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Marriage and Family instability in Modern Kenya: The Case of Western Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Marriage institution has provided the anchorage and the rationale for Africa to be termed as the 'continent of the family'. This coveted identity is however, in total decline given the new realities and circumstances surrounding the institution. This is occasioned by family instability in which most marriages no longer hold. Traditional African family patterns are slowly but progressively being altered as a result of modernization. Family patterns that were the norm in African societies are gradually being altered and substituted by modern values and the vows common in churches 'until death do we part' are no-longer tenable. Changes in the African family is being felt in fertility rates, are at marriage, marriage patterns and marital stability. Based on opportunistic sampling that conveniently selected 26 maternal dyads (consisting of mothers and their daughters who are married with at least two children) within the Western Kenya region, the study examined through in-depth interviews, the trends that depict family patterns in Kenya. It teased out two key issues connected with the African family patterns that is marriage and familial stability with the goal of illuminating the changes that are characterizing their prevalence. The comparative study between the mothers and their daughters regarding the nature of their marriages and the effects on familial stability concludes that marriage is under siege and innovative processes are needed to change the tide since the present generation are too casual in their marital relationship and the institution is fast losing its grip.

Keywords: Marriage, Family, Traditions, Stability and Instability, Modern Kenya

INTRODUCTION

In the past 50 or so years, there has been a dramatic shift in the marriage as an institution. The shift has occurred in the manner of procuring marriage and the stability of the same as well as the desirability of marriage as a coveted destination. This is in big contrast to the past when Africa was known as the continent of the family. Some of the notable changes include a rise in the age of first marriage, especially for women (Mensch, Singh, & Casterline, 2005), decreasing rates of polygamy (Hetherington, 2001; Wilson, Ngige, & Trollinger, 2003), and greater individual choice of whom and when to marry (Parkin, 1966; Yan, 2002; Smith, 2007).

Scholars have observed that the changes are emanating from a wider context resulting on the cultural and social transformations that are driven by urbanization and globalization. Some of the pronounced aspects in this drive include exposure to western cultures, increased formal

education, greater migration and expanded labour force participation (Grant & Furstenberg, 2007; Kalu 1981).

Family patterns that were the norm in traditional rural African societies are gradually being altered and substituted by modern values. Increased urbanization and industrialization and the subsequent adoption of the western ideologies and cultural lifestyles have driven societies away from the traditional rural extended families towards a more urbane and nucleated systems characterized by monogamy as a preferred marital union (Goode, 1963). Further, Frederiksen (2000) observes that the exposure to western media has brought with it narratives of romantic love that has shaped both non-marital as well as marital partnerships.

The greater movement occasioned by the increased urbanization and the improved trade and educational standards has provided the youth with opportunities to socialize outside the realm of traditional lifestyle. This has enabled the youth to socialize with their peers including those of the opposite sex (Ghimire, Axinn, Yabiku, & Thornton, 2006). Based on the increased mobility, there is room for encounters beyond the traditionally possible boundaries hence possibilities of the youth interacting beyond the knowledge of their parents and other kin. In this regard, youth are able and, in most cases, do find spouses on their own. This has brought with it a radical transition from traditionally arranged marriages to self-selected spouses with greater reliance on dating and courtship as a means of finding a suitable marriage partner (Fox, 1975; Ghimire et al., 2006; Yan, 2002). These observed changes however, is argued to have led to the marital instability since the process lacks the traditional social controls and functions outside the socially sanctioned approval systems.

There have been shifts from the traditional courtship system to the modern which have brought with it several changes that are continuously compromising the position of the African continent as the 'continent of the family'. The contrasts between the 'traditional marriages' and 'modern marriages' lie in the fact that the former followed the customs and practices of past generations with heavy reliance on 'go-betweens' who would introduce the potential couples. In this circumstances, most of the young people did not have much say on their potential spouses but were paired on the basis of characteristics as observed by the aunties and other relations that brought the young adolescents together. Evans-Pritchard (1950) however observes that among the Luo community, the male had considerable say in the selection of their own spouses.

