Divorce and remarriage: perceptions and experiences of Christians in Masvingo City, Zimbabwe

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Abstract
This study sought to find out the perceptions and experiences of Christians in Masvingo City, Zimbabwe, in relation to divorce and remarriage. This qualitative inquiry used interviews and questionnaires in order to solicit data from a sample of 48 participants who were purposefully selected. Data were arranged into themes and discussed in light of related literature. The study revealed that divorce and remarriage among Christians are realities and a cause for concern. The reasons for divorce that came out of the study were diverse. These include unfaithfulness in marriage, lack of communication, domestic violence, and financial disputes, among others. Although divorce is not encouraged among Christians, some Christians resorted to divorce as a means of gaining freedom from unhappy unions. The study also established that the consequences of divorce are many and for the most part negatively affect the people involved. This study recommends that young people be taught about marriage by church elders so that they become ready for all that it entails. Further studies to cover a wider area are also recommended.

Key words: perceptions, divorce, remarriage, Christians, Zimbabwe

Introduction
Marriage is an important social institution which serves as the focus of existence in almost all human societies. Marriage is an expectation embedded in African culture (Kambarami, 2006). Among most African societies, a person of marriageable age is expected to get married and start a family. In this regard, a real man or a real woman is expected to get married and have children. Among the Shona, a sub grouping of the Africans, marriage is regarded as a contract between two families, the wife-giving family and the wife-receiving family (Bourdillon, 1998). Marriage thus serves as a unifier of originally unrelated people. Since marriage allies two distinct individuals and therefore two distinct families, it can be viewed as of political significance (Chetty, 2005), a kind of political alliance. Understood from this perspective, marriage is expected to last a lifetime as separation of spouses has detrimental effects on relations between the families united by marriage. It is no wonder that in times of marital problems, efforts are made to mend the relationship between spouses so that the marriage institution is saved from collapsing. Saving marriage from collapsing is in effect saving social relations between families.

For Christians, marriage is a divine institution that God instituted. In marriage, God unites man and woman to become one flesh (Genesis 2: 24). As such, it is a union that is meant to last a lifetime. Separation of spouses is disapproved since ‘what God has joined, let no man separate.’ According to the Bible, marriage serves basically two main purposes, namely companionship and procreation. According to Genesis 2:18, God saw that it was not good for a man to stay alone so he de-
decided to make him a suitable companion in the form of a woman. Genesis 1: 26-28 says God created male and female in his own image so that together they control creation and procreate. Marriage gives rise to a family which is a basic social institution in which children are to be raised.

Divorce, which is the dissolution of marriage, signifies the end of a marriage. Divorce is a global social problem. It is fast developing into a pandemic threatening the social fabric that is based upon the family as a basic social structure. Divorce is becoming ‘fashionable’ as some people now feel that there is no point in staying in a marriage relationship that does not meet their expectations, contrary to the traditional notion, especially among many African societies, that suffering and disappointments were the realities of marriage to be endured, especially by women. While those who tie the knot promise to cling to their partners ‘till death do us part’ this vow is now being broken with ease. Today newspapers are replete with stories of divorce among couples. Even newlyweds are found filling for divorce. Reflecting this scenario, a Zimbabwean gospel musician once sang, ‘kurambana kwenge muchato munyika ino’ (Shona, literally translated as ‘divorce is like a wedding in this country [Zimbabwe], which implies that divorce is now common; it has become like a norm). In Zimbabwe, the divorce rate is rising (Newsday, 18 July 2015; The Herald, 27 December 2015).

Notwithstanding that divorce is considered anathema in most churches, the reality is that Christians do divorce. These include religious leaders. With reference to Zimbabwe, an article in the Sunday Mail of 28 February 2016 entitled “Pastors shred marriage fabric” testifies to the reality of divorce among Christians who are expected to uphold the permanence of marriage. The newspaper reported the divorce and remarriage of some prominent ‘men of God’. In view of this, it is hardly surprising that lay people are empowered, even inspired, to initiate divorce when they feel the need to do so. Contrary to the view that God ‘uses death, not divorce,’ to end a marriage (McFall, 2009, p. 2), the reality on the ground is that couples do not always wait for death to separate them.

