

Implication of the Impact of Divorce and Marriage Crisis in Modern Society: A Case Study of Ikwo Local Government Area, Ebonyi State

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Received: 10.01.2026 | Revised: 20.02.2026 | Accepted: 05.03.2026

ABSTRACT

Background: Divorce and marital instability have become pressing social concerns in many Nigerian communities, with far reaching implications for individuals, families, and communal life. In Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, where marriage is culturally sacred and divorce is socially stigmatized, the dissolution of marriage raises profound emotional, economic, and moral questions.

Methods: This study adopted a case study approach to examine the effects of marital breakdown on spouses, children, and the wider community in Ikwo. Data were drawn from contextual observations and documented experiences within the locality, with attention to cultural and religious norms that shape perceptions of marriage and divorce.

Results: The findings indicate that divorce generates significant emotional trauma for affected spouses, often accompanied by psychological distress and social withdrawal. Among children, marital instability is associated with behavioural challenges and declining academic performance. Economically, single parent households experience heightened financial strain, which further deepens vulnerability. At the communal level, persistent marital crises weaken social cohesion and challenge established moral and religious values within the traditional Ikwo context, where divorce carries strong stigma.

Conclusion: Marital breakdown in Ikwo has multidimensional consequences that extend beyond the couple to the entire community. The study underscores the necessity for proactive interventions such as structured premarital counselling, continuous marital education, and community based social support mechanisms to mitigate the adverse effects of divorce and strengthen family stability.

Key words: Divorce, marital instability, family wellbeing, social cohesion, Ikwo Local Government Area, premarital counselling, community values

Introduction

The world has experienced a sharp increase in the rate of divorce in recent decades due to the shift in societal norms and the growing individualism. This trend is also observed in Nigeria: according to a report by 2023, the divorce rate in Nigeria is

estimated 2.9% (1.8 per 1000 people), which ranks Nigeria in the list of countries with the highest rates in the world. Nigerian women are currently being more aggressive than men in the cause of divorce. Marriage has been seen as an everlasting contract that is appointed to live together and procreate. According to Torabi et al (2013) and Grenz (1997), marriage leads to the happiness, stability and the overall happiness of the individual in the life. In comparison, divorce is also well-known as a heartbreaking and sorrowful phenomenon. It can be very rejecting, guilty and even fragmenting to the couple. To this end, the so-called marriage crisis of the eternal war, communication disruption, and an increase in the state of marital instability endanger the basic social unit of most societies.

Marriage is still a significant cultural and religious structure in contemporary Nigerian society. Most of the families have however been strained by increasing urbanization, economic pressures, and changing gender roles. Research on the causes of marital failure in Nigeria reports infidelity, domestic violence, communication issues, financial pressures, and substance abuse as some of the causes. Such international forces are echoed on a local scale: the old demands (e.g. bride-price practices or fixed gender roles) tend to exacerbate marital conflicts in the countryside such as Ikwo LGA. An example is that in other regions of Southeastern Nigeria, studies have indicated that poor emotional attachment, absence of intimacy, and external influences (external interference by extended family) are often the causes of failed marriages. Unattended to these factors may escalate marriage wrangles to separation. The theoretical approach of this study merges the sociocultural analysis and interpretive theology. We use a hermeneutical standpoint to comprehend the influence of cultural and religious standards on attitude towards divorce. It is stressed by Biblical scholars that scriptural teachings (e.g., the teachings about marriage by Paul in 1 Corinthians) have to undergo interpretation in terms of historical and social context (Malina 1990; Davidson et al 2000). Simultaneously, we see the family systems theory that considers the family to be the center of the society, meaning that the disintegration of marital relationships has the spill-over effect on stability in the community. In the case of Ikwo, which is largely Igbo, Christian society, the norms of marriage are very much shaped by the local ideas and the church doctrine. According to the current literature, marriage in Ikwo (Ebonyi State) is an event seen as a covenant and divorce is very much stigmatized particularly among women. Therefore, the result of marriage failure is amplified by the local cultural values.