Nonetheless, anthropological research documents that an increasing number of youths, particularly those residing in urban centers, are embracing what Harrel-Bond (1976) refers to as the stereotype of western marriage. This newly emerging process is characterized by several distinctive features including self-selection of spouses, love and emotional attachment, sexual exclusivity, sexual activity prior to marriage, lower levels of homogamy (on observable traits), and greater independence from parents and kin prior to marriage.

As observed by Clark, Kabiru and Mathur (2010), of all these changes, perhaps the most salient is the transition from *kin-selected* to *self-selected* spouses. They further underscore the fact that historically, marriage in sub-Saharan Africa marked the union of two families or lineages. As such, involvement of parents and extended kin was both central and essential to the process.

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One of the fundamental changes that has taken place is that over the last half-century, marriage in urban areas has become more widely seen as a union between two individuals with their preferences largely determining the ultimate outcome of the relationship. In this context, Clark et al. (2010) notes that over the past 50 years, love and emotional compatibility have substantially displaced the family and kin concerns of economic well-being, social status, and the continuation of the lineage as ideal bases for entering marriage.

Another observed change that is of crucial importance is the differences in age at marriage between the past generations and the present generations for women. Fifty years ago, it was commonplace for women to enter into marriage soon after puberty (about 14 years) and to transition directly from their natal home to the marital household. Today the median age of first marriage for women in Kenya is 19.7 years (CBS, MOH, & ORC-Macro, 2004; Caldwell and Caldwell, 1987). It is however, noted that for men, the age of first marriage has not risen notably over the last 50 years and currently stands at age 25 (CBS, MOH, & ORC-Macro, 2004).

There have also been changes in the family set up and the power wielded by each party. For instance, according to Göran Therborn (2006) African societies have experienced slight distortion in the patriarchal tradition, following the advent of urbanization, as well as due to the drop in the importance attached to land and cattle in the economy. Male supremacy has also been altered a bit even though it still has a prominent strong hold in the society. There has also been a shift from extensive polygyny to monogamy even though the two are still co-existing besides each other depending on the circumstances.

At a general level, contemporary African family patterns are being subjected to changes that emanate from the ameliorated economic conditions, reduction of levels of familial control courtesy of education, and health opportunities. These factors continuously exert tremendous impact on contemporary family patterns in the sub-continent and make the family rather unsteady.

This paper therefore, exposes the generational differences in terms of the spousal selection and the subsequent implications of the selection on the familial and marital stability. The research involved twenty-eight familial dyads and teases out the distinctive differences between the generations.

METHODOLOGY

The study site was generally the Western Kenya regions around Kisumu and involved mostly the Luo community. This study involved maternal dyads. This is a mother who has had at least two children who are grown-ups and the daughter to be selected had also to have been married with at least two children to be able to qualify to be recruited for the study. The process of identifying women was done via the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake network. The regional coordinator of the Maendeleo in Kisumu introduced the research to the respective coordinators in the villages where they operate. The recruitment criteria purposefully targeted women and their daughters who are already married and have at least two children of their own.

The women were recruited from several villages which included Kano, Kajulu, Kondele and Seme. However, some informants were living in far places as Yala, Lela and Maseno. It was possible to find a mother in Kano and the daughter married in Lela or Maseno.

RECRUITMENT

The regional coordinator through her local networks took the research team to the local contact persons in Kano, Kajulu and Seme from where participants recruited. Women in Kano and Kajulu came to the homes of the local branch officials of Maendeleo ya Wanawake and each was asked whether they had grown up daughters who were already married and had two or more children or had been pregnant twice in their life time. Further, they were requested if they knew anybody who fitted that description. For the younger women, they were asked whether they already had two children in their marriages and as to whether their mothers were still alive.