Within the Shona context, which is the indigenous ethnic group to which a majority of Zimbabweans belong, divorce has traditionally been discouraged (Bourdillon, 1998). Efforts were made through counselling to preserve the marriage. Where divorce was unavoidable, the husband had to give his wife gupuro (a token that would serve as a symbol of divorce and evidence that she is no longer married). Divorce was considered as a reflection of failure, especially on the part of the divorced woman (Mukonyora, 1999). Mukonyora (1999) further states that a divorced woman is ‘unwanted at her husband’s home and is accepted with reluctance in her patrilineal home. (p. 278). As such, divorce signifies loss, particularly for the divorced woman; ‘loss of friends and family; loss of status, possibly loss of children and sometimes loss of financial security’ (Kitson, 1992, p. 18).

After divorce it is in most cases relatively easier for a man to remarry than for a woman to do the same. A divorced woman is said to have lost value and is considered as a ‘used’ thing that most men would not wish to marry. As a result, a number of divorced women remain single and are labelled mvana (a Shona term referring to women who have either been divorced or impregnated and dumped; which implies a second-hand woman). Men do not experience the same stigma. For the Shona, it is more acceptable for a man to seek divorce than for a woman to do so, hence most divorces are initiated by men.

Christian teachings consolidate the perceptions of divorce found in African culture, notably that divorce is unacceptable and that women have to work hard to preserve their marriages and so save themselves from be-
ing labelled divorcees who are perceived as a threat to other women’s marriages. Among the Shona, divorce is made more difficult by the payment of roora (bridewealth) as well as the designation of marriage as a communal affair, a relationship between families and not individuals. As such, there is a lot of pressure that is exerted on couples to stay together in spite of a rift in the marriage union. On the other hand, the HIV and AIDS pandemic is engendering a rethinking on divorce and remarriage as revealed by a study conducted by Chireshe (2012).

Many studies have been undertaken to establish causes and effects of divorce (Bracher, Santow & Watkins, 2003; Kitson, 1992; Tembe, 2010) in various areas but not much research has been done on how divorce is perceived and experienced, particularly in Masvingo City, Zimbabwe. The subject of divorce and remarriage is a controversial one, with some perceiving divorce as an end to marital problems while others condemn it on the basis of its social effects on the divorced, children, and society in general. For Christians in particular, the teaching that the married should never separate because they are united by God renders divorce unacceptable in most Christian circles. The negative view towards divorce is epitomised by the biblical text (Malachi 2: 16) where God is recorded as saying he hates divorce. Jesus’ teaching in the New Testament is to the effect that divorce was never part of God’s original plan but was borne out of people’s stubbornness. As such, divorce is condemned. Although Jesus disapproved of divorce because ‘what God joined no man should separate’ (Matthew 19:6), he nevertheless permitted divorce on the ground of adultery. Still this concession is contested within the Catholic church where marriage, at an official level, is taken as a sacrament which should never be broken. The negation of remarriage by some Christians is based on Jesus’ teaching that one who divorces his wife makes her an adulteress and one who marries a divorced woman commits adultery (Matthew 5: 32; Romans 7: 2-3). This teaching implies that those who divorce should not remarry but remain single because remarriage is tantamount to committing adultery.

In view of the controversies surrounding divorce and remarriage, it was of interest to the researchers to establish, empirically, what the Masvingo Christian community makes of divorce and remarriage in terms of both perceptions and experiences. The study considered the official teachings of the churches in relation to the perceptions and lived experiences of divorcees. Masvingo City was selected because of its proximity to the researchers as well as the fact that it is home to diverse churches. Focus was on Christians because a majority of residents of Masvingo City identify themselves with Christianity.

