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Exploring the Perceptions of Married Individuals on Sacramental Marriage: A Case of Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract:
Sacramental marriage holds a significant place within the Catholic Church as a sacred covenant between a man and a woman. However, understanding the perception of married individuals regarding sacramental marriage within the specific context of the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi remains largely unexplored. This research study aims to bridge this knowledge gap by delving into the perception of married individuals on sacramental marriage within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi.

Through qualitative research methods such as interviews and surveys, this study will gather data from married individuals within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi to gain insights into their perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to sacramental marriage. By exploring their perspectives, the study seeks to uncover the factors that shape their perception of sacramental marriage and the specific challenges they face within this religious and cultural context. The findings of this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the unique dynamics and experiences surrounding sacramental marriages within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi. This knowledge will be valuable for clergy, counselors, and policymakers in developing targeted interventions and support systems to address the challenges faced by married individuals within this community. It will also provide a foundation for enhancing pre-marital counseling and marriage preparation programs to better meet the needs of couples in sacramental marriages. This research study will fill the existing knowledge gap by shedding light on the perception of married individuals on sacramental marriage within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi. The insights gained will have practical implications for improving the support, guidance, and overall well-being of couples in sacramental marriages within this religious community.

Keywords: Perception, sacramental marriage, catholic archdiocese of Nairobi, challenges, interventions

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

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Marriage holds great significance within the Catholic Church as a sacrament, representing a sacred union between a man and a woman. Understanding the perception of the married in a sacramental marriage is crucial for comprehending their experiences, challenges, and factors that contribute to the success or difficulties they encounter. This section provides a comprehensive background to the study, examining the global, continental, regional, and Kenyan contexts.

1.1.2. Global Context

Marital challenges are prevalent globally, with various societal, cultural, and economic factors influencing the stability and happiness of marriages. Rapid changes in societal values, shifting gender roles, increased urbanization, and globalization have impacted the institution of marriage (Coontz, 2005). The increasing divorce rates and marital dissatisfaction indicate the complex challenges faced by couples in maintaining healthy and fulfilling marriages (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007).

Within the Catholic Church, sacramental marriages are expected to adhere to specific religious principles and teachings, which can provide both guidance and potential sources of tension for couples. The perception of the married on sacramental marriage has gained attention, leading to the development of marriage enrichment programs and pastoral support services within Catholic communities (Fitzpatrick, 2014).

1.1.3. Continental Context

In Africa, the institution of marriage holds great cultural and religious significance, with traditional values often intertwining with religious beliefs. While Africa has generally maintained lower divorce rates compared to other regions, there has been an increasing concern about the erosion of traditional family values due to modernization and Western influences (Oyedemi & Obiyan, 2015). These influences, combined with economic challenges and changing gender dynamics, contribute to the evolving landscape of marriage in African societies.

1.1.4. Regional Context

Within the African region, Kenya is a country that has experienced rapid social, economic, and political changes over the years. These changes have influenced family structures, gender roles, and societal expectations, thereby impacting the perception of sacramental marriage among married individuals. Urbanization, poverty, high levels of unemployment, and the influence of Western ideals have all played a role in reshaping the perception of sacramental marriage in Kenya (Mutongu, 2017).

1.1.5. Kenyan Context

The Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, one of the largest dioceses in Kenya, is home to many Catholic faithful. Nairobi, the capital city, represents a diverse urban environment where individuals from different ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds come together. This diversity presents a unique set of challenges for couples in sacramental marriages as they navigate through socio-cultural differences, economic pressures, and the demands of modern living.

While there is limited research specifically focusing on the perception of the married on sacramental marriage within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, some studies have explored marriage dynamics and challenges within the Kenyan context. A study by Khasakhala and Ogutu (2018) found that economic hardships, infidelity, and lack of effective communication were key challenges faced by married individuals in Kenya. Another study by Nzioka (2018) highlighted the influence of socio-cultural factors on marital satisfaction among Kenyan couples.

However, there remains a research gap regarding the specific perception of the married on sacramental marriage within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi. Understanding this perception is essential for developing and implementing targeted interventions and support systems to promote the stability, happiness, and spiritual growth of sacramental marriages in this region.