After getting the few people who fitted the study criteria, the study asked them where they lived and before finally accepting them as informants. The study further got in touch with both the mothers and the daughters for recruitment and informed consent. In situations where the daughter or the mother refused to be part of the study, the other was automatically dropped. It should be noted that both Kano and Kajulu were peri-urban so people were living in communal set-ups but with a lot of influence from the Kisumu urban environment.

The above process was repeated in Kisumu town where the urban cohort was recruited. The recruitment in Town was able to get eight complete dyads through snowballing based on the desired characteristics. The town informants were however, majorly recruited through the daughters who then directed the study to their mothers who some were in the rural areas.

Through the convenient and snowball sampling, a total of 56 people were contacted forming a dyad of 28 though even though the study targeted only 25 dyads or 50 informants initially. However, at the end of the interviews, 54 people had been interviewed consisting of the following breakdown; 26 complete dyads and two incomplete ones. One of the mothers had a daughter who did not fit the criteria on closer scrutiny, while there was a daughter whose mother was bereaved in the process of data gathering and could therefore, not be interviewed.

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection process involved in-depth interviews conducted by the three researchers. It involved going to women's homes and requesting for their time. The interviews went smoothly since all the women had consented during recruitment and were aware of the days and times when they were to be visited.

The interviews were audio-taped by use of a digital voice recorder for later transcription. All the women gave their consent to the taping. Other than the in-depth interviews, the team also observed the women in terms of their physical conditions and their routine activities in the homes. As part of tools pretest, on the first day in the field, each person interviewed one informant as the rest of the team watched. After each person had completed the interview, time was allowed for transcription so that the team could observe the emerging pattern in preparation for the entire field interviews.

DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

After the end of the data collection process, transcription process followed. The informants were divided in terms of those coming from the rural areas, urban areas or peri-urban areas. Other than this locational division, all the mothers were coded **a** and the daughters coded **b** for ease of reference (for instance 1a and 1b for a dyad). Data analysis was done along the set

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themes which included some four key areas as follows: Meeting a husband, first pregnancy, completing the marriage process and how subsequent pregnancies happened. This article therefore, concentrates on the first theme which was finding a husband and how that played around in terms of marital stability.

FINDING A HUSBAND: THE DISTINCTIVE DIVIDE ACROSS GENERATIONS

The findings reveal a number of strategies that were reported by the maternal cohort as well as the daughter's cohort as a means through which they met their spouses. The nature of meeting was later interpreted or rather seen to have a bearing on the marital stability. The different strategies have been lumped together into two broader categories namely: Go between and Neighbourhood networks. Out of the 53 informants interviewed, 34 of them indicated that they go their husbands through relatives or some form of contacts created by those known to them. Among the relatives mentioned by informants included own sisters, brothers, maternal as well as paternal aunties, cousins, friends, grandparents as well as other villagers known to the parties. One of the informants noted that the person who brought them together was her father-in-law. In this kin-based connection, 24 informants indicated that the relatives belonged to the female side of the equation. It is only in six cases were the contact persons related to the man.

In terms of the generational divide, all the women in the mother's generation met their spouses through some form of referral or through a go-between. These were mostly paternal aunties who ensured that they brought along their relatives to be married in the villages where they were themselves married. As shall be noted later, this type of contacts provided an anchorage and a strong base in which the marital stability depended. Some of the striking quotes from the informants include the following:

> *"My auntie is the one who connected me to my husband. By that time, I was 14 years old and she asked me to visit her and later she told me about the man who she really praised. That is how I met my husband almost 60 years ago" (75-year-old mother of six).*
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> *"One day, the sister to my father came home and asked my mother if I could go visit her. It was during this period that she introduced me to my husband. He noted that the guy was a good man whose father had been the elder in the village. The rest is history and we have been married for the last 50 years" (A 62-year-old mother of five).*
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> *"My elder sister was married in this village and she is the one who introduced me to her brother-in-law who after one year, we decided to get married. During that period, we could both consult her whenever we had any problem. I was 16 years when I got married here" (A 58-year-old mother of six).*

The second strategy reported by 18 informants was the neighbourhood networks. This form included several ways of meeting that involved being school mates, classmates, business associates, village mates, residing in the same estates in towns, church mates and work mates. Most of the informants who indicated that they met their husbands through the neighbourhood network had varied experiences. Whereas others established the first contact in the schools, churches or other social places in which young people are found or frequent, some had a

romantic life that began early in childhood in their respective places of residence. What was common in this form of meeting is that no one introduced the two parties to each other. The neighbourhood networks provided them with an opportunity that they themselves exploited in what they term as romantic attraction and later love.

