Conflict Management in the Family

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Abstract

Conflict is part of human life. It occurs when two or more people disagree or engage in struggle over certain issues. It is a social necessity and a normal and functional inevitable aspect of the healthy function of all communities. In the case of the family, it might be caused as a result of financial constrain, sexual problems, negligence of emotional, physiological, financial maturity and family encumbrances before contacting marriage, psychological problems, social as well as other variable. Family conflicts reduce the quality of life. This reduction in the quality of life and considering the fact that the family is the nucleus of the society, there arise the need to design management strategies to tackle the problem. Some of these strategies include: accommodation, collaboration, compromise, problem-solving, avoidance, family life education and counseling services.

Introduction

Conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable point of human assistance. It is the pursuit of inevitable interests and goals by individual members of the family. It involves struggle over values and claims to wealth, power and prestige in which the other members of the family attempt to neutralize, injure and in the worst situation eliminate the other member of the family. At time it may result in violence which is the use of force in the pursuit of incompatible and particular interests and goals. Conflict theory assumes that people act in their own sequence in a material world in which exploitation and power struggle are prevalent (Mboto, 2000; Francis, 2011).

Schaeffer (2004) stated that conflict theorists view the family not as a contributor to social stability but as a reflection of the inequality in wealth and power that is found within the larger society. He went on to explain that the feminist and conflict theorists note that the family has traditionally legitimized and perpetuated male dominance. This male dominance is the cause of conflict in most Nigerian families. Aside male dominance, there are other causes of conflict such as negligence, sexual, psychological, social, addictive behaviour, economic, health, children-caused problem as well as incompatibilities. These problems need proper management if the most needed and preached stability and peace is to be experience in our society.

What is the Family?

A family is a set of people who are related by blood, marriage (or some other agreed-upon relationship), or adoption who share the primary responsibility for reproduction and caring for members of society (Schaeffer, 2004). Generally speaking, there are two types of family – nuclear and extended. In considering these different family types, the writer has limited himself to the form of marriage that is a characteristic of modern society − monogamy. The term monogamy describes a form of marriage in which one woman and one man are married only to each other. According to the functionalist view, the family performs six major functions first outlined 70 years ago by sociologist William F. Ogburn (Ogburn and Tibbils 1934). The functions include: (a) Reproduction (b) Protection (c) Socialization (d) Regulation of sexual behaviour (e) Affection and companionship (f) provision of social status. Despite these lofty objectives of the family, there is relative peace in the peace.

Family violence which is the result of family conflict is a common phenomenon. It comes as a result of failure of supportiveness. It could be seen in nearly every home and can reach its climax in some societies. According to Lauer (2002) family violence is one of the most frequent reasons for police calls. Dawson and Langan (1994) stipulate that 16% of murder victims are killed by family members. Kyriacou (1999) have found out that domestic violence is one of the leading causes of death among women and is the most common cause of known fatal injury. It is pertinent at this point to ask, what are the major causes of family conflict?

Causes of Family Conflict

The following have been identified as the causes of family conflict.

(a)   *Financial constraint:* This include the inability of the head of the family to meet his financial responsibility in the family by paying children school fees, providing basic needs of the family, impecuniousness, unfulfilled promises and expectations of financial buoyancy. The unwillingness of the wife to make effective and economic use of the limited resources of the family, Inadequate financial resources, poverty, lack of assistance from the family and unnecessary spending of the family resources.

(b)   *Children-caused conflicts:* Mezieobi & Okpara (2007) explained that some of the conflicts we have in

our families that often lead to violence are often caused by the children. This happens as a result of large family size especially in polygamous house where children loyalty is divided in favour of one of the parents and some ganging up with their mother against their father; fastidiousness and even disobedience to parents' directives.

(c)   *Sexual problems:* Another area that causes conflict in the family is sex, this may be as a result of sexual incompatibility and the inability of one partner to satisfy the sexual urge of his/her partner. It may also be as a result of infidelity or extra marital sex, denial of sex on demand, sexual deviations or dysfunctions and impotence.

(d)   Negligence of emotional**,** physiological, financial maturity and family encumbrances before contracting marriage. Mezieobi and Okpara explained further that hereditary factors inimical to stability or stable family life, neglect of principles governing good mate selection, premarital and marital counseling and parental advice and those of relations against early marriage often lead to conflict in the family when eventually the marriage is done.

(e)   The psychological problems that can bring about conflicts in the family include emotional stress, aggressions, infatuation, anxiety, dependency, avoidance and temperament.

(f)   *Social problem:* Mezieobi and Okpara (2007) are of the view that the following social problems can cause family conflicts, they include; faulty socialization, social apathy, painting one of the spouses socially black, poor relationships between the dyad husband and wife and between the wife and husband's parents relationship and vice versa, interacting with people or peers one of the spouses is opposed to, indulging in interventions that leave the children and one of the spouses uncared for.

