

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY ISSUES IN HEALTH, HUMAN KINETICS AND GENERAL EDUCATION PRACTICES



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION ONE ISSUES IN HEALTH

Chapter 1

Reinvigorating the Health Education Component of Primary Health Care in Nigeria for Better Quality of Life at Community Level

1

Adebayo, F. C. & Moronkola, O. A.

Chapter 2

Causes of Malaria Incidence among Pregnant Women in Obudu and Calabar South Local Government Areas of Cross River State, Nigeria

15

Lucy Ikah Okey & Akah, L. U.

Chapter 3

Perception of Socio-Health Consequences of Cohabitation Among Undergraduates of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria

34

Prof. Olufemi O. Kalesanwo & Magdalene I. Oparaeke, PhD

Chapter 4

Threats to Marital Life in Contemporary Society: Suggesting The Integration of Marriage Preparation Education into Health Education Unit of School Basic Science Curriculum

48

Jacob Olusola Odelola, PhD

Chapter 5

Factors Influencing Choice of Processed Foods among Adults and Adolescents in Calabar Municipality

62

Levi U. Akah, & Edidiong E. Sunday

Chapter 6

School-based and Workplace Education for Drug Use
and Abuse in 'Nigeria' 79

Onwuama, M. A. C. & Owolewa Musiliu Oluwarotimi

Chapter 7

Nomophobia: Consequences for the well-being of University
Students in the 21st Century Nigeria 92

Melvina N. Amalu, PhD & Nneka Sophie Amalu

Chapter 8

The Effects of Nutrition on Pregnant Women Attending
Anti-Natal Clinic in Ifako-Ijaye General Hospital,
Lagos State 103

Esan, James Adebayo, PhD &

Gbadamosi Olatanwa Afusat

Chapter 9

Comparative Assessment of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
Practice among Healthcare Workers in Public and Private
Healthcare Facilities in Calabar Metropolis 115

Stephen Ushie Akpa, Beatrice Utande. & V. C. Emeribe

Chapter 10

Sexual Health Education for in and out of School Young
People in Nigeria 128

Prof. Olawale Akanbi Moronkola & Rebecca

Oluwafunmibi Ojeniyi

Chapter 11

Vital and Bio-Statistics in Health Education 143

Hamilton-Ekeke, J-T & Walker, D.

Chapter 12

Health Literacy and Hypertension Control among Hypertensive Patients in Cross River State. 168

Effioanwan Irene Duke Nkere PhD

Chapter 13

Factors Influencing Poor Service Delivery in Public Health Facilities in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State. 195

Uwemedimo Offiong Ekarika, Edet Itam Ben Akpa & Stephen Ushie Akpa

Chapter 14

Review on Coronavirus: Its Impact on the Socio-Economic Status of Nigeria 214

Andrew, Christian Chinedu & Moses Imam

Chapter 15

The challenges of Parenting Children with Hearing Impairment 228

Aderibigbe, Samson Akinwumi, PhD; James Daniel Daniel & Abang Victoria Zake

Chapter 16

An Exploration into the Effects of Drug Use, Misuse, Abuse and Collaborative Approach to Curbing with Illicit Drug Use in Schools and Colleges 235

Ochogu Joy O. & Onwuama Mercy A. C.

**SECTION TWO
ISSUES IN HUMAN KINETICS**

Chapter 17

Psychosocial Determinants of Food Choice among Athletes in Tertiary Institutions in Calabar Metropolis 251

Levi U. Akah PhD, Rademene E. Urom, & Matina A. Apie PhD

Chapter 18	
Water Safety Education	277
Awesu, T. K., PhD	

Chapter 19	
Roles of Physical Activity as a Lifestyle Intervention in an Increasingly Sedentary Population	297
Mercy Fatoba & Fatoba, J. O.	

