

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE- JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
AND MENTAL HEALTH

THE IGBO CHRISTIAN---TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE VIS A VIS HIGH RATE OF
PROBLEMS AND DIVORCE AMONG IGBO PEOPLE LIVING IN AMERICA
[AN INTEGRATIVE ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT PLAN]

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OUTLINE

CHAPTER ONE

1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MARRIAGE AMONG IGBO PEOPLE

1.1 Definition and Understanding of Marriage

1.1.1 Forms of Marriage among the Igbo people

1.1.2 Aims and Purposes of Marriage in Igbo land

1.1.3 Preparations and Marriage ceremonies

1.2 The concept of Family in Igbo land

1.2.1 Nuclear Family System

1.2.2 Extended Family System

1.2.3 Communitarian nature of the family system

CHAPTER THREE

CAUSES AND CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS

2:1 Problem of Incompatibility of the Couples

2:2 Lack of Communication

2:3 Financial Problems

2:4 Infidelities in the Marriage

2:5 Mental Health Problems

2:6 Childlessness

2:7 Different Religious Beliefs

CHAPTER FOUR

Thus, some marriages among Igbo people in Nigeria have problems and conflicts but they usually manage it well, and most marriages continue in most cases. It was new for me to hear, within the first week of my arrival in the United States, that one of the biggest problems facing Igbo our people in the U.S. is divorce. I did not understand what my informant was saying until I encountered and interacted with people involved. It did not search for people with marital problems but the situation presented itself to me.

It all started when I went to a parish to say mass and was introduced as an Igbo priest who just arrived the country and was to stay in that parish for one month. After the mass, I joined in the routine of greetings and exchange of pleasantries with the parishioners. A young lady approached me and greeted me in our native language and asked me if I would spare some time to meet with her. We made an appointment and she came and narrated her ordeal in her marriage of seven years with four kids.

She asked me to keep her in prayers and promised to do her best to make the marriage work. Her case involved violent abuse and great religious difference, which has made her husband unwilling to stay in the marriage. According her, the parents and siblings of her husband are contributory to their marital problems because they always tell him what to do.

I have conscientiously followed this particular case for nearly five years. They are involved with a difficult court case. The husband filed for divorce and has not been faithful in paying the child support demanded by law. The wife is unemployed. I wondered why someone who is in a professional field and has a good job would want to allow the children to suffer in bid to punish his estranged wife. The court is moving slowly.

Another case was that of a man whom I met in the company of my friend who came to pick me up from the train station. The moment I was introduced as an Igbo priest, this other passenger started to pour out his bitterness and agony because of his wife. He made me understand that he had four children with this woman and has been thrown out of the house. There is a restraint order, and he has not seen his children. His accusation against his wife was that she has become "Americanized", and other women had led her into their "vicious club."

I was made to understand that he brought his wife to this country and now she does not have any respect for him. I did sympathize with him and unconsciously memorized his name. One day, I met this man's estranged wife and beautiful daughters, and her story was different. I heard the story from friends of the woman who had gathered to celebrate with her on her graduation, which was worth celebrating after what she has been through in life.

This other story was one of domestic violence, abuse, intimidation and suppression. She had been assaulted and choked even when she was heavy with her last daughter. Her self esteem was low, and she believed that she is good for nothing. Neighbors came to her rescue by calling

the police on the husband. Evidence was gathered to establish a case of domestic abuse, and the restraint was issued. He never bothered to ask after the children for many years, until the wife filed a case for child support, which he did not pay for a couple of years. The man's family members who are in this country were also instrumental in the failure of the marriage.

The wife later discovered that the man was married to another lady. He denied that he was married to other woman and had children with her, until the woman brought evidence of his marriage in Nigeria to the judge to prove her case. I was caught in the web of confusion when I heard the stories from friends of the woman. When she talked about her ordeal she was always moved with tears.

When I attend functions organized by Nigerians, one of the things I hear is the story of separation and divorce. Among the men, one hear that the ladies, especially registered nurses, driving SUV cars, are the ones who put their husbands out of their matrimonial homes in order to be free and to enjoy their money and drive big cars and wear expensive dresses.

The women accuse their estranged husbands of being unfaithful, money conscious, and authoritarian. Some would say that their partners were lazy, and never got a better paying job, and they were not prepared to help out in domestic chores.

I had telephone conversations with more than twenty women living in several states who are going through marital problems with their husbands. I met with a group of divorced ladies in Houston a few years ago who have formed a solidarity group to support each other. I attended a party they had in one of their members' house with all their children and female friends. It was after that meeting that I started to think about the scope of this problem, and the effects it might have on both parties and their children.

According to Rev Evaristus Obikwelu who lives amongst Nigerians in Houston, the rate of divorce is above 10% of the population there. In his view, this poses a big problem for future marriages and families, since many are afraid that the current wave of divorce might affect them if proper care is not taken. The Nigerian population in Houston specifically is over 150,000 according to the former US ambassador to Namibia.

A man narrated the ordeal he went through with his estranged wife, whom he married from Nigeria. According to him, the problem is that his wife had no respect for his parents and family members, and would always want to send money to her immediate family. He put her through school in the United States, and after her graduation she got a teaching appointment and her pay check was higher than the husband's.

Things started going sour and they were living in an apartment building where the man left her after she called the police on him for battering. He is going through divorce now and vowed

never to go back to that marriage. He pays child support for their three kids and has time to visit and be with them. He regrets going to Nigeria to contract that marriage. And he is not prepared to engage in any serious relationship in the near future.

Marital conflict is not restricted to only those divorced or separated, but also other families who are coping and holding on to their marriage. No doubt there are good and stable marriages among the Igbo people living in the United States, but some of the marriages are in trouble. The conflict has escalated to murder in America and even in Nigeria when the partner in question travels home for vacation. There are stories of people who hired killers to murder their partner in Nigeria in order to have access to all their money, property and custody of their children.

Prompted by the alarming rate of murder of partners, Dr. Olatunde Olusesi wrote an article on the issue after a careful study of the situation. He commented on the murder of a Nigerian woman in Missouri: "the recent murder in Missouri of a Nigerian woman, [A.I] 28, by her estranged husband, [M.I] 50, has not been any different. This tragedy, as well as the related report that over 500 Nigerian men in the US might be facing charges for taking the lives of their wives, underscores the enormity and complexity of the crisis in the Nigerian immigrant family." [p.21] Stressing the potential dangers in homes that have abusive relationship, he warned: "each home plagued by domestic violence, like those of the following men who killed their wives in the last five years alone: Jonny Omorogieva, John Onwuka, Kelechi Charles Emeruwa, Theophilus Ojukwu, Benjamin Unachukwu, and Ebenezer Akeredolu, is a potential slaughter house.

The call for action becomes imminent and mandatory if we are to save lives, marriages and children. It becomes a big concern for those interested in stability and a healthy relationship in family life. The need arises for the study of the situation, understanding of the background of Igbo people, and an assessment of the situation. Thus, an exposition of the meaning of marriage and the cultural background of the Igbo people will promote an understanding of this problem, and how it might be approached, and how it may be addressed.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TRADITIONAL/CULTURAL MARRIAGE AMONG THE IGBO PEOPLE

Definition and Understanding of traditional Marriage

Marriage among the Igbo people is as old as their origin. This is due to the fact that the Igbo mythology claims that their progenitors were a couple *Eri* and his wife were sent from heaven by God to populate and inhabit the earth. This ancient myth purports that the world started from the Igbo race. The couple had seven children who founded some of the leading towns in Igbo land.

The Igbo believed that God ordained marriage [*CHI-UKWU* -‘MOST HIGH GOD’] and it should be cherished and celebrated. It is a natural institution and the means by which a man and woman could procreate and perpetuate their lineage. It touches the entire family and the communities of parties involved, because it is viewed as a communal affair. In the words of *Nwabude*, “marriage among the Igbo is a communal affair. It involves the families of the man and the woman, their ‘*umunna*’, [extended family of uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins of even very distant degrees], the friends and well wishers of both the man and the woman”. [p.14]

The noun form is ‘*alu m di na nwunye*’ which has the verb ‘to marry’ ‘*ilu di* [to marry a husband] and ‘*ilu nwunye*’ [to marry a wife]. According to Basden [1982] marriage and childbearing go together and every adult is expected to be married since “*unmarried persons of either sex, except in special cases, are objects of derision, and to be childless is the greatest calamity that can befall a woman. Hence a very high value is set upon marriage*” [p.68]

Marriage among the Igbo can be defined as a union between a man and a woman on agreement or organized by their parents, with the dowry and traditional customs performed, and they live as husband and wife. Common among the ordinary Igbo is the view that marriage is the lawful living together or union of a man and a woman of different families for the purpose of having children, provided that the traditional and customary rites have been performed.

It is a great achievement on the part of the man to be able to have a wife because it raises his social status. It is a matter of pride for the woman that someone finds her desirable and admirable. It is the dream of every woman to be married and most importantly to have children, especially a male child. The Igbo people have many reasons to cherish and celebrate marriage. An unmarried adult is seen as an ‘*efulefe or ofeke*’ [a useless person].

Usually, he does not have a vote or a say in the meeting of the elders. He does not command respect in the community simply because he has not done what he is expected to do, which is to be married. The people do not recognize as marriage the living together of two lovers or friends if they have not performed the prescribed traditional rites. They are looked on with repudiation and disrespect, and this is seen as irresponsibility.

An unmarried lady is not respected in her family and the community. Many times the parents will be pressuring her to get married and “save their faces”. Marriage cements the relationship between the families of the couple and this extends to their various communities.

In an interview with the great theologian, historian and lecturer, Professor Obi, [12/2008] about Marriage and life in Igbo land, he stated that *‘life is elastic in Igbo land. The celebration of marriage is sumptuous and everybody is welcomed to share in all the food and drink.’* Marriage for him is a watershed and people from all parts of the community could go to the wedding feast, invited or uninvited. People usually do have good will for the couple and would attend such celebrations as a sign of support and social interaction.

The Igbo literary icon and legal practitioner, Dr. Obi, defined marriage as *‘the union between a man and a woman for the duration of the woman’s life, being normally the gist of a wider association between two families or sets of families’* [p.8] This definition does not bring about all the components and elements of marriage in Igbo land but it does attest to the fact of the formation of families and the bond established by marrying couples. Of course, it raises the question about polygamy and divorce that are existing practices in Igbo land.

The celebrated literary icon and novelist Professor Achebe, [1958] in his description of a settlement of a marriage dowry in Igbo land used dog a play metaphor when he said *“marriage is like a dog play, if I fall down for you and you fall down for me, it is a play. Marriage should be a play and not a fight”*. [p.51] This brings a spirit of understanding and commitment in the marriage relationship that involves different families and communities, because there bound to be intermarriage between the two communities. Thus, a lasting and friendly relationship is established in marriage which continues to flourish to generations yet unborn.

A cursory look at different forms of marriages in Igbo land would be of great help because not just one simple and single form marriage exists among the Igbo people. Other forms are publicly celebrated and acknowledged and there are some that are permitted to exist covertly.

1.1 Forms of Marriage among the Igbo People

Prior to the advent of Christianity and Western civilization the Igbo tradition promoted and encouraged polygamous marriage, because it places the man among the wealthy and affluent of the society. A man increases his wealth by marrying many wives and having many children who will help in his large farmland.

POLYGAMY

The Igbo people are susceptible to polygamous life due to their values and worldview. Polygamy is used here in the understanding of a man marrying more than one wife at the same time. Polygamy is a family system in which a man is allowed to have as many wives as possible. It is not the same as having concubines. Each of the wives is a lawfully married and has the right to be called a wife among other wives.

The legitimacy of any of the wives of a polygamist is not questioned as long as he duly performs the required traditional rites and ceremonies with the wife. She has all the rights and privileges and duties of any of the legitimate wives, though a kind of hierarchy exists in the polygamous system.

