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Assessment of the Causes and Effects of Marital Instability among the Hausa Ethnic Group in Nigeria

Yasmin Aliyu[1], Baduku Anthonia (PhD)[2], Jaafar Abdulkadir (PhD)[2]
[1]Department of Social Development, Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna. [2]Department of Sociology, Kaduna State University
Corresponding Author: meenaliyu06@gmail.com
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Abstract
The institution of marriage is highly valued among Hausa people and plays a crucial role in their social structure and identity. However, like any other society, the Hausa community also experiences instances of marital instability, leading to various consequences. The primary focus of the paper centres on identifying the significant causes and consequential effects of marital instability. Reviewing books, journals, and online papers served as a means of data collection. Utilising content analysis, the extracted data was examined. Culturally specific factors such as child betrothal/arranged marriage/forced marriage, polygyny, and interference by in-laws, along with general factors like natural defects (such as infertility and contagious diseases), socioeconomic factors (like poverty and unemployment), and unrealistic expectations, among others, have been identified as key determinants of unstable marital relationships. The paper elucidates the effects of marital instability, which encompass psychological effects, infidelity, divorce, decreased work productivity, and domestic violence. Dysfunctional theory is used to provide a theoretical framework for the study. It is recommended that couples seek knowledge and understanding of Islamic marital laws, learn to compromise, inculcate the fear of Allah in their hearts and activities, and there should be free choice in marriage.

Keywords: Culture, Hausa, Islam,Marital instability, Marriage

Introduction
Marriage is a cultural practice that transcends all human societies and culture; regardless of a society's degree of civilization, there is bound to be a marriage system in place. Marriage is defined as the union of a man and a woman such that children born by the woman are recognized as legitimate

offspring of both parents (Igbo, 2010). In many societies in Nigeria, it is the legally and socially approved union between a male and female (or females), that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes, which prescribe the rights and duties of the partners and accords status to their offspring (Musa, 2008).

In Africa, and especially in Hausa communities, marriage is held with great value that even today, despite modernisation and westernisation, it is a taboo, and stigma is attached to persons (both sexes) who are middle aged and still single. Every normal adult is expected to get married if there is the means (Musa, 2008). Marriage is so important that couples are expected to stay in it even when they encounter a lot of problems, and should try to stabilize their marriage at all cost (Alhassan, 2008). In Hausa marriages, there is the unspoken rule of 'for better, for worse', and couples are advised to be patient at all times in their marital lives.

Marriages in Hausa communities are governed by Islamic law, that is Shari' a (this is because the Hausas are predominantly Muslims and their lives revolves around Islam) and custom (al'ada) (Alhassan, 2008). Marriage is not legally recognised until the husband has paid bride wealth to the wife. The bride price can be in cash, kind, and in rare cases in credit. It serves to legitimize children, confers conjugal rights, serves as allowance to the bride, formalizes the mutual agreement between the two families, and most importantly, it stabilizes the marriage (Kenkel, 2008). Islam allows the man to marry more than one wife, and up to a maximum of four wives, to this, he must be able to discharge the right of each wife and try to be just in his dealings with them. If he cannot, then he should marry one wife (Malumfashi &Yakasai, 2009).

Marital instability refers to a situation where a marriage is vulnerable to difficulties, unresolved conflicts, and potential dissolution. It is defined as the disruption or breakdown of a marriage, which can lead to separation or divorce. It is also the condition or state of a marriage that is characterised by a lack of harmony, trust, peace, and permanence (Lamanna & Rheidan, 2011). In an unstable marriage, there may be frequent conflicts, breakdown in communication, emotional distance, or other issues that threaten the stability and longevity of the marriage. Marital instability can manifest as a range of challenges and signs indicating that the marital relationship is at risk of breaking down or ending in divorce or separation (Roberts, 2017).

Marital problems and challenges are a normal part of married life experienced by couples. The family has never been free from serious problems and instabilities that could threaten the marriage (Animasahun & Fatile, 2019). However, when the problems are unresolved and persistent, it tends to destabilise the relationship. If the husband and wife cannot live in peace, and cannot cooperate in the affairs of the home and training of their children, then the aim and purpose of their marriage is defeated and it could lead to destabilization, separation or divorce. If they are compelled to live together by the pressure of society, religion, or law, not only will they remain unhappy (in this case, their marital life could turn into an empty shell marriage), both the couple and children will suffer from such a relationship.

