

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTS OF SEXUAL PROBLEMS IN MARRIAGE

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Abstract

Love is the ingredient that brings meaning and rich pleasure to sexual activity. In order to develop a lifetime love affair, however, couples must maintain a positive sexual relationship. A mutually fulfilling sex life will enrich any marriage. People growing together in love find that their sexual relationship provides more meaning and enjoyment at all time. Physical desire with its sexual expressions is without doubt the most complicated aspect of love in marriage. So many potential causes of difficulty exist, and problem solving is complicated by silence, suspicion, anger, hurt, misunderstanding, fear, or guilt, which is often hiding in the shadows. The physiological mechanisms of sexual expression are intricately complex and can be shut down at any stage; yet, when hindrances are removed, they work together smoothly, without conscious effort, transmit an experience of tremendous thrill leading to fulfilment and complete relaxation. The entire love making episode involves three phases of physical response that are interlocking but separate and easily distinguishable. They are desire, excitement, and orgasm. To use Helen Kaplan's metaphor, these three phases have a common generator, but they each have their own separate circuitry. Sexual desire comes from a special neural system in the brain; excitement is indicated physically by the reflex vasodilatation of genital blood vessels; and orgasm depends upon the reflex contractions of certain genital muscles. These two genital reflexes are served by separate reflex centres in the lower spinal cord. Problems arise when an inhibiting "switch" turns off anyone of these physical responses in our system. Many sexual problems stem from ignorance of basic marital facts and can be remedied easily by proper counsel.

Introduction

According to Odogboro (2010), "It may shock one to know that ninety percent of marriages that are broken or are in their night mares are polarized on sexual incompatibility or sexual disorders". While sex may rarely be the ultimate in marriage, its improper handling, however has not only instigated adultery and other forms of unfaithfulness amongst couples, but also signalled doom in most marriages and homes across the world. Many marriages and homes across the world today have collapsed and others are collapsing, owing to ignorance about sex on the parts of the affected couples.

Many fights between spouses that burst in the nights to wake neighbours have sexual misunderstandings as their remote or immediate causes. But the irony of this situation is that most couples either do not give this subject the serious attention it deserves or are too shy to talk about it when asked. Consequently, sexual intercourse / love making has become one of the most virile instruments or weapons that Satan uses to devastate the world in general and marriages in particular.

Odogboro, also posited that everything a man or woman says, does or thinks is influenced by his sexuality. The buying of cars, building of houses, academic pursuits, buying and wearing of clothes of all sorts and so on, are all under the influence of sex. For instance a man dresses gorgeously to parties or wants to drive the latest car just to attract the opposite sex. We all do

attract the opposite sex knowingly or unknowingly for one purpose which is to get what the opposite sex has that we do not have and our same sex cannot offer it; that is the sexuality that is in the opposite sex.

According to Adewale (2007) sex has pulled down many great men, made some ordinary women powerful, caused scandals, pulled some together, separated friends, caused worry and brought peace at home, destroyed many lives, yet it is the foundation of life". It touches every area of our lives; it touches the passion, the emotion and motivation. It invades our intellect; affect our finances and social life. It is a weapon of war to some, and a weapon of peace to others.

What Is Sex (Sexual Intercourse)?

Until lately, the word sex has been traditionally made a taboo in our societies such that anyone who merely mentions it is considered or looked upon as vulgar or immoral. A pastor is free to use all words on the pulpit but must not mention sex except with apology. Odogboro (2010) noted that most Bible dictionaries and concordances do not have the word "sex". This is possibly because sex had been considered among the names that Adam did not give among all things he named. Thus, this three letter word (sex) is not anywhere mentioned in the Bible except for its adjectival presentation or descriptions in the Bible.

William Cutrer and Sandra Glahn, define sexual intercourse as the insertion of the penis inside the virginal, generally followed by ejaculation. It represents a beautiful example of skilful engineering on the part of the divine creator. Normally for conception to occur, sperm must make it into the vagina, and sexual intercourse is usually how that happens. E.L. Thorndike and Clearance L. Barnhart described sex and sexual intercourse as the joining of male and female sexual organs, usually with ejaculation, coitus, and copulation.

Similarly, the complete Christians Dictionary for home and school edited by Morris G. Watkins *et al* (1992) defines sexual intercourse as "a relationship between a man and a woman involving the union of the parts of the body involved in reproducing the young". While these are beautiful definitions of sex and sexual intercourse, one must admit that they have technically and carefully described sex and sexual intercourse as it is. While it is true that a parent does not sit a child down to teach him or her sex and sexuality because it is innate in all men, it is of great importance to expose its intricate implications for its adequate application or practice towards its maximum enjoyment and benefits. This is the essence of this presentation. For an operational definition, we may consider sexual intercourse especially lovemaking as:

The process of activities ranging from the contemplation of the essential benefits or delights and pleasures that are in the sexual being of an opposite sex (gender) that culminates in the sexual perturbation of the sexual sensual organs – the eyes, ears, the skins, the neck, the breast, and hair leading to the insertion; penetration and back and forth thrust or pushing of the male erect penis into the female vagina resulting in a total inflammation and vibration of the entire body into a climax of ejaculation (emission or release) of fluid/juice both from the male' penis and the female's vagina that leaves the both in a height of indescribable pleasure that engulfs the whole body leading their bodies to a relapse or relaxation that no sedative can afford.