The first wife is usually the head and *primus inter paribus* unless otherwise stated by the husband. Achebe described a polygamous family in his literature when he painted the picture of a wealthy and respected man in the village of Umuofia, *"there was a wealthy man in Okonkwo's village who had three huge farms, nine wives and thirty children. His name is Nwakibie and he had taken the highest but one title which a man could take in the clan"* [p.13-14]

Some people could have as many as 12 to 14 wives and as many children as possible. Many traditional rulers had as many wives and concubines as possible, especially those they conquered in war.

In a typical polygamous setting, each of the wives has a particular day or week she is supposed to meet with the husband and feed him and actually stay with him or be allowed to enter his *obi* [living room of the head of the family]. Each of the wives is usually settled with a house that she shares with her children and in some cases a portion of the farm is given to the wife that serves as a garden. In a sense, each wife is granted a certain amount of private accommodation in the compound, usually to the extent of a hut for her use and that of her children.

With the advent of Christianity and Western civilization, the practice of polygamy has undergone some metamorphosis and has gone out of practice among Christian converts. [It is practiced in some places] It does not enjoy the open and public support it had before the

advent of Christianity and Western civilization. Rather, today the support is tacit and it is still a lawful form of marriage accepted by the society.

It is generally accepted among the Igbo that the traditional marriage allows polygamy, and there is no customary law against it provided that the man has the capacity and ability to maintain all his wives. Polygamy as practiced among the Igbo people has both an important practical function in cementing alliances in many villages and economic functions of increasing the man's wealth and at the same it has some value as a social status symbol. For Ogbalu [1972] wives are economic investment for they and their children help a man in his farm work. [P.15]

Among other reasons, polygamy in Igbo land is promoted for sexual reasons, though this is not a major factor. There is the belief among the Igbo that a man is not supposed to sleep with a pregnant or nursing woman, and thus the need to have more than one wife. Nwabude hinted that *'among the Igbo, there is a practice that when a child is born, it takes three years to wean it. Within this period, the man and his wife are not expected to have sexual relationship for very many reason, one of which is that it is not good for the health of the child'* [p.24] It seems a logical and natural necessity for a man to have a second wife based on this belief.

Another reason for polygamy is the case for a male child. Even though a man may have numerous female children by his wife, who help in his farmland, but her inability to bear a male child is a potential reason for a second wife or even a third wife. The male child has right of succession and continuation of the family lineage.

To promote decency of life and moral probity, men are encouraged to have as many wives as possible provided they can afford. Flirtation is highly discouraged and looked on with disdain. Actually, it is a mark of irresponsibility for a married man to be seen flirting with married or unmarried women. In the words of Nwabude *'among the Igbo, adultery or concubinage is frowned on and they are not culturally and socially acceptable. It would be worse if a wealthy or a titled or a man of honor is involved in such an act'* [p.24] Thus polygamy serves as a check to the male sexual desire.

Usually when a man is repeatedly seen with an unmarried girl, the rumor is that they are intending to marry even though courtship was not a social norm in the past. Courtship must be in private so that the parents of both parties may not know of it until there is an intention to get married. Then the man would introduce the topic to his parents.

The people are so strict with probity of life that if, in the course of the 'hidden courtship' the girl gets pregnant and proves that it was the man who is responsible, there could be arrangement by both parents for immediate traditional marriage or the girl would be kept in

the house of the man until after her delivery. If the man is married she could be added to the number of his wives.

It should be noted that polygamy is favored and fostered equally by men and women; in the past women were the chief supporters of the system. It was the ambition of every Igbo man to become a polygamist, and add to the number of his wives as circumstances permit. Basden has this to say, “they are an indication of social standing and, to some extent, signs of affluence; in any case, they are counted as sound investments” [p.97]

In recent times, Christianity, Western education, and other social factors have systematically relegated polygamy in Igbo land to virtually a non-existent reality even though there may be a few who are in polygamous marriages today.

MONOGAMY

Monogamy has virtually replaced polygamy in Igbo land.

With the conversion of many Igbo people to Christianity, a new social form and structure was being formed. The old customs and practices became something to be scorned and disdained. It became a grave or mortal sin to marry more than one wife. Those already in big families were encouraged to get married in the church with one of their wives, and to have nothing sexually to do with other wives.

There was a story of a reputed polygamous wealthy man who refused Christianity on the ground that the priest asked him to do away with his wives and children and just take only the children from the first wife. The old man told the priest that he questions the integrity of this God who would want him have nothing to do with his own wives and children of his blood. Igbo land is predominantly Christian and boasts of the greatest number of priests and religious in Africa. This makes a case for the acceptance of monogamy.

There are other factors that work in favor of monogamy, such as a shift from agro-centric economy to an industrial one, Western education and influence and urbanization brought by civilization. Thus, the ancient Igbo cultures and practices like a small pond in summer gradually receded and dried up under the harsh summer sunlight. *Ogbalu* [1972] did add that fear of quarrels and jealousies among wives helped to promote monogamy. [P.15]

In Igbo monogamous life, we see the reflection of the Christian monotheistic religion with its Hebrew biblical heritage. Credence is given to the biblical passages of Old and New Testament that speak of ‘in the beginning God made them male and female and that is the reason why a

man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and the two shall become one flesh' [Gen2: 24, Mtt. 19:4-5]

This religious tradition gradually gained its strength in the tradition of the people, and has been accepted. Today, it is almost abominable for an Igbo man to have more than one wife unless he wants to be seen as a fallen Christian who is not in full communion with the church.

This new trend has its own challenges and struggles, especially in the area of fidelity and begetting of male children. In actual fact it poses a big challenge to a barren woman where the possibility of a second wife is strong. To this Basden remarks: "a childless marriage is a source of serious disappointment and sooner or later, leads to serious troubles between man and wife" [p.63]

Monogamy has challenges stemming from political and social standpoints. However, it is interesting to note that most if not all families in Igbo land are predominantly monogamous, or at least were primarily monogamous before a few got into polygamy due to certain circumstances. The Igbo man is no longer seeking polygamous marriage, as was the case in the past.

CHILD MARRIAGE

Prior to the advent of the colonial masters and early Christian missionaries, many marriages were begun as early as a child is born. It was essentially between family friends and business partners or among age group. A father could arrange a wife for his little son from his friend's family. He could arrange with the friend as soon as a female child is born. He visits the child and family and makes his intention known by official bringing with him a keg of palm wine and some kola nuts.

An erudite Igbo scholar **Ogbalu** pointed this out when he said, "A child may get married at any age. A person who sees a newborn baby girl might decide to marry her or for his son to marry her. He informs the parents with a calabash of wine and performs the ceremony of the *ido-oku mmiri* of the child" [p.16] having performed the ceremony the child would hardly get married to another person when she grows up, unless the bond is broken due to certain circumstances.

This arrangement could be made even before the child is born. It could be an oral agreement and parents are expected to respect that kind arrangement. Should any of the contracting parents die before the marriage is actualized, the other living parents will ensure that the will of the dead parent is respected. Thus the children are trained at an early age to think of themselves as married, waiting for the time of maturity.

The child-couples could help each other's families in domestic chores and farm work. They could fetch water from the stream and get firewood from the bush for their intended parent-in-

laws. The parents of both children would make it a point of duty to drum this arrangement into the mind of their children, so that they know that their future depends on it. The children cannot but think and act as engaged future husband and wife. In actual fact, in the past most marriages were not based on love but on investments, and other reasons.

In some areas of Igbo land, child-marriage [ido-nkwu nwanyi, igudo-nwanyi] simply means, bringing bride wine, and staking bride claim. According to Basden, “richer class parents often select a wife [or wives] for a son, while he is still a boy, irrespective of his wishes or inclinations; he is probably not even told of the transaction until it is an accomplished fact, and the girl is presented to him as his wife” [p.69]

However, this kind of marriage arrangement may meet with opposition from one who happens to fall in love with someone else. If the objecting person is insistent, and the parents want to yield to his wishes, they would discuss with the contracting family and have the marriage dissolved and the dowry returned back, though not without some problems.

Parents engage in this kind of marriage arrangement as a way of sustaining continuity of family tree, and at the same time to cement their inter-family relationships. It must establish a firm friendly relationship between families, sometimes, it is a payback for favors done or received from the other family. Both families would do everything possible to avoid conflict or disintegration, after a long period of established friendship or relationship. So in the case of dissolution of the arranged marriage, they would want to settle it amicably.

It becomes problematic if the family of the girl finds out that the young man is flirting with other girls and still intends to marry their daughter, they would inform the parents of the boy and ask them to caution their son and have him stop such behavior. It can be same if the girl was found “sleeping around” or moving with another young man. It actually shows that the Igbo people do not tolerate flirtations and have great respect for family system.

What is behind child-marriage is basically the fact that parents have had experiences of marriages and they are in a better position to detect the qualities in a prospective housewife. In the case of child-marriage, they make their inference from the life of the parents of the child, which they believe would be inculcated in the child as she grows up. Experience has equally shown that sometimes, this does not turn out to be the case.

This is an old philosophy of life, which says that a good parent would always rear up a good child. Good tree bears good fruit is just the basis of that philosophy and it did work out for them - some of these qualities include on soundness of life and absence from the family of issues like, insanity, robbery, childlessness, laziness, quarrelsome, and other things are important for good cohesive peaceful living.

Today, child-marriage has completely disappeared from the system, and many factors contributed to that: Education, Christianity, civilization, and urbanization are some of the factors that discouraged child-marriage.

Women's education was one of the greatest barriers, because girls in the past were not allowed to go to school. Their entire life was restricted to the family and village learning domestic shores and preparing for marriages. Mothers would gladly tell their daughters that their place was in the kitchen and farmland, and of course to bear as many children as possible.

It was the introduction of the revolutionary pre-marital school by Blessed Father **Tansi** that broke the chain of ignorance among the Igbo girls. He removed girls getting ready for marriage from their parents, and kept them in a convent run by nuns. They were taught English, sowing, baking bread and cakes, and art crafts and religious education.

The women were independent and self-sufficient. Prior to this time, they were dependent on their former husbands. The girls left the convent better equipped, and empowered to send their daughters to school, which was previously abhorred by mothers. They also contributed enough wealth to their families.

This radical turn of event by the cleric brought glorious redemption for women in that neighborhood and its environs. Women started getting enrolled in schools and some of them got to doctoral levels, and today some Igbo women have made tremendous progress in their area of work. The likes of novelist Elizabeth Ishichei, the economist with the World Bank – Iweala Okong, the world acclaimed pharmacist Dora Akuyili and the young world literary award winner Chiamanda are all daughters of Igbo land.

Statistically speaking, Igbo women are the most educated and sophisticated ladies in Nigeria and a lot of them are professionals who are well known in their area of specialization. Unfortunately, today in Igbo land, young men of the present generation are not interested in Western education as the young ladies. All these factors enumerated helped to reduce child-marriage. Many Igbo ladies are graduates with at least a bachelor's degree or a diploma. They usually got married while in college or upon completion of their college degree.

Woman-to-Woman Marriage

At the first glance this form of marriage might look like gay-marriage, where a lesbian marries a fellow lesbian. This practice has nothing to do with woman-to-woman sexual intimacy. Rather, it is a cultural practice that has been in existence in Igbo land prior to the advent of Christianity. It is not a common practice that can be seen in every clan or community or family, but it exists.

The practice of this form of marriage stems from the fact that a woman who does not have a husband and has had no child of her own outside marriage and lives in her paternal home with some property, and perhaps a piece of land allocated to her, might decide to arrange for a marriage with a woman who may beget children for her.

Normally, they marry young ladies who possibly are not the best of girls in their homes and chances of future husbands are bleak. The bride price would be paid and other traditional rites performed and she would be brought to the home of her “woman-husband” who must have arranged with a man of her choice to be sleeping with the woman in order to beget children for her. This wife may also decide to select her own lover with the approval of her female-husband and through the man she could raise children for her female husband.