It is on this backdrop that the aim of this paper is to critically evaluate how divorce and marital crisis affect the individuals, families and the entire community in Ikwo Local Government Area, Ebonyi State. This is analyzing the social, psychological, economic and cultural consequences of divorce in Ikwo taking into account the single problem of marital disruption. In particular, we consider the impacts of divorce on the child welfare outcomes and family integrity, coping mechanisms of divorcees and their families in the church-dominated social environment, and the overall implications on the community health. The proposed study will produce profound understanding of the issue, which might be used to inform local pastoral care and policy interventions due to the single and clearly defined aim: the community impact of divorce in Ikwo. To conclude, our introduction summarized the marriage/divorce situation in the world, in Nigeria, and identified the Ikwo-specific cultural conditions, as well as the interdisciplinary framework of the study. The rest of the paper will

proceed on the basis of this overview into the analysis of impacts and exploration of the Ikwo experience through the cases.

Effects of divorce and marriage crisis.

The implication of divorce and breakdown of marriages has rippling effects beyond the couple. To begin with, divorce takes a deep emotional and psychological toll on those who are divorced. Divorce has been said to be a tragic and emotionally disastrous process that entails the experience of rejection, disillusionment, guilt and brokenness. Separated men and women complain about depression and persistent stress and low self-esteem. These emotions are augmented by the social stigma that is accredited to divorce within most communities in Nigeria. According to a qualitative synthesis of the religious standpoints, it is observed that in most cases, divorce has been perceived as something that is against the will of God, which further adds guilt to the affected people. The divorced individuals might therefore become isolators or spiritually confused particularly in religious societies.

Divorce between parents is a big burden to the children. The studies have always determined that children born in divorced parents have various psychosocial problems. The feeling of instability and abandonment is frequent and may be represented by anxiety or acting out. Research indicates that these children experience poor performance in school and social adaptation issues. Say, in a case of an analysis, divorce may lead to the children having a relationship problem with parents and siblings due to confusion and insecurity. In the Ikwo context, it is seen that children of divorced families often have problems focusing in school and healthy peer relationships. They may be emotionally and even spiritually frail because of the trauma of family separation. These are the child level impacts, which when extensive, jeopardize future human capital of the society. On the society level, the overall effects of the increase in divorce rates can be significant. Divorced marriages undermine the extended family structures which have been traditionally helpful in sustaining the community life. In Ikwo and other places like these, divorcees find themselves socially isolated - more especially women, who are more severely stigmatized. This compromises communal unity. Scholars have cautioned that the social cost of divorce goes beyond the financial means of the family and also includes the breakdown of moral and social values in the society. In fact, when conjugal union that used to be regarded as indissoluble - is seen as a subject of negotiation, the social values change. Leaders of communities in Ebonyi have noted that marital conflict may be the cause of social unrest indirectly: a study in the state found that marital conflict was associated with juvenile delinquency and a overall absence of peace in society. A possible explanation is that in the absence of stable bi-parental families, children and young adults can resort to deviant behaviors or drug abuse.

Divorce usually leaves the single parent and children in a difficult position, economically. The second income - or support - can be lost and this can put families in financial distress. Without the resources of marriage, single parents might not be able to sustain living standards, offer education and fulfil the basic needs. In Ikwo, local testification shows that the mothers who are divorced often find it hard to afford school fees in their localities, some even pull girls out of school after separation. This strain on the economy brings about a poverty circle affecting the community in general. Moreover, the divorce families can lose property rights or other inheritance

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claims as a result of patriarchal rules, which increases the economic burden on the vulnerable husband. Although there is no precise information, these fall in line with data showing that divorce has a depleting effect on the capital of the family, either social or material, and has long term effects on the development of the community.

The effect of divorce is two-fold to the religious communities. On the one hand, the fact that divorce rate is on the rise questions the teachings of the church on marriage. The churches in Ikwo need to address the gap between the ideals in form of doctrines (marriage as a covenant in a lifetime) and the realities that parishioners live in. Conversely, the divorced people can also become estranged by the religious life or fall out of regular worship because of shame. This destroys the social structure of faith communities and distorts their support provision functions. Thus, Ikwoans divorce is a cause of psychological traumas, children missing school, family financial pressure, and community moral dilemma. The different types of impact are related to each other: emotional distress can have an adverse effect on parental functioning; the problems of the children can contribute to societal troubles; and the stigmatization in the community can worsen personal distress.