For very essential clarification of the above definition, it is necessary here to make some classification of sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse varies by certain degrees. There is sexual intercourse that is mainly for punitive purpose; just to victimize. This is the type that involves the consent of one party with a partial or forced consent of the other. In some or most cases, it is without any consent of the victim. This is one serious abuse in sexual intercourse usually called Rape.

The second form of sexual intercourse is that of passive consent. This involves a sexual intercourse in which one partner does not show interest though he or she has not objected or refused to participate. Such is the case in which a partner just allows the other to sex him or her with the mind that the other should just do and go and leave him or her alone. In this case, the passive partner may even be reading or watching television while the other is gratifying himself or herself. There are women who just lie down for the man to have his way to avoid trouble. This is an unhealthy sexual experience that removes the bliss and life in any marriage. These types of sexual intercourse are far apart from love – making. Love making is the sexual intercourse that is given by God to spouses whose marriage are purpose driven and purpose fulfilling. Love making is the height or climax of love expression. It is about the most exciting and pleasure giving experience that life can afford such that it is the actual reason for marriage (and the two shall be one flesh Gen. 2:28). Sexual intercourse, is the most vibrant and active therapeutic device that God has built in humanity.

Purposes of the Gift of Sex

From the scriptures (Gen. 2:24, 25; I Cor. 7:2-7), we understand that in Gods eyes, the purpose of the gift of sex with marriage are three fold:

- i. Continuing propagation of the species
- ii. Mutual satisfaction of sexual needs
- iii. Reciprocal expression of commitment and love for each other.

Sex is like life, it cannot be defined in one word. It is composed of many things besides the mere physical. According to Kirkendall (1947), sex has four different and vital aspects.

First, sex is a powerful drive urging an individual onto action and accomplishment. Some people who have devoted a great deal of study to it believe that sex is the strongest of all the drives, which spurn us to action. Second, sex is one of the strong urges, which interests men and women in each other. A part of the strong bond of attraction, which men and women feel for each other is based upon this impulse.

Third, sex is both physical and emotional in nature. The best of this is found in marriage. Here the physical relationship also becomes an emotional relationship through which a husband and wife are able to express their affection for one another. The fullest satisfaction in sex can be experienced only when it is associated with love, loyalty and appreciation of one's partner.

In marriage, sex is the foundation for the development of family life. Every individual has had his or her origin in a sexual union between a man and woman. So sex has an extremely important part to play in marriage, for the love which a husband and wife feel for each other usually leads them to desire to create a new life to which each contributes a part of himself or herself. This is the most important role, which sex can play. This leads to the forth characteristic, which is very important to society. Sex insures the continuance of life from one generation to another. Through the process of reproduction, the life and characteristics of past generation are passed on to new generations. Every individual inherits certain biological characteristics from his or her parents and lives in the

kind of home they have created for him. In turn, he passes on certain biological traits and provides a home for his children.

Facts about Sex in Marriage

There are some facts about sex that need to be known by all married couples so as to remove all inhibitions about love making in marriage. The following are facts about sex in marriage according to Bisi and Yomi Adewale (2007):

1. God the founder of marriage is the creator of sex. "And God blessed them and said unto them, be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28).
2. Sex in marriage is not sinful, dirty or ungodly. Sex is scripturally approved by God as Holy, acceptable and not injurious to our spiritual life (Prov. 5:15 – 19).
3. Sex can take place between husband and wife anytime, any day except for fasting and prayer and they are to come back to each other quickly to avoid sexual immorality (I Cor. 7: 1 – 5).
4. Sex in marriage is an obligatory act and it is good for the health of the body and soul of marriage (I Cor. 7).
5. The body of the man belongs to his wife, while the body of the wife belongs to her husband. Hence they must not deny each other.
6. It is better to marry and have sex with one's spouse than to burn with lust (I Cor. 7:9).
7. Sex in marriage is a lifelong relationship.
8. Romantic marriage does last longer than non – romantic one.
9. Sex is to be enjoyed by both husband and wife without any shame.
10. Good fore play should precede any sexual intercourse for the benefit of all, most especially the woman.
11. Satisfaction in sexual relationship provides the forum in which deep intimacy is developed, not only physically but also psychologically or emotionally.
12. Both husband and wife can reach the highest level of sexual pleasure of excitement called orgasm.
13. When a couple is still having sex, no matter the level of their conflicts and misunderstanding, it is still easier to settle and reconcile them. As soon as couples get to the point of not sleeping together for months because of quarrels, then they are calling for a major disaster in their marriage.
14. Couples who discuss their sex life without any inhibition tend to have better understanding of each other's body, their sexual needs and so have a better sex life.
15. Wrong conception, inhibition, and mentality can destroy or hinder good and intimate sex life in marriage.
16. Knowledge can seriously improve the sex life of a couple and help to build a better marriage.
17. Intimate marriage is impossible without an exciting sex life. Though sex alone cannot build a good marriage, but without a strong bedroom life, a strong marriage is almost impossible.