A number of the people who met in this manner indicate that they themselves made conscious decisions to start a relationship based on what they term affection and attraction to each other. In most of the cases, family members only got to know when the two were already in a relationship. The following are some of the quotes from this category:

> *"I first met my husband in a matatu in which he was the driver and I was a frequent traveler. We got fond of each other and started dating and later got married" (A 27-year-old woman and mother of two).*
>
> *"I used to sell in my father's shop and the guy used to be a frequent customer. We got used to each other and became lovers after which we got married" (A 24-year-old mother of two).*
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> *"I used to stay with my grandmother and we supplied milk to the neigbouring estate where construction workers lived. One of the constructors fell in love with me and I decided to give the affair a trial. When construction work was over, the workers relocated and I decided to accompany him" (A 35-year-old mother of three).*

There are those who may not have been introduced by someone else but met their spouses in one of the traditional methods common in the Luo community. This is the custom of escorting a sister being married to her new home.

> *"When my sister was getting married, we were requested as demanded by the Luo customs to escort her to her new home, while there, one of my sister's brother in-laws got interested in me and we established a relationship which culminated in a marriage" (54-year-old woman).*

There are those who met in the estates where they lived with their parents or sisters or other relatives. The men they later married were either their neighbours or were also living with relatives in the vicinity.

Their stories differed from one girl to the next.

> *"I met my husband in Nairobi where I used to stay with my sister while schooling. I knew the man when I was in form 1 since he was my sister's neignbour. The guy pestered me for a relationship but I resisted till when I was in form 4 when due to peer pressure and the conditions in which we lived, I gave in. My friends in school had boyfriends who shopped for them and gave them what they needed including pocket money. After completing my fourth form, we had sex and I conceived. This accompanied by the man's mother's death and the poverty in my sister's house, I decided to get married" (26-year-old college graduate and mother of two).*
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> *"I met my husband in the estates where we lived since the man's uncle and my father were workmates and we lived in the same staff quarters. We started dating casually*

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and when the man went to college, our affair blossomed. He invited me to college and after a lengthy chat, I noted that his interest had now changed from dating to marriage. We had sex and I conceived and he later accepted responsibility and I moved in with him after college" (A 34-year-old mother of three).

In the same vein, some met as business associates or while trading at the different market centres in their neighbourhood. Some of the encounters include the following:

"I met my husband through our business connections. We both traded in the same market where I sold foodstuffs while he traded in clothings. We dated for a year before settling together as husband and wife. We just moved in together without consulting our parents" (A 29-year-old form four leaver and mother of two).

"My husband's father owned a shop at our market centre and he used to sell at the shop. Occasionally, I could go and talk to him about school since we were both in High school at that time. We started dating and I got pregnant and my parents were furious. I therefore, just eloped with him and we left the village for Kisumu town where we continued life" (36 years old woman and a mother of three).

Then there are those who met as members of the same church and were in the same choir where they could occasionally go for choir practices and socialize at the same time.

"We were members of same choir in a church in Kisumu. We used to admire each other and one day, he asked me if I could be his girlfriend. He was a handsome man and a number of us admired him. I therefore accepted. After dating for one year, we decided to get married even though our parents were not in the picture. My mother had wanted us to wed but we didn't have the resources to do so" (A 29-year-old woman and mother of two).