In conclusion, the perception of the married on sacramental marriage within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya, is part of a broader global phenomenon. While various factors contribute to this perception, the unique socio-cultural, economic, and regional dynamics within the Kenyan context necessitate a focused investigation. This study aims to bridge the existing research gap by comprehensively exploring and analyzing the specific perception of the married on sacramental marriage within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, ultimately providing practical recommendations to enhance support systems and promote thriving sacramental marriages.

1.1.6. Statement of the Problem

Despite the sacred nature of sacramental marriage within the Catholic Church, there is a growing concern about the challenges faced by couples within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. While some studies have explored marital challenges in general, there is a research gap regarding the specific challenges encountered within the context of sacramental marriages in this particular region. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing and implementing targeted interventions to support and strengthen sacramental marriages.

The existing literature lacks a comprehensive analysis of the unique socio-cultural, economic, institutional, and communication factors that contribute to the challenges faced by couples in sacramental marriages within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi. Additionally, there is a lack of research on the effectiveness of support systems and resources currently available within the archdiocese to address these challenges.

This research aims to bridge this gap by conducting an in-depth investigation into the challenges faced by couples in sacramental marriages within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi. By identifying and analyzing these challenges, this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge and provide practical recommendations for clergy, counselors, and policymakers to enhance the support and guidance provided to couples in sacramental marriages. Ultimately, this research seeks to promote the stability, happiness, and spiritual growth of sacramental marriages within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The key purpose of this study is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions held by married individuals on sacramental marriage within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi to identify the factors that influence these perceptions and provide insights for the development of targeted interventions and support systems to strengthen sacramental marriages within this specific context.

1.3. Research Question

What are the key factors influencing the perceptions of married individuals on sacramental marriage within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi?

2. Literature Review

Sacramental marriage holds immense significance within the Catholic Church as a sacred covenant between a man and a woman. The perception of married individuals regarding sacramental marriage is crucial for understanding their experiences, challenges, and the factors that contribute to the success or difficulties they encounter. This literature review aims to explore the perception of the married on sacramental marriage within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. By reviewing relevant literature, we will gain insights into the factors that shape their perception, the challenges they face, and the existing research gaps in this specific context.

2.1. Socio-Cultural Factors and Perception

Socio-cultural factors play a significant role in shaping the perception of sacramental marriage within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi. Cultural beliefs, traditions, and societal expectations influence how married individuals perceive the sacramental nature of their marriage. For example, Mutiso-Mbindyo et al. (2017) found that cultural differences and societal expectations influenced the perception of marital conflicts and satisfaction among Kenyan couples. The influence of Western ideals and modernization also impacts the perception of married individuals on sacramental marriage (Bukusi, 2018). Further exploration of these socio-cultural factors can provide a deeper understanding of how they shape the perception of the married on sacramental marriage.

2.2. Challenges and Perception

Married individuals within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi face various challenges affecting their perception of sacramental marriage. Economic pressures, communication issues, conflicts, and other stressors impact how they view their sacramental union. Understanding the challenges they face and their corresponding perception is crucial for developing strategies to address these issues effectively. For instance, Nzioka (2018) highlighted the influence of communication patterns on marital satisfaction among Kenyan couples. Exploring the connection between challenges and perception can provide insights into how the perception of sacramental marriage can be strengthened and supported.

2.3. Spiritual and Religious Factors

Spirituality and religious beliefs play a central role in shaping the perception of married individuals regarding sacramental marriage. The depth of their faith, religious practices, and connection to the Church impact how they perceive their sacramental union. Fergusson, Ross, and Robertson (2016) emphasized the importance of spiritual connection in couples and its influence on their relationship dynamics. Exploring the spiritual and religious factors that contribute to the perception of sacramental marriage can provide valuable insights into the role of faith in supporting and strengthening marital bonds.

