

Awareness of Health Consequences of Extra Marital Relationship among Couples in Umuahia South LGA of Abia State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the awareness of health consequences of extra-marital relationship among couples in Umuahia South Local Government Area, Abia State, Nigeria. Three objectives and three research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of 55,428 couples in the 10 communities of Umuahia South LGA. A random sample of 500 respondents was drawn for the study. The instruments for data collection were questionnaire and focus group discussion guide. Data were analyzed using means for quantitative data while the qualitative data was used to substantiate the quantitative data. The findings revealed that married couples are aware of the physical, emotional and social health consequences of extra marital relationship. It was therefore, recommended among others, that marital counseling services that stresses the importance of marriage, marriage enrichment and marital commitment be made available to the couples.

Key Words: Extra-marital; Relationship, Couples; Health; Consequences

Introduction

Interpersonal relationship is generally an important part of a human life. One of the ways to accomplish this is through marital relationship of which monogamy is only a part. Monogamy is only a part of human procreation strategy to foster relationship. The core relationship for most adults as a matter of fact, is that with one's spouse and children. However, extra marital relationship is wide spread. According to Fernando (2015), the fact

remains that millions of husbands and wives in the modern world do fall prey to this unfortunate serpent where families breakdown, and in most cases end up in divorce where innocent children are left to pick up emotional pieces left from their parents due to extra marital relationship.

Extra marital relationship also referred to as infidelity wasn't limited to intercourse and it contains any sexual activity that breaks the trust of sexual exclusivity within a marriage

such as sexual kissing and heavy petting (Zare, 2011). According to the author, it also includes activities where there is no physical contact at all, such as telephone or online sex due to this fact that the offender is investing sexuality outside of the marriage. Extra marital relationship refers to violation of marriage vows and which has to do with a person other than one's spouse. It is defined as a married person's sexual relationship occurring outside marriage. Three kinds of extra-marital relationship namely: emotional outbreak affair, emotional sexual affairs and sexual addiction affairs have been identified, (Schensal, 2006). Emotional outbreak affairs generally happens when the marriage is experiencing problems and during this time one partner turns towards a friend or companion of the opposite sex for emotional help and comfort. Emotional sexual affair is an affair whereby the unfaithful spouse does not only give the body but also the heart and there are slim chances of reunion. Sexual addiction affair is an affair in which the sexual addict uses sex over again to cause inner pain and emptiness. Ogwokhdemhe and Ishola (2013) identified a fourth kind of extra-marital relationship to include one night affair which is a kind of affair that mostly happen unintentionally and there may not be a sexual affair at all.

Today, however, the observable situation in the society including Umuahia South Local Government

Area of Abia State, Nigeria seems to indicate that the sacredness and sanctity of marriage and family with reference to exclusive sexual union between husband and wife has been dashed to the mud. Extra marital relationship seems to be the order of the day with no equanimity of conscience. Tafoya and Spitzberg (2007) observed that American couples indicate that 20 - 40 percent of heterosexual married men and 20 - 25 percent of heterosexual married women will have an extramarital affair during their lifetime. Glass (2003) observed that 46 percent of unfaithful wives and 62 percent of unfaithful husbands had affairs with someone at work. Arora (2015a) posited that due to the hectic modern day lifestyle, partners often fail to give in to the needs and demands of their mates, hence problems, sexual dissatisfaction, personal disliking and obvious loathing start brewing in their relationship. Then arises a point when the partner starts seeking pleasure or sexual gratification elsewhere and the only choice that strikes his mind is to step out of his present relationship. The reasons that may lead to extra marital relationship according to the author include sexual dissatisfaction, unhappy about physical appearance, sexual boredom, incapability to fulfill sex fantasies. Olayinka (2000) opined that if a wife deprives her husband sexually, he may retaliate by not having sex with her again. Thus the husband may resort to flirting among other women.

Having an extra marital relationship cannot do any good to ones marriage. The health consequences of extra marital relationships are always too bitter to tolerate. According to Arora (2015b), extra marital relationship weakens the love bond - the partner may feel guilty and this in turn weakens the love connection; creates sexual vacuum - the fact that you are sexually involved with a second man/woman often leads to creating a gap between you and your partner; makes the partner feels disowned; leads to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). As a result, the sexual, mental and emotional health is put at stake for both couples. Collins (2007) asserted that sexual unfaithfulness/infidelity is the most common disruptive force in families, the most devastating, and the most universally accepted justification for divorce. The author further submitted that the offender may experience regret or guilt, the innocent partner feels betrayed, rejected, hurt and sometimes self-condemning because he or she was not able to satisfy the wayward mate. It becomes more difficult to believe that one's spouse can be trusted in the future and often, there is anger, threat, and lowered self-esteem. Separation and divorce may be an easy and fast way to deal with extra-marital relationship (Collins, 2007). This situation has disintegrated a good number of marital unions that were once very happy in Umuahia South local government area.