From the above description of the ways in which the different women in the sample met their spouses, we can deduce that those in the maternal cohort married young and were introduced to their spouses by a go-between. It is actually right to say that all the mothers in the 26 maternal dyads found their spouses through a go between while the daughters in the dyads were almost exclusively through the self-selective devices otherwise mirroring what can be loosely termed as romantic love. The mothers also married young since all of them got married before the age of 17years while in the daughters' cohort, the age range varied from 17 years to 25 years.

MARITAL STABILITY/INSTABILITY IN THE GENERATIONS

Apart from the means through which the dyads got their spouses, the research teased out whether the marriages were long lasting, stable and still in force. The mothers' generation despite the many years of marriage were still in their matrimonial homes and were either still with their husbands or some were already widowed. Out of the 26 women in this category, only eight still had their husbands while eighteen had lost their spouses and were widows. What is interesting is that the eight were still in stable marriages and described their husbands very positively. The eighteen widows were now the heads of their households and families and had buried their husbands and continued taking care of their children who were now grown-up

people. A number of them noted that their generation was not only different but believed in the institution of marriage unlike their daughter's generation. Regarding the stability of their marriages, they noted the following:

> *"During our days, we did not have the luxury of choosing a husband, you were introduced to someone by your aunty or other relatives who also acted as a marriage counsellor. She was the person to go to whenever you had any marital disputes or misunderstandings. After being introduced, the go-between brought the two families together and a common bond and understanding was therefore created. This accorded us a cushioning against being thrown out at will" (A 78-year-old widow).*
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> *"Even though we married younger than it is the case today, our bonds were cemented at the communal level and there were witnesses to our marriages that were crowned by bride wealth payment. The go-between was not just a vehicle through which we met, she also acted as a solid rock upon whom we depended for counseling and other emotional consolation. They also provided directions to the young couple. Remember, all the go-between knew each side in the marriage and not just one side" (66-year-old mother of six).*
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> *"One advantage of the go-between is that they told one of the positive as well as the negative characteristics that you would encounter from either side. This meant that you entered the marriage a little well prepared on what to expect. They also paired 'likes. If you were mean or a witch, or you came from a family that had such characters, you could most likely be paired with someone coming from a similar family. This meant that good people married each other while the others were also given a chance to find their match" (68-year-old widow).*
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> *"One characteristics of our marriages was that it involved the whole family as well as clan. It was not an individual affair conceived in some unholy places and devoid of parental blessings. We went to our marriages with our heads high and our families were always willing to receive us for marital counselling or for any talk that needed parental guidance. This also happened on the man's side. In a nutshell, our marriages were blessed and stood on socially stronger grounds than those of today" (60-year-old woman whose husband is still alive).*

From the above confessions, we can deduce that marriages in the past had communal blessings beyond the two people contracting the affair. It would seem that despite the young age at marriage, most women got into relationships that were socially sanctioned and had societal blessings. This enabled the parties to consult beyond the go-between and could always bring the families together to solve any possible marital disputes.

In the daughters' dyads, among the 26, only two were still married during the time of the study. The marriages were barely ten years old and most of them were already unstable and had led to "separation". The study decided to call this "separation" since most of the marriages could qualify as "come we stay" given that many of them lacked any form of legitimacy whether religious, legal or cultural. Of the 26 mothers, six later had their marriages solemnized in church while all the rest had what is referred to as cultural marriages in which case, bride wealth was

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paid and witnesses to the solemn occasions invited. In other words, the twenty women were also in a culturally recognizable union. This was not the case on the daughters' side. Of the 26 daughters, only four reported that their spouses had taken something to their parents in form of bride wealth. The rest noted that this had not happened. The women gave several reasons as to why they were not in stable marriages.

The reasons adduced ranged from domestic violence, irresponsibility, alcoholism, parental rejection, infidelity, inability to provide to disrespect among others. Other women mentioned several reasons and noted that they did not know what marriage entailed and would not mind remaining single for the rest of their lives.