Chapter 20	
Assessment of Sports and Recreational Facilities in Special Needs Education Programme at Lower Basic Schools in Nigeria	309
Bada, Oluseyi Akintunde	

Chapter 21	
Information Management and Technology and Success Attainment in Nigerian Army Sports Festival	321
Okou, Femedein Timipre, PhD	

Chapter 22	
Blood Pressure and Exercise	329
Ogar, Emmanuel Ekawu & Adie, Boniface U.	

SECTION THREE
ISSUES IN GENERAL EDUCATION

Chapter 23	
Evaluating the Quality of Instruction in Agricultural Education in the 21 st Century	351
David Adie Alawa	

Chapter 24	
Cybercrime: A Threat to Entrepreneurship in an E-Era	
A. L. Okute, PhD	

Chapter 25

Generalizations in Qualitative Research: Basic Features, Strategies and Issues. 380

Bassey A. Bassey, PhD & Cletus Ibuot

Chapter 26

Higher-Ordered Test Items as Assessment Practice in Higher Education during Pandemics: Implications for Effective E-Learning and Safety 395

Bassey A. Bassey, PhD & Valentine J. Owan

Chapter 27

Social Media in Classroom Instruction and Management of Tertiary Institutions: Challenges and Prospects 410

Basil A. Akuegwu

Chapter 28

Computer-Administered Testing Practice in Higher Education In The Era of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome-Related Diseases Outbreaks 429

Valentine Joseph Owan

Chapter 29

Appraising the Ethical Principles in Health Education Research 443

Bassey A. Bassey, PhD; Joseph O. Ogabor & Martina A. Apie, PhD

Chapter 30

Organization and Management of Effective Health Service Delivery during Infectious Diseases in Nigerian Universities 457

Omorobi, Garieth Omorobi & Eton, Idorenyin Clement

Index 472

Chapter 4

THREATS TO MARITAL LIFE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY: SUGGESTING THE INTEGRATION OF MARRIAGE PREPARATION EDUCATION INTO THE HEALTH EDUCATION UNIT OF SCHOOL BASIC SCIENCE CURRICULUM

By

Jacob Olusola Odelola, PhD

Introduction

The benefits accruing from marriage has continued to increase the need to ensure, through research efforts, its survival in societies. Essentially, marriage is for companionship. Marriage provides emotional and economic security through its enduring social support. The family, which is a unit of the society, evolves through marriage. Family serves as the centre of education, moral instruction and health care.

Biologically, the institution of marriage arises from the facts of human procreation and the rearing of children for the lengthy period of dependence of children on their parents and the need for prolonged parental care and training (Onifade and Oyerinde, 2001). Moronkola (2003) described marriage as a private but social institutional relationship accepted in human society as an avenue for sharing love, care and sexual intimacy between a marriageable man and a woman. Fakunle (1992) defined marriage as the union of two individual persons, man and woman, originating from different backgrounds and different in psychological, spiritual, sexual and social orientations coming together as one unit of the society. This implies that marriage is the union of two people who, in spite of their different backgrounds, desire to make a family. In fact, the social approval of the relationship between two people of the opposite sex presupposes that marriage will be blissful and enduring.

Changes that have occurred in recent times as a result of harsh economic condition are overwhelming on the society. Our culture has been affected by foreign ones to the extent that today's anxieties, aspirations and anticipations are altogether different from what they used to be in the past. The area most affected by this phenomenon is marital life. Hence, Sotonade (1998) remarked that the area of marital adjustment is becoming very complex, resulting in serious marital conflicts, and most of them usually lead to high rate of divorce, with the adverse consequences on the couples concerned, the children of the marriage, the immediate family and the society at large.

Marital life is the relationship that exists between a husband and wife, including their roles and responsibilities. A threat to marital life is visible where there is disagreement, impatience and quarrel between husband and wife. When threats to marital life are overwhelming, they lead to unrest and disunity in the home. The most visible symptom of a threatened family life is conflict between a husband and his wife. If it is poorly managed, it can lead to marital violence. If marital violence is allowed to continue, it leads to separation or outright divorce. Each of these stages of marital problem has damaging effects on the family concerned. Regarding the individuals concerned, there are high personal costs in terms of their physical and mental health.