**Method**

**Research design**

This study was qualitative since it sought to find out perceptions and experiences of divorce and remarriage among Christians in Masvingo City, Zimbabwe. Qualitative research involves an interpretive naturalistic approach to the subject under study (Sidhu, 2003; Neuman, 2006). Since a descriptive survey is best when collecting qualitative data (Bell 2011), it was employed to probe deeply and analyse perceptions and experiences of divorce and remarriage. Silverman (2010) and Denscombe (2007) posit that research participants are chosen based on their first hand experiences because manipulation, control and generalisation of findings are not the intentions of descriptive surveys. Since qualitative research describes events as they are from the participants’ perspective (Sidhu, 2003), perceptions and experiences of Christians were not manipulated but presented and analysed from the point of view of the participants.
Population and sample

The target population comprised all Christians in Masvingo City who attended Mainline, Pentecostal, and Zionist/Apostolic churches. The religious groups chosen represent the denominations which are popular and where the majority of people in Masvingo City go to. The study involved a purposefully selected sample of forty eight (48) participants who were well informed about the purpose of the study and were given the chance to give their consent. Robson (2002) and Sowell (2011) assert that purposive sampling is best when seeking classified information or when selecting participants with the information required. Divorce and remarriage are sensitive issues that required the researchers to select the sample carefully in order to get credible data. Eight religious leaders, representing each of the eight churches that participated in the study, took part in the study. The eight church leaders were purposively sampled because they were the custodians of the religious belief systems. Two divorcees from each of the eight chosen denominations were selected. Seven (7) divorcees were purposefully selected while nine (9) were selected by snowballing, making a total of sixteen (16) divorcees. Ross and Medin (2005) describe snowballing as a non-probability sampling technique that is used to identify potential participants who are difficult to identify. Purposeful and snowball sampling were used in selecting divorcees because some of the divorcees who participated in the study were already known to researchers even before the empirical study. Twenty-four ordinary church members who were not divorcees but knowledgeable about divorce and remarriage also participated in the study.

Instrumentation

In-depth, semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires were used to collect data. In-depth interviews were chosen because they are the best when collecting detailed data on people’s experiences and opinions. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that in-depth interviews are characterised by probing deeply and collecting first hand information from the people who have lived the experiences. In-depth interviews were used to collect data from religious leaders so as to gather detailed information. Gay and Airasian (2008) state that the main advantage of in-depth interviews is that they are flexible and allow the researcher to explore in greater detail meaning that is difficult to obtain using other techniques. Open-ended questionnaires were used to collect data from forty participants, including divorcees. Patton and Cochran (2002) suggest that open-ended questionnaires are appropriate when collecting data from a relatively large number of people within a short space of time. Questionnaires were administered by the researchers and were collected back after they were filled in by participants. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) assert that open-ended questionnaires cater very well for anonymity and also allow the participants to express their views without influence from the researchers. Participants for the current study were asked not to write their names on questionnaires in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

Data presentation and analysis

Data was organised around the emerging main themes; described and analysed using the content analysis. According to Nayab (2011) content analysis aims at securing an in depth understanding or the “why” and “how” of human behaviour and decision making. It produces specific information on the cases studied rather than general conclusions.

Results and discussion

Data is presented according to four main themes, namely, church teachings on divorce and remarriage, perceived and experienced causes and effects of divorce, perceptions
and experiences of remarriage after divorce and what the church does and can do in relation to divorce and divorce. Information from church teachings was largely obtained from religious leaders who are ideally the custodians of the faith. Churches generally affirmed that marriage was instituted by God and as such was meant to be a permanent union. Divorce was taught as a deviation from the original plan of God and was granted on the ground of people’s hardness of heart (stubbornness).

The current study established that the religious groups under study had their perceptions influenced by some verses in the Bible. Marriage, according to the Bible, is a sacred union between a man and a woman, which was ordained by God. It mirrors the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 3:23). Most participants portrayed the view that divorce and remarriage are not acceptable before God. Mainline churches (churches A, C & D) generally shared similar perceptions of divorce and remarriage. In Church A marriage was perceived as a God-ordained institution. Based on Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:4-6, a man and a woman who are joined in marriage become one flesh and marriage is a union for life. This repels divorce. Divorce was perceived as a tragic occurrence that represents a deviation from God’s original design for marriage; a teaching based on Mark 2:2-9 and Matthew 19:3-8. In this regard, biblical legislation on divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1-4), was given as a response to people’s failure, ‘hardness of heart’, to live up to the marriage ideal.