Some of the voices in these regard among the daughters included the following:

> *"I could not withstand the violence that was not ending. I was not ready to die young. It seems like I did not take enough time to know and understand the man I married. I wish I had listened to my mother who cautioned me against him" (26-year-old woman who has been in marriage for 5 years).*
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> *"When we married, the man was very responsible and faithful but of late, he has so many girlfriends and I feared contracting HIV. After consulting with my mother, and enduring abuses from his mistresses, I decided to leave. After all, he has not even visited my family ever since I moved in with him four years ago" (27-year-old woman).*
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> *"How do you live with someone whose mother thinks that you are a desperate prostitute out to wreck her family? My mother-in-law did not approve of our marriage and haunted me out of it. The day she came and told me on my face that I did not deserve his son and I could go hang myself if I wish, is the day I decided to call it quits. The son was present and did not in any way protect me. After all, I was already informed that he already had a wife who was his mother's preference at home. I choose to save my life" (25 years old woman).*
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> *"Let us just accept that the boy child is a wreck without a future. They can completely not live together with a woman who knows her rights and has her money. I baby sat my husband for long. I got fed up with accusations of being tough headed and economically independent. He believed that since I was earning more money, I undermined him and did not respect him as the head of the household. I tried my best to persevere but when it became unbearable, I left with my two children" (35-year-old professional woman graduate).*

On the marital instability of the daughters' generation, the mothers noted that the children of today do not listen to wise counsel. They believe that they have gone to school and know what is good for them. They get into relationships that are casual, temporary and transitory without knowing the consequences. They are easily swept off their feet into un-working marriages that lack blessings from either side of the families. When such marriages face any turbulence, the young couples lack where to turn to. In addition, the ability of many of the girls to provide for themselves also challenges the traditional male control. Not very many boys are prepared for the new realities.

Some of their voices are noted below:

> *"How do you expect the boys of today to control these empowered women who work outside the domestic sphere and also control their resources? Sometimes men get challenged and may not be in a position to come to terms with these present realities" (56-year-old mother).*
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> *"Today's marriages are mere come-we-stay lacking in parental approval and are bound to end as soon as they begin. Our children must learn to listen to us even though they are more educated than we are. There is something in life that formal schooling does not give and that is patience and endurance. Our daughters lack this" (70-year-old mother).*
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> *"I have my daughter back here after six years in what she was calling marriage. To begin with, I have never seen that man here in my house and she already has three children. I have been feeding them throughout and I have been wondering the kind of man she married. She has always complained about him and she says that he is an alcoholic. My only advise to her has been that she found him on her own and should not blame anyone for her predicament. The day her eyes will open, she will know that she deserves better and that family must be involved" (61-year-old mother).*

DISCUSSIONS

From the foregoing, the results indicate a stable marital and familial bond among the maternal generation which is lacking in the daughters' generation. The parental generation had their marriages sanctioned by society and accepted by all the parties concerned. It seems rather difficult to tell whether the daughters' generation is engaged in what Mokomane (2006) and Manting & Bouman (2016) calls cohabitation or come- we-stay. Mokomane noted in her study in Botswana that although the number of marriages had decreased, people who co-habited had increased. The same trend was observed by Moore and Govender (2011) in their South African study where they observed that highly educated Black South Africans and well educated rural Black South Africans had lower rates of marriage. Mokomane (2006) noted that cohabitation involved living together without any formality. This observation made Clark, Kabiru and Mathur (2010) conclude that the process of courtship and marriage in sub-Saharan Africa has changed remarkably. Some of the reasons for this increased co-habitation could be as a result of higher educational achievement as well as enhanced legal status of women compared to the past. Mokomane (2006) further notes that population mobility and response to what she calls the marriage squeeze and high incidences of out-of-wedlock births were also influential in the changes. There have been a myriad concern resulting from the marital instability and the co-habitation among them economic implications, negative effects in childhood development and moral concerns associated with a family institutional breakdown (McLanahan & Bumpass, 2018).

Clark et al. (2010) observes that marital aspirations, school enrollment, emotional attraction, pregnancy and independence from kin are all predictors of people getting engaged or getting married. They observe that youths in urban Kenya have adopted the so-called modern ideals about marriage which include feelings of romantic love and commitment far away from parental controls and or even knowledge.

