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Parental Influence on the Marital Instability of the Young Couples Aged between Twenty and Thirty-Five Years in Ruiru Sub County, Kiambu County-Kenya

Kamatu Kamau David

Senior Pastor, Kiambu Town Baptist Church, Kiambu, Kenya

Dr. Elijah Kirimi M'arimi

Lecturer, Department of Psychology and Criminology, Laikipia University, Kenya

Abstract:

The purpose of this research was to find out whether indeed parents influence the instability of marriages of young couples aged between 20 to 35 years in Ruiru Sub County of the larger County of Kiambu. This study was necessitated by the need to address issues affecting the stability young couples' marriages. The Location of the study was chosen mainly because of the high rate of divorce and separations which come so soon in marriage relationships. The study sought to achieve the following objectives: (1) to find out the effect of parental philosophy on young couple's marriage stability, (2) to examine the effect of parental control on the stability of their children's marriage and (3) to find out the extent to which the young couple's relocation from home and how it influences parental hostile reaction on the couple's harmony. Descriptive research design was used. The study also employed probability and non-probability sampling techniques, purposive sampling and simple random sampling procedures respectively to determine the sample size. Using self-administered questionnaires, and interview schedules, primary data was collected and subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques. The sample size was 234 arrived at from a population of 238,858 sourced from GoK census (2009). Slovene's formula was applied and later subjected to Krecje & Morgan. Validity of the instrument was ensured through content validity and reliability tested using Cronbach's Alpha with a coefficient of 0.7 which was considered acceptable. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 20 while qualitative data was analyzed in their thematic grouping and content summations. A regression model was adopted which determined the relationship between the variables. It was then presented using charts, graphs and frequency tables. The analyzed data was summarized in order to present the findings, draw conclusions, and advance recommendations and to make suggestions concerning the topic of study. The study established that parents indeed influenced on the instability of their children's marriages. Finally, the study, recommended that various stakeholders in marital matters, the county and the national governments will find the research useful to implement the findings as well as for formulating policies. Further research should be carried out to validate the findings and the conclusions of the study by undertaking related researches in the whole country. In the spirit of reaching out to the wider society, the findings and the conclusions should find their way into the mass media and public barazas to create massive awareness to the general public on the need to enhance marital stability and encourage mutual relationship among couples and their parents. National peace and cohesion begins with marital harmony.

Keywords: Parental Influence, marital instability parental philosophy, parental control

1. Introduction

Suda (1991) begins by observing the fact that marriage produces families and then in return such families stand to become the basic social units. In the past families used to be relatively stable with a wide network of relatives to support the raising of children. Therefore, the main aim of marriage was procreation where parents' major responsibility was to bear children and rear them in order to extend the family lineage.

In Western ideology, Goetting (1990) asserts that the husband –wife marital bond is the central family tie which supersedes claims of the extended family. However, despite the agreement on the rules of membership regarding the in-laws, the codes of conduct associated with such relationship remain unclear. In such circumstances, actual interaction and sentiments assigned to these relationships are defined differently by different individuals. Finch, (1989) claims that as per the sister or brother in-law, relationships appear to be solely based on friendship.

In the US, Rozaklis (1998) states that strained marriage relationships emanate from strands of in-law's influence as was reported in the print media way back several decades and the same challenge is across all walks of life. An old 'Times' story of 'Mrs. R.' (April 7, 1952) includes this vivid account of Eleanor Roosevelt's relationship with her mother-in-law: After the honeymoon her mother-in-law,

Sara Delano Roosevelt, treated her like a child. The old lady controlled the family purse strings; she hired the bride's servants, and ruled the bride's house and husband: Franklin always differed with his mother.

Further, Rozaklis (1998) investigated how interfering parents are always the major external factor associated with conflict and therefore dissatisfaction in the marriages of their children. From her study of a Cornell University team where she did four interviews with 190 men and 174 women she found that in-law troubles ranked third as a source of marital disagreements. From her findings, she described mothers-in law as those persons who don't respect the laws of time and space, therefore tending to offer their advice anywhere more so in the daughter in-law's affairs and at family gatherings.