Church A viewed Matthew 5:22 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-15 as providing grounds for divorce, namely, adultery and abandonment by an unbelieving partner. Remarriage was allowed for the faithful spouse whose spouse has been unfaithful. This teaching seems to have been influenced by the Erasmus view which Tembe (2010) depicts as allowing remarriage after divorce for the innocent partner. An unfaithful spouse who remarries while the spouse who has been faithful is still alive and remains unmarried and chaste faces expulsion from the Church. The Church recognised that sometimes marriage breaks down to a point where it is better for spouses to separate. However, although the church permitted divorce under some circumstances, it strived to help spouses reconcile in the face of conflicts.

In Church C divorce was not permissible. Marriage between members of the Church was sacramental and hence indissoluble. One religious leader of the Church said in principle there is no divorce in the Church. There is what is referred to as annulment. Annulment legally means that there was no marriage from the beginning. Marriage is taken as if it never existed (Tembe, 2010) because there were impediments to it. Impediments include ignorance of the obligations of marriage. Where marriage has been annulled, spouses can remarry. In mixed marriages they use the Pauline privilege (1 Corinthians 7), which states that if the non-believer decides to break the union, the believer is not bound and therefore can remarry. Mixed marriages are unions in which one member is baptized in the Church while the other one is not.

As in Church A and Church C, marriage in Church D is a holy matrimony instituted by God himself and as such is a lifetime commitment. Divorce is not encouraged. One reverend of the Church (DML1) said, “We do not encourage divorce because God hates divorce. Whenever is necessary we encourage dialogue, seeking counselling, and spiritual guidance.” The reverend further said “We try our best to help couples to stick together and respect their marriage vows.” It should, however, be noted that while seeking spiritual guidance can be helpful, it is difficult for some because they do not want to reveal their personal struggles to others (Hawkins & Fackrell, 2011).

Marriage was viewed in Church D as having a binding and lifelong character. It was
regarded as a lifetime union. The study revealed that religious leaders in the Church (D) were divided on the scriptural permissibility of divorce, with some saying divorce is allowed on the ground of unchastity while others said divorce was not allowed at all but rather reconciliation. The contention on the issue of divorce in this particular church was based on the fact that while Matthew mentions unchastity as a ground for divorce, Mark and Luke forbid divorce and do not mention any special ground for it. The leader who participated in the study (DML1) said that his personal take was that divorce in certain extreme situations, after every attempt has been made toward reconciliation, should be resorted to. He said:

There is no purpose in compelling people to live together when, despite every effort, their marriage has ceased to have any meaning. In the case where the life of a partner is endangered and in situations where people are most likely to hurt and even kill each other, I have recommended divorce myself. I don’t think God likes it when a partner dies in the process of keeping a marriage.

Pentecostals (Churches E and F) indicated that their view of marriage was based on Matthew 19:6, which reads: “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” They believed that marriage is for only two people and not more than two. They also believed in the permanence of marriage as a lifetime relationship that should not end in divorce but terminated by death. The Apostolic and Zionist churches (Churches B, G, and H) had their perceptions influenced by Old Testament icons such as David and Solomon who had more than one wife. They also said their churches discouraged divorce and remarriage but upheld the permanence of marriage.

Study findings affirm Morrison’s (2016) assertion that marriage is, in part, religiously defined, and different cultures use different definitions. Perceptions of the participants in this study were largely influenced by their church beliefs and doctrines. This is consistent with Robnison (2011) who found out that many beliefs and perceptions of Christians about divorce are based on what is being promoted by their denominations.

It can be noted that divorce was viewed negatively in all churches but was allowed to take place when everything possible has been done to try and save a marriage. As Tembe (2010, p. 64) argues, ‘When divorce happens, it is permitted, not commanded.’

**Perceived and experienced causes and effects of divorce**

**Causes of divorce**

**Arranged marriages and generational curses**

A number of factors emerged as accountable for divorce among Christians in various churches. This study established that the Apostolic and Zionist churches had similar perceptions and experiences which are mostly based on arranged marriages and generational curses as the major causes of divorce. Most participants submitted that they viewed marriages which were not based on love but to please the family and the church as having in most cases a weak foundation.