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Marital instability as noted can be caused by several factors. Musau et al. (2015) in their study in Machakos County reported that irresponsibility accounted for 74% while infidelity accounted for 51.3% of the cases. Other reasons adduced included violence (42.3%), alcoholism (38.7%), in-law problems (24%), unemployment (11%), age difference (10%) and polygamy (10%). The rise in the levels of marital instability rates has become a key phenomenon underlying the significant changes in family structure. The level of instability and the attendant violence meted out to women in families and of late men too is creating an unstable environment in which many young girls are either not willing to settle down in marriages or young men are scarred of entering the marital unions. It should be observed that marriages that result from premarital pregnancy even though in most cases may precipitate marriage to avoid the stigma and perceived difficulties of having a child out of wedlock (Ellison, 2003) is not good grounds for entering into a union as it lacks future stability. The number of marriages in the daughter cohort that resulted from unintended pregnancies and later resulting in separation were common. A statement like the one given by a 26-year-old lady are commonplace:

> *"The pregnancy brought in some sense of urgency in my life. I agonized over my future and that of the un-born baby. I did not want to burden my sister nor go back to live with my mother in our rural home as life would have been very harsh after the death of my father. I opted to get married as the man appeared ready and had accepted responsibility over the pregnancy".*

The effects of marital instability are serious and the consequences beyond reproach. Smock (1994) for instance noted that instability has more serious consequences for women, making them prone to poverty due to their disadvantaged position. Musau et al. (2015) on the other-hand list several challenges facing separated women which include lack of shared parenting, low income, stress, lack of arable land, loneliness and social stigma.

The traditional African context where marriage was seen as a social responsibility rather than a private business (Kamatu and M'arimi, 2017) as is seen among the daughter's generation spells doom for the future of the family. The importance of a wife being viewed as OURS rather than HIS could explain some of the challenges faced today where familial rejection is common. Edin and Kafelas (2004) observed that this view enabled communities to value a wife as someone who naturally left her original family to come and cater for 'our family' hence enhancing social acceptance. Further, parental involvement either directly or through the go-between provided an anchorage and a solid base upon which marriage rested. This ensured that the dissolution of such a marriage was extremely difficult or almost impossible (Furstenberg and Cherlin (2004). The communities also traditionally provided marital education services and counselling as seen in the institution of the go-between that reduced marital stress and ensured marital stability and promoted the desirability of marriage among the unmarried. The inclusion of parents of the extended family played a crucial role by according a sense of belonging and identity to the young generations into the lineage and a welcome gesture to the new bride (Ngewa, 2007).

Generally, the priorities and attitudes towards marriage today have evolved among the present generation. This has been occasioned by several factors among them the changing social norms which have shifted over time with greater acceptance and recognition of alternative relationship models such as cohabitation, long term partnerships without marriage or

prioritizing personal growth and career aspirations over traditional marriage. Further, the focus on formal education and career development have meant that both boys and girls prefer building successful careers and achieving financial stability which either delays or lead to reevaluation of marriage as an institution of choice. This formal education comes with high level of individual independence and autonomy where the young are increasingly seeking to establish their identities, exploring personal goals and engaging in self-discoveries that make nonsense of the traditional patterns of life and more so marriage.

The change in fortune for the girls has altered the relationship dynamics with greater emphasis on equality, shared responsibilities and mutual respect. Some of them focus on emotional compatibility and shared values which in essence make it difficult to find the right person when needed. There have also been problems of challenged masculinity with the boy child unable to fulfil his economic obligations of being the "provider" in this lean times. The rising costs of living means that some members of the present generation prioritize marriage less than previous generations. Economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment and financial stress can strain relationships as well as marriages. This in most cases lead to tensions, disagreements over money management, and lack of resources to meet family needs hence marriage destabilization.