As regards parental influence on young couples' marriages, again far away from Africa, we find almost similar issues with parents interfering with marriages of their children. Altman (1992), report that in many Asian countries, married women are responsible for most domestic duties and are expected to live with, and take care of their husbands' parents while in their marriages. These women are often treated unfairly by the husbands' family. In the year 2000, according to U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2005), 74% of Asians older than 60 years lived with their adult children, in China to be precise. In support of Altman's view, Shang Ying (2014) states, in reference to Chinese culture that for the Chinese patriarchal system, mothers and their daughter's in-law tend to treat one another as outsiders, like "other people". The relationship between mothers and daughters in-law is not as close as that of mothers and their own daughters. Some mothers and daughters in-law cannot avoid conflict. This produces distanced relationships and disputes between them and gets even more serious when they live together.

Shang –Ying (2014), in his earlier studies done in China, between 1995 and 2005, had the following revelations; living with mother in-law degrades married woman's happiness but promotes a married man's happiness. Even where a daughter lived with her own mother while married, it still lowered the daughter's happiness. On the flipside, a married man experienced happiness when living with his own parents. Such experiences have always brought conflict in the newer marriages. Cases of parents domineering on their married sons' families have become a common occurrence.

In a more general African context, marriage was basically a social responsibility rather than a private business. Marriage, even though a union of two persons in companionship, does not confine the couple in a world of their own. In fact, the spouses are more in company of each other only at night, while during the day they were in company of other members of society, reports COHRE (2008). In Nigeria Ngewa (1997), tells of a community from the same vantage point. She states that among the Ibo, grandparents choose names for their grandchildren. It is traditionally mandatory for parents to participate in their children's marriages. The community believes that once that is done, the grandmothers can cause such children "inherit" the good attributes, qualities and abilities of the persons they are named after therefore their influences recurrently keep interfering with young marriages.

According to Beir, *et al.* (2000), of the East African tradition, family was intended to become broader, extended family comprising of children, parents, grandparents and great grandparents. Such traditional structures therefore tended to favor large families living together unlike the modern trend towards smaller nuclear family units. Meda (2011) indicates that in Kenya, to be precise among the Kikuyu community it was and is still believed to be that each new generation replaces their grandparents. Once that happens the grandparents would then be free to become ancestors.

The grandparents' replacement occurs through child naming like earlier mentioned by Beir (200). The first-born son or daughter would take the names of their grandparents, male and female respectively and also depends on whether the names dedicate to maternal or paternal lineages. Failure to effect for some reason, such patriarchs and matriarchs might cause unknown trouble to their son's wife which might later translate to parental infestation of such a marriage.

From a study, Mwiti and Duek (2007) found that it is a common occurrence for in- laws participation whether positively or negatively perceived. Such participation tends to always find its way in their children's marriages among the Meru. The community emphasizes on their participation in many ways for there is need for the couple to know each other. They underscore the fact that the individuals in marriage come from their own unique family systems. The senior members of the community continue to insist that our thoughts, perceptions and expectations are shaped by the experiences in the families we grew up in. That in itself makes it clear that cultural issues exacerbate marital problems.

Further Mwiti *et al.* (2007) continue to observe that in some indigenous communities, a wife may be perceived as "ours" and that she naturally left her original family to come and cater for "our family" where many in the husband's family tend to think so. It is ongoing; some traditional cultures assume that in marriage, a wife should stay at home helping her in-laws. This has created considerable stress for a professional woman. The situation also entices the husband to picking up a newly brewed form of stress where he becomes unable to clearly decide whether to encourage the woman express her gifts, or listen to the parents' demand to leave her job to help run the family farm.

This concept seems to be overflowing deeper even to those yet to be married in Kenya. It is apparent that mothers find it really hard to release their own sons to women (wives to be) whom they seem not to trust. Such was an experience discussed by Mburu (2015, April18) DN2, on his weekend magazine platform. A woman complains that her fiancé does not put her first, so she demands that he must make choice between her and mom.