It is evident that in the contemporary world marital disruption is widespread. This has continued to be responsible for increased number of people with physical and emotional disorders in the society. The World Health Organisation asserted that health is a state of complete physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and not merely absence of disease or infirmity. Therefore, the promotion of peaceful marital life is necessary for the realisation of the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of the individuals in the present day society.

In recent times, divorce is one of the social menaces that have besieged marital life. It has been found, through research study, that divorce remains the major cause of many other antisocial acts among which are child-abandonment, juvenile delinquency, prostitution, child abuse and drug abuse (Olarinmoye, 1991). In the same vein, Aliyu (1997) noted that the world at large is experiencing an unprecedented wave of

sophisticated international crime, juvenile delinquency and an alarming rate of marital failure as a result of family instability.

Prevention is known to be a better strategy to solve a problem even before it starts. According to Browne (1989), the technique of intervention which attempts to solve a problem before it starts is the most effective. Marriage preparation education seeks to prepare young individuals to face challenges in marital life in future. Babatunde (2019) observed that the high rate of divorce among young couples is due to lack of preparation to understand the intricacies of building a life with someone. He, therefore, suggested that there should be a preparation programme for intending couples. It is important for young boys and girls to be exposed to marriage preparation education right from secondary schools to prepare them well ahead of the task of marital life. More importantly, some of them may not have another opportunity for such exposure.

Prevalence of marital conflict and disruption

Conflict is a dissension between two individuals. In the contemporary society, marriage is besieged by conflict which, most times, lead to separation and divorce. Marital conflict is the state of tension or stress between marital partners as the couples try to carry out their marital roles (Tolorunleke, 2014). According to National Population Commission in Ntoimo and Akokuwebe (2014) divorced refers to persons who were married, but their last marriages have been terminated by legal, customary or religious procedures, and have not remarried, while the separated are those who separated from current marriages by judicial, religious or customary laws or by mutual agreement.

In the modern society, the usual practice of managing conflictual marriage is no more in use. This may be responsible for the increase in the proportion of persons who settle for separation and divorce. There is no doubt that, in many parts of the world, the rate of separation and divorce is on the increase. In 1992, 165 children under 16 and 57,000 children aged under 5, in England and Wales, experienced their parents' divorce (Utting, 1995). The divorce rate in Canada, United States and Europe was close to 50% of the marriage rate and has been climbing steadily in subsequent decades (Inglehart, 1990). In Africa, the rate of

divorce is on the increase with Zambia having 19,000 instances of divorce in a year. (Akinboye, 1982). Ntoimo and Akokuwebe (2014) reviewed the documented study of Taky (2001) which revealed that after 30 years of marriage, 35 percent of women's marriage in Ghana, 38 percent in Togo, and 39 percent in Mauritania are disrupted by divorce. Olarinmoye (1991) found out that three out of every customary marriage ended in divorce in Nigeria. Ntoimo and Akokuwebe (2014), after studying crude marital dissolution rate, divorce rate and separation rate, put at 11.0 per 1,000, 5.0 per 1,000 and 6.0 per 1,000, and that 5 out 1000 of Nigerians are divorced and 6 separated.

In addition to the high number of couples who divorced, there is a considerable number of couples who are unhappily married, and those who live together without marriage seem to have similar levels of relationship disharmony (Greeney, 1991). Many marriages are on the edge of breaking down while some are seriously stressed due to a number of crises and are most likely to crash in not too distant future.