Aspects of gender equality often embody gender roles and expectations that can be seen as unequal or restrictive in today's society. Emphasis on gender-based roles and responsibilities may clash with the aspirations and expectations of individuals seeking more egalitarian partnerships. This also clashes with individual autonomy and personal choice. Traditional marriages as noted involved arranged marriages or limited agency in partner selection which is seen as infringing upon an individual's freedom to make decisions regarding their own life and partner. The changing social structures and dynamics have evolved, and traditional marriages may not always align with the changing needs and aspirations of individuals. Factors such as urbanization, globalization and increased mobility have expanded people's exposure to different cultures and perspectives, leading to a broader range of relationship models. Rising divorce rates and separation accompanied by their recognition of their legitimacy have actually contributed to reevaluation of traditional marriages as some may perceive traditional marriages as retrogressive to personal freedom.

In the research, many of the women in the daughters' generation who were separated regretted not knowing their partners well before ultimately deciding to live with them or rather get married. They blamed themselves for being ignorant and not being able to get adequate commitment from their spouses before making the important decision. They equally indicate that at the time of getting married, they did not know much about the realities of marriage and could not understand how their loving partners changed over the course of their co-habitation. A number of them reported that they had trouble facing emerging problems such as lack of attraction, decreased marital satisfaction and the emerging abuses that they were least prepared for. The fact that many of them did not seek the services of a professional counsellor or get marital tips from their experienced parents could probably explain the shock that they experienced.

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CONCLUSION

African family patterns are increasingly faced with the challenges and pressure between traditional and modern values and structure. The pace at which individuals are abandoning traditional ways and adopting modern ways of living is not only alarming but at times done in an environment that has remained conservative and the consequences are being felt in all corners. Marriage as an institution has taken a beating that has resulted in familial instability that has questioned the traditional acclaims to Africa being the "continent of the family". When the West led in divorces, Africa remained relatively steadfast and ensured that the family remained the cornerstone of their existence. One would wonder whether this paper is advocating for a 'return to the past' in matters marriage. Sometimes, not everything is worth fixing and if it worked, it can still be modified to reflect the present realities. For instance, individuals can still enter into relationships based on romantic love but conduct the necessary background checks before they plunge into the deep end in their relationship. It is equally not asking for too much to rope in one's parents so as to have the necessary social capital when the romance dwindles with time. The necessity of the social support system and the ability to have social contacts through whom one can receive emotional consolation, advise and counselling during marital turbulence is necessary. Whether this institution is the family, community or other possible social networks, the choice remain open to the individuals concerned. The fact that couples should receive some form of premarital education to better understand themselves and their partners is pertinent. This process will enable them learn the best methods to mitigate or manage conflict in the relationship. This will also enable them to appreciate the differences between how men and women think and act to situations, respond to emotions and react to different scenarios. The process will also make the young couples understand that relationships are matters of give and take and good relationships are dependent on a number of virtues among them respect, loyalty, complementarity, honesty, patience and enhanced communication between the couples. Generally, we should enhance education and awareness promoting healthy relationships, effective communication and conflict resolution for fulfilling marriage. Marriage counseling and support is a necessity for professional guidance and support to navigate challenges, improve communication and strengthen their relationship bonds. This also involves strengthening the family institution and community social support system to help couples develop strong foundations for their marriages and navigate the challenges of raising a family.

It may also be important to stretch our definition to what constitutes marriage. The institution of dowry and bride-wealth has been discussed and found to be commodifying the women. This may not go down well with the empowered female person and the notion of traditional appreciation has been lost. It has become more of a transaction and some parents are placing impossible demands in the pretext that they have spent a fortune educating their daughters. The need to accept and appreciate such practices as non-marital childbearing, single parenthood, co-habitation, non-marital unions that were traditionally frowned upon may be necessary. Above all, we must devise ways and means of dealing with what has been termed as 'challenged masculinity' where the boy child has continuously been on the receiving end and society expects him to be the breadwinner and yet he is incapable of satisfactorily providing for his family.

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