2. Statement of the Problem

It was becoming increasingly alarming for the rising number of newly married couples who upon marriage soon begin quarrels, relocate to new places away from parents or even effect divorce. Inquiries from pastors in Tatu, Administration Police base Membley, the village elders of BTL and finally the area Sub Chiefs, all affirm that many cases have recurrently been surfacing whereby young married people came seeking for interventions of the locality's opinion leaders. Common occurrences were that parents had reportedly demonstrated dislike of their children's choices of spouses thus causing conflict in the latter's marriages. In this regard, it was viewed

that perhaps this phenomenon was responsible for the high demand of meager housing facility in Ruiru Sub County as the young couples continue to look for comfort away from their parents.

Recently, it was also witnessed an influx and unusual localized movements of young married people in the area from one housing estate to another which in return caused a cycle of emotional disturbances regarding adjustments of couples and children to the new living environments and also to their children's new schools every time they shifted. This study therefore embarked on finding out if the parents in this location of study had influence on the instability of their children's marriages.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out whether parental factor has any influence on the marital instability of the young couples of between twenty to thirty-five years of age within Ruiru Sub-County, Kiambu County-Kenya.

4. Objectives of the Study

4.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study was to establish the extent to which parents influence the marriage stabilities of young couples and the effect it has on the stability of their marriages in Ruiru Sub-county, Kiambu County.

4.2. Specific Objectives

The specific objectives that guided the study were as follows:

- i. To find out the effect of parental philosophy on young couple's marriage stability, within Ruiru Sub-County, Kiambu County-Kenya.
- ii. To examine whether Parental control has any effect on the stability of their children's marriage within the location of study.
- iii. To determine the extent to which the young couple's relocation from home influences parental hostile reaction on the couple's harmony in the location of study.

5. Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

- i. To what extent does parental philosophy affect the stability of their children's marriage?
- ii. To what scope does the parental control influence the stability of their children's marriage?
- iii. To what levels does the parents' reaction on the couple's relocation from home cause disharmony in their marriage?

6. Justification of the Study

While unhappy married couples relocate to new places from their parents' compounds of residence in search of the much-valued peace, it also causes undue anxiety and unnecessary emotional tension. The study had proposed that some smooth ways for new marriage to be able adjust more easily and to integrate with the relevant parental systems as well as to the in-laws.

Based on emotional tensions and the strained relationships between the two sets of relatives (most of which is lately being reported on media and some just physically witnessed), the trend continued to affect many more generations to come. The immediate generation of the married couples today misconstrues violence as an acceptable way to sort out disputes in life now being carried through generations. Therefore, the study fills the gap and serves as an eye opener to the relevant stakeholders, parents, potential marriage candidates, for further studies.

7. Literature Review

7.1. Parental Philosophy on Instability of Marriage

Marriage stability can be driven by the parents' beliefs systems that influence their children's decision and behavior. Parental participation in their children's marriages is considered important since it advocates for marital education, family counseling and related services that improve couples' communication and problem-solving skills resulting initially to greater marital satisfaction and, in some cases, reduced divorce, although these effects appear to fade away with time.

At the same time, cultural differences that exist among the married couples show up clearly when cultural issues based on parental background exacerbate marital problems Mwiti et al. (2007). In some indigenous communities, especially in Africa and some parts of South America, marital conflicts arise out of the family related perception that a wife belongs to the entire community, and that she left her original family to come and cater for "our" family (Edin & Kefalas, 2004). Matters even become more complex where, in some cultures, it is assumed that in a marriage, a wife should stay at home to help her in-laws, something that is likely to create a considerable amount of stress and conflict, especially for a professional woman (Gottman, 2009). Such a situation also entices the husband to pick-up newly-brewed form of stress, where he is likely to get lost in making defined decision between encouraging his wife to pursue her profession and express her gifts or to listen to the parents' demands for his wife to leave her job to help run the household matters.

7.2. Traditional Family Philosophy on Young Couple's Marriage

In view of the African traditional philosophy, parents would impose their participation in their children's marriages as well as their specialized roles and that of grandparents which had effect on the stability on the new marriages. A family has been described as the basic unit or the nucleus of the society. It is a fact that marriage produces families, and in return, such families become the basic social unit as earlier indicated by Suda (1991). They further observe that in the past, families used to be relatively stable with a wide network of relatives in support of the raising of children. Therefore, marriage and family life had a 'communal' perspective, where the main goal was to propagate successive generations into the infinite future. The critical responsibility of a married couple was basically inclined to the bearing of children (procreation) and rearing them to safeguard the extended family lineage.