Threats to marital life

Marriage supposed to be blissful and enduring but, most times, it is disrupted by separation and divorce, when threatened. Threats to marital life otherwise expressed as precursor to marital crisis identified in the modern societies are discussed as follows:

- (i) **Childlessness in marriage:** The society places high premium on children. In African culture, a child is an investment that parents depend on for care at old age (Odelola, 2012). A childless marriage can be violence-ridden. Relationship in a childless marriage often suffers, and, in most cases, the problem leads to dissolution of the union. Animashaun (2015) found, in a study, a significant relationship between infertility and couples' divorce just as he reviewed the study of Bennet (2004) who found that divorce rates were strongly (and positively) associated with childlessness.
- (ii) **Desire for male child:** In African society, a marriage that is able to produce male children is considered very successful. A male child occupies an important position in a family because he

carries the family name from one generation to another. A woman does not feel at ease if she is unable to bear a male child as the husband can be persuaded to secure another woman who will give birth to male children to ensure that the name of the man does not go into oblivion. Meanwhile, crisis will continue to characterise the marriage.

- (iii) **Neglect of duties and obligations:** Persons who are married are expected to meet certain obligations and perform some duties in order to ensure peace in the home. It is important that the husband provides money for the needs of the family and also exercise control over family members. The wife is expected to ensure that the house is kept clean and food is prepared for family members at appropriate times. The family becomes chaotic if any of the spouses fails to perform his/her duties. Ewereji (1998) said that when spouses abandon majority of their roles for each other to perform conflicts, which result in matrimonial problems that could give worry, anxiety, depression and others, will become the main feature of that marriage.
- (iv) **Poor physical appearance:** Poor physical appearance that makes a person look unattractive can be a source of conflict at home between husband and wife. Ogbonnaya (1991) stated that couples who are careless about their ways of dressing have often carried unnecessary problems into their marriages. Physique, gait, vigour, stamina and posture, which are associated with good physical body, should be maintained through personal hygiene and regular exercise.
- (v) **Religiosity:** Religiosity is taking religious activities to the extreme. Crisis can occur in marriage in which couples are of the same religious faith as well as those with dissimilarity in religious belief. In those with same religious faith, there may be difference in adherence to the tenets of the religion between husband and wife. Those with dissimilarity of religious faith may face the problem of acceptance from parents and relatives who can do anything to end the union. In any case, religious fanaticism is the bane of marital bliss.

- (vi) **Alcohol abuse:** Excessive consumption of alcohol can render an individual irresponsible at home as s/he will neglect family obligations. This will have negative influence on marital life. Brooks and Brooks (1979) had earlier alluded to the fact when they noted that successful marriages are shown to have reduced and the probability of divorce increased among excessive or heavy drinkers.
- (vii) **Poor understanding of partner's sexual lifestyle:** Lifestyle connotes behaviour and behavioural orientation of a person. Sexual lifestyle encompasses identified sexual behaviour and sexual expression of a person. Husband's tender smiles and soft-hearted comments about some other married women or damsels can make a woman to be suspicious of her husband and can brew tension in the home. There are some women with naturally smiling faces, if their husbands do not show understanding of the natural smile, when they greet other men, they may be suspicious of their wives. A woman's poor response to the husband's romantic move can lead to marital disquiet. Also, a woman's avoidance or outright refusal to have sexual intercourse with her husband, probably due to previous misgiving or ill-health, can result into marital crisis.
- (viii) **Inequality in educational attainment:** Educational qualification is an important index of socio-economic status. Education is a gateway to employment and other economic opportunities. The individual with poor educational background is likely to be subjected to unemployment or unskilled and low paying jobs. In the contemporary society, education and income determine, to a large extent, the status of a person. A situation where the socio-economic status of husband and wife are far apart is a possible source of marital distress.
- (ix) **Family financial mismanagement:** Customarily, husband is the head of a family who should provide for the needs of family members. In the recent times, due to the prevailing harsh economic condition, it has become sensible for a woman to augment the family expenses. NRCHME (2017) asserted that managing money is an important part of being in a relationship

as finance can affect the health of the union. Ogbonnaya (1991) posited that many families have been ruined because of poor management of resources. In order to prevent the family from disintegration, spouses should be prudent in handling the income of the family.