“Love should be the basis of every marriage but trying to impress the family or church members is one of the main causes of divorce and remarriage” (GFL2).

Some elderly participants blamed the young generations for not sticking to church doctrine, saying this caused divorce. The issues of infidelity and incompatibility are most likely to affect the couples since the two were not given the chance to choose their partners. Divorced parties in Zionist churches
were allowed to remarry if they were proved to be incompatible but after a series of prayers and counselling sessions. This affirms Ross’s (2010) assertion that the church is struggling to protect marriages as people live in a broken world, and everything in this world is broken including marriages as well.

In the Zionist and Apostolic churches husbands were noted to be the ones in most cases who initiated the divorce in the event of witchcraft and the wife may also decide to leave her husband because of incompatibility with other wives. One divorcee said, “I was number five out of six wives but I decided to divorce my husband since all the other wives were against me” (GF1).

Evil spells or generational curses were blamed for barrenness and divorce. One participant with three wives said ‘I believe that some divorces are caused by a curse or an evil spell’ (BM3). Most of the participants in Apostolic and Zionist church blamed the devil and his angels as the major causes of divorce. “Our church believes that it takes a lot of prayers to fight and conquer spirits that fight marriages in a family” (BF2).

Social and sexual causes

Participants from Pentecostal churches revealed that influence of family members and infidelity were the major causes of divorce. Members of the family were considered as not very important on the choice of the spouse. The church plays a leading role in dating and love affairs and this to some extent contributes to successful marriages. It emerged that some family members who did not attend the same church may be negative and disapprove the choice and that may cause problems leading to divorce. The interference of family members into the affairs of a couple was seen as contributing to divorce. CM4 had this to say in relation to this matter:

One divorcee confided in me that the parents of his wife were too involved in their daughter’s marriage. They used to prescribe how he was supposed to treat her. He then told his wife that that they had to abandon the marriage project and resume after she has convinced her parents not to interfere with her marriage.

Infidelity due to long separation as spouses seek greener pastures was noted by some participants to be the other cause of divorce. “It is very difficult for us husbands to stay far away from our wives and remain faithful and wives may also find it difficult to remain loyal during a long separation” (FM1). Another participant, a divorcee (AF2), said:

My husband impregnated a certain girl and the girl came to our home. My husband took her in and I could not stand the idea of being in a polygamous marriage.

Unfaithfulness on the part of both husbands and wives emerged as a major cause of divorce in some previous studies (for example, Adam, 2015; Tembe, 2010). Unfaithfulness on the part of a spouse is considered a reasonable ground for divorce in some churches. As Adam (2015, p. 43) asserts, ‘adultery breaks the one-flesh relationship.’

Lack of sexual satisfaction, also referred to as poor communication in the bedroom, also emerged as a cause of divorce. In this connection one religious leader (DLM1) said, “Oftentimes couples fail to agree and satisfy each other sexually.” In addition, spousal abuse came up as a cause of divorce. The study revealed that abusive relationships often do not last long because one partner may feel he or she cannot live such a life hence decide to retire from the abusive marriage. The following quotation illustrates abuse as a causal factor for divorce:

The woman was being seriously abused by her husband.... She decided that it was better that she goes back to her parents
than to endure abuse in the marriage (CF3).

Related to abuse was lack of communication among couples as a cause of divorce. In abusive situations free and open communication is often curtailed. The study revealed that where there is lack of communication among couples, marriage is likely to be unenjoyable and this may ultimately lead to divorce.

Psychological and economic causes

Incompatibility and lack of support from the spouse were also noted as other causes of divorce. On incompatibility, one divorcée (CF5) said, “We had terrible differences over issues of infidelity and financial investment.” Another (DF5) said:

He just left home and went to leave with another woman who became his wife. We did not have a registered marriage but he had paid roora (bridewealth) to my parents. I just heard that he has wedded with his new wife and this made me certain that I was divorced.

In the case above the husband just divorced his wife by abandonment. On lack of financial support, one participant said, ‘My husband was very negligent to the extent that I was raising children alone and that was the reason for our divorce’ (FF1).

