Onitsha have employed many measures to avert marital separation such as marriage course, marriage counseling, religious endogamy, prayer and deliverance programmes.

Conclusion

Marital separation is a serious social problem like divorce that needs urgent attention. This is because literature has shown that married partners all over the world separate for one reason or the other. Marital separation affects every body in the family, the church and the society. Its effects on children need urgent attention because the children are the leaders of tomorrow. It is plausible that an educated and a trained child today will be a good leader tomorrow while untrained child today will bring heartache and shame to the parents and the society.

Recommendations

People who want to get married should seek God's directions in choosing the right partner since marriage is created and ordained by God. Married partners should know that no human being is perfect therefore they should be ready to tolerate and forgive each other. Parents should know that children depend on them for many things in life, therefore they should not deprive them of parental care and love. They should spend more time with children in word of God and in guiding them with those gender roles deemed appropriate in the society. Since husband and wife are expected to live together till death pans them, marriage course should not be for couples who are preparing their wedding alone but for all married partners especially the young couples and even those who are not yet ready to marry should be taught the principles of happy married life.

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