Women who were the only surviving siblings of their lineage may arrange wives for their paternal families in order to raise a male child there to avoid the extinction of their family name. It is usually their responsibility to cater for the needs of these women and their children. They control the lives of these ladies, and make sure that they are not involved with men of questionable character, in order to raise decent children for their family.

Another form of this woman to woman marriage is a situation whereby a wife who might be sterile or incapable of getting a male child may arrange and use her wealth and resources to pay for the bride price of another woman and allows her to sleep with her husband. By so doing, the second woman automatically becomes a legitimate wife, but to the woman.

Sarah’s behavior in the Hebrew bible is akin to this form of arrangement. “Now Sarah, Abram’s wife bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, and Sarah said to Abram, ‘you see that the Lord had prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it might be that I shall obtain children by her’” [Gen16: 1-2]

In a brief description of this form of marriage, *Ogbalu* says: “this custom is practiced, whereby a woman who has no male issue or is sufficiently wealthy to foot the bill, marries a wife. Naturally the husband looks after the wife’s wife”. [p.16] These things are done because of the importance attached to children, especially male children, in order to foster generational continuity. Sometimes, women engage in this kind of marriage to validate their social status.

Levirate Marriage / Widow Inheritance [Nkuchi Nwanyi]

There is a practice in Igbo land to allow a widow to select a lover from among her brother-in-laws, or from her late husband’s. She can only engage in this after she must have finished with

mourning and grief. Sometimes, the widow does not have a choice in this case. The family might inform her of their decision to allow one of the men to act as her husband, including the satisfaction of her sexual needs.

It is a very complex and complicated issue because the processes of inheritance vary from family to family. It might fall on the eldest of the family or the closest friend of the late husband. There are occasions, when the men in the family struggle to inherit their late brothers' wife. This particular form allows for the ratification of the marriage and the two people would freely contract the marriage.

Another form of this widow inheritance is done when a man dies without a male. If the wife is still young, the family may arrange for the unmarried younger brother of the man to inherit the woman. In this context, widow inheritance means an inherited wife or a wife taken in another's stead. Here a man automatically takes over his father's young wife, or his dead brother's wife. I remember vividly a scenario in my childhood when we attended a wedding at the church and the bridegroom dropped dead at the entrance of the church. His younger brother who was already an adult was called in to continue the marriage and he got married to the woman. Their kids are grown ups and possibly they have grandchildren now.

The story of Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth might help to support this practice. [Ruth1: 6-14] The Sadducees in the New Testament bible gave a description of similar practice in their Jewish culture though under another context in their question about the Resurrection of the dead. "Teacher, Moses said, 'if a man dies childless, his brother shall marry the widow, and raise up children for his brother'". [Matt.22: 23-24]

This is a very strong custom that has defied real Christian intervention and continues in the Igbo society. Among the old aged traditional plights of the widows in Igbo land is the 'secret but real' right of inheritance by prospective brother in-laws and friends of the late husband. It sounds like the 1845 pathetic scramble and partition for Africa. It is always a war and competition for the matrimonial bed of the widow.

Unfortunately, the truth about this other aspect of widow inheritance is that most of the men involved are officially married and might all be Christians but they want to fulfill this duty. Those involved might try their best not to let the public see them doing something more than being guardians to the children of the widow.

The fact remains that this is a practice that cannot be easily swept under the carpet or covered up discreetly because people know what goes on behind curtains. It wouldn't have been a problem if it were for Christianity did not condemn such practices. One of the reasons why the society permits this kind of practice is because it helps to control the woman from wayward life. Usually, childbearing is not encouraged here.

Above all, marriage in Igbo land has enjoyed significant honor in the life of the people and it is at the center of their lives. It is something everyone possibly looks forward to enjoying in the future with big dreams and plans.

Aims and Purposes of Marriages in Igbo Land

Procreation/Family Continuity

The most essential property of marriage among the Igbo people is procreation and the perpetuation of the family lineage. A childless marriage is as good as nothing. Professor Celestine Obi in an interview succinctly put it ‘a child that is begotten should as well beget someone else’ [*amuta nwa ya mutakwa onye ozo*] He further stressed the importance of having a male child in a family because of the distribution of land and economic crops since girls do not have a share of any of these. A childless wife is looked upon as equivalent to a man and sometimes considered as a curse in the marriage.

Basden commented on the problem of the childless couples in these words: “if, in due course, no children are forthcoming as a result of the union, serious differences arise between husband and wife, each mutually accusing the other of being responsible for this state of affairs. Should matters continue so, the wife is at liberty to cohabit with another man in order, if possible, to secure the desired result”, [p.76] the resultant children from such relationship belong to the husband of the woman as if he were the biological father.

The Igbo people believe that a child is a great blessing and a confirmation of a real marriage. Every child is welcome, but a male child is highly desired because in him the hope of family continuity rests. It has to be noted that the Igbo marriage is a patriarchal one and so a male child is expected in every marriage.

Nwabude insists that: “among the Igbo, the survival of the race is very paramount. The young couples are aware that marriage implies begetting children, formation of a family and consequently acquiescence to be continued existence of the race”. [p. 126]. Thus, the couple accepts the responsibility on behalf of the family, race, clan, Igbo people and entire humanity.

The Igbo express belief in lineage continuity is some of the names they give to their children. [*Afamuefula*- may my name never be lost; *obiefuna*- may our ancestral lineage never get lost; *ikemuefula*- may my strength not be in vain; *ifeadikanwa*- nothing is more precious than a child; and so forth] The cry of a newborn child announces a gift of the gods and hope of posterity. Everyone welcomes the arrival of a child because the people believed that a child belongs to member of the community.

People sing songs and perform dances in jubilation for arrival of a child and they visit the newborn and his/her parents and they offer gifts. As the child grows, every member of the community takes responsibility in the moral training and upbringing of the child in the community. In each child every member of the community sees an extension of self, and does everything possible to inculcate discipline in the child.

Need for Helpmate/Complimentality

A man is expected to marry a wife when he is of age, in order to have a helpmate. In Igbo land, a bachelor who lives alone and cooks his own food and does other domestic chores is looked upon as incomplete and there is a great expectation from the society that he should be thinking of marriage. In actual fact, if he is unable to marry because of financial constraints, his parents and family members [*umunna*] might contribute money and get a wife for me.

It is believed that a wife brings either good luck or bad luck to the family. The wife helps to organize the life of the husband, and even helps in economic management of the family. She helps the man to gather and not to scatter or squander. Thus some women are given names like *Odozi-aku* [wealth manager] *Oso di ya alu* [co-worker with her husband] and other similar names that define the role of the woman in the family.

Farming was the chief occupation. And marriage was considered a great investment because women are very helpful in farm work. Men do their work but women do greater and longer work on the farm like the clearing of the bush and weeding and even crop cultivation. A hard working -woman is a great asset for her husband. Men basically do the harder work like tilling the ground.

A lot of women engage in buying and selling of their farm products and other small business and this boost the economy of the family. It is an accepted fact that men are supposed to provide for their women in our culture, but men do not engage many things women do. The men can provide the money with which the women engage in small business, and the daily running of domestic affairs.

In Igbo cultural setting, the roles of men and women are clearly spelled out, and everyone goes about his or her responsibility religiously. For instance, married men are not expected to enter the kitchen and cook food nor women expected to tap palm wine or climb trees in order to cut branches. Both compliment each other in their respective duties in the family.

C. Fulfillment and Social Obligation

As it is the dream of every man to be married, so it is the dream of every woman to have a husband and have a change of last name. Women automatically inherit the husband's last name by their marriage. It is a common Igbo worldview to think of the man behind an elegant

and beautiful lady. In Igbo land, a woman with college degrees and wealth, but without a husband, has no status.

In other words, a woman is socially defined and identified by her husband. Women are given names like: ***Di bu ugwu nwanyi***- A husband is a woman's prestige or pride; ***Mma Nwanyi bu di***_ a woman's beauty is inherited in her husband.

A man gets fulfilled if he marries a good wife and has children in that marriage. It is a testimony to the biblical truth: *"happy is the husband of a good wife; the number of his days will be doubled. A loyal wife brings joy to her husband, and he will complete his years in peace. A good wife is a great blessing and she will be granted among the blessings of the man who fears the Lord"* Sirach 26:1-3]

Married men and women also fulfill societal obligations by their marriage, and they live to the expectations of society. Married couples are expected to continue the work of procreation. Every child is welcome and accepted in the community because God is the giver of every life. The Igbo people do not believe in the numerical counting of children because one can have as many as possible. It is one of the reasons birth control is difficult to be accepted by majority in Igbo land.

There may be other reasons for marriages in Igbo land, but these are the commonly accepted reasons for marriages. People may have particular or minor reasons for engaging in marriage based on their cultural setting. Tribes and clans have some slight variations in their perception of marriage and even in its celebrations.

PREPARATION AND MARRIAGE CEREMONIES

Over the years, the Igbo people have variously prepared for marriage ceremonies, which have both immediate and remote preparations. Marriage preparations remotely starts from the first moment the idea is conceived and initial introduction made to the intended family depending on the type of marriage. But the material preparation begins as soon as the family of the groom makes their intention known to the family of the bride.

As soon as the groom is decided in the choice of a wife whether it is a girl he had been dating or a girl he saw at an occasion or place, he sets the preparatory machine in motion. Prenuptial enquiries are made by the groom and his family about the bride to be and her family. Basden puts it this way: *"a boy happens to meet a girl who attracts his attention, and he immediately institutes inquiries as to her parents, and whether she be already engaged or not. If she is free he endeavors to elicit, through her friends, information concerning her capabilities in cooking, trading and other useful and profitable accomplishments"* [p.69]

An inquiry is also made about the girl's character, if she is of good temper, quiet, industrious, and so on, and if these are satisfactory results the boy can then inform his parents of his decision to marry the girl in question. It is the parents and an intermediary [*onye aka ebe*] who will make the initial visit to the girl's house and open up negotiations. During such a visit, they present a bottle of dry gin or a pot of palm wine as a gesture. Friendly relationship is automatically established upon the acceptance of the presented drink, though no mention is made of the contemplated marriage. This first visit is called '*iku aka n'uzo*' literally knocking at the door.

The matter is introduced after subsequent visits, and the parents of the girl ask the visitors to give them time to ask questions and make their own inquiries. After all inquiries, and they are positive that there is no impending predicament or obstacle, they would tell the family of the boy that all is well [*uzo galu*] and they are expected on a given date for further arrangements.

Before a date is fixed, the girl's consent is sought in private by her parents and sometimes, there might be delay due to her hesitancy to say yes. Then the service of her mother is enlisted to convince her if her family believed it was the right choice for her. At the end of the day, her "yes" is elicited, and marriage arrangement continues.

The paying of the dowry is an essential part of the marriage arrangement. It is negotiable depending on communities. In the past, the price was reckoned in cows, goats and cowries but today it is in Nigerian currency [e.g. \$500] with other prescribed items [see attached sample list]. According to Professor Obi, the reason behind this money is that the in-law is expected to bank this money and give it back to the prospective son-in-law in the future if he goes bankruptcy and he promises to give him even from his personal money to support his daughter. It is also a sign that the groom could provide for himself and his wife and would not allow her go hungry.

At this stage only a handful of people from both families are involved in this arrangement. There is sharing of food and drinks, and breaking of kola nuts in each of these visits. It is symbolic that she is give a glass of palm wine and asked to look for her husband from among those present. After a sip of the wine she walks around and gets to her man and kneels on one leg and offers the drink. The man happily drinks this wine and wipes the glass with some notes of money and returns it to her. Those present would clap for them and entertainment follows.