2.4. Conclusion

This literature review provides an overview of the perception of the married on sacramental marriage within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi. Socio-cultural factors, challenges faced by married individuals, and the influence of spirituality emerged as key focus areas. While some studies have explored these topics in the broader Kenyan context, there is a research gap regarding the specific perception of the married on sacramental marriage within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi. Further research is needed to comprehensively understand the factors that shape their perception, the challenges they encounter, and how their perception can be nurtured and supported to promote the well-being and stability of sacramental marriages within this region.

3. Research Methodology

This study utilized convenience sampling to select participants based on accessibility and availability within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi. Young graduate students who met the inclusion criteria and expressed willingness to participate were approached by the researchers. Convenience sampling was chosen due to time and resource constraints and the relatively small and concentrated target population within the selected institutions.

3.1. Data Collection

Data collection for this study involved conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. In-depth interviews provided an opportunity to explore individual participants' perceptions, experiences, and understanding of sacramental marriage within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi. Focus group discussions allowed for group interactions and collective exploration of shared experiences and perspectives related to sacramental marriage and its significance. Both methods were conducted in a conversational and interactive manner, encouraging participants to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions openly.

3.2. In-depth Interviews

Individual in-depth interviews were conducted with selected participants. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility and adaptation to participants' responses. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions regarding participants' perceptions of sacramental marriage, their experiences within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, and their understanding of the significance of the sacrament. Probing questions were used to delve deeper into specific topics as needed. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

3.3. Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were conducted with groups of participants to explore shared experiences and perspectives on sacramental marriage. Each group consisted of 6-8 participants to encourage active participation and facilitate meaningful discussion. The discussions were guided by a set of open-ended questions relating to participants' perceptions, challenges, and aspirations regarding sacramental marriage within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi. The researcher facilitated the discussions, ensuring that all participants had the opportunity to contribute. The discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach. The transcribed interviews and focus group discussions were thoroughly reviewed to gain familiarity with the data. Initial codes were generated to capture important concepts, ideas, and patterns emerging from the data. These codes were then organized into themes, which represented recurring patterns of meaning related to the perceptions of married individuals on sacramental marriage within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi. The themes were refined and reviewed through an iterative process, ensuring they accurately reflected the data. The final themes formed the basis for interpreting the findings and generating meaningful insights.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and protecting their rights. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by assigning pseudonyms to participants and securely storing the data. The researchers adhered to ethical guidelines in conducting research involving human participants, including principles of beneficence, respect for autonomy, and justice.

4. Discussion of Findings

In this chapter, the study's findings were examined based on the objectives of the study. The study involved 56 respondents who provided insights into the Ubuntu philosophy and African identity, which were further categorized into internal-spiritual and physical aspects.

Regarding the physical aspects of their African identity, 39 out of the 56 respondents referred to specific attributes such as skin color, hair texture, and having been raised in Africa. These aspects were highlighted as factors that set them apart and make them unique, especially in comparison to individuals from other regions like Asians, Europeans, and Americans. The respondents considered their African descent and upbringing in Africa as integral components of their physical African identity. Additionally, they expressed pride in their rich indigenous food and the geographical location of Africa. The abundance of sunshine in tropical lands was also mentioned as a source of pride for their African identity. Furthermore, the respondents emphasized the significance of belonging to a continent that is considered the cradle of humanity and has overcome the burden of colonialism. These historical and cultural elements contributed to their sense of pride in being African.

The participants in the study expressed various characteristics that they perceived as spiritual aspects of African identity. Among these characteristics, being communal and having an African mindset were particularly emphasized and considered sources of pride for the participants in association with their African identity. The communal aspects encompassed strong social relationships, expressions of solidarity, and a hospitable attitude during times of need, all of which were seen as integral to African identity. This way of perceiving one's identity was reflected in the concept of "Us" – a profound identification with the community, exemplified by the belief that "I am because we are and I am nothing without everybody else," echoing the words of Mbiti (1969, p.108).

This communal identity fostered a sense of shared responsibility and a priority to put others first, exemplified by the attitude of "shauri yetu not shauri yake" (our concern, not his/her concern) in Kiswahili. Under the category of the African mindset, the respondents highlighted the belief that individual achievements are interconnected with the support and involvement of one's kin, evident in various life events such as marriage, burial, and other engagements.