Lack of preparation for marriage was another factor cited. It came out that some divorces are a product of lack of readiness for marriage. Some people get into marriage without a full appreciation of what marriage entails in terms of roles, responsibilities and challenges. As such, they get disillusioned and find marriage unsustainable resulting in them quitting marriage. As one church leader (CML1) said, “People are not prepared well enough for marriage. As a result they get into marriage unprepared for the new life and its challenges.”

Perceived and experienced effects of divorce

While divorce was generally perceived as having negative consequences by Christians from various religious backgrounds, there were also some discernible positive consequences.

Psychological

It came out that divorcées may feel out of place and worthless. DF1 had this to say, “Divorcées may feel that they are no longer worth to be recognised as they might think they no longer carry their dignity.” Divorce as a source of humiliation to the family and the church was noted to be a very sensitive issue for the Apostolic and Zionist churches as they blame the wife for leaving the husband instead of staying together with all other wives. “Husbands in our church are not allowed to divorce a wife except when the wife refuses to be delivered from witchcraft which is a shame to the family” (BML1). This suggests that the wife and her children are the ones who suffer most. Husbands may in this case suffer mild negative effects of divorce as they enjoy the right to replace the wives who have decided to leave them. Thus, divorce in this case engenders loss of self-esteem and a negative self-concept especially for women.

Divorce emerged as a traumatizing experience. One divorcée (CF5) said, “It is painful to separate although circumstances dictate separation. It’s a difficult experience that took me some time to adjust to.” Divorce thus came up as a devastating experience that breaks the divorced person’s heart.

In some cases divorcées get so disturbed by the experience of divorce that they become careless with their lives. As CML1 said, “Some become so negatively affected that they become careless with their sexual lives
and in the end make careless decisions only to regret when it is too late.”

In some cases where victims of intimate partner violence decide to get divorced with their perpetrators, divorce provides a feeling of relief and freedom. One female divorcee (CF3) said that she decided to seek divorce after repeated acts of physical and verbal abuse by her ex-husband who was a Christian. In this case divorce was a way out of violence and a means of regaining independence; an ‘exodus’ experience. This is in tandem with Tembe’s (2010) contention that today women see divorce as a means of regaining their freedom.

Social

The effects of divorce were mentioned by most participants as very devastating to all members of the family especially those directly involved such as the husband, wife and children. There is a problem of children with regards to custody. Parents may conflict over who will take care of children, leading to legal wrangles. Most Pentecostals lamented that divorce brings a lot of suffering to children and this becomes a burden to the church as they take the responsibility of helping the children. “Children who are abandoned by a parent or parents who remarry are a cause of concern for us Pentecostals” (EF3). A related problem is that one of the spouses might fail to access children who are in the custody of the other spouse. The upbringing of children was said to be negatively affected. As one participant (DM3) said, “The upbringing of children will not be proper because of lack of parental love. Some children, especially those under the custody of their mothers, develop enmity towards their fathers.”

The families united by the marriage may be inimical as a result of divorce. Since marriage is a communal affair, divorce has negative consequences on social relations between the families united by marriage. As marriage unites, so divorce disunites. AM2 said, “The two families which had been bound by marriage will not be in good books.” This finding confirms McDermott, Fouler and Christkas’ (2013) assertion that divorce can affect social networks.

Divorcees are stigmatised as failures and treated as social outcasts. As CM2 explained, “The people who have divorced will not be socially acceptable and they are always labelled as failures who failed to endure marriage challenges.” This suggests that divorced people may be blamed for the divorce. Apart from being viewed as failures, divorced women are often seen as a threat by other women who fear that they (divorcees) might take away their husbands. This finding corresponds with McDermott, Fouler and Christkas’s (2013) argument that divorced people, particularly women, may be perceived as “social threats by married friends who worry about marital poaching (p. 514).” Women who are divorced face more social challenges than their male counterparts. This was expressed by CF3 who said, “Divorced men are easily incorporated by society but as for women it’s a big problem.” This suggests that women are blamed for their fate as divorcees, this confirming Mukonyora’s (1998) assertion that the social stigma for divorced women is great.