In whichever case, extramarital relationship is dangerous as it may cause some problems that the person involved did not bargain for. Fernando (2015) submitted that extra marital relationship can be the greatest tragedy and disgrace that a marriage can suffer from. The author further asserted that the individual's ego will become bruised and later, anger, hatred, jealousy, pain, humiliation and desperation begin to struggle for supremacy in the individual's inner being. Even though extramarital relationship has many consequences, it seems that the awareness of health consequences among couples in Umuahia South Local Government Area is yet to be ascertained or documented. This therefore necessitated the present study.

Purpose of the Study

The study focused on awareness of health consequences of extra-marital relationship among couples in Umuahia South Local Government Area. Specifically, the study determined couples' awareness of:

1. physical health consequences of extra-marital relationship.
2. emotional health consequences of extra-marital relationship.
3. social health consequences of extra-marital relationship.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the physical health consequences of extra-marital

- relationship in Umuahia South Local Government Area?
2. What are the emotional health consequences of extra-marital relationship in Umuahia South Local Government Area?
 3. What are the social health consequences of extra-marital relationship in Umuahia South Local Government Area?

Methodology

Descriptive survey design was used. Umuahia South LGA is one of the LGAs in Abia State with its headquarters in Apumiri. It has an area of 140km² with a population of 138,570 according to 2006 population census. It is made up of ten major communities, which include Olokoro, Old Umuahia, Amakama, Ubakala, Mgbarakuma, Umunwanwa, Nsirimo, Ohiya, Amachara, and Umuokpara. Igbo is their mother language. The primary occupation of the residents of the local government is majorly farming and trading. A small number of the residents are civil servants and students of various levels and grades. Bigamy is practiced by some in the area which is a factor to extra marital relationship. Experience in the area also shows that some couples have multiple partners. Consequent upon

these, this study became necessary in the area.

The population of the study consisted of all the married men and women from the ten communities that made up Umuahia South Local Government Area which is estimated at 55,428. The sample size comprised 500 respondents, who were randomly selected from five communities sampled (100 respondents from each community). Questionnaire and focus group discussion guide (FGDG) were the instruments for data collection. The questionnaire was assigned response options of Strongly Agreed-4, Agreed-3, Disagreed-2 and Strongly Disagreed-1. Data were presented using descriptive statistics of tables and means to answer the research questions. A criterion mean of 2.5 was used for decision making. The proceeds of the FGDG were thematically analyzed and used to substantiate the quantitative data.

Results

The results and findings of this study were presented based on the research questions as follows:

Awareness of couples regarding the physical health consequences of extra-marital relationship in Umuahia South Local Government Area.

Table 1: Responses on the Physical Health Consequences of Extra-marital Relationship among Couples

S/N	Items	Mean \bar{X} Responses
1.	Sexually transmitted disease like HIV/AIDS, syphilis, gonorrhoea etc	3.3
2.	Hypertension and stroke resulting from worry and anxiety	3.1
3.	Reproductive tract infection and damage to reproductive organs	3.1
4.	Premature death	3.2
5.	Unwanted pregnancy and frequent abortion	3.1

Table 1 shows the mean responses on physical health consequences of extra-marital relationship among married couple. The table shows that contraction of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV and AIDS, syphilis and gonorrhoea are physical consequences of extra-marital relationship with a mean score of 3.3; hypertension and stroke is also a physical consequence of extra-marital relationship with a mean score of 3.1. The table also shows that reproductive tract infections and damage to reproductive organs are also physical consequences of extra-marital relationship with a mean score of 3.1. Furthermore, the table shows that premature death is a physical consequence of extra-marital relationship with a mean score of 3.2; and that unwanted pregnancy and frequent abortion are consequences of extra-marital relationship with a mean score of 3.1. The means of all the items

are greater than the criterion mean of 2.5. This implies that couples are aware that all the items are physical health consequences of extra-marital relationship.

The qualitative data on physical health consequences of extra marital relationship revealed that it could result to the contraction of STDs which may affect the quality of the sperm and ovum; dislike for condom use may lead to infections like HIV, STIs and hypertension; there could be food poisoning due to hatred. For alcoholics, it could lead to gastritis and damage to internal organs of the body. The qualitative finding further revealed that there may be wife abuse, battery, violence and combat that could result to physical injuries.