In Nigeria in recent years, marital instability is one of the social problems that are bedevilling the society. Decades ago, when today's elderly in the society were establishing families, divorce was relatively infrequent and this is not because they do not have family problems,

but because they were able to adequately solve their problems, and therefore stabilise their marriages (Falola et al, 2020). Among the present generation, the reverse is the case as divorce is said to be on the increase. It is very rampant in Hausa communities, perhaps because blood and kinship basically form the basis of social interaction and relatives have strong saying on a person's marriage and marital life (Musa, 2008). This may also be due to the nature and customs of Hausa people.

Statement of the Problem

Marriage, a fundamental pillar of society, is often envisaged as a haven of stability and companionship. However, within the Hausa ethnic group of Nigeria, a worrying trend of marital instability has become prevalent, casting a shadow on this traditional ideal. The Hausa are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa as well as the largest ethnic group in Nigeria, and their culture is deeply rooted in Islam. Traditionally, marriage among the Hausa is seen as a sacred bond (Malumfashi & Yakasai, 2009). Marital instability is one of the social problems that are eating deep into the fabric of Hausa societies.

In recent times, more marriages are affected at an alarming rate in the matrimonial setup, a situation which has not been the case before. This in turn has thwarted the goals, aspirations and expectations of numerous couples. The disruption caused by marital instability is enormous, and goes a long way in subjecting its victims to traumatic experiences, dashed hopes and difficult living. It is an aspect of social disorganisation; hence, it negatively affects the social order (Waite & Lehrer, 2013).

Many marriages that have been blissfully conducted just succeeded in giving the parties involved a momentary joy; little did the parties involved think or know that such marriages will not work out until one problem or the other starts surfacing in the matrimonial home. Marital (family) life contains an endless source of stress which if not tackled may threaten the stability of the marriage (Robert & Donald 2013). Instability may arise from inconsistencies that may be built in a particular form of marriage, for example, forced and gift marriages which are noted with difficulties and tension in marital life or other factors which may occur after the union.

The concerning rise in marital instability among Hausa people, which is marked by escalating rates of separations and divorces raises significant questions regarding its causes and profound effects on individuals, families, and the broader society. Despite the importance of understanding and addressing marital instability, there is limited literature on the Hausa ethnic group in Nigeria. Previous researches either primarily focus on the concept in other ethnic groups in Nigeria, or provides generalised insights into marital instability across the different tribes in Nigeria but fails to capture the intricacies of the Hausa ethnic group's distinct socio-cultural and religious context (Olasehinde & Onodje, 2023; Oyefara, 2018; Animasahun & Fatile, 2019; Onovo & Ani, 2021; Falola et al, 2020; Esere et al, 2011). The Hausa, known for their rich cultural heritage and strong adherence to Islamic traditions, present a specific socio-demographic profile that demands nuanced exploration. Consequently, this paper fills the identified gap in literature regarding the culturally sensitive factors contributing to marital instability among the Hausa people as well as its various effects.

Forms of Marriage Practised by Hausa People

The following are some of the forms of marriage practised by Hausa people. While some are generally practised in most societies, others are more widespread in Hausa societies.

a. **Auren So (Love Marriage):** This is a marriage between two people who are in love. The union is based on romantic attraction between the spouses. The couple are allowed to choose each other, but it is usually required that their parents approve the relationship and participate in the wedding activities. This type of marriage is becoming more common in Hausa society, as people are starting to have more freedom to choose their own partners.
b. **Auren Zumunci (Marriage among Kinsfolk):** This is a form of marriage in which two close families, who are either relatives or friends wed their children. In line with the dictates of Islam, marriage among kinsfolk is widely practised especially in rural Hausa societies. However, this is with the exception of siblings, mothers/fathers, direct aunts/uncles, and other close relatives as described in the Holy Qur'an. It can be based on love or arranged to maintain religious or kinship ties.
c. **Auren Hadi (Arranged Marriage):** This form of marriage involves the union of two individuals based on the decision of their families. In this type of marriage, the families play a crucial role in selecting a suitable partner for their children. The couple may have limited or no prior knowledge of each other before the marriage, and the focus is often on compatibility, family background, and social standing.
d. **Child Marriage (Auren Yarinta):** This form of marriage involves the union of two underaged partners or an adult with a young partner. In most cases in Hausa society, it is the female that is given out in marriage at a tender age, while the male is allowed to marry at a much later age so as to be responsible enough and capable of shouldering the financial, social and religious responsibilities in the marriage.
e. **Forced Marriage (Auren Dole):** This is a form of marriage which is conducted in a situation where one or both of the partners do not consent to the marriage. It is when a female or male is given out or married to someone he or she does not love; rather their parents or guardians force them into the union, perhaps because of social, economic or political benefit.
f. **Gift Marriage (Auren Sadaka):** This form of marriage occurs in a situation whereby the parents or relatives of the girl present her to a person (more often religious people, wealthy men, influential people, traditional rulers, e. t. c) free of charge, that is, without them paying anything, mostly in order to boost their (the parents) prestige and income.