For most traditional societies of the world, marriage became a social responsibility, rather than a private business. That is why among the Ibo people of Nigeria, for instance, grandparents chose names for their grandchildren, a tradition that has persisted even to date (Ngewa, 2007). Traditionally, it was mandatory for parents to participate in their children's marriages as well. This was so because communities believed that once that happened, the grandparents could cause their grandchildren "inherit" the good attributes, qualities and abilities of their grandparents they were named after. Thus, the same way, parental influence would recurrently keep on being felt in the future upcoming marriages (Mwiti & Dueck, 2007). However, while this study from Nigeria and the observation by Mwiti and Dueck aim at bringing out the virtues in this set up, this study investigated the negative impact of this parental network that has been seen to influence marriage problems in present day society where couples are bent on drawing out more autonomy than conformity.

Further still, such traditional structures tended to favor large families living together, unlike the modern structure that aims at promoting smaller nuclear family units. Through this set up, the extended family was very critical in promoting a sense of identity, belonging, moral support and 'rootedness' to the newly married members. It was again only through the platform of the extended family arrangements that one could rightfully claim ownership and inheritance of family property and belonging, adds Rowe (2004).

7.3. Effective Parental Involvement in the Young Couple's Marriage

Furstenberg and Cherlin (2004), state that parental involvement in the traditional African societies causes dissolution of a marriage extremely difficult or almost impossible. It also served as the only legitimate context for sexual relationships and child-bearing. Equally, marital education services from the said parents would be effective in reducing marital stress and eventual divorce among low-income members of society and also promotes marriage among the unmarried.

Low-income populations confront a wide range of stressors that middle-class families do not. Evidence from the study by the above-mentioned authority is however limited to low income couples, and a mix on the strategies designed to overcome these stressors for example, providing job search assistance or by supplementing low earnings, does not solely aid in teaching marital communication and problem-solving skills which would in return increase the likelihood that low-income couples would marry or that married couples would stay together. Ngewa (2007), apparently in support of the above discussion adds that the inclusion of parents of the extended family played a very crucial role by according a sense of belonging and identity to the young generations into their lineage through marriages.

Further, as if reading from the same page, Meda, (2011) observes that in Kenya particularly among the Bantu communities, it was, and to some extent still is believed to be a normal thing to involve parents because each new generation is believed to replace their parents and grandparents for the sustainability of the said clan and community. Once that happens, the grandparents would then be free to become ancestors.

The grandparents' replacement concept is understood to take effect through child-naming rituals, whereby if the first-born child was a boy, he would take up the names of his grandfather, and the same would happen in the case of a girl to the grandmother. That depended on whether the names are to be dedicated to maternal or paternal lineage where priority is usually on the paternal lineage. Naming of children after paternal parents usually comes sooner while those after the maternal comes later. It is further observed that failure to go by this tradition could bring serious trouble to the entire family, or even to the whole community lineage at large.

7.4. Theoretical Framework

7.4.1. Family Systems Theory- Murray Bowen (1988)

Bowen's theory was used here for the study in relation to parental influence in young marriages. It was chosen to demonstrate that parents are by themselves a subsystem in any family and there is need to embrace the concept of family boundaries. When parents fail to employ the said theoretical concepts they might find themselves right in the centre of their children's marriage and thus causing conflict. A parental philosophy earlier discussed is another concept again that can easily cause conflict for it does not respect subsystem boundaries as understood through this theory.

Family systems theory developed by Murray Bowen describes how all family members can work together to resolve issues of its individuals in a family system (Wallerstein & Kelly, 2000). Accordingly, this theory observes that every family member is connected to one other through a system of overlapping and intertwining relationships that can only be deciphered when all members work as one. The first central premises of family systems theory are that family systems organize themselves to carry out the daily challenges and tasks of life, as well as adjusting to the developmental needs of its members (Waite, 2005). For that matter and in particular for this study, the developmental need in question is the stability of the children's marriage. It is of paramount interest to find out whether parents as family members work towards the stability of marriage or whether their influence provides negative effect.