Once the dowry is paid the girl is allowed to visit the family of the groom for a few days in order to see if she really wants to live there or not. When she comes back and says that she is happy with her experience, arrangement is final. The marriage becomes an elaborate and big celebration. The clan and entire community is called to witness publicly the marriage of the couple.

The elders of the community and the **umunna** of both families are virtually involved in the whole arrangement because marriage binds two communities and goes beyond the two families. The ceremony is usually a grandiose one and the groom receives a lot of financial and material support from friends and well –wishers. However, if he has the money and means to do it alone he can, but it wouldn't stop him from receiving the extended hands of support from others and he would also do the same for future grooms.

Among the things to be provided by the groom include hundreds of yam tubers, bags of rice and beans and also a great quantity of cassava flour and **garri** to be cooked. Cows and goats are slaughtered and as many chickens as possible are killed. Neighbors will help out in preparing the sumptuous food and setting up canopies and tents for the guests and every other person.

This ceremony is called 'wine-carrying or traditional marriage and so a lot of wines are provided. People can have as many as 100 cartons of beer, soda, assorted soft drinks and Guinness stout. Gallons of traditional palm wine are taken for granted, because it is an indispensable element. Without it, the ceremony would not take place. The palm wine would be tested and approved by the elders before it is used in the ceremony. What comes to mind here is the wedding at Cana where Jesus Christ performed his first miracle. He changed six jars of water into wine when the groom had ran short of wine and his mother requested him to help out in such a critical situation. [John 2:1-11]

When everyone is gathered, with the guests present, a display of the girl and her maids of honor is made to welcome all the invited guests. The girls beautifully dressed, dyed and beaded in ankles, waist and neck to the delight of men. There are entertainments ranging from cultural dances and songs and traditional kola nuts and drinks are served.

At the peak of the ceremony, the girl escorted by her maids of honor, is ushered in and the eldest man prays for her fruitful marriage and pours libation and gives her a full glass of palm wine to search carefully for the husband who would be hidden in the midst of the crowd. She drinks and goes around until he finds the groom and offers him the drink. He accepts and drinks and people would clap and applaud them. Thus the two had become husband and wife in the eyes of the people, and from that day on the woman belongs to the husband.

In Igbo culture, a woman is the property of her husband and all she has belongs to him. This is an intractable issue but it is a known fact and practice that the woman belongs to the husband though not in the derogatory way as mere objects. The fact remains that there are many things a man can do, but if the woman she does that, she might find herself in big trouble.

This ownership should not be considered as a kind of slavery because the woman enjoys some rights and respect in her matrimonial home. But there is some kind of ownership that is visible on the part of the husband. It should not be a surprise to see this issue of ownership having a

great influence in the mentality of every Igbo man whether living at home or abroad. The husband is virtually the head of the family and has an enormous responsibility.

THE CONCEPT OF FAMILY IN IGBO LAND

The concept of family structure among the Igbo people expands the range of consanguine relationships or members by blood and affinity relations or membership by marriage. One does not marry his blood relations. He or she is expected to marry outside of the family lineage or kinship community. It is considered a great abomination and a taboo for one to marry his blood relation. The family is closely knit together in Igbo land where everyone is each other's keeper.

The family is talked about in Igbo as *Ezi na Ulo* [intra and extra] meaning the immediate household members and those from outside. It is an all-embracing concept that excludes nobody. There is some kind of chain relationship here in family setting. It is like tracing the family tree back to the genealogy. The Igbo include the unborn and even the yet to be conceived as members of the family. The ancestors are part of the family and are looked upon as the living dead.

Based on this understanding of family among the Igbo people, it seems that there is only one form of family, but in practice there are two forms: the nuclear family system and the extended family system.

NUCLEAR FAMILY SYSTEM

In a way, the form of family system resembles what it is obtainable in the Western world where a man, wife and children make up a family unit. This is reflected in two ways in both the monogamous and polygamous families. In the monogamous family the '*obi*, '[*patricentric*]' of the man or his household distinguishes him from other members living in a large compound. But the '*mkpuke*, '[*matricentric*]' of the wife if in a polygamous family sets her family apart from other wives. An Igbo adage says: '*eke sia na obi ekee na mkpuke*' [after a man gets his own portion, he shares it among his wives]

Basically every Igbo family is a nuclear one but it does not end there. It has the potentiality of being an extended family system. The dependants are also part of a man's nuclear family. This nuclear family system also includes all the immediate in-laws, grandchildren and great grandchildren of the man from his daughters. The families of his sons are also part of his family. It could be termed a macro-nuclear family. Sometimes, it is difficult to draw the line on where nuclear family ends.

EXTENDED FAMILY SYSTEM

One of the characteristics of the Igbo people is the practice of the extended family system. They are a gregarious people and love living together. Ogbalu defines the extended family system as a group of families that have a common descent and [p.12] they trace their ancestor to a particular individual and in most cases bear his name as their clan or village name. It is not surprising to see among Igbo people villages with names like: **UMUDIKE** [Children of **Dike**] **Umuezike** [children of **Ezike**] **Umuogbunabor**, **Umuebuka**, **Umunwankwo**, **Umkorochi** and so on and so forth.

All those who trace their ancestor or great grandfather to the one single man form this extended family and they are usually referred to as 'UMUNNA' [Father's children]. The growth of the **Umunna** is limitless. In the extended family system one could find numerous grandfathers, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters, cousins, nieces and nephews as the line expands on the father's side.

The grouping of the **umunna** [extended family] stems from the nuclear family system because it is the combination of all the families of the same ancestor that form the extended family system. Logically speaking the universal is arrived from the particular and in the universal the particular is contained.

A person becomes a member of the **umunna** by birth and each and every member of the community belongs to any particular **umunna**. From the various **umunna** or extended family system a community is born, and subsequently a town is created when various **umunna** within a specific location with common interest, language and culture merge together.

This relatedness and connectedness plays out in many ramifications in the lives of families and their members wherever they may be. It is a resilient and salient factor in nearly every marriage among the Igbo people. No single individual marries a woman theoretically speaking but all family members are involved, including the 'married daughters' [**umu-ada**] whose authority in their paternal homes is uncompromising.

THE COMMUNITARIAN NATURE OF FAMILY LIFE

Unlike Western individualism, communitarianism is a way of life among the Igbo people of Nigeria, and this way of life extends to all African peoples. It is enshrined in the philosophy of life called Uujama [brotherhood]. There is a kind of open door policy that is practiced among families, both nuclear and extended. People share things among themselves and they believe that it is the responsibility of one to take care of his siblings or relations and even the in-laws who have become part of the family. Ogbalu depicts the Igbo communal mentality as he

expressed their belief that that they have a great responsibility to all with whom they are related, especially when they live in luxury and their relations live in misery and squalor. [p. 8]

In the past, most Igbo families had no walls or fences and no gates. There was always a small wood door that connects one to his neighbors' houses. Families could have communal landed properties and fruit trees and the crops, and fruits from these are shared communally among the family members. Sometimes, children end up sleeping in the houses of their aunts because the house is equally their home.

In some families the meals are eaten together, and drinks taken after meals, followed by story-telling and discussions. Moonlight plays were common. Everyone looked after the well being of the other. Nzegwu [1961] briefly painted this setting in these words: "tradition established communal living which brought unity to the children of the same ancestor. They lived together, worked on each other's farm, thatched each other's houses, played together and fought together." [p. 35-36]

One may anticipate the dilemma in Igbo marriages today, when they are subject to western influences, and especially when they live outside their traditional and cultural milieu, as to the role of extended family and communitarian traits in marriages. The intricacies involved are many and the terrain must be walked cautiously as we engage in this discourse. The questions are: What are the factors responsible for broken marriages among the Igbo living in America? Is divorce or separation a credible option? What factors can strengthen or stabilize Igbo marriages in America?

CHAPTER THREE

CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS AND CAUSES

The factors that lead to divorce or separation among immigrant Igbo people in United States may not be the same in Nigeria, where divorce or separation is not encouraged by the state or the community. There may be existing factors that are inherent in marital problem in both situations but the American environment permits divorce and separation. The problem

becomes obvious when couples who in Nigeria enjoyed a good relationship for many years, find themselves in a rocky marriage in less than a year or two upon relocating to the United States.

The concern continues to grow more as we witness and hear stories of domestic violence, battery, and even murder among Nigerians living in the United States of America which is not the seen in Europe and other parts of the Western world where Nigerians live in great number. We started asking questions, listening to stories from victims and eye-witnesses. Some of the factors stated are: incompatibility of couples, lack of communication, financial problem, mental illness, family of origin involvement, infidelity, lack of respect, religious difference and so on.

INCOMPATIBILITY OF THE COUPLES

Incompatibility is a strong factor in divorce or separation in the U.S. for those whose marriages were either arranged or enacted after several years of long distance relationship. As indicated earlier, Igbo society encourages arranged marriage, and the parents of the man could start looking for an Igbo girl for their son to marry upon return from the United States. The young man in most cases trusts the judgment of his parents, especially if he had been away for couple of years and probably has not been in touch with the people and the daily reality in his home country. More so, the entire family is part of the arranged marriage, and so he would not want to marry someone whose parents and siblings would disapprove of.

The young man may have been married to someone in America for years and may have kids with her, and later had a divorce from the America wife and he decided to travel home and enter a marriage with a person of his cultural background. He may have received his citizenship by this time. He then travels home to contract a new marriage with the arranged girl or an old friend of his. Everything is done and the marriage properly celebrated. He files the papers to enable the wife to come over and stay with him.

The short period of stay at home before the marriage is not enough for the couples to know each other well if it is an arranged marriage, or to observe the changes and differences in world view in the case of all old friend. Basically, the marriage and the proper relationship start when they live together as husband and wife in America. He may have been a good and caring husband who is a spendthrift as long as the wife was still in Nigeria. Living together will bring in the true reality for both of them and it could be very challenging. They may be disappointed when they realize that they were never compatible and no matter how much they try, it does not work. Abuse and violence might set in and other related marital problems will begin to emerge.

Divorce or separation occurs in when they cannot manage the crisis any longer. What one hears is each blaming the other for hiding behind a mask, and not being authentic in character and behavior. There is usually much bitterness and animosity in such situation. Incompatibility may exist in marriage in varied forms, from social, religious, emotional perspectives to sexual. People sometimes realize after just a couple of years, that the content of their marriage is not what they want.

According to L. Berman, a Chicago Sex Therapist and relationship expert; “we put the blinders on when we are dating. We focus so much on the wedding, we don’t notice the warning signs” [CNN.com/2008] She further maintains that people choose partners who may have the right resume but maybe not the entire package. It goes to confirm M. Klein’s opinion that some couples enter into relationship because they think that they are in love and ignore their differences. Some of these factors play out in the marriages among some Igbo people in the United States. The consequences can be disastrous.

Case# 1 Ms C, who resides in the United States, complained that since she married her husband D and moved over to join him, her life has been hellish and without peace. She said that the picture her husband painted of himself before he married her was of a caring, loving, peaceful and unassuming man. He was ready to go places with her and he enjoyed what she liked. Now, her feeling about marriage has changed because she doesn’t see all those good qualities, but rather the opposite. She has come to realize that all the promises he made to her before and shortly after marriage were empty ones. They are emotionally, socially, sexually and academically incompatible and it is difficult to find a compromise or in the relationship. She virtually had to beg for sexual relationship every time from her husband, for example. She pointed that he doesn’t like to go out for social functions which depresses her very much because she is a socialite. Whenever she tries to go out on her own, the husband is suspicious and wants to create an ugly scene. She thought that the situation would improve, but it gets worse.

LACK OF COMMUNICATION

Communication skill is a good tool in marriage, and where it is lacking problems arise. Culturally, Igbo households are male –dominant, and the voice of women is usually not heard. It doesn’t mean that they cannot advise their husbands. Rather they have no strong voice in matters that affect the community or in running the affairs of the home. Given this cultural heritage, the men grow up thinking they are superior to women and this belief consciously or unconsciously play out in marriage relationships among the Igbo people.