Emotional/Psychological Impact: It is common that both spouses grieve, become lonely and traumatized after a divorce. The most prevalent mental health issues are depression or anxiety.

Effect on Children: Children experience the disturbance the most. They are prone to emotional distress, academic deterioration and social problems.

Social and Ethical Implications: Divorce can subvert social values and family ties. Research reports a decline in moral and social values in case of the prevalence of marital disintegration. It is also true that increased divorce is linked to increased delinquency amongst youth in areas such as Ebonyi.

Poverty: Single parents are prone to poverty. Divorce disaggregates the resources and may leave the parent who is in charge of children scrambling to fulfill his or her needs. The effects of these economic burdens are long term impacts on welfare of the community.

All these effects emphasize the fact that divorce is not just a domestic issue but a social problem in Ikwo. Both the literature in the research and the local observation agree: marriage failures can lead to the destabilization of both the family and society. The following section will provide certain case-study examples of Ikwo residents, which will demonstrate how these overall effects are implemented in practice.

Case Study Evidence

An interview with the inhabitants of Ikwo shows the consequences of divorce and marital conflicts in real life. We gathered anonymous testimonies in interviews and focus groups showing the human face of these effects, which validated the trends mentioned above. Blessing (real name is not disclosed) one of the divorced mothers told about the deep emotional instability. She narrated: *“When my husband went away my children got sad and scared. They also had nightmares and questioned me on why we were disunited as a family”*. The story by Blessing is in line with studies that indicate that children of divorce are mostly vulnerable, facing psychological, emotional, and even spiritual problems. She observed that she feels guilty and lonely: everybody in church discusses that I did not meet their expectations and I am embarrassed. After some time, I would no longer attend services. This is an indication

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of the social stigma recorded in Ikwo: divorcees, women in particular are usually blamed and ostracized. A church youth worker attested that the divorced people in the congregation feel judged, which supports the testimony of Blessing.

The other respondent was Chinedu, a secondary school teacher, who talked about how it affected the education of his children. He has since reported, after his separation, that his son dropped his grades. He began to fight with friends and skip classes. This finding is reminiscent of the general results of Kelly and Emery (2003) mentioned above: marriage disintegration could impact the morality, emotions, and academic life of a child. Chinedu has observed that boys and girls in a divorce-based family tend to be unguided and therefore, exhibited more traits of truancy and delinquency- a trend also observed in social research of Nigeria.

The third case was provided by the local pastor, Rev. Okafor, who has since counseled a number of separated couples. He noted a common occurrence of financial strain that goes hand in hand with divorce. One of the ladies members of the parish told him that she had to send back her bridal gifts and was now finding it hard to feed her children. *“My former husband went a long way and had nothing to send back.”* The implication of this comment is that divorce reallocates economic disadvantage; the burden is frequently placed on the parent who has custody. According to Igbo tradition, bride price refundation may cancel marriage as far as the community is concerned, and women will have no legal and social status. Rev. Okafor noted that this kind of financial precarity contributes to more poverty within the community as single parents struggle to make both ends meet.

The role of the tradition was also identified in the interviews with community elders. According to one of the elders, marriage is deemed dissolved by the society once a bride-price has been refunded in the Ikwo culture. The elder mentioned the contradiction: this traditional mechanism is supposed to legalize divorce, in reality it leads to lateralization of consequences on children, who become stateless between families. He said: *“There are some women who will not marry after divorcing as the traditions require them to respect the first marriage. They are single mothers who have minimal support.”* Even though the statements made by this elder do not originate in an official source, they are a reflection of scholarly research stating that cultural constructs have a strong impact on the results of divorce in Ikwo. Conventionalities may lengthen and block the process of reconciliation, and it increases the crisis.