A second central premise to family systems theory is that families are dynamic in nature. They have patterns of rules and strategies that govern the way they interact; the dynamic nature of family helps to ensure that the family can meet the challenges associated with daily living and developmental growth of the family members (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Critical to the above premises is the concept of 'holism:' the family systems approach argues that in order to understand a family system we must look at the family as a whole. Thus, two families living across the street away from each other may each be comprised of a mother, father, and child; yet it is in their rules of interacting with each other and their collective history that they are understood as uniquely different (Silverstein & Auerbach 2009).

In contrast, a non-systems approach would attempt to understand each family by looking at the individual members separately. By studying them individually, the way they interact, their communication, or their humor make their uniqueness lost or clouded. The implication is that an individual member of the family does not exist alone and will only be understood in regards to a subsystem. This is a pivotal segment as regards this study. The subsystems comprising of the larger families will address the marital aspect of the children in relation to other subsystems. Family systems theory also makes use of the concept of 'hierarchies', the concept of hierarchies describes how families organize themselves into various smaller units or sub-systems that together comprise the larger family system (Schultz & Cowan, 2001). Such sub-systems are often organized in terms of gender or generation. Practitioners generally have focused on three primary subsystems: marital (or couple), parental and sibling. Each subsystem is distinguished by the members who comprise the sub-system, as well as the tasks or focus of the sub-system. Further, the same source observes that the aforesaid family sub-systems are established to accomplish the tasks and goals of the family. When the members or tasks associated with each sub-system become blurred by those of other sub-systems, families end up in difficulties. For example, when a child becomes involved in the issues of the marital sub-system, psychosomatic difficulty often emerges that require emotional intervention. The question therefore is, does parental participation come in to alleviate such emotional challenges or do they influence it negatively? This drives the study to search farther whether parents really provide the right emotional intervention in a marriage or not. Perhaps in the same way children can cause difficulties in marital subsystem, in-laws can as well cause similar difficulties when their influence lands into their children's marriage. Further, this theory also includes the concept of family boundaries. This concept describes how important information flows between the subsystems. Depending on how permeable the boundaries are, parental influence should be understood to cause to some extent the uniqueness of a given family system. Families draw boundaries between what is included in the family system and all that is external to the system (Sagatha, Devi & Vasuki, 2008). Boundaries occur at every level of the system and between sub-systems. On the same point, Moynihan, (2005) buys the idea that boundaries influence the movement of people into and out of the system also regulates the flow of information in and out of the family. Although the concept of boundaries as applied to family systems is largely a metaphorical one, permeability of these boundaries often distinguishes one family from another. Some families have very open boundaries where its members and others are allowed to freely come and go without much restriction, whereas in other families there are tight restrictions on where family members can go, and who may be brought into the family system or not.

In more closed families the rules strictly regulate what information may be discussed and with whom. In contrast, information may flow more freely in families that have more permeable boundaries Sagatha, *et al.* (2008). Consequently, practitioners working with families including marriage counselors often encounter families where they find themselves being welcomed into the family, and information about the family is forthcoming without limitations. In such families, the practitioner's ideas and interventions may be accepted with only limited reservation. On the other hand, in more closed families, the practitioner may have substantial difficulty in being accepted by the family. Information about the family is more difficult to obtain, and ideas and interventions of the practitioner are met with resistance.

As regards this concept, the boundary concept depending on whether porous or closed, may determine whether information flows in and out of the young couples. It is by the porosity or the non-porosity that would determine how parents might influence their children's marriages through instillation of their philosophies positively or negatively. On this point the theory taps on the idea that one part cannot be understood unless its relationship with the other part is also understood like Harrison (2008) states. Such great input on families is understood in the light of three-generational perspective as another pillar pointer advanced in this theory. The theory observes that patterns of interpersonal relationships connect members across generations where in this case the in-laws are considered to be a first generation and that the level of anxiety can be externally applied. It is apparent that in this intergenerational view parental involvement cannot be casually wished away. Children in marriage therefore are likely to meet with parental influences affecting the degree of their adaptation required in their own marriages.