Some men an aura of superiority around that makes communication with their wives difficult. What we see in such situation is the command and orders being issued, a monologue, rather than a dialogue. In situations where some kind of communication exists, it might be in a form that doesn't promote a healthy relationship. Most family therapists agree that one of the most difficult obstacles in the marriage relationship is effective communication. Finding time to truly share with one another amidst the obligations of family, job, church, and society is a struggle many couples face. For the Igbo people living in United States, the problem is complicated beyond their former situation in Nigeria. The stress is simply too much for many to bear, and it affects their marital life.

It has been observed that most of the problems affecting the Igbo families in the United States are tied to breakdown in communication. The style of communication could be problematic in many marriages. Sometimes, a kind of triangulation is played out whereby the man communicates to his wife through his son or daughter, and the wife does same through his mother, friend or the children. In this type of triangular communication, effective and meaningful communication is lost, and the situation gets worse. Openness is said to be an essential part of communication, and mutual growth demands an open expression of feelings, precisely at the times when openness seems most difficult and withdrawal is most attractive.

Some couples complained that they never had time to talk about their problems with their partners either because of job schedules and engagements, or just they were too afraid to bring up the matter. They lack the courage to freely discuss with their partners in order to have a better understanding of the situation and proper perspective of things. Basically, people fail to understand that good communication is neither a matter of luck nor natural endowment, but a skill that can be learned when partners share goodwill, mutual trust, and the desire to communicate. Another piece that is vital is the idea of '*metacommunication*'- what is beneath what is communicated. When couples communicate in this form, what matters is the ability to understand what is behind what is heard and not just the peripheral level of understanding. It takes a great skill to listen, appreciate, and possibly enter into the world of the communicant in order to fully understand what is communicated.

Case

A woman discovered a piece of earring in her husband's car, and concluded that he must have been having an affair with another woman. She never brought up the matter with her husband, but started showing some attitudes and being sarcastic to the point of denying the husband sexual relations. It was after the lady in question called to ask the man if he would return her earring that the man brought up the case before the wife. He told her that he gave a stranded stranger a lift, and she called to ask if he saw her earring. He did tell her that he gave the lady his business card, and from there she got his office number and called. It was then that

the wife started to open up and to say that she has been suspicious of his infidelity and that explained her strange recent behaviors. They had time to sort things out and resolved the matter amicably and she learned to improve in her communication skill.

Good communication is the bedrock of any good marriage that is sustainable and stable. It gives room for mutual trust, honesty, transparency, openness, and growth. Couples who do not communicate in the relationship end up seeking for help outside, from friends and family members, and they end up in making assumptions based on erroneous judgments about their partners. The consequences might be reactionary, and confrontational attitudes develop towards their partners, which result in conflicts and quarrels.

Poor communication skill is a big threat to marriage because it can lead to disaster and great family distress. The matter is complicated when the mindset of the men is that women are not supposed to have a voice in their marriage. Thus, it might become problematic for men with such mindset to listen to the voice of women who have learned to or speak their mind. The men may try to stifle a communicative approach.

FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

From all indications, one in every two divorces among Igbo people living in United States, finance is one of the major reasons for the conflict that led to the break up. In the interactive session I had with the group of married people, nearly 80% listed finance as a major problem in most marriages. Back home, a man who wants to marry a woman would demonstrate to the prospective in-laws that he would be able to take care of the material needs of his wife or that he has a means to sustain his family. It is one of the reasons for the paying of the dowry. A man is expected to provide for his family as the breadwinner and whatever the wife brings is a supplement. It is rare to see a woman provide for the entire family.

It is also the practice in my part of the world that the woman should give her husband her incomes and from there he pays the major expenses in the family. In actual fact, a woman who controls her finances in her matrimonial home would be termed a “bad wife”. Most of the time, the monies are spent on the immediate home of her husband and could be extended to his in-laws at his discretion and consideration. He could help to support his in-laws financially and other wise if he so wishes. There are some men who could be buy houses, cars, and establish good businesses for their in-laws and it is a welcome gesture. It is expected of the man to do some of these things for his father in-law, if in the eyes of the people he has what it takes to do so. If he fails to do so he is looked on with disdain and seen as a bad and miserly son in-law. On the other hand, a father in-law can also lift his son in-law from his financially. Many wealthy

people do help to establish their son in-laws so that they would be able to take good care of their daughters.

Life in America is different when it comes to the financial expectations. There are a lot of bills to be paid every month: mortgage, utility, telephone, hospital, educational, domestic and every other bill. Unfortunately, people in Nigeria expect very much from their children and relatives in the United States. The man would want to take good care of his parents, siblings and relatives in Africa, and the demand is unending. Most telephone calls from home are for one demand or the other and this puts stress on the man when he cannot meet these demands. The woman also has her own problems from her family and friends. If the woman is not working, it makes the case worse, because the whole burden lies on the husband. If he is very understanding, he can still manage to help his in-laws, but it definitely affects his financial strength.

The wife would virtually depend on him for every need. There are some men who would want their wives to stay at home and care for their children for many years while they provide for the family. Due to added family responsibilities, it is never easy for such people. The pressure might be on the wife, and she starts agitating to look for a job and wants an alternate arrangement for children. Conflicts arise in these situations and problems start setting in.

One of the reasons why some men would want their wives to care for their children is for them to give them good upbringing and spend quality time with their children. But when there is strong financial stress the woman may want to get a job, even at the disapproval of the husband. The situation could be the same for a woman whose husband is putting her through school, and, has little or no income. The majority of the group members agree that the growing demands from their respective families at home put a big stress on them, and they must try to help those at home.

The core of the financial problem in marital life is the management of the incomes. In a family where both partners are working and there is no equitable consensus on how the incomes should be managed, problems are bound to surface. If there is an agreement by both parties on who runs the finances and how, it might help address financial problems. There is an observed tendency that the man would want to manage and control the incomes at his own discretion, as was the case in Nigeria. The women in the group complained it is worst when they are the ones who make a bulk of the money, and their husbands spend them indiscriminately, without consultation or consent.

Case

Client D complained that she works three jobs and goes to school and at the same time would take care of their three kids whenever she is home. She has to make dinner for the family and other domestic chores, while her husband has only one job and comes back to relax at home.

Each and every month he empties their joint account by sending money to his siblings and relatives without consultation. She only discovered that the money was gone whenever she goes to withdraw money when she is in need of something. According to her, the painful aspect is that whenever she tells him that she wants to send some money to her parents, he says that they have no money. A similar case was that of a man who brought his wife, a nurse by profession into the country and resigned from his job. He asked her to take up two to three jobs so that she could make enough income which he spends lavishly before the end of the month. He beats his wife whenever she complains about his behavior. The marriage never lasted beyond six years.

Some women I interviewed remarked that part of the problem is the exclusive financial management by their husband. In their view, it is unfair for them to labor and toil under stressful conditions, and their husbands send the money home to build houses and engage in other business while their [woman's] parents and siblings are suffering and nothing goes to them. They want their fair share. When a compromise is not reached, the woman may look for freedom and liberty in order to manage her own finances.

In the survey made by O Olusesi [2008], 78.4% of marital problems are caused by one partner sending more money to his/her extended family back home. This leads to tension and conflict in the family, and leads to argument. Without proper and careful intervention, the marriage might become dysfunctional and possibly break up.

A Nigerian national Michael C. Iheme shot his estranged wife Anthonia in August 2008, and calmly called the police and said, "I have killed the woman that messed my life up, a woman that had destroyed me". It was gathered that the man was caring for the children while the woman worked as a nursing aid in a cancer center and was the breadwinner, which was an uncustomary swap of roles. The man could not take the insults and humiliations he perceived in his situation, and could not accept the fact that his livelihood was dependent on his wife. Friends of the family noted that the man was not in control of the finances and could not spend money as he wanted. He decided to put an end to the situation by shooting his wife, and called the police to report his crime.

In a pathetic and horrifying scene, another Nigerian the same year butchered his wife to pieces and put the remains in a bag. The wife, who was a registered nurse, just came back from night duty and was preparing for Sunday service when the incident occurred. People speculated that apparently the man was not earning enough money and could not control the pay check of his wife, and he decided to end her life in that horrible way.

The issue of finance in marriages among the Igbo people living in America is a factor to be considered by every family and think of the best way to handle the situation. The Igbo people

are known for their exorbitant and flamboyant life and celebrations. Igbo men believe that money helps to define their social status. And for those living abroad the proof of their financial status in the society is based on their investment back home, a massive house is essential. This is a societal expectation, and whatever house one has in the big city does not really count so much unless there is a befitting one at the home of the person. This is enshrined in the philosophy of the people: 'aku ruo ulo' [metaphorically charity begins at home]

INFIDELITY

One of the problems of marriages among Igbo people living in America is infidelity by one of the partners. There are known cases of partners seeking divorce or separation because of the amorous life of the other partner which had made life intolerable and unbearable for the wounded partner. Some women are involved in this act but it is not as prevalent and pronounced as it is among men. Often, the problem is kept private until it gets to the stage of divorce. Our culture subtly tolerates a man's infidelity, which sometimes might lead to polygamy but it seriously scorns a woman's infidelity. Traditionally, men could send their wives away on the ground of infidelity and promiscuity. Women could report their husband's promiscuous life to his family members or a trusted friend of his who could counsel him on his behavior.

Our survey among the group suggests that 45% of marital infidelity occurs when partners did not live together for a long time before they got reunited in America, while 25% of them are those who were in prior marriage with American citizens before they got their papers and were able to file for their wives at home or marry for the first time someone back home. Less than 5% of those who came together on lottery visa are involved in extra marital relationship. It suggests that those who have been in a prior sexual relationship before their Nigerian wives joined them often go back to their former relationships, and this harms their marriage. Some men also indulge in a long distance relationship with some girls in Nigeria, and they exploit the opportunity each time they travel home alone. Some women have received text messages, voice messages, emails, money transfer receipts and sometimes nude pictures sent to them by their husbands' girlfriends in Nigeria. Often times, when they confront their husbands, it leads to explosive quarrels.

Recently, one woman was going through her husband's mail while he was in the hospital, and she found nude pictures and messages sent by his girlfriend in Nigeria. Apparently the pictures were taken when he made his last trip to Nigeria and had fun with the girl. After the husband was discharged from the hospital, she confronted him with the pictures and email letters. The

man became defensive and started a fight that resulted in a neighbor calling the police. He was charged with battery and violent abuse and was restrained from entering the house that he spent millions of dollars to buy. The wife has filed for divorce and custody of the children. Some of these are the stories we hear among our people and the problem they go through in their marriages.

MENTAL HEALTH

The understanding of mental health problem is for Igbo peoples limited to roaming the street and eating from garbage and bins. It is about those who are mentally deranged and cannot be habited in homes unless they get proper psychiatric treatment. The psychological theories of psychosis and neurosis are not fully integrated into our culture. It is reserved to the realm of theory and principles, though we do have psychiatric departments and clinics for severe cases.

In mental health, we talk about psychotics, people who cannot manage their inner conflict with reality. There is either a chronic or episodic break with reality. They have issues with boundaries, and do not differentiate between the internal and external reality. Hallucination and delusions are often experienced. Instances are Schizophrenia, Schizoaffective disorders, delusional disorders, and substance induced- psychotic disorders. Anxiety and emotional depression also play a lot of causal role in mental illness.

