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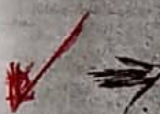
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Phenomenon of Elderly Male Couples in Ilorin Metropolis: Implications for Social Work

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ABSTRACT

From time immemorial, marriage between husband and wife had been filled with bundles of experiences ranging from love, enthusiasm, lost and melancholic feelings which every couple manage within their home in order to live a fulfilled life, be compatible and cohabit peacefully with one another amidst several challenges surrounding them. However, the objectives of this study identified the core anomalies confronting elderly male married couples in Ilorin metropolis. It also, states the causes and its health consequences on elderly male couples in a bid to proffer possible solutions via the significance of social workers. The study used a qualitative data collected from 12 elderly men residing in the three geographical locations of Ilorin metropolis (that is; Ilorin west, East, and South local government areas) through an in-depth interview guide. The collected data was transcribed and was coded, using Nvivo12 and was analyzed thematically. Result of the study revealed that elderly men between the ages of 60 and 69 years encounter series of problems ranging from boredom, lack of sexual intimacy, lack of regular communication, jealousy and anger. While among older adults between the ages of 70 years and above suffers problems such as difference in life style/stages, depression, high blood pressure, dementia and the host of other elderly anomalies bedeviling them due to the difficulties experienced from long lifespan marital stay. The study discussed the implications of the findings for social work practice and it also proffer recommendations to relevant agencies, family members, the immediate communities and concern aged couples. And more so, policies and programs that will enhance the role of social work practices should be formulated and upheld by the Nigerian governments, through professionalism of social work.

KEY WORDS:

Elderly male, married couples, older adults, Ilorin metropolis

Introduction

Since the creation of Adam and Eve on planet earth and since the being together of husband and wife in every human society, countless blessings, joy and tribulations have been occurring in individual's marital homes and, without leaving behind the rare challenges and difficulties associated with marriages across the globe. However, the journey of life begins with a step which as well involve travelling with a companion whom every individual (he/she) is expected to identify, communicate, interrelate and interdependent with. The companionship of an adult man and an adult woman is an in indivisible union termed marriage (Osarenren (2002), in which one selects a life partner with virtually all unidentified roles. Marriage is a union of two like minds from different backgrounds/up bring,

that come together as husband and wife to live, stay to plan and setup their own family and till death do them part. Scholars from different disciplines have argued so much on the importance of marriage in every society as a basic functional institution. According to Olugbenga (2018, p.306) marriage is a culturally, religiously and socially an acceptable union between a man and woman called husband and wife. It is seen and perceived as one of the relevant and fundamental human relationships that have the sole established right and obligations revolving between couples, their off springs and more so, between the couples and their in-laws.

Iriogbe (2015, p1) as cited in Onoyase (2017), posited that marriage is a social union that involves coming together of man and woman as husband and wife. Marriage on the other hand as posited by Okorodudu (2010), is a union agreed upon by husband and wife irrespective of all odds involved, with little or no idea. The reasons behind marriages are numerous and these includes; sexual satisfaction, procreation, economic integration, companionship and compatibility, to mention a few. The importance of marriage between husband and wife cannot be over emphasised, it is an intra generation transition programme that entails a life time planning, relationship, and procreation of future generation. (Olugbenga 2018) It has been investigated by several scholars in recent times that most men are disinterested in marrying because of reasons beyond their take, such reasons are: the increasing difficulties in maintaining a happy and stable home (Amato, Johnson, Booth and Rogers, 2003). This is so because, a reasonable amount of marriages today has collapsed due to marital disputes posing a serious threat to the life's of those involved, rather than having a peace, responsible, and satisfying married homes that ought to be pleasant to marital couples (Omeje 2014). Olson & Olson (2000) argued that, marital dispute and discontentment is observed as a major source of marital instability which transcends to divorce, abandonment, single-parenting, separation and marriage failures.