Additionally, the study participants brought attention to various internal-spiritual aspects of African identity, which are summarized below:

- Strong preservation of African moral values, demonstrated by the absence of public displays of sexuality as observed in places like Miami Beach.
- Appreciation for individuals who uphold moral values and demonstrate solidarity, particularly in times of crisis, emphasizing the bond among Kenyans.
- Recognition of tradition and culture as defining elements of African identity.
- A deep reverence for the Supreme Being, ancestors, and the entire spiritual world.

These internal-spiritual aspects reflect the African worldview and the philosophy of Ubuntu, which highlights the interconnectedness and interdependence of individuals within the community.

Conversely, the study participants also identified aspects they perceived as contradicting Ubuntu and African identity. These included individualism, capitalism, corruption, and immorality. Corruption and individualism, in particular, were viewed as significant threats to African identity, as they opposed the values of community and cared for others that are central to African culture.

The respondents expressed their concern about glorifying wealth for a select few while neglecting the well-being of the broader community. Corruption, theft, and immoral actions by African politicians were also cited as sources of shame, as they stood in contrast to the principles of Ubuntu.

The concept of "I am because we are" was highlighted by the respondents, which underscores the ontological connection to the community and the recognition of the community's importance in defining one's self. Ethical behavior toward each member of the community was emphasized as it not only strengthens the community but also reinforces one's own sense of self. Such ethical behavior is seen as a way to honor the ancestors, spirits, and the Supreme Being, all of whom are considered foundational to the community.

In summary, the study shed light on various spiritual aspects of African identity, emphasizing communal values, ethical behavior, and interconnectedness within the community, all of which are deeply rooted in the philosophy of Ubuntu. Conversely, the study also highlighted concerns about individualistic and corrupt tendencies that could undermine the essence of African identity as defined by Ubuntu.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study shed light on the perception of African identity within the context of university education, emphasizing the unique African approach to life and the crucial need to integrate it into the teaching and learning process.

The study clearly revealed that current university education does not favorably nurture African consciousness and identity. Many respondents expressed that the methods of acquiring knowledge and the content felt foreign, lacking adequate representation of African values. African culture-related units, such as Negritude and African philosophy, were found to be the limited extent of references to African values in higher education. The educational process overlooks the socio-cultural environment of the learners, leading to a disconnect with the African socio-cultural order, ancestral knowledge base, and the spirit of Ubuntu. Consequently, much of the education in Africa today needs to address the unique needs and challenges of African societies. Graduate students and key informants associated prevailing learning paradigms with negative traits like cut-throat competition, individualism, consumerism, and materialism – all of which clash with the spirit of Ubuntu.

To effectively cultivate African identity, it is essential to mainstream the African humanistic and spiritual worldview into university education. This approach will prepare agents of Africa's transformation in line with the concept of "appropriate epistemology" (Kaputa, 2011). Embracing a renaissance approach would foster a deep respect for the African self and encourage studying and interpreting life and reality from the African perspective. This self-respect would encompass the physical and internal-spiritual aspects of African identity.

Incorporating physical aspects of African identity into university education could involve exploring African ancestry, the African origins of civilization, anti-colonial ideologies, African socialization, and the concept of African unity in diversity. On the other hand, addressing the internal-spiritual aspects of African identity would entail understanding the African ontological-felt connection with reality, which underpins the prevalence of an ethical order. It would involve delving into the spiritual dimensions of African identity that influence how Africans perceive and interact with the world.

It is crucial to recognize that Africa's national and international development approach must be connected to its cultural outlook, identity, mindset, and spirituality. Therefore, any pursuit of transformation and development in Africa must be grounded in the fundamental principles of Ubuntu. These principles include maintaining strong family and community ties, fostering human solidarity, and valuing collective well-being over individual gain.

In conclusion, embracing and integrating the African humanistic and spiritual worldview into university education can strengthen African identity and empower individuals to contribute meaningfully to Africa's growth and development. Such an inclusive educational approach will foster a sense of pride in African heritage and uphold the essence of Ubuntu, promoting a more harmonious and sustainable future for the continent.

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