Personality and character disorders are also contributory factors to problems in family crisis. The DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition) defines a personality disorder as "an enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture, is pervasive and inflexible, has an onset in adolescence or early adulthood, is stable over time, and leads to distress and impairment." Personally, I think my definition is easier to understand, although they both say essentially the same thing. [2003]

Some of the personality disorders include: Borderline, Narcissistic, Obsessive-Compulsive, Paranoid, Schizoid, Antisocial, Avoidant, and Dependent personality disorders. Not many Igbo would actually think of these factors are contributory in marital problems, because Igbo people have not been trained to seek Psychiatric or therapeutic help. Instead of seeking for professional help from therapists, psychiatrists, counselors or even social workers, Igbo people prefer help from traditional healers or priests, as the case may be, since they believe that mental health problems are related to supernatural causes. It is almost a sacred area to think of one's partner as having mental health problems as long as he stays in the house. It is a known fact that personality disorders as defined above are not easily diagnosable, but their presence is a big threat to the stability of marriages.

CHILDLESSNESS

The inherent traditional beliefs among the Igbo people are played out in their lives in America, irrespective of the circumstance and environment. It is believed that a child is the seal of a marriage and a confirmation of the durability of that marriage, especially when the couple is blessed with a male child. A woman must prove her womanhood by childbearing and if she fails, the marriage is threatened. Some men do not want to engage in full marriage until their spouse is pregnant, and they are assured of her fertility.

There are cases of marital tension because the wives have not been able to conceive and bear a child. There are fights and quarrels over insignificant issues but the factor beneath these fights is childlessness as the man would eventually reveal. Some men have abandoned their wives because she had only female children and they would be willing to pay child support if their wives take them to court and they would want to try for a male child with someone else. The pressures from the family of the man may be so intense that he is forced to file for divorce in order to marry and have a male child. People confirmed stories of their husbands engaging in extra marital affair with an arranged girl in Nigeria in order to have a male child. Only a handful of men would want to adopt a child when it becomes clear that they cannot have a biological child of their own.

The Catholic Church's stand on **invitro-fertilization** is a big problem for many who would want to explore that option, but are not prepared to go against the teaching of their Church. In her writing N. O'Brien restated that Church's teaching: "But as reaffirmed in "Dignitas Personae" ("The Dignity of a Person"), the instruction issued Dec. 12 by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Catholic teaching opposes all fertilization techniques that separate procreation from the conjugal act because they "proceed as if the human embryo were simply a mass of cells to be used, selected and discarded." [2008]

The celebrated encyclical of Pope Paul VI, **Humane Vitae** elaborately stated the position of the Church on preservation of life, and, discouraged any action that might hinder procreation. It hinted the inherent danger in use of artificial birth control and use of **invitro-fertilization** with its implications. Pope John Paul "11" wrote the document called the **Donum Vitae** [Gift of Life] in 1987 to support and uphold the teaching of the Church as proclaimed by his predecessors. To mark the 40th anniversary of **Humanae Vitae** in 1995, he wrote the **Evangelium Vitae** and unshakably maintained the position of the Church and its firmness in protecting human life and restraint on the medical use of **invitro-fertilization**. This leaves some childless couples with a great dilemma, especially those who are faithful to their tradition.

There are grave doctrinal consequences for those who go against the teaching of the Church on this issue. Some of the actions are punitive disciplinary ones. The Igbo Catholics who might

want to try, or have tried, invitro-fertilization would not want to make it public unless on a confessional stand in order to get absolution. Unlike some of the American Catholics who might go to their pastor and solicit his prayers and blessings before she goes for invitro-fertilization, the Igbo Catholic may want to clarify with his priest or seek his opinion before she makes a decision. Those who do this are seen as not being strong and firm in their faith. In the event of no credible solution to child bearing, the marriage might break up or experience tensions and unresolved problems.

RELIGIOUS BELIEF

The majority of the Igbo people believe in one form of religious practice or another. Hardly would one find an Igbo person who is an atheist. Sometimes, one sees traces of religious apostasies (whereby one revolts or renounces his religious belief for another religion) or religious harlotry (whereby one practices more than one religious belief at the same time). Mixed marriages are permitted among Catholics and other faith traditions but it is determined by Catholic conditions. The Code of Canon Law 1124 stipulates that “without the express permission of the competent authority, marriage is prohibited between two baptized persons, one of whom was baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it after baptism and has not defected from it by a formal act, the other of whom belongs to a Church or ecclesial community not in full communion with the catholic church” [1983]. The Code went further to state that the local Ordinary cannot grant the permission unless all the conditions stipulated in canon 1125 are met.

It has been observed that some men promised their spouses back home that they would keep all those conditions, and they convince the priests to wed them but after a couple of months or years of living together they would recant all those conditions and would want their wives to join them in their church. The education and baptism of their children which they promised to be done in the catholic way would be reversed, and the women find themselves in the difficult situation of making a choice between their husbands and their church.

Another aspect of the problem is when one of the spouses defects to another religion and abandon their common faith of many years. This surely affects every aspect of their lives and it gets worse when each of them wants to win the other over to his or her faith. Families experience religious competition and rivalry. Religious bigotry may also be present in such a

situation, and it is never a healthy situation for any family. Unfortunately, the children are dragged into this conflict and a kind of triangulation occurs.

Case

A wife reported a case of her husband whom she married in the Catholic Church for nearly 15 years and they both attended the same church with their children since they moved to America. She narrated that her husband got involved with a lady in his work place who introduced him to her pastor in a Pentecostal Church. He was told of a revelation from God for his family. He started attending that church for prayers and fellowship, and seems to be at peace and happy with that experience. He eventually wanted the whole family to go with him to his new church but the wife refused. He threatened her with all kinds of things and sometimes they had fights. The wife tried one or two times to attend but did not find any satisfaction there and stopped attending. The moment she stopped attending, things got worse and problems in the family started accumulating including financial ones. The husband stopped attending to his former responsibilities in the house and would spend more time in his church and in the company of the woman who introduced him to the church. His wife now has some suspicions and fears. She is crying out for help to save her marriage. She is one among many other women who are having problems in their families due to religious differences. Compromise is hard in some of these cases because they cannot help themselves. Some people have divorced their partners or separated from them because of this religious problem that led to other more serious ones.

We have cases of women who accuse their husbands of not being religious as they used to be in Nigeria. These men are not usually home for prayers and Sunday services. Response from the questionnaire made, 95% of the women said that religion is a big factor in peace and stability in marriage, while 45% of men would agree to that. According to the women, if their husbands are God fearing and religious, they would always want peace and stability in marriage. They would not want to do anything that might disrupt the stability and peace in their homes.

The issue of divorce is a strong one and highly contested by the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church does not grant divorce in a validly celebrated marriage unless there are evident proofs of existing impediments in the celebrated marriage and only then can she grant nullity. Indissolubility in the Catholic Church is one of the doctrines that Church does not compromise. It is based on the theology that marriage is natural and sacred union which is ordained by God.

It is a covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of conjugal life and love that lasts the whole life [*'consortium totius vitae et amoris coniugalis'*], which by its very nature is ordered to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children'. [Canon Law 1055] This particular canon stresses unity and indissolubility as the essential properties of marriage. Here, the Church has in mind a marriage that is ratified and consummated [*matrimonium ratum et consummatum*] This kind of marriage is absolutely indissoluble because of its nature and purpose. In the words of Canonist C. Mba: 'when a ratified marriage is subsequently consummated by sexual intercourse, performed in a human manner [*humano modo*], the union becomes absolutely indissoluble. No human power, civil or ecclesiastical, can dissolve such a bond". [1997 p.18] The Church in Vatican II document states that the goods of marriage [*bona matrimonii*] argue for an "unbreakable oneness" of the spouses [*Gaudium et Spes* 48]

The Church frankly frowns on anyone who engages in an attempt to file for marriage dissolution, whether extrinsic or intrinsic, unless it pertains to a marriage already celebrated in good faith, and later impediments were discovered which nullify the marriage. Many Igbo people who would want to hold to the Catholic tradition will always find it difficult to go for divorce in the Church unless there are reasonable evidences of diriment impediments found in the marriage. Most people would not want to sever their relationship with the Church, which is tantamount to denial of Holy Communion and other sacraments.

The enormity of this problem of conflict and threat to marriage is clear and real. Counseling must engage these causal factors in an integrative way to determine the most effective intervention. The integrative models found in the work of David C. Olsen were adopted for group use. Each of the models was explained to the members on various meetings. It was after they had understood the models that they were asked to use them in their family dynamics. The explanation helped them to understand some of the dynamics that play out in their relationship which they were ignorant of. The group members use the following treatment models in their homes, and return with feedback.

CHAPTER FOUR

TREATMENT ASSESSMENT PLAN/PRINCIPLES FOR INTEGRATIVE FAMILY THERAPY

3:1 Integrative Treatment

The integrative treatment plan advocates a holistic and integrative treatment of the family that is cognizant of the fact that there are multi-layered factors that contribute to behavior and interactions within a family system. The isolationist method of favoring one model or theory as against the other is avoided in the integrative method. It has been observed that the application of individual techniques to the complexity of a family system has been insufficient. Every family is unique and peculiar and thus no single model or system can work for all families and thus the necessity of an integrative model. In his book Integrative Family Therapy, D. Olsen

maintained that “integration involves studying the basics of systems theory, understanding the major paradigms of family therapy, blending those paradigms and then applying that unified model to assessment and treatment planning” [1993 p.13-14]

The integrative model of family therapy will help counselors to make informed decisions about those to be involved in the counseling session for treatment, what to focus on in treatment and the duration of the treatment. The model provides a map of treatment that will assist in both assessment and treatment planning as D. Olsen suggested. The idea of one-one treatment is not favored because the family is a system that has many parts and layers. Sometimes, the family is seen as a system within a subsystem that has a chain relationship within itself and outside. Thus, the idea of viewing family system therapy as getting together an entire family instead of an individual and have them talk to each other is erroneous and ineffective method of counseling. It is more than a set of group techniques because it is more or less a way of seeing and thinking. Here, the focus in the interaction is on the process of communication and not the content that they communicate.

GROUP AND FAMILY THERAPY MODEL

The group comprises 18 adults, 6 males and 12 females who are within the ages of 35years and 55years. A good number of the members were from an already existing prayer group who were interested in the issue of conflicts in families. There were other members who have been consulting with me on private basis about the problems who volunteered to join in the group. The purpose of the group was made clear to all members who expressed their interest in finding solution to the conflicts in families. Confidentiality was stressed and members promised

to keep whatever that were said in the group within the group. The group was able to meet severally based on the success registered and the interest that was rekindled in the members. The members always look forward to the next meeting.

The group members were exposed to the theories of integrative family therapy and to the realities of the problems in the family system as enlisted above with their help. It was an 'AHAA' moment for many of them and awakening time. Many were nodding their heads in affirmation that they got the point and that it made sense to them. There was a dead silence for some minutes as if to say that we have reached a point where we do not know what next to do. Everyone was just quiet and mute and we respected that moment until someone asked this question: "How do we go about implementation of this beautiful model in our homes?" There were diverse opinion on prioritization of the models but the majority wanted us to start with the scale we will follow below.

3:2 Structural Family Treatments

It was amazing to see how every member reacted to the idea of structure of the family. Everyone spoke from his or her heart about the structure of the family that has defined hierarchical structures and organizations. Their response agrees with the Structural family therapists' postulation in the work of D. Olsen that "each intact family has at least three subsystems: parental, marital, and sibling." [p.22] But the majority offered that in real life situations, especially in the United States, things have changed because the practice of what they believe and know becomes difficult for many of them. We settled for some clarifications and understanding of what was being communicated in the group.

Some women expressed their concern that given the fact that tradition and culture made men heads of the family, that some of the men do not live up to that responsibility and role. They maintained that some men are not there to lead by example, and most often they do not help in training and disciplining of their children. A big concern was raised about the involvement of the extended family members in their immediate families. It was observed that this is an intricate issue and has its misinterpretations and repercussions since our culture holds tenaciously to the practice of extended family system.