From the foregoing, other contending problems confronting couples decisions to stay/quit a marriage includes but limited to: lack of adequate communication, childlessness, unsatisfactory sex life, distrust, financial constraint/poverty, ignoring boundaries, impatient, emotional or sexual infidelity, boredom, selfishness/jealousy, and value differences, etc. Ojukwu and Obiji (2016) asserts that when partners in a marriage relationship developed displeasure about the character of his/her partner, what ensue negatively thereafter is poor communication. Effective communication connects, bond, and strengthen love and understanding in marital relationship from been broken. According to Eseré (2002; 2006), incommunicado set into a marital relationship when there is the absence of effective communication within husband and wife which crumbles most marriages. Fifty percent (50%) of broken relationships today are caused by severe lack of communication between partners (Idowu and Eseré, 2007). Again, poverty on the other hand is a daring issue in most marriages and according to Delving,

(2013) financial constraint cripples break up most marriages. Going further is the issue of sexual satisfaction in most marriages. Oladapo (2012) assert that, sex among all other marital roles is classified the topmost aside food and that sexual commitment is a sanctification in marriage. Value orientation, in-laws intrusion, and psycho-emotional condition amounting from family responsibilities/pressure and all of which could cause fears and anxiety or emotional distress are some of the problems encountered in most marriages across board and particularly in sub-Saharan Africa countries. (Ojukwu and Obiji (2016). These problems and many others are the sole objective of this study because, it is pertinent to know what and why are the actual phenomenon's of elderly male couples aside the physical, psychological, socio-economic and health crisis bedeviling aged married men and more so, to identify the consequences and proffer serviceable recommendations with the relevance of social work practice.

Challenges of Elderly Persons

From the biological explanation, ageing comes as a result of the effect from amassing broad array of microscopic and organic deterioration over long period of time which increasingly diminishes the physical and mental competency of man. Becoming aged is neither categorical nor persistent. However, ageing come upon every human as we incline in years. The difference observed in ageing and among elderly people comes gradually and definitely. Furthermore, ageing is linked to other life miseries such as, losing loved ones, traumatic pains, staying in a too comfort environment and retirement from active service, etc. Elderly people are fragile men and women whose wealth of experience is always handy to the upcoming adults. They are faced with so many difficulties ranging from physical, social, economical, psychological and above all, health challenges. Health challenges take the lead because, 'health' they say is 'wealth' and more so, the decline/diminishing impact from ageing lies most on health factors (WHO, 2021).

It is on this note that the following health challenges remains an issue to the elderly persons. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, depression, dementia, back, joint and neck pain; diabetes; osteoarthritis; hearing and vision impairment, cataracts and refractive errors etc. Elderly persons sometimes experience one or more of these health challenges at a time and this may as well, rise or worsen the severity of its intricacy, this state of health challenges among the elderly is termed geriatric syndromes which regular effects results into various underlying circumstances. This state of health may result to either urinary incontinence, delirium, frailty, pressure ulcers and falls (WHO, 2021). According to Roberts, Wise, & DuBenske (2009), health challenges among elderly couple is a great difficulty because it is only where there is a compassion love between aged couple that their health challenges can be ameliorated giving the fact that one couple may be free of health crisis and may pay attention to the other couple without any repite.

Compassionate love among elderly couples remains...

of health challenges but, when there is no anomaly between both couples (Hoxles&Suzman 2007).

Material and Methods

Study area

The study was conducted in Ilorin metropolis, Ilorin is the capital city of Kwara state and in the north central region of Nigeria. Kwara state has a land mass of about 36825km² and with population of 2.37 million (2006 census). It is bounded to the North by Niger state, to the South by Osun and Ekiti states, to the East by Oyo state and to the West by Kogi state. The state has 16 local government areas in which one of its local government areas owes a boundary with the people Republic of Benin, a country within the West Africa region. Ilorin metropolis is largely dominated by the Yoruba ethnic group and with Baruba's and Fulani's as the minority group and with significantly Nupe tribes occupying the Northern part of the state. Therefore, the research was conducted in the three local government areas that comprises Ilorin metropolis (that is: Ilorin West, East, and South LGAs respectively) and the study area was purposively selected because it is the most densely populated part of the state where both indigenous and aliens dwell together irrespective of tribe or religion.

Sampling Procedure/Data Collection

The study adopted multi-stage technique, comprising cluster, simple random, and availability sampling methods. The existing local government areas (LGAs) were adopted as clusters, using simple random sampling method, three LGAs namely Ilorin West, East, and South local government areas were selected out of the 16 LGAs in Kwara state. In each of the selected local government areas, six communities were purposively chosen. To reach the participants, a major street was purposely selected and a snowball sampling method was used to select the eligible participants, who were within the age range of 60 years and above. While a total number of 12 male participants were used for the study. Ethically, the participants were told about the rationale for the study and gave their consents before the commencement of the interviews. The study also considered that a sample size of 12 is acceptable for a qualitative study to provide sufficient data for theoretical saturation (Nelson, 2017).

Qualitative method of data analysis was adopted and in-depth interview (IDI) was conducted with the twelve participants at different locations since response was based on trust. Audio recorder was as well, used to collect data from the participants. The audio records were transcribed and categorized into themes to shade more light on the outcomes and non-verbal cues, and other important information were also written on a field note pad.