Awareness of couples regarding the emotional health consequences of extra-marital relationship in Umuahia South Local Government Area.

Table 2: Responses on Emotional Health Consequences of Extra-marital Relationship among Couples

S/N	Items	Mean \bar{X}	Responses
1.	Loss of trust and hatred	3.0	
2.	Over aggression	3.5	
3.	Conflict (violent syndrome) in the home	2.5	
4.	Sadness in the home	3.0	
5.	Damage to self-esteem	3.0	

Data in table 2 show the mean responses on emotional health consequences of extra marital relationship among couples. The table shows that loss of trust and hatred are emotional health consequences of extra marital relationship with a mean score of 3.0. The table further shows that over aggression is an emotional health consequence of extra marital relationship with a mean score of 3.5; conflict (violent syndrome) in the home is an emotional health consequence of extra marital relationship with a mean score of 2.5. More so, sadness in the home is an emotional consequence of extra marital relationship with a mean score of 3.0; and damage to self-esteem is an emotional health consequence of extra marital relationship with a mean score

of 3.0. The means of all the items are greater than and one equal to the criterion mean of 2.5. This implies that the couples are aware that all the items are emotional health consequences of extra marital relationship.

The qualitative data revealed that emotional consequences of extra marital affair could be aggression; transfer of aggression; anxiety; emotional imbalance; unrest for the members of the family; lack of concentration; loss of memory; nagging in the home; lack of joy; loss of appetite; emotional trauma and hurt; and jealousy.

Awareness of couple regarding the social health consequences of extra-marital relationship in Umuahia South Local Government Area.

Table 3: Responses on the Social Health Consequences of Extra-marital Relationship among Couples

S/N	Items	Mean \bar{X}	Responses
1.	Sexual assault	3.1	
2.	Divorce	3.1	
3.	Malice and suspicion	3.1	
4.	Marital separation	3.1	
5.	Isolation	3.1	
6.	Lack of peace	3.2	
7.	Feeling of guilt	2.9	

Data in table 3 show the mean responses on social health consequences of extra marital relationship among married couple. The table shows that sexual assault is a social health consequence of extra marital relationship with a mean score of 3.1; divorce is a social health consequence of extra marital relationship with a mean score of 3.1; malice and suspicion are social consequences of extra marital relationship with a mean score of 3.1. Furthermore, marital separation; and isolation are social health consequences of extra marital relationship each with a mean score of 3.1. The table also shows that lack of peace is a social health consequence of extra marital relationship with a mean score of 3.2; and that feeling of guilt is also a social health consequence of extra marital relationship with a mean score of 2.9. The means of all the items are greater than the criterion mean of 2.5. This implies that couples are aware that all the items are social health consequences of extra marital relationship.

The qualitative data revealed that partner who indulges in extra marital affair could withdraw from the society, family and religious obligations; no social bond with the spouse and children. If the woman is cheated, she may not give attention to the children and family members. The cheated partner may feel ashamed and humiliated in the neighbourhood. One of the children may cheat because of

the gene inherited. The qualitative findings further revealed that religiously, the cheat spouse may be excommunicated from the church. More so, there could be inability to concentrate at work leading to low productivity with its consequent loss of job.

Discussions

The findings in table 1 show that majority of the respondents are aware of physical health consequences of extra-marital relationship. The table shows that contraction of STDs like HIV and AIDS, gonorrhoea, syphilis etc; hypertension and stroke; reproductive tract infections and damage of reproductive organs; premature death; and unwanted pregnancy and frequent abortion are physical health consequences of extra-marital relationship. This finding is not surprising and expected because it corresponds with the submission of Arora (2015b) which stated that extra marital relationship leads to STDs - indulging in sexual acts with more than one partner increases the chances of getting STIs especially if sex is practiced without any protection. Also, extra marital relationship can lead to unwanted pregnancy which may lead to frequent abortion with its consequent premature death when mismanaged. It deprives couples of their sound health therefore they should be enlightened more about the dangers and health disadvantages of marital infidelity. The findings also

agreed with that of Zare (2011) that the husband of an unfaithful wife may lose the entire reproductive capacity of his spouse for at least one childbearing cycle.

The common themes revealed in qualitative finding on physical consequences of extra marital affair were that it could result to the contraction of STDs which may affect the quality of the sperm and ovum. Dislike for condom use may lead to infections like HIV, STIs and hypertension. There could be food poisoning due to hatred for the cheating spouse. For alcoholics, it could lead to gastritis and damage to internal organs of the body. The qualitative finding further revealed that there may be wife abuse, battery, violence and combat that could result to physical injuries. These findings are in line with the findings of Malik, Nawaz, Mehmood, Riaz, Mushtaq, and Khan (2014) that 70% of the residents told that their husband did verbal, psychological and physical violence on them. Most of them suffered physical violence. And when her husband and family came to know about it, quarrels and disputes became routine of the day and the relationship became tenser.