The men were strong in their statement on this because they were not ready to let go of their extended family members. The knotty issue was the level of involvement of these extended family members in matters that concern immediate families. The drawing of boundaries was suggested based on individual family arrangement and agreement. People agreed to go home and sit down and carefully consider how they would go about this in their respective families and to arrive at a family consensus. Families of both couples are included in the extended family system and their influence is not to be taken for granted. Some of the members pointed out that presently they have either of their parents living in their homes.

A member pointed out the importance of maintaining a good and healthy marital system which may affect the functioning of other systems. It was recommended that every family should look at the way its marital system is functioning and see whether it is healthy enough to maintain a good relationship with other systems within the family structure. The issue of triangulation with children or other members of the family was explained, and people were asked to critically evaluate what is currently happening in their various homes.

3:3 Interactional Treatment Planning

In every family there exists some kind of interaction, both spoken and unspoken. Interactions between couples may be symmetrical, which based on equality, or complementary, in which case someone predictably backs down. Interactional therapists favor the symmetrical, because it is healthier, though it has its own difficulties because when argument escalates, no one wants to back down. It is believed among Interactional therapists that the interactional feedback loop has much influence on behavior as well as communication. In the view of D. Olsen, “the sequence of events in communication is maintained through punctuation which organizes behavioral events and helps determine how one understands content” [p.25]. The punctuation is more or less about how a husband or wife interprets an interaction from their own perspective, and what part of the interaction they focus on. A person may say something to his or her partner and the partner has a different interpretation and understanding of what was said and meant and reacts in way that would elicit some kind of different reaction from the other person.

A member of the group vividly painted a picture of how she had tried to stop her husband from buying a lot of things he sends to his family in Nigeria and the man resorted to storing those things at a friend’s house without her knowledge. But she later found out from another

friend and was mad that the husband had to keep things outside their home to give others the impression that she is not a good woman. In her explanation the more she tries to stop him from buying these things the more he resorts to other ways of excluding her from his plans. But the husband's response was that he was storing things out of the house simply because he does not want to make her unhappy, since he was determined to continue to buy those things.

The majority of the group accepted that they are all involved in some kind of punctuation, "pursuer" and "dancer" style in their marriages in one way or the other. They recommended proper communication and dialogue that allow for clarifications and verification of facts in order to enhance better communication. The idea of **metacommunication** was discussed, which means, to communicate about how they communicate. The 'howness' of communication is very important because on it anticipates the response or reply. It is suggested that couples distance themselves from 'blaming the other' and see 'dance' as the problem and try to improve their style of communication and learn some more helpful ways of communication.

The group recommended that couples should have a sense of equality and give room for freedom of speech. The men were encouraged to shun all kinds of cultural intimidation and discrimination toward women, in order to enable their wives to always express themselves without fear of victimization. Mutual trust and respect were encouraged among couples. Some of the experiences at the early stage of the group were revealing because it was difficult to put the men and women together on an equal ground. We used that experience to experiment on what could be happening in family interactions.

3:4 Cognitive Theory

The protagonists of the Cognitive theory are of the opinion that there exist some distortions in communication lead to emotional problems. When they speak about cognitive distortions, they refer to the beliefs people hold about the meaning of events or communication. There is the likelihood that this distortion or belief may affect how we understand what was really said. The task of the cognitive therapists is to identify how cognitive distortions twist communication in couples and families, and seek to understand and correct these problem in order to encourage a smooth process of communication. There is also a focus on general thinking styles, on underlying beliefs about the nature of marital and family relationships. What belief one partner holds about marriage is important in order to see how that works with the belief of the other partner.

Here, the theory of the 'cognitive grid' is elaborated which talks about the core beliefs that people hold to about relationships. In most cases, some of these beliefs are unspoken and there is a great expectation from those who hold such that their partners are supposed to know and understand what they have in mind. We found out that most of the women held to these beliefs that their husbands should be mind readers and be able to understand them mentally, as a demonstration of how much they love them. Some members testified that their husbands are good at mind reading and that makes their marriage better while others are of the opinion that their husbands' failure to read their mind is a minus in the marriage.

According to D. Olsen, some of these beliefs also include; all-or-nothing thinking ['if you fail in one area you really do not love me']; catastrophizing, which turns the normal irritants of life into catastrophes ['if you don't do your homework you will flunk out and never get a good job'];

arbitrary inference, where one spouse may jump to a conclusion that does not seem to have a basis in reality ('he is doing this just to irritate me); and tunnel vision, in which one sees only data that fit one's beliefs about the other and ignores what does not. These ways of thinking are automatic, and people are not aware of how they distort communication through these cognitive grids.

The group members admitted that some of these un verbalized beliefs do play out in their marital relationships and distort their communications. Some in the group admitted that they are either constantly involved in arbitrary inference or tunnel vision. The forum created some awareness on the assumptions and presumption that people have in marriages that are not good for a healthy relationship. One of the cases cited was that of a husband who had planned to have a sumptuous dinner with his wife on her birthday only to get news of his father's massive heart attack that same day. He came home moody and gloomy. His wife had laid the dinner and was in the mood of the celebration but found her husband distant and withdrawn. She got infuriated and started shouting that he is doing all those things to spoil her birthday and she furiously stumbled out to the house to her friend. The husband felt terribly disappointed that she did not read his mind, to understand that something terrible must have gone wrong to cause his mood change. It took the intervention of some of their trusted friends to bring them to talk about this problem, and be able to understand that neither one of them did whatever happened to irritate or spite the other.

When this case was cited, everyone in the room agreed that the case resonated with him or her and there was a general feeling that we all experience. People in the group mentally

switched roles with either the husband or the wife in the case cited. The general question was how one can prevent such incident in his or her family and many suggestions were offered. It was suggested that people should build mutual trust in their partners, and move from a negative and pessimistic view of things to a positive and optimistic view. The idea of speaking from their parts in the language of Richard Schwartz was recommended whereby the exiles, managers and fire fighter parts should always be taken into consideration.

3:5 Family –of-origin Treatment Planning

The influence of family of origin in any marriage is tremendous and should not be overlooked because people enter marriage with both positive and negative experiences from their immediate families and these would always affirm or negate the experience of their partners. Bowen's multigenerational theory talked of the themes and patterns families, transmitted over generations. David Olsen described multigenerational transmission, triangulation, and differentiation of self as the key concepts of this theory. Multigenerational transmission is understood to be the transference of marital patterns, ways of being in relationship, and even psychopathology over several generations in a family. One can think of violent abuse, battering, promiscuity and alcoholism can often be traced over at least three generations. This explains the need for thorough premarital investigation that both families engage in before any marriage is contracted in Igbo land.

Multigenerational transmission could possibly have triangulation, sibling rivalry, covert parental coalitions, parental division, **scapegoating** and sometimes **parentification of children** in the case of alcoholic parents or drug addicts. What happens is that each generation seems to repeat blindly the same mistakes with tragic consequences. In our culture, it could be interpreted as a generational curse for which people solicit for ritual healing in order to break the curse. However, it must be remarked that triangulation speaks volumes in the minds of the group members. There exist several types of triangulations in their families. Parents can align against a child; one member of the family can be a type of go-between runnings back and forth between two other family members; or one parent can align with a child against the other parent. Sometimes, a child becomes a substitute spouse, the confidant of the other parent. This kind of triangulation happens often when the children become teenagers or young adults and they are roped into the family squabble by one parent against the other.

There is another key concept of multigenerational transmission which is called differentiation of self. David Olsen talked of it as: "the ability to maintain a relationship to one's family of origin by being oneself. It is measured along a continuum, with cutoff on one extreme and enmeshment on the other" [1993 p.30] The implication of this theory is that the differentiated adult does not simply cut off or rarely have contact with his or her family of origin, but can be with them without becoming enmeshed with them. A differentiated person can maintain a non-anxious presence with his or her family of origin without diffusing the anxiety by either cutting off or enmeshing.

In situations of anxiety and stress the differentiated adult is nonreactive, whereas the **nondifferentiated** person is reactive and loses objectivity and the ability to stay outside the reactive cycles. The group had problems in properly understanding individuation and separation in the African context, and how much of differentiation is attained by couples. It was clearly pointed out that people can be with their family of origin without being enmeshed with them and that the idea of cutting off is another extreme couple should be aware of. A deep understanding of how things are done in ones partner's family of origin is important to help couples interact well and maintain a healthy family relationship. Member could identify how cut off or enmeshed they are with their family of origin or at least suspect what their partner's relationship is to his or her family of origin.

3:6 2ND SESSION ON GROUP SOLUTIONS AND PROPOSALS

In this session, there was a review of the last session, and an invitation was given to members to propose ways of having sustainable and healthy relationships in the family, cognizant of the fact that problems in marriages are as old as marriage itself. A member pointed out the fact that problems are not only limited in marriages among Igbo people in America but rather it spans on all walks of life - financial sectors, political, medical, education and every other field of life where human beings meet and interact.

There was a unanimous conclusion that marital problems among the Igbo people living in the United States is peculiar to the people and needs to be addressed. Some people suggested that, since many marriages were arranged and love was never the basis of such marriages, because their “wives were parceled to them”, people should give love a chance to grow in such marriages. They maintained that “they marry and then they fall in love” though it was a general consensus that a majority also courted and married their spouses in Nigeria, but the courtship was not the “Western type”. Among the virtues expected to help love grow were humility, trust, transparency, patience, truthfulness and honesty. These virtues, a majority of the women suggested, would help to stabilize their marriages. Perseverance, forgiveness and endurance are also part of the ingredients that would help to maintain a stable and healthy family.

People were cautioned against the negative influence of ‘friends’ who offer them bad advice when they confide in them about their marital problem because when they follow this advice, which the friend adviser may not apply in her own situation, end up creating new problems. Many agreed that a lot of harm had been done to marriages due to negative influence of these so called friends who sow seeds of discord by their counsel.

There was a general feeling in the group that God has been shut out in many families because people are too busy with their work and hardly have time for prayers and services. Every speaker highlighted the need for prayers in families and dedication to Sunday obligations. It was suggested that every family should have at least ten minutes of family prayers once a day and specific days and time where everyone should be present and be an active participants for

believing couples. It was also offered that people should respect the religious freedom of their partner and try not to coerce him or her into one's religion.

The group was electrified when women complained of the insensitivity of their husbands to their feelings and emotions especially in matters of gift exchange. Since it was a Valentine Day celebration, I asked how many gave gifts to their partners, and how many do same on their partner's birthday. The women shouted that they are the ones who lavish gifts on their husbands at any slightest provocation but receive nothing in return. They follow up this with telephone calls to wish their husbands happy birthday or valentine as the case may be if the person is not home on time. A member narrated painfully how she had tried over twelve years of their marriage to teach her husband to buy her something on her birthday or Valentine Day, no matter how small it might be, because she expected such heartfelt giving. The husband would always make excuses. The lady understood that it was not out of bad will, but she had stopped buying something for her husband on festive days.

The suggestion here is to help the husband to learn and improve on this, and stop the excuses he makes. A similar case was reported by one who virtually dresses her husband up with nice clothing and had not sincerely received a gift from him. The emotion ran so high that people started clapping and affirming the statements. The women said that all they are asking their men is to show some kind of love to them by gift exchange on feast days. They promised that they are ready to allow them control all their finances, but they deserve respect and love.

It was suggested that men should listen to the feelings of their wives and try as much as possible to meet these minor but important needs. It is ridiculous that these men do not show

the kind of love to their wives that they show to their ex- American girlfriends or lovers. They were challenged to change their attitude and improve on their love relationship with their wives.

However, some men commented that some of their wives do not bother to hug them, kiss them, and warmly welcome them when they come back from work after long hours outside home. They expected a relaxing and warm reception filled with love. They also reiterated that the fact that sometimes, their wives deny them their conjugal right [sex] under the pretext that they are tired, and this could continue for days and sometimes weeks. They equally expected their wives to ask them about their mood change whenever they see it and at least to share their burdens with them.