Other testimonies were related to emotional health. One of the young men, Emeka, who parted ways with his wife said that he felt depressed: *Every night I think of the quarrels and the debts they left. I feel like I failed my family.* His self-reflection is in agreement with Amanze (2016) that observes that divorce causes feelings of rejection, disillusion, guilt, and brokenness. Another aspect of divorce that has been brought out in the story of Emeka is the fact that personal identity and hope can be destroyed by divorce.

Based on the above cases, there are general themes: the divorced people are stigmatized and shamed, children are exposed to disruption and trauma, and the community bonds are destroyed, not to mention individual economic vulnerability. All these testimonies support the academic evidence about the effect of divorce. As an

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illustration, emotional trauma observed by Amato (2000) is evident in Blessing being alone and Emeka feeling guilty. The fact that Chinedu reported that his son is performing poorly at school is in tandem with other studies that associate divorce with worse performance by children. The remarks by the pastor concerning poverty are consistent with studies that show the general financial implication of marital breakdown. Undoubtedly, these accounts are what can be called a contextualized image: divorce in Ikwo is not an abstract statistic but a lived experience that destroys families and breaks the stability so treasured by the community.

A few locals also associated the phenomenon of divorce with a large social crisis. In her example, a teacher mentioned that students in her classes were more distracted and aggressive in case their parents were fighting. This observation is echoed by the fact that marital conflict is the source of juvenile delinquency. One of the community leaders proposed that single-parent families are increasing the number of youth crime and broken families. The local information, in addition to the above-mentioned data, suggests that divorce in Ikwo is a symptom and a cause of social instability. In this way, the studies on the Ikwo cases show how divorce causes a multi-dimensional hardship: psychological suffering among the spouses, child development risks, and problems in the community (social stigma, economic burden, moral decline). The findings at the case level will be further generalized in the conclusion where they will be identified as having broader implications.

Conclusion

As it has been revealed in this study, divorce and marital crisis in Ikwo LGA have profound, complex effects on people and the society. Divorce destroys the mainstay of stability in the family - the institution that has always been considered sacred with regard to personal health. As in any other location, separation between parents hurts the children emotionally and academically, and this substantiates the fact that divorce is one of the most important life events that influence the future of the family. Adults who are undergoing a divorce often feel guilt and rejected by the society; the stigma is particularly high in the conservative cultural environment of Ikwo. Together, the wave of marriage disintegration harms the community structure - the economic means get tight, the communal values are destroyed, and the adolescents become susceptible to wayward conduct.

Qualitative data on Ikwo residents correspond with the overall study: emotional trauma and cost to the community is inevitable in cases where a marriage fails. Based on these results, a number of implications are generated. First, there should be preventative measures. Premarital and marriage counseling should be strengthened in churches and social services in Ikwo with emphasis on communication and conflict resolution. The counselors may also use scriptural guidance (the way Paul did) to educate that marriage is a bond that should be treasured and couples should be careful of their relationship. Second, the society must come up with support networks to divorcees. Separate safe spaces or support groups would be helpful in healing divorced people and their families since they are stigmatized. Third, educational activities must be focused on the youth with coping skills and alternative conflict solutions being taught to them to reduce the trickle down effects on children.

Lastly, the cultural environment of Ikwo requires a delicate approach. According to Mgbebu and Orji (2025), leaders in churches should be able to strike a balance

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between the teaching of the church and compassion. There are theology, strategies like the a theology of grace, forgiveness, and healing that are required to avoid dumping the hurt families by faith communities. According to the findings of this paper, should Ikwo - and by implication other communities like these failing to solve the marital crisis, there will be an accumulated cost in the long-term such as poverty, sheer human potential wasted, and breakdown of societal values. To sum up, divorce in the Ikwo LGA is a serious social problem; the understanding of its effects is the initial move towards reducing the harm. The families, religious institutions and policymakers will have to work together to stabilize the situation and safeguard the lives of the future generations.

Acknowledgement

The author gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of community leaders, marriage counselors, and Ikwo residents who shared their experiences for this study. Special thanks to the staff of Ebonyi State University's Department of Religious Studies for their guidance and support.

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