- (x) **Negative activities of the non-members of the family:** Activities of mother/father in-law, church/mosque members, family friends and other relatives can sometimes be detrimental to the stability of a marriage. This can be so particularly when they are allowed to interfere in the affairs of the family. Animashaun (2015) opined that negative roles, interruption, poking nosing, negative attitudes, poor behaviour, wrong advice and over-dependence syndrome of in-laws can disrupt a marital union. Couples who are fond of taking instruction from their individual parents instead of laying family issues bare for discussion and take decision within themselves often bring unnecessary tension into their marriage.

Effects of threatened marital life

Threatened marital life suffers damaging effects on physical, mental and emotional health. The effects can be overwhelming on the individual couple, children and the society at large. Stammer (1996) as reviewed by Aremu, Adepoju and Fayombo (1999), listed some of the effects of marital violence on couples as follows: low self-esteem, sense of helplessness and dependency, social isolation and withdrawal, poor or non-existent social support network, multiple health problems, sexual difficulties, recurring injuries, bruises, wounds and fractures, reciprocal anger and aggression.

Devastating effects of threatened marital life on the children of the marriage cannot be over-emphasised. Children from broken homes do not enjoy parental care. Most times, they lack proper upbringing and, as a result, become scammers, armed-robbers and criminally inclined people in the society. Conyers, Hurt and Hurt, Rosenthal and Hansen and Santowal, as reviewed by Amzat (1988), found that parental divorce has detrimental effects on adolescents' school behaviour and academic achievements. Amzat (1988) further said that divorce will make the

adolescent worse off economically no matter what divorce settlement is reached or what kind of adjustment parents make.

The society does not in any way benefit from marriage in crises. The couple concerned cannot give their best in terms of contribution to social and economic development of a nation. This stems from the emotional problems that are likely to distract their attention. They constitute economic burden to the government. This is because of the huge treatment cost of physical injuries and emotional illness resulting from violence that characterise the family. The children that come from troubled marriages are not well-nurtured; therefore, they become social miscreants in the society.

Marriage preparation education

Marriage preparation education is an educational process aimed at empowering a person to tackle the foreseeable problems of married life in order to reduce to the barest minimum the possibility of marital disruption. Learners are, in the process, assisted to achieve, broaden and reinforce their understanding, attitudes and practices including values as a result of enriched knowledge about quality marital life. Marriage preparation is based on the reality that it is important to strengthen one's relationship and prepare constructively for future challenges and conflicts that everyone will inevitably face at some point in their marriage (Patricia and Khuman, 2005). In brief, marriage preparation education empowers a person to handle potential difficulties in a future marriage.

Marriage preparation education is broad, as it covers such areas as sexuality, conflict resolution, mutual respect and cooperation, communication, personalities, intimacy, responsible parenting, duties and obligations of husband and wife, family welfare and resource management, all geared towards achieving marital stability. Encyclopedia.com (2019) mentioned the objectives of marriage preparation programme to include:

- (1) Prevention of distress, including dating or domestic violence and conflict and prevention of divorce by altering malleable risk factors (e.g. negative interpretations, conflict resolution skills);

- (2) Competence-building, by enhancing self-and-other-awareness (e.g. attitudes and behaviours that improve or erode marriage), knowledge of couple issues (e.g. finances, sexuality, parenting), interactive skills (e.g. communication, problem-solving, stress management) and access to resources (e.g. self-help curricula, social services, mutual support networks); and
- (3) Intervention, including individual or couple therapy, as appropriate, to resolve conflict, promote healing, teach skills for growth, or to deter partners from entering a high-risk marriage.