People were excited with the way the group had grown and matured and suggested that we continue this discussion in the future. They recommended that every member should bring his or her partner in their future for more and elaborate discussion. Some were of the opinion that the session was very therapeutic and inspirational.

CHAPTER FIVE

FEEDBACK AND RESULTS

Sometimes, results are not predictable in any given experiment until the final result is tested and proved, because of the diversity of human nature. Human capacity for change and adaptation is helpful in relations with others. Our rationality gives room for introspection and growth where necessary.

It is encouraging to see the positive feedback from people after some interventions, though not all the interventions yielded positive results. But a good number of the results were very helpful. People gave testimonies of improved relationships in their marriages and homes when they started applying the integrative models in specific cases.

CASE ONE

A member who claimed that she always get angry with her husband when he does things she wouldn't approve, and they end up most of the time quarreling, was asked to think of her method of approach and how her husband reacts to that. She reported that the few times she did not vent her anger immediate on her husband, but tried to peacefully engage him in a dialogue, he responded well and even apologized for the mistakes he made. According to her

she had some peace, and a restful soul, each time they discussed peacefully about the “hot” issues unlike the former times she would confront him angrily. She really appreciated the change in style and the deeper reflection on her other “parts” that react to any such situation. It gives her room to explore the “triggers”, and what they meant to her, and of course to consider her own transferences in the relationship.

According to her, many things manifest themselves in her “hot” exchanges with her husband. Her family of origin idea of family structure, her religious belief system, and her own belief that she needs to change this man and make him a better person, causes her to become harsh conclusion at the slightest provocation. She believes that growth will be gradual, but will be very rewarding. She also helps her husband think about how he says things to her.

CASE TWO

A member who has been having problems with her husband for couple of years due to his non involvement in family responsibilities reported an improved effort for peace in the family. The family is laden with many issues- financial, social, religious, and the sexual relationship. The woman adopted the strategy of the non confrontational and reactionary approach because of what she learned from the group But, after series of failed peace talks the husband yielded to free and open discussion and expressed his mind on the main causes of their marital problems from his perspective. Both promised each other a change in their style of communication, and the man sat down with his wife for family budget planning and equitable distribution of

responsibilities. They co-operate on paying bills. Each one now lives up to his or her responsibility in the family and their problem solving skills improved tremendously.

CASE THREE

In this case, the wife complained about how her husband spends all the money in their joint account without informing her, and the bulk of the money was from her pay check. She threatened to quit her jobs since she does not enjoy anything from her labor due to her husband's spending. She accused her husband of buying unnecessary things online and sending money to his family and relations at home without her consent or knowledge. The worst is that whenever she tells him that she wants to send some money to her own family, he would always complain that they had no money and he would never approve of that. She complained that her workload at home is too much for her because she had two or more jobs, and added to that is the care of their baby and preparation of their food.

She discussed these issues with her husband to see what his response would be. She reported that he did apologize and promise to involve her in most of the decisions with regard to money. He has started helping in child care when he is home, and sometimes helps out in preparation of dinner. She is quite happy with him now, and she is very proud of their marriage.

CASE FOUR

One client who was on the verge of divorce with her husband of 16 years marriage felt that she had to go on with her separation plan. They have four children in the marriage, and the wife

was working and going to school at the same time. They were living in an apartment and the man was not contributing to the welfare of the family. The woman invited her mother to help baby sit while she goes to work and school and the man insisted that the mother-in-law must leave the house. He was abusing his wife physically, which resulted in her moving out of the apartment with the kids and her mother to a new house where she single handedly pays the mortgage and the school fees of the kids in Catholic Schools. She is happy and enjoys some respite in her new home, and would not want to go back to the man who abuses her and does not show her love.

She admitted that she feels socially isolated amongst the Igbo people in many gatherings but she is accepted in the Therapy group, and she feels at home there, where nobody judges her or condemns her. For the meantime, she is not open to any negotiation or reconciliation with the estranged husband, though culturally she is still his wife and will always travel to the man's home in Africa whenever she travels to Africa.

CASE FIVE

A client reported that the more she tries to help her husband relate well with his estranged mother in Nigeria, the more she has problems with her husband. She was accused of not doing anything to help her husband reconcile with his mother, and when she tries that and the two get along fine, the mother-in-law turns the husband against her and they would have quarrels. If she stays clear of the problem between mother and son, both would accuse her of encouraging division and discord in the entire family. And when she tries to convince her husband to relate well with his mother, it hurts her marriage.

She moves from one problem to another, and seems to be in an impossible situation. There are other factors beneath the problem like their financial situation and job insecurity. The man lets his whole stress on her and at times threatens her with divorce. She does not want the divorce because of the kids and other personal reasons, but at the same time she is having so much stress in the marriage and finds herself confused, and does not know what to do about the situation.

The interventions offered to her would work for sometime, but later the same problems or new ones surface. The wife struggles to keep the marriage going and she uses prayer to support herself in the midst of the crisis. The husband does not believe in the efficacy of prayer but wants practical a solution which does not come around. He feels frustrated and disappointed and blames it all on the wife. He accuses his wife as the cause of his misfortune and this weighs heavily on the woman.

Her soul does not enjoy peace in the marriage. She would not consider separation because she is financially dependent on the man and had not found a job for a couple of years. She gets spiritual and emotional support from the group and she is hopeful that some day God would help stabilize things in her marriage. But for the time being she is fearful of what might happen if the man insists on divorce. Her case is one of the cases has not succeeded. We continue to try to help her.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

From the discussion of Igbo marriage in general, and the complexities of lives of the Igbo people in the United States, one could see the difficulties and problems affecting Igbo marriages in the U.S. Igbo bachelors living in the United States look at marriage with fear and trepidation, and are reluctant to bring wives into the country. And those who intend to migrate to America have the same reluctance because divorce among Igbo people living in America seems like a cancer that has eaten deep into the fabric of their whole being.

There is a need for proper marriage education, orientation, and cultural integration of values for intending and married couples, in order to encourage a healthy marital relationship. It is a known fact that divorce has devastating effects. H. Markman observed that “the damaging effects of destructive marital conflicts and divorce on spouses and children are incalculable and these effects include economic, medical, and mental health problems”. [2001, p.8] Added to this is the growing number of studies showing that divorce has lasting and negative impacts on many children.

Judith Wallersten, who wrote **The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce** [2000], is one researcher who has received a great deal of attention for documenting the long term devastating effects of divorce on children. In her report, she remarked that children of divorce are more likely to have a difficult time forming close relationships, and have more difficulty handling conflict, even into adulthood. Andrew Cherlin, a sociologist at John Hopkins University and a former skeptic about the long term effect of divorce, has said that children of divorce are bound to have long term measurable increase in risk of dropping out of high school, becoming pregnant as teenagers,

and having mental health problems. He maintained that children of divorce are also at greater risk of living in poverty, because marriage provides a family a stronger financial base in life than anything else we know.

It must be noted that there are also single parents and divorced parents who are doing a wonderful job of raising their children.

H. Markman indicated that indices show that children do best when they are raised in stable homes by two parents who love each other, handle conflict well, and provide a base of commitment that brings stability to the lives of those children. [2001, p.10]

The devastating effect of divorce or conflict in marriage is not limited to children alone. Adults also suffer greatly from the negative impact of marital problems and divorce. According to the opinion of Markman, marital problems are the number one cause of depression, and depression is the most common mental health problem in our society. He used the work of Steven Beach at the University of Georgia and his colleagues, which shows that marital dynamics such as emotional connection, support in helping one another cope with the stresses of life, and dependability of the spouse, all reduce an individual's likelihood of being depressed.

Inasmuch as the Catholic Church encourages couples to remain together in marriage that is valid and consummated, it does not support the idea that one should remain in a relationship that has repeated history of abuse and violence. P. Okpalaoka, of the Apostolic Tribunal of the Roman Rota says that 'the personal relationship between the spouses, characterized by series of matrimonial rights and obligations inter se, can be interrupted when the marriage enters into a problematic or crises situation, precipitated by the non- observance of the matrimonial rights

and duties on the part of one spouse or both. If this problematic situation persists and defies any satisfactory solution, it is very likely to plunge marriage and the family into either partial or total disintegration' [2002, p.285] He further maintained that 'partial dissolution of the marriage vis-a-vis any persistent unresolved problems between a husband and a wife is verifiable in the situation of temporal separation of the spouses while the marital bond still remains. Through this separation, the spouses live apart from each other until such a time that tempers cool down and reconciliation between them is effected.' [2002, p. 285]

This could be pursued through the Church, with the interventions arranged for the couples involved. The arrangement for the welfare and care of the children must be taken into consideration in any plan of action. Every arrangement being made for custody of the children should be for the best interest of the children, and provide for their care and protection.

The Church works in collaboration with the state agency entrusted with the welfare of children. The Church will always consent to the legal provision for situations like this and help facilitate its implementation. Of course, both parents should be allowed to visit the children wherever they might be, provided that their visit does not constitute any negative impact in their lives.

Couples should strive to maintain a healthy relationship and keep their marriage stable and peaceful. The primordial role of family in Igbo culture should not be taken for granted since the Igbo couples in America still cherish and value their homeland. The extended family system has a strong influence in virtually all Igbo families and so it has to be given its place of honor but not to the detriment of the nuclear family. An integration of African and American cultures should

be made by all parties in marriage to enable a balanced and healthy relationship. This calls for proper structural planning of the family in such a way that it will encourage peace and harmony.

An integrative use of the different models and theories discussed in chapter three will go a long way to help the families handle some of the causes of conflicts and problems in marriages. Seeking out a marriage counselor would definitely be beneficial to the families. At the same time, the practice of psychological evaluation before marriage and sometimes within marriage will help ensure the mental state of couples and most likely reduce tensions and conflicts in families.

Couples should watch out for signals that are indicators of a marriage in danger. In most cases, when partners have difficulty in managing their conflicts and problems, and they do not work as a team, the problems become more complicated and intense. Another danger sign is when life gets busier with domestic work, care of the children, work claiming more time and money. These pressures may result in danger to the marriage.

Things get worse, when the parts of life that bonded them together, for example, the eating of dinner, TV watch, swimming, Prayer and so on are neglected. The couple may spend less time together, and when their talk often turns to arguments, then the marriage is probably in jeopardy. Things get worse when the partners begin to associate the other with pain and stress, rather than support and pleasure. When friendship together becomes a thing of distant memory, this is an indication of danger on the horizon. Couples should start looking for help when they detect these early signs, in order to remedy the situation.

As part of the cultural integration for a healthy marital relationship amongst the Igbo in the United States, couples should be encouraged to be aware of the complex issues they face. If possible, each couple should receive help to discuss these prospective problems in advance, or early in the marriage. Because of its position of honor in Igbo culture, the Church is in a unique position to help couples- to provide the advance counseling, and to encourage couples to use the Church as a resource when they experience difficulty.

Pauline exhortation offers guidance: “love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, love is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered. It does not brood over injury. It does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. [1Cor. 13: 4-7]

Couples may need help to work together to settle their problems, and do whatever is possible to enhance their communication skills in order to build a lasting and peaceful marital relationship. They may need help in adjusting to the new environment and responding positively to the new demands posed by their marriage at any given time. Opportunity for growth is available when each couple is ready to learn and respect the values of his or her partner and allow room for growth in their relationship.

Appendix

Igbo Marriage Assessment/Intervention Guideline: copyright Rev. Fr. Stephen Okeke

- **Causal Factors:**

- Incompatibility of the couples
- Lack of Communication
- Financial
- Infidelity
- Mental Health
- Childlessness
- Different Religious Beliefs

- **B. Intervention:**

- Integrative Treatment
- Structural Treatment
- Interactional Treatment
- Cognitive Treatment
- Family of origin Treatment

- **Outcomes**

- Enhance Communication Style
- Problem Solving Skills increase
- Shared Responsibilities
- Improved Relationship
- Need for Prayers

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