Some of these marriages practised by Hausa people create tension and unhappiness, especially if the spouses' needs, desires, and values are incompatible, conflicting, and uncompromising. The way marriages are conducted or executed can be said to have some consequence for the stability or instability of marriage.

Causes of Marital Instability

Factors facilitating marital instability are many, and they occur in different forms. However, the following are some of the causes of marital instability in Hausa communities:

a. **Natural Defects:** Natural defects like infertility (of women and men), impotence of men and contagious diseases like leprosy constitute factors facilitating marital instability.

Leslie and Korman (2018) asserted that society sees childlessness as an important reason for defining some couples' marriages as a failure. In many Hausa societies, where great value is attached to the continuity of the family line through offspring, the failure to reproduce is viewed with great concern. Generally, if the wife did not bear any children, the fault is automatically assumed to be hers (Oyefara, 2018). Therefore, it leads to a lot of hardship on the woman, ranging from insults, shaming, jests, and other emotional abuses by the husband, his family and other members of the society, thereby leading to a lot of problems in the marriage.

Similarly, the impotence of the husband can bring about sexual dissatisfaction and the resultant effect of a lack of peace or even total disintegration of the marriage. Contagious diseases and physical defects (especially when they occur after marriage) may lead to feelings of disgust, aversion or even hate by the healthy spouse, resulting to neglect or divorce (Malumfashi & Yakasai, 2009).

b. **Socioeconomic Factors:** One of the clearest findings to emerge in recent decades has been the fact that the rate of marital instability increases with descending socioeconomic status. Irrespective of whether the criterion used is education, occupation or income, it is apparent that family problems are much more common in lower-class families than in upper-class families. Kenkel (2015) opined that couples are happier, and the wife is less likely to seek for divorce in a marriage where she has enough to eat and use, with satisfaction, attention and love from the husband. It is when a wife does not have that satisfaction and recognition that problems will begin to occur or she will want to have a change for the better.

   Poverty can lead to a lot of marital problems, especially in situations where the husband is redundant, and does not make any effort to earn income in order to provide for the family. There could also be a power tussle if the wife becomes the breadwinner of the family, and the husband demands full command and authority of the house, as this will likely result in disagreements and problems in the marriage.

c. **Child Betrothal/Arranged Marriage/Forced Marriage:** Child betrothal is formerly the normal method of arranging marriages in Hausa communities (Musa, 2008). However, the method, which is gradually becoming outdated, has contributed to the rate of marital problems as well as divorce in Northern Nigeria specifically (Alhassan, 2008). For example, when a girl who has been betrothed at a young age grows to realise that she does not desire to marry the man, her parents will be required to refund the bride price already paid and any other gifts given if the betrothal agreement is broken off. The parents could also be stigmatised as being untrustworthy as they did not fulfil the promise of marriage (Musa, 2008). If the girl is forced to marry the man, the marriage is not likely to be blissful and may end in severe and persistent marital instability.

   The situation is similar in cases of forced marriage, whereby the agreement of one or both of the partners is not sought before the marriage. The marriage is usually arranged by parents or guardians of the partner-to-be with the offspring of relatives, friends or neighbours. In the olden days, it was one of the most prevalent ways of marriage in Hausa societies. Although it has largely been replaced by love marriage, it is still practised and it contributes to the rate of marital instability among Hausa people.

d. **Polygyny:** Polygyny is the union of a man with multiple wives simultaneously in marriage. It is a common practice among the Hausa people. Islamic law permits a man to have up to four wives, provided that he is capable and can treat them equally and fairly (Syed, 2007). While polygyny is culturally and religiously accepted, it can also pose challenges and conflicts within households (Olasehinde & Onodje, 2023). The coexistence of multiple wives in one household can lead to conflict, jealousy, and unequal distribution of resources, potentially leading to tension and instability.