Aside the above variables, there are other variables like drunkenness, smoking, drug addiction, keeping late nights and sex maniac can lead to serious conflicts in the family. More still health problem, wrong accusations, constant name calling and labeling such as idiot, bastard, prostitute among others could also aggravate family conflicts. However, family conflict may take the form of spouse abuse, child abuse or abuse of parents. Abuse of parents is perhaps not as frequent as others.

Family Conflict and the Quality of Life:
As Lauer (2002) rightly explained all family conflicts diminish the quality life. Physical and emotional difficulties may result from serious family conflict. There is also an extra problem of adjusting to a broken home which is the result of separation or divorce. The problem of adjustment to new and ambiguous roles results in the step family also. Children academic performance in school is negatively affected. A child from a single parent home cannot perform as well academically as others from a two-parent family. Aside the above effects on the quality of life of the people, it has been observed that several kinds of deviant behaviour such as stealing, drug abuse, bullying and rapping have been associated with disturbed family life. Individuals who come from conflicted families tend to have a variety of difficulties that can be referred to as maladjustment, antisocial behaviour, interpersonal problems and self-esteem (Snyder & Sickmund, 1998; Lauer & Lauer, 1999; Gelces & Straus, 1988; Hampton & Geles, 1994; Dawson & Langan, 1994; Browne & Hamilton, 1998; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999)

Managing Family Conflict
There are several ways of conflict management in the family. The following could help stop conflict in the family;

(a)   Accommodation. This is a conscious attempt by one or more members of the family to neglect their needs and focus on satisfying those of the others. This involves self-sacrifice which is a manifestation of self esteem disorder. It is always the reflection of the desire to ensure that there is personal and family harmony, and also to preserve the relationship at ones cost. This is the common practice among women who have many children. They decide to stay intact instead of divorce in the interest of their children.

(b)   Collaboration: In this case both the husband and wife could work together to find solution that is satisfactory to both parties. It is a situation where the husband, the wife and even the children win, depending on the situation and the parties involved are satisfied with the solution they have arrived at peacefully.

(c)   Compromise: Compromise as a management strategy involves finding a reasonable mutual acceptable solution to the family conflict that will be acceptable to both parties. Here the parties are assertive and partially cooperative. It is often necessary where both parties are incompatible.

(d)   Problem-solving: Problem solving as a strategy for managing family conflict involves the willingness to comprehend the problems that gave birth to the conflict and to solve the problems. This is used when both parties need lasting solutions to their conflicts. It is also used when both parties see conflict as opportunity to improve an existing relationship.

(e)   Avoidance is another management strategy of resolving family conflict. In this situation, the wife,

husband or child/children ignores the conflicting issues or even denies the significance of the issue in their life. It is a very simple way of ignoring the problem and thus ensures that peace reign in the family (Ojiji, 2011).

(f) Legalized system treat marriage in which couples would contact to many per specific period of time and would then decide whether they are to continue with the marriage is another management strategy of family conflict.

Furthermore, good family life education is a strong strategy of managing family conflict. This has the advantages of: (i) changing the negative attitude about single-parent families and the legitimacy of violent behaviour as well as breakdown the harmful ideologies about the good family. (ii) change some of our norms eg. Reduce family to small family size by engaging in monogamous marriages which have the following merits on the children: (i) aspire children to higher levels of education (ii) be more confident of children academic ability (iii) attain higher develop of children education (iv) be more involved in school activities of children; and (v) enjoy a greater variety of intellectual and cultural activities such as music, dance, travel and reading (Lauer, 2002).

Mezieobi (1995) also outline the following as the essence of family life education in schools which can invariably act as good conflict management strategies in the family;

a) Commence early in school to orient school clients to the family types, their constituents and the place of each individual in the family unit to its satisfying existence, happiness and stability.

b) Sensitize children of the factors that occasion family instability, family stress and the avoidance and ameliorative therapy.

c) Orient future generation of Nigerian citizens to the values of family stability thereby goading them on to its pursuit of desirable family life behaviour.

d) Imbue the school clients with the knowledge that human beings are the architects of family stability and its disorganization; and

e) Humanize learning by discussing family life problems. (p79)

In addition to the above conflict management strategies in the family, the establishment of counseling services is essential. This body will help especially the young to understand and appreciate the need for conflict resolution, mate selection, avoid disorder, sexual disorder and sexual diseases. It will also help them have the need for family planning and management strategies for behaviour modification; appreciate the need for marital adjustment as well as understand the functions of marriage.

Summary/Conclusion

The family is the cornerstone of the society. An ideal family therefore is expected to provide stability, support and continuity to the world. It is one of our most essential primary groups. Family conflicts are quite natural and inevitable. It diminishes the quality of life. Physical and emotional difficulties may result from family conflict. Its management calls for carefulness and the adoption of the above named strategies.

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