Staying there for weeks and if not months while I face the brunt. Even if our grown up children who stays apart from us visits, they only spend few time with me, the larger period of time is being spent with their mother in her room talking and laughing, leaving me to myself all alone and the next thing you see is for such a child to come and bid you bye. It's really annoying. (Johnson, Male, 67 years, trader)".

In the same vein, another participant also posits that:

"I made a mistake from the onset not to have married another wife, now am 70 years old and I am depressed by whom I called my wife. She hardly obeys me nor does she cook regularly. All she does is for her to warm up meals that have been cooked by a house made for some number of days and stocked in the fridge for me to eat. I no longer eat fresh meals again. During the day time she is either with a friend, watching films from the TV set, or making calls with her children/siblings. At night she sleeps deep without turning back and even snoring. All of which are scary to my likings. We only have sexual affair when she desires and deem fit to be. I am starved from both ends and never shown love like it was in the recent past. My wife is now my only problem at home, she talks to me without any regard in the presence of all. I derive joy when am with friends and loved ones. (Tunde, Male, 70 years, retired lecturer)"

Reasons for the Elderly Male Married Couples' Phenomenon

The problem associated with the elderly male married couples cannot be over emphasized without looking into the causes and consequences. Many aged men faces one challenges or the other, ranging from health, physical, psychological and to mention a few of these problems and coupled with the socio-economic/political instability in the country. However, many women pay no attention to what goes around with their husbands so long they are both aged. They seem to be less concern about the trauma/feelings that their husbands are undergoing. Women, be they as they are either old or young are ought to be a comforter, a giver of warmth and inspiration. Many elderly men die a natural but unduly death holding to high blood pressure, depression, neglect and abandonment caused on them by their so called wives, especially at older age. Two participants have these to say in an interview session:

"The reason why I had to marry a second wife at my late forties was because my wife started showing me more interest in the children than me

We both met initially and love one another but I was able to reason it out that she may later have no time to show me love. She calls upon the grown up child then, to attend to my needs while she stay aside. She would not want me to scorn at any erring child. She does as if the children are for her alone, the *disrespect* knows no bound and we *hardly communicate* fluently as intimate lovers. At a point, she tend to *starve me of my marital rite/obligation* thus, dispute sets in, and to avoid myself of all these embarrassment, I made up my mind marrying a second wife which has stabilize the abnormalities and had restored hope and sound health to my life rather than becoming depressed and hypertensive in my own house (Ibrahim, Male, 69 years, Artisan)".

"Let me start by saying marriage is very good and important in every man's life. Especially when children come in place. However, every man should be careful of whom he takes as wife because women everywhere are all the same and it takes two to tangle. My wife has been my source of joy since we got married in the late 60s. Although her *family background* matters most and she had earlier from the onset took over all liabilities at home and within the neighbour hood making me look quite and irrelevant. She becomes *violent, nagging and troublesome*. She is an *impatient wife* and has this '*over-confidence*' that whatever she wants must be. I had been managing the feelings of discontentment and embarrassment within and without me. My friends and family members have a way of showing their concern but it is done underground because they dare not confront her. Even as we both aged, she still remains the true picture of her very self, while the long due psychological trauma had given me hypertension, depression and inability to spend enough time together with her at home. In fact, my life has been in *chaumbe* all the while and my religion does not permit me to marry a second wife else, I would have married one long ago. It is for better, for worse (Ezekiel, Male, 71 years, retired civil servant)".

From the above data, it is obvious that plight and challenges confront elderly person in Ilorin metropolis as a man, husband and father have made them

depressed, they hardly communicate and exchanged love like before. As indicate above, many women in Ilorin metropolis are found with attitude of switch love, affection and humbleness from their husband to the children, this were make many husband isolated, neglected and suffers throughout their aging lives.

Effects of the Anomalies on Elderly Male Couples:

Elderly male couples experience series of pains and traumas which eventually results to countless miseries and mishap if not properly monitored. Some men in their homes become stupid due to the inconvenience infringed on them. Two other participants were as well interviewed and these were there comments:

"I was diagnosed of having high blood pressure and was admitted even. My wife and I were two wrong persons, we quarrel and abuses each as if there would be no tomorrow, at the end of it all she 'won' because, I was told not to query with her again by my doctor. She almost kill me, but thank God, here I am, depressed and rejected" but I am still the old shade of myself, full of boredom. (Samuel, male, 65 years, a farmer)".