e. **Rigid Gender Roles:** Gender roles are the social expectations about what males and females should do and how they should behave. The Hausa culture has certain expectations and norms regarding gender roles and responsibilities within a marriage. When these roles are not met or when there is a significant cultural clash between spouses, it can lead to instability. Traditional gender roles assign very specific tasks and responsibilities to men and women (Onovo & Ani, 2021). Men are expected to be the breadwinners, while women are expected to be the homemakers. These can be a source of marital instability as it can lead to conflict and resentment if the spouses are not able or willing to fulfil their expected roles (Esere et al, 2011). For example, if a husband is unable to provide for his family financially, it can lead to stress and tension in the marriage. Similarly, if a wife is not able to keep the house clean and take care of the children, it can lead to criticism and disapproval from her husband and in-laws.

f. **Incompatibility:** Causes of marital instability have been traced to the matter of wrong choice by some couples. Robert and Donald (2013) locating the source of problems within marriage reinforced the belief that marriage to the right person will result in a happy marital life. Many people explain their marital difficulties by rationalising that they made a poor choice and should try again in another marriage. Nowadays, the matter of incompatibility (wrong choice) is very rampant in society. The parents and relatives of the spouses might advise them not to go ahead and marry because they feel or know they are not compatible but this will usually fall on deaf ears.

g. **Unrealistic Expectations:** Expectations, in this context, are what someone believes should happen in his or her relationship. Kenkel (2016) found that expectations in family such as financial expectations, parenting decisions, role of relatives in the marriage, amount of time spent away from home, gender roles, etc can have impact on the stability of marriage. Couples with unrealistic expectations tend to marry expecting never ending romantic, passionate love with their spouses (Goode, 2009). These unrealistic relationship expectations may lead to unrealistic standards for marriage and at times divorce. When there is a gap between the expectations and reality (experienced behaviour), dissatisfaction and marital tension will be high. Couples soon to be married find it difficult to examine expectations rationally; therefore, changing unrealistic expectations of marriage is most effective before couples seriously consider marriage.

h. **Substance and Alcohol Abuse:** Substance and alcohol abuse negatively affects the life of individuals who engage in it. The problematic aspect of such abuse lies not only in the health hazard that it poses to the victim but also in the fact that the abuser/alcoholic eventually ceases to function responsibly. He or she may be involved in automobile accidents, lose efficiency and concentration at work, and may even lose the job itself (Goode, 2009). The victim tends to be violent at one time or the other and becomes a burden on his/her family. Their marriage tends to be problematic and could eventually break apart.

i. **Religious Incompatibility:** Religion plays a significant role among Hausa people, and differences in religious beliefs or levels of devotion between spouses can lead to conflict. The key question having to do with relative failure and success potentials of inter-faith and intra-faith marriages is still left in some doubt. It may be that sampling and procedures are at fault, but it was found that shared religious beliefs are highly predictive of marital stability (Waite & Lehrer, 2013). Lamanna and Rheidan (2011) opine that marital stability greatly depended on religious compatibility. Consistent with these, Esere et al (2011) argue that marriages not sharing the same religious practices can result in conflict and divorce.

j. **Interference by in laws:** In Hausa societies, there is emotional attachment among relatives, and parents play a major role in decision-making in their children's lives. Although there are advantages to this, it could be highly detrimental if the relatives, especially in-laws, are biased against the spouse of their child. This could be in the form of unwarranted intrusion into their marriage, intentional bad advice, and manipulations, which could all cause disharmony in the family.

k. **Desertion:** This is an indicator of and a factor that heightens marital tensions. In a usual desertion case, the husband fails in his obligation to cater to and support his wife and children. This usually involves physical departure; though some of such husbands come and go several times in the course of the marriage, maintain irregular job habits, and have little concern for their marital and family responsibilities. Hence, there will be no marital harmony or consensus since the husband has failed to live up to his responsibility by not performing his roles. When one of the marital partners deserts, there is usually tension in the family and the marriage may likely end socially, but (probably) continue legally.

Effects of Marital Instability

The following are some of the detrimental effects of marital instability:

a) **Psychological Effects:** Individuals who have an unstable marriage have an increased risk of developing psychological problems. It may include depression (overwhelming feelings of sadness and grief, loss of interest or

pleasure in activities usually enjoyed), anxiety, and low self-esteem (feelings of worthlessness or guilt). These emotional effects can extend to children within the household, negatively impacting their well-being and development (Goode, 2009). Severe depression may increase the risk of suicide.

b) **Infidelity:** Marital instability may cause people to have extramarital affairs/cheat on their partners. This especially occurs in a situation where there is a lack of physical and/or emotional intimacy between the couple as a result of marital problems. Hence, a partner may end up having an affair with another person, which may further destabilise the couple's marriage.