Integrating marriage Preparation Education into Health Education Unit of School Basic Science Curriculum

Curriculum is a guided series of instructions targeted at achieving a particular purpose in the learners. It is the process undertaken by the school (or society) to determine what knowledge, skills and attitudes to be acquired and to ensure their acquisition and development by learners for the sake of bringing about desirable behavioural changes and societal development (Onwuka, 1996). Health education curriculum is an instructional programme including implementation strategies designed to achieve desirable health knowledge, attitude and practice in learners. The approval of National Health Education Curriculum for implementation in the nation's secondary schools in 1985 concretised health education as a separate teaching subject in Nigerian secondary schools. According to FMoE (2006), health education was, at various times, taught as hygiene education, health science, health education, or combined as physical and health education. However, the revision of the basic science curriculum that took place in 2012 led to the restructuring and integration of four primary and junior secondary school science curricula, viz: basic technology, physical and health education, computer studies and information communication technology.

In the current basic science and technology curriculum for junior secondary school classes 1 to 3 in Nigeria, family life education appears as an item under health education. The topics under family life education include: (1) meaning and types of family; (2) duties of members of the family; (3) puberty in boys and girls; (4) teenage pregnancy and its consequences and (5) assertiveness and communication skills (NERDC,

2012). It is gratifying that the planners of the curriculum reasoned that family issues are worthy to be included in the curriculum, but marriage preparation education is glaringly excluded. One of the reasons for the emergence of the current curriculum is that there is the need to infuse emerging issues that are of national and global interest (FMoE 2006). It should be pointed out that the issue of marriage disruption is of global concern as it cuts across the continents of the world.

The out-of-school youth population should be made to benefit from marriage preparation education. Gulma (1988) suggested the following mechanisms for use to reach out-of-school youth population in the society to include: (i) the media: radio, television, newspaper, magazine, pamphlets, posters and mobile film units) (ii) literacy campaigns (iii) agricultural extension service (iv) cooperative societies (iv) youth groups (v) district and village union and (vi) social mobilisation agency.

The benefits that can accrue from the teaching of marriage preparation education in secondary schools are as follows:

1. The students will be equipped well ahead with the knowledge and skills to handle likely difficulties associated with marital life. Hence, they are most likely to have blissful marriage in future.
2. The multiplier effect of marriage preparation education is evident. This is because the students taught marriage preparation education can teach their friends and siblings in their communities who do not have the opportunity of such exposure thereby helping the society at large to solve the problem of marital disruption.
3. The locally-prepared course material to be used for teaching the students will be culturally-oriented and will be acceptable in the community. This is because anticipation and reciprocation in the marriage are mostly controlled by traditional standard of performance. Furthermore, over-reliance on foreign course materials, which are not culturally-appropriate, can be put to a halt. Moreover, the Federal Government of Nigeria is encouraging increased local content in all products.

4. In marriage preparation education, the students will be taught negative tendencies that can lead to disruption of marriage. This way, students with such negative habits will be able to get rid of such behaviour in their lives before they are married.
5. Marriage preparation education can help the student to make informed decisions regarding choice of future marriage partner. Hence, they will be able to take into consideration such difficult issues as religion, compatibility, personality, families of origin and expectation before a choice is made.
6. Marriage preparation education will build the students' knowledge, skills and positive attitudes towards the marriage institution in the contemporary society.

Conclusion

Marital disruption as a result of separation and divorce is rampant in the society nowadays. Experts have identified a number of threats to marital life. The issue of marriage survival is important to the achievement of peace in the society. Marriage preparation education is a preventive programme designed to prepare youths to face the challenges of future marital life. The teaching of marriage preparation education in secondary schools is apt for solving the problem of marital disruption.

Recommendations

1. Marriage preparation education should be integrated into health education unit of junior secondary school basic science and technology curriculum in Nigeria.
2. Human and material resources needed to teach marriage preparation education should be provided in schools by the government.
3. Government and non-governmental organisations should find ways of reaching out-of-school youth population with marriage preparation education.
4. Health education teachers who are to teach marriage preparation education should have a good knowledge and should use innovative methods of teaching through attendance of seminars and conferences (both local and international).

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