Another participants interview:

"Me, I don't want to die a cheap death, women are lazy people who always want to hinder men from being a man especially, when we are aged. A friend of mine was having similar marital dispute with his wife and after loud argument he slums and dies. (Yinka, male, 67 years, welder)".

Discussions of the Major Findings

Old age among the elderly people comes with so many challenges due to decline in physical and biological factors of human existence. These challenges or difficulties vary from our society to another particularly on married couple's socio-economic status, family background, environmental challenges, and peer influence factors. Aside these difficulties that comes with aging, elderly persons across the board (aged 65 and above) physical, psychological, social, and health difficulties are yet another topmost challenges they face. Hence, Cano, Johansen, Leonard, & Harawalt (2005) asserts that older and elderly couples have issues related to one another's health crisis. It is concluded that elderly male couples in this study still faces some internal (home) anomalies with their spouses and this amount to decline in interrelatedness and interdependent interactions with one another, irregular communication, absence of sexual intimacy, disrespect and misplaced priority, neglect/abandonment, over confidence, wronging, personality trait, lack of attention, boredom and to mention a few of these difficulties they encounter.

These problems can be challenging and life threatening because, most elderly male persons have different health problems and coupled with all of these anomalies, it could eventually lead to high blood pressure, depression, mental health illness (e.g. anxiety disorder, mood disorder, and dementia), sudden death, change in lifestyle mood, etc.

Consequently, Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, Ragan, & Whitton, (2010) argues that, When misunderstandings arise within married couples, the long-term wellbeing of the relationship depends on how the couples manage the problem and on what transpire between them, these two main factors plays a great aspect on how they argued it because, some issues are more difficult to determine than others, which as a result could lead to health crisis. For instance, dispute between couples on problems such as sex, misplaced priority, personality trait, financial constraint and the host of others are some of the phenomenon confronting elderly male couples (Rehman, Rellini, & Fallis, 2011; Williamson, Hanna, Lavner, Bradbury, & Karney, 2013). Sanford, (2003) also agreed that unhappy couples faces different and possibly difficult set of issues, ranging from violent behaviours by their spouse, a behaviour which most have had been a aged long attitude or perhaps nagging; lackadaisical approach of wives to husbands' needs causing disrespect and changes in lifestyle mood; absence of love and warmth; misplaced priority showed by spouse either abandoning their aged husband at home and leaving for their grandchildren's care (to baby seat) in any of their married children's home or unable to prepare regular daily meal other than persevered and refrigerated warm up foods that might have stayed over days due to flimsy excuses, etc.

The problems that married couples face changes as they advance as a person and even as a couple, (Reese-Weber, Kahn, & Nemecek, 2015). Unlike young undeveloped married couples that are faced with problems of distrust and jealousy (Feiring, Markus, & Simon, 2018), elderly male couples are face with tremendous problems that has do with their health and social wellbeing and most family members, friends, community dwellers and the society at large are not putting these issues into consideration. It is a phenomenon that has come to stay but, also needs redress and reproach in the nip of time to stop sudden death, depressed mood and even, becoming widow among aged women within the web of this vices. With every passing day or year in every elderly couples married life, marriage should be an exciting and romantic experience in which the relationship between couples should be waxing stronger and better (Tolorunleke, 20014). Two participants that were interviewed gave contrary opinion to this assertion, one agreed to have married a second wife at his late forties before it becomes too late of him to do so in a bid to ameliorate the future anomalies that can come from his first wife later in life. The second as well, posits that, his wife has not been productive in all ramifications since they both became of aged. He stated the stress he goes through and the pains attached to it as though he is a widower or an aged bachelor.

Implications for social work practices

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the socio-wellbeing of elderly age persons in Nigeria is in shambles and Ilorin metropolis in particular is not left out of it. In Nigeria, different scholars, agencies and organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations (UN), family service agencies, and non-government organizations (NGOs) among others, had laid so much emphasis on the state at which elderly persons' right and the protection of their dignity would be met in improving and promoting their standards of health and living. Apart from the fact that the elderly persons are fragile age cohort that needs care, love and concerns. However, some of the elderly people in Ilorin metropolis are worried about what goes on around them than being cared for and being loved for whom they are. Consequently, many other social and psychological phenomenon wage war against them in their various homes. Thus, this anomaly relatively concerns social workers whose role and relevance is to improve the wellbeing of the individuals, groups and communities (National Association of Social Workers (NASW), 2015). By taking into cognizance the reality that elderly male couples suffers as an individual, mental/psychological trauma which negatively affects their livelihood and social wellbeing.