7.4.2. Adlerian Theory (1927)

Alfred Adler's is another theory used here to support that parents (in-laws) indeed influence young marriages. Parents are the key relatives of families of origin. The theory's original concept mainly invests on the birth order within family constellation. However, even where the birth order apparently shows some consistency to each position, it was the psychological interpretation that counts. One such concept is the view of human nature. An individual begins to form an approach of life within the first six years of life. Based on that, Adler focuses on how the person's perception of his past and his interpretation of early events continues to influence their later life. For the purpose of this study, this can be interpreted to mean parents and their children may equally focus on their past and fail to recognize future family dynamics that come by the marriages.

Every individual comes into a marriage along with different experiences that are likely not to be easily accommodated by parents from both sides. On the same point, Sherman and Dinkmeyer (1987), report that an individual is seen as an indivisible whole, born, reared and living in specific familial, social and cultural context which might have enclave meaning for their lives. All these come along with

an individual to a marriage from family of origin and striving to achieve certain individual goals. Such goals will mostly have roots embedded on the experiences from individual's family of origin.

Adler's view on social interest aspect as well as interpreted by Ansbacher & Ansbacher (1979), further informs on significant role played by parent's interference in causing marriage problems. In this context, Adler equates social interest with the daughter or son now in marriage who will always see with their relatives' eyes, hearing with their relatives' ears and feeling with their relatives' hearts.

Another key concept analyzed here regarding parental influence on children is their birth order and siblings' relationship. In so far as the psychological position is concerned, an individual in marriage may remain more attached to their parents mostly depending on whether they are going to remain as the only child or the youngest child. These two categories will be very hard for a parent to "release" a child to "the other person." The release relates clearly to the study's objective on parental reaction to the "loss" phenomenon following young couple's relocation. The said restrained "release" is therefore likely to cause conflict due to ties that remain so strong between the individual in marriage and his or her parents. It makes the other party to feel left out and therefore labeled an "outsider" in his or her own marriage upon perceived attack by any one of the said parents.