The findings in table 2 showed that the couples are aware of emotional health consequences associated with extra-marital relationship. The findings in the table revealed that couples are aware that loss of trust and hatred; over aggression; conflict (violent syndrome) in the home;

depression and damage to self esteem are emotional health consequences of extra-marital relationship. This finding is expected and not surprising because it corroborates with the assertion of Fernando (2015) which revealed that extra-marital relationship can be the greatest tragedy and disgrace that a marriage can suffer from. The couple's ego will become bruised and later anger, hatred, jealousy, pain, humiliation and desperation begin to struggle for supremacy in the couple's inner being. The author also revealed that innocent children affected are left to pick up emotional pieces left from their parents. The findings are also similar to the submission of Collins (2007) who submitted that the offender may experience regret or guilt, the innocent partner feels betrayed, rejected, and hurt; there is anger, threat and lowered self-esteem. Extra marital affair wreaks havoc bringing in several negative effects, causing unbearable emotional pain and mental trauma for the faithful partner who never even thought of going through such a phase.

The common themes revealed in the qualitative finding was that emotional consequences of extra marital affair could be aggression; transfer of aggression; anxiety; unrest for the members of the family; lack of concentration; loss of memory; nagging in the home; lack of joy; loss of appetite; emotional trauma and hurt; and jealousy. The finding on emotional trauma and hurt is similar with the finding that women are more

hurt by an emotional affair (Sharpe, Walter & Goren, 2013; Thornton & Nagurney, 2011). The finding on jealousy agreed with the finding of Carpenter (2012) who revealed that men are more inclined to experience jealousy if their partner engaged in infidelity.

The findings in Table 3 show the awareness of social health consequences of extra-marital relationship among couples. The findings show that couples are aware of sexual assault; divorce; malice and suspicion; marital separation; isolation; lack of peace; and feeling of guilt as social health consequences of extra-marital relationship. This finding is expected and not surprising because it agrees with the finding of Shackelford, Buss and Bennet (2002) that it is more difficult for men to forgive a sexual infidelity than an emotional infidelity and they are more likely to end a current relationship following a partner's sexual infidelity. The finding also corresponds with the assertion of Collins (2007) who asserted that separation and divorce may be an easy and fast way to deal with extra marital relationship and that infidelity is a legitimate biblical reason for divorce. The finding is similar to the finding that extra dyadic (marital) involvement can cause trauma within the relationship and can often motivate couples to separate, divorce, or seek out counseling services (Hertlein, 2011; Fife, Weeks, & Gambescia, 2008). This finding further agrees with the submission of

Fernando (2015) who submitted that couples do fall prey to extra marital affairs where families breakdown, and in most cases end up in divorce.

Furthermore, the finding is in-line with the assertion of Arora (2015b) who asserted that extra marital relationship creates sexual vacuum - the fact that you are sexually involved with a second man/woman often leads to creating a gap between you and your partner; makes the partner feels disowned and isolated giving room for malice and suspicion. The finding on lack of peace also corresponds with Collins (2007) assertion that infidelity is the most common disruptive force and devastating in families.

The common themes revealed in qualitative finding were partner who indulges in extra marital affair could withdraw from the society, family and religious obligations. There is no social bond with the spouse and children. If the woman is cheated, she may not give attention to the children and family members. The cheated partner may feel ashamed and humiliated in the neighbourhood. One of the children may cheat because of the gene inherited. The qualitative findings further revealed that religiously, the cheat spouse may be excommunicated from the church. More so, there could be inability to concentrate at work leading to low productivity with its consequent loss of job. This is similar to the observation of Hertlein (2012) that couples who do not revisit

interpersonal rules (e.g. consequences of infidelity) may perceive their partner as functioning in detrimental ways, potentially creating tension between the partners and interfering with daily function.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, it was concluded that married couples have the knowledge of the physical, emotional and social health consequences of extra marital relationship; and that this poisonous serpent has claimed the life of some couples leading to combat in the home, food poison, and also, death. Infidelity has rendered some spouses jobless because of low productivity at work due to physical, emotional and social health problem associated with it. Some children born of infidel spouses can turn out to be infidels.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need for counseling service that stresses the importance of marriage, marriage enrichment and marital commitment be made available to the couples.
2. There should be a law that will sanction any couple convicted of infidelity.
3. Counseling services should be provided for children born by infidel spouses.

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