Therefore, social work in the womb of time is a discipline with dual opportunity either as an educator or a practice based profession which is concern with welfare aids, support and assistance to the elderly in a progressive manner and to every other desired human being. It is embedded by social science theories and guided by rules, standard and principles of social justice, respect for diverse culture, collective responsibility and human right principles. Social work implicates interplay between people and social structures in a bid to ameliorate challenges of life and social well-being (Forde & Lynch, 2013). By promoting and aiding socioeconomic growth and development, supporting grass root empowerment of people and facilities, social cohesion, liberation from oppression and abuses are all attribute of social work practice. Social workers' are people who practices as a professional with a degree in social work. The sole responsibility of social workers is to care for people or group of individuals and families that are confronted by problems affecting their livelihood.

Thus, elderly persons are people to care for and be shown concern to. A practicing social worker must be skillful in knowledge to teach and develop methods or approaches in which clients' will find suitable in easing their plight and enhancing their lives and knowledge. Social workers are recognized as worthwhile game players in the society and as well as a very important agent of change who sees all elderly adults as clients and ensure that they are well cared for by making them to understand their plights and also willing to put an end to their sufferings. However, social workers are involved in policy development, advocacy services and as well engage in research work (Cipolletti, 2010) which can be of more relevance/significant to programmes and projects that will promote the livelihood of the elderly persons in Nigeria. Social workers are therefore call upon to rise to the

challenges facing most marriages across the globe, especially the elderly male couples because, most homes are now left with widows.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The elderly adults in Nigeria suffer a lot of problems ranging from physical, mental, psychological, health, social and economical difficulties that are most peculiar to several marital issues within the globe. However, there are certain variant anomalies in almost every marital home in Nigeria, and this range from lackadaisical approach of their wives at older age, lack of sexual intimacy, reduced communication/interrelatedness of couples, disrespect, misplaced priority, neglect and abandonment, impatient and other forms of deteriorations that necessitates for an intervention. The elderly persons has no specific social security/protect seeking their wellbeing in Nigeria and most of this people are only supporter by friends and family members, religious caregivers and few non governmental agencies within the society that choice to. In a bid finding a lasting solution to the plight of the elderly male married couples in Ilorin metropolis, in Nigeria at large, and the globe in general, all stake holders that is the public and private corporations- government organizations and non-governmental organizations, friends/family members, religious clerics, and professional practitioners must all take the bull by the horn in reducing this tormenting and life threatening monster that seems to dwell within older couples and perhaps making most elderly women widows too, due to its aftermath ordeal with most elderly male married couples. This study therefore, recommends the following:

- 1) Marital education, family counseling, and related services anchored by social workers can improve the phenomenon of elderly male married couple plight through problem-solving skills.
- 2) Hospitals and therapy care centre's anchored by professionals with seasoned experience should be built with related facilities to improve the health and psychological challenges associated with the elderly.
- 3) Outreach cry, sensitization and public awareness programmes by social workers/other related caregivers should be stretched to the elderly people around all pros and cons to reduce boredom, depression and suicide death which could make most women widows.
- 4) The three tiers of government in Nigeria should formulate policies as a matter of urgency that will address issues relating to elderly person social protection and social rights within homes and the society.
- 5) The Nigeria government should as a matter of urgency, initiate more effort to institutionalize social work profession beyond symbolic statements/recognitions.
- 6) Social workers should counsel all aged married couples concerning issues that usually arise between them and its attendant consequences in order to reduce this phenomenon in Ilorin.

- 7) Nigeria government should provide enabling environment for the scope of social work practice to revolve round the locks and cranny of Nigeria society with all needed supports backed by law.
- 8) Government and nongovernmental agencies at all levels should pay more attention to the need and worries happening to the elderly adults, especially those that are still couples.

Limitations

This study examines the phenomenon of elderly male married couples amidst several others which they face such as physical, psychological, social and above all, health challenges which seems natural and phonological within this age bracket. However, fewer anomalies that can as well aggravate their health status arouses within the home which tend to become a severe problem to them due to the fact that they are aged and quiet different biologically from the women folks. The problem poses a limitation on the number of participants sampled and the time framed for the interviews, because the participants were put into consideration occasioned by the pandemic and not to be stressed out/exposed to other risk challenges. Therefore, interpretations of these findings should take into consideration due to the small sample size ($n = 12$) used in a qualitative method in three out of the sixteen local government areas in Kwara state, Nigeria, which is not fully a good representation of the general population size.

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