7.5. Conceptual Framework

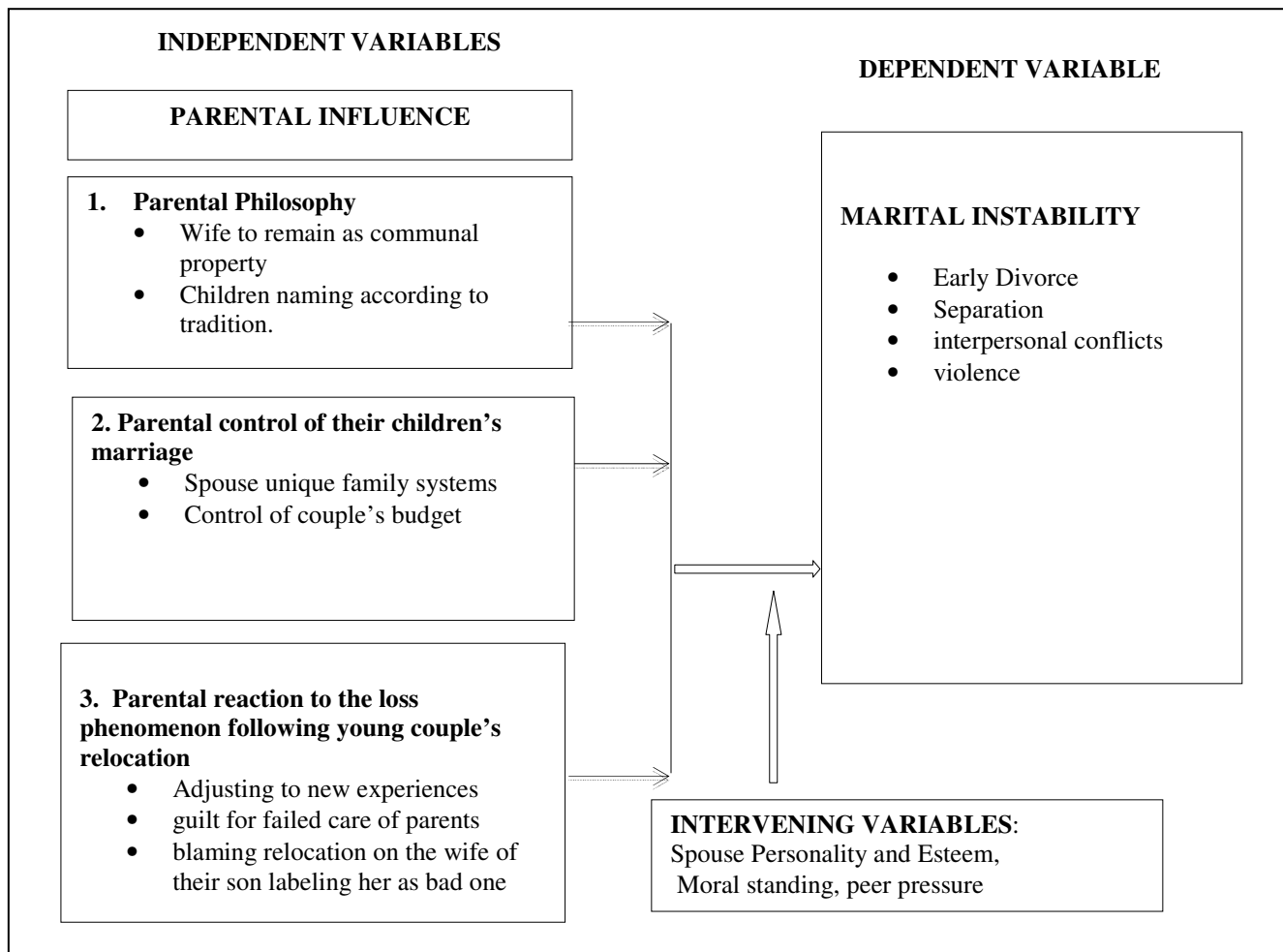


Figure 1: Conceptual Frame Work

Source: Kamatu David © 2016

8. Research Methodology

The study employed descriptive research design. The design helped in determining the frequency of the occurrence regarding the relationship between the described variables. It clarified the variables and shaped the laid down hypothetical constructs. Further, using descriptive design aided the researcher to determine the characteristics of the population as concurred by (Creswell, 2004). Descriptive design has therefore been used to ascertain that there is indeed parental influence on their children's marriages. The use of this design was also appropriate to the concluded study since the researcher intended to collect detailed information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the target respondents' views and opinions concerning the topic of study.

9. Discussion of the Findings

The study employed descriptive research design. The design helped in determining the frequency of the occurrence regarding the relationship between the described variables. It clarified the variables and shaped the laid down hypothetical constructs. Further, using descriptive design aided the researcher to determine the characteristics of the population as concurred by (Creswell, 2004).

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10. Conclusion

The study investigated parental influence on marital instability in young married couples. Based on the findings of the study it is reasonable to conclude that parents in a big way contribute to the instability of their own children's marriages. Further, the findings revealed that as much as the married children coveted for freedom to live away of parental nest, they still desired valued parental involvement in various cultural and traditional aspects like child naming and dowry payments which have resulted to hurting the marriage harmony and parent- married couple relationships.

Young married couples are still to a large extent driven by parental philosophies which have always spilled over into their marriages, negatively impacting and are in disregard of the changing times, the study intimates. On matters relating to parental control of their married children's budget, the study provides that they were mainly interested to do so mostly during special occasions. This serves as an indicator that parents hold the desire to prove themselves in the public eye and that they still remained relevant to have control even when their children are in marriage.

On the question regarding whether parents want to control marriages the rest of the children's life, the majority did not confirm so. This is observed to suggest that as the parents get older; they tend to lose the grip of their married children.

11. Recommendation of the Study

This study covered only Ruiru Sub County. It is hoped that more studies would be done to cover the whole Kiambu county and the nation at large. Future research should further investigate the issues highlighted in this study to suggest the means in which stakeholders in marriage matters can effectively address the ever-recurring problems of young marriages. Individuals, educational institutions, general public, religious organizations, and indeed the county and the national governments should find this study useful as the basis in which to implement policies.

Further research should validate the findings and the conclusions of the study by undertaking related researches in the whole country. To reach out to the wider society, the findings and the conclusions should find their way into the mass media and public barazas to create massive awareness on the need to enhance marital stability and encourage mutual relationship among couples and their parents. Finally, professionals like counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists as well as social workers and religious leaders may make good use of the outcomes to effectively address myriad needs to enhance the much-needed marital stability.

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