c) **Divorce:** Divorce is the legal breakdown of marriage. The rate of divorce has recently been showing a general upward trend. It is argued that the continually increasing divorce rate reflects the increasing unhappiness and instability in marriages. All marriages have troubled times, but when it becomes persistent, it leads to the destabilisation of marriages and divorce (Malumfashi & Yakasai, 2009).

d) **Decreased Work Productivity:** Marital problems have been associated with decreased work productivity in both men and women. This may be the result of decreased concentration and preoccupation with problems at home.

e) **Domestic Violence:** Domestic violence can be considered as an effect of marital instability. Couples in unstable marriages have a greater risk of experiencing violence at some point in their marriages. The anger and tension that they may feel because of their unhappy marriages may lead them to violent or aggressive behaviours. These behaviours can have serious effects on the marriage as well as the victims' psychological and physical wellbeing (Falola et al, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Dysfunctional Theory by R. K. Merton

Dysfunctional Theory is a sociological theory developed by Robert K. Merton in the mid-20th century. The theory emerged within the structural-functionalism framework, emphasising the interdependence of social institutions and the unintended consequences of social structures (Coser, 2005). While structural-functionalism focused on the positive functions of social institutions in maintaining societal equilibrium, Merton recognized that not all consequences of a structure were positive. He expanded on the concept of latent and manifest functions, and argued that social structures could generate unintended negative consequences, which he termed as dysfunctions (Nickerson, 2023).

Dysfunctions are the aspects of a social phenomenon that disrupt social order, contribute to social problems, or hinder the achievement of societal goals. The theory is instrumental in examining societal dynamics, highlighting the need to consider not only the intended functions but also the hidden or negative outcomes of social phenomena (Calhoun, 2010).

As the theory posits that social institutions can have both functional and dysfunctional consequences, in the context of marriage, functional consequences can include providing companionship, support, and raising children. Dysfunctional consequences include factors that lead to conflict, like arranged marriage, financial problems, polygyny, etc. Also, in its entirety, marital instability is a dysfunction of the institution of marriage. The theory provides insights into how social structures, norms, and behaviours can unintentionally contribute to marital instability among Hausa people, and the resultant negative effects on the family and society. For example, the practice of polygyny, where a man has multiple wives, is common in Hausa society. Although it is often seen as a way to strengthen social ties, enhance economic security and reduce immorality, polygyny can also lead to jealousy, competition, and conflict among wives, potentially destabilising marriages. This is a dysfunctional aspect of polygyny, which in turn has negative consequences on the family and society.

Recommendations

To reduce marital instability and its inherent effects in Hausa communities, the following are recommended:

a) **Understanding of Islamic marital laws:** Marital partners should seek knowledge and understanding of the Islamic rules guiding marriage. This will discourage partners from infringing the rights of their counterparts resulting in ill treatment and marital instability.

b) **Compromise:** Couples should learn to compromise, meaning that they should recognise that there are two (or more) sides to every issue, and as such, should overlook some issues that might bring problems so that there might be peace in the family.

c) **Fear of Allah:** Married couples should inculcate the fear of Allah in their hearts and all their activities. They should view marriage first and foremost as a religious institution that has firm religious, legal and moral implications. They should bear in mind that their joining together is devotion and they will definitely be rewarded for it.

d) **Education:** Education needs to be intensified, in order to have more awareness. Parents and children should be encouraged to acquire both Islamic and western knowledge. In most cases, educated partners are more likely to have positive conflict resolution skills. In addition, there should be marital counselling sessions for partners before and after marriage, to help guide them through the different stressors inherent in marriage, as well as on effective resolution of marital problems.

e) **Communication:** Couples have to communicate constantly. They should set a time to talk about plans, problems, grievances or misunderstandings, and once this habit of sharing things verbally is established, the marriage becomes much more resistant to stress. In addition, couples with strained relationships should learn not to introduce a third person into their affairs; this usually stems from poor communication, and will have adverse effect on their relationship. This recommendation is one of the most effective, because spouses will understand each other's feelings and perceptions, and thus prevent a problem from destabilising their marriage.

f) **Free choice in marriage:** As posited by Islam, parents, relations and guardians should advice and guide their offspring in the choice of marital partners. However, they should be allowed to marry whom they desire, as the world of ills that forced marriage and incompatibility could cause are far-reaching. Free choice in marriage tends to decrease the rate of problems being experienced by spouses because the marriage is based on love, mutual acceptance and compatibility.

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