Economic

The study revealed some economic consequences of divorce. These were said to be more pronounced in a situation where spouses would have accumulated some substantial property together. DML1 said the following in connection with this: “In situations where the two would have gathered much together the degree of the struggle for the possessions is great.”

Since divorce is not an event but a process, which involves the legal system, it has financial implications. In connection with this, DM2 said, “These days divorce can be very
costly as people have to go through the legal system where they have to pay legal costs.”

Remarriage after divorce

Generally, findings reveal that it is relatively easier for males to get remarried than for females to do the same. One participant (HF1) who held some discussion with some divorcees in her church said, ‘Most divorced women I have talked to do not want to remarry. Instead, they prefer to be single mothers claiming maintenance. They do not trust that they can have better partners in life.’

Some participants felt that remarriage after divorce with a partner who is still alive and where there are children from the previous marriage is difficult because of the challenges that this brings. As one participant (AM2) said:

When divorced people who have children together divorce and remarry, there are chances that they may frustrate their new partners as a result of their interaction with ex-spouses which is often kept alive by their children.

Thus remarriage has its own complications although in some cases it is necessary especially if the divorcees are of a marriageable age. However, notwithstanding the generally negative perception of divorce and remarriage from participants, both the clergy members and lay persons, divorce and remarriage came up as realities among Christians. One religious leader (CML1), in connection with divorce and remarriage, said “I officiated a marriage of two divorcees. Both had children from previous marriages. So you deduce that when approached by a couple intending to start a new life, where love is manifest, a minister can hardly do otherwise.” Another participant (DF2) who is a lay person, affirmed that divorce and remarriage are also evident in their church as testified by an example she gave as follows, “There is a divorced couple from our church that I know. The couple had terrible differences and so they divorced. The man is now in a new happy marriage.”

It can be noted that although divorce is considered a last resort after every effort has been made by both church and society to keep a couple together, and although remarriage is frowned upon in most Christian circles, these are realities among Christians today. As Hawkins and Fackrell (2011, p. 153) argue, some divorces are ‘necessary and just.’ It appears views on divorce and remarriage are becoming more and more liberal, with couples opting for freedom rather than keeping a marriage for its own sake.

The role of the church in combating divorce and in the aftermath of divorce

While the church generally does not approve of divorce, it recognises that this is a reality among its members. As such, it has to respond to the problem. In view of this, the church can say and do something to prevent divorce and to deal with divorce when it occurs.

The church was viewed as an institution that can assist in the prevention of divorce by teaching the yet-to-be-married what marriage means, the responsibilities and challenges associated with marriage. While churches do give some premarital lessons, some participants felt that there was need to be more rigorous in this regard. As one participant (DM1) said, “Divorce occurs because people are not prepared well for marriage. The church should conduct more serious premarital lessons.” This suggestion seems to be inspired by the proverb that says ‘prevention is better than cure’. Related to this is the finding that the church usually assists with counselling and prayers in order to avoid divorce. The church could also assist couples to improve communication which is necessary for healthy relationships.
It emerged that divorcees are taught to believe in life after heartbreaks. As AF1 said, “In our church divorcees, who are mostly women, are taught that if one door closes, then the other will definitely open for you.” Thus divorcees are urged to be strong and to pick up their broken pieces and move on with life.

Silence on the part of the church on matters of remarriage was noted. One participant (HM2) had this to say in connection with this silence, “I have never heard any teaching on remarriage in our church. However, the subject of divorce is talked about during wedding ceremonies when those wedding are told not to contemplate divorce since ‘what God has joined no man should separate.’ This suggests a negation of divorce and remarriage.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

The current study has revealed that divorce and remarriage among Christians are real and that these have drawn the attention of most denominations as they shred the fabric of the institution of marriage. There was a general consensus by most Christian participants in this study that as far as possible marriage vows should be kept sacred by both husband and wife except when it is necessary to divorce. Spouse abuse and the HIV pandemic were other main reasons for the spouses to waive their marriage vows. This study recommends that the church takes it upon itself to educate the young before they get into marriage so that they know its demands and all that entails to be a spouse and be ready for it. Further research could be conducted to cover a wider geographical area.

**References**