Sexual Problems and their Effects on Marriage

In his book, *The Marriage Builder* Lawrence Crabb (1982) stated that, "sexual problems in marriage is a very serious issue that must not be handled with levity or over looked. If poor communication heads the list of marital complaints, sexual problems run close second". Crabb

further stated that "Nowhere does disharmony between spouses express itself more painfully than in the bedroom".

Most people probably approach marriage with enthusiasm and look forward to the sexual freedom that will follow. Many of these people are disappointed when they discover, sometimes on the honeymoon that sex within marriage is not as consistently exciting or pleasurable as they had eagerly anticipated. There can be a variety of causes for this disappointment.

Causes of Sexual Problems in Marriage

1. **Misinformation about sex:** Despite the modern openness about sex and widespread belief that we are highly informed about the subject, counselors often are amazed at the ignorance and lack of accurate knowledge that characterized many couples. Sex researcher, William Masters, wrote that "the greatest cause of sexual problems is wrong information, misconception, and taboo. Sexual instincts and urges are inborn, but knowledge of love making must be learned. When the learning is inadequate or accompanied by painful and other abusive experience, subsequent sexual adjustment problems often arise.
2. **Cultural Values and Attitudes:** The society in which one grows up and in which one lives often molds sexual attitudes and behavior. In past decades, sex was not discussed openly, media depiction of sex were limited, and marital fidelity was the expected norm, but when immoral sexual behaviours became known, there was community outrage and shame. Cultural attitudes and high moral standards probably contributed to the relatively low frequency of intercourse apart from marriage. Then things began to change. Sex became a subject that could be discussed more openly. Old Taboos began a subtle process of challenging traditional views of marital fidelity and sexual responsibility.
3. **Pornography:** Pornography contributes to sexual problems in marriage both in men and women. Most men experience the feeling of potency and the temporary relief from stress that comes when they masturbate while watching pornographic pictures. These men's pornographic experiences do interfere with the sexual intimacy of their marriage. Although the influence of pornography and the prevalence of addiction are most common in men, the problem exists as well in women.
4. **Busy life styles and stress:** When work, the demands of parenting, church activities, and other pressures combine to create anxiety, or push couples into time starved life styles, interest in sexual intercourse declines, because of physical reasons. In men, for example, prolonged stress sharply decreases the level of testosterone, the primary male hormone. Distracted by the problems and pressures of life and lack of both energy and sexual drive, many men would rather sleep or watch the late night movie than make love to their wives. In both husbands and wives, when busyness and stress levels go up, interest and involvement in sexual activity tend to go down.

Mutually pleasurable sexual intercourse takes physical and mental energy. It also takes a relaxed, unhurried attitude that is not greatly concerned about time. When a young couple is first married, often they can sleep late on weekends because they have no children to demand their attention, to interrupt their love – making, or to interfere with sexual

spontaneity. These couples often have a great deal of vigor and natural energy. As they grow older, the husband and wife may have less energy, more responsibilities and demands on their time, increased mental or physical fatigue, and a need for more sleep. Growing children demand attention, and their presence often forces couples to reduce the frequency and spontaneity of sexual intercourse.

5. **Boredom:** In some cases, after a couple has been married for a while, they get accustomed to each other. They run out of novel ways to have sex; fore play becomes shorter, and coitus becomes routine. After several years, the sexual activities that were once so exciting become monotonous. Partners spend little time stimulating each other sexually, and sometimes the husband and the wife become less interested in their appearance. Sex under such circumstances is not very fulfilling, to say the least, and the stage has been set for an extra – marital experience with someone who appears to be more exciting, attractive and novel than one's mate.
6. **Premature Ejaculation:** Experiencing orgasm before they want to is the most common sexual problem men face. How do you keep from ejaculating if she's not ready for you to do it? As a woman shared, "He wants me to be more 'into it' but premature ejaculation is a problem. I know that if I get crazier, he will lose it faster. Then I'm left unsatisfied. What should I do?" The fear of "oh, no; it's going to happen again": can become a self – fulfilling prophecy for some. Holding back requires a combination of physical sensation and mental focus. Some suggest that the man finds a distraction – such as thinking a sad thought or mentally rehearsing multiplication tables to "slow him down". As one frustrated woman response to these techniques, "The whole thing about premature ejaculation is that it is not simple to just follow some instructions in a book. It is a long process of working together at finding a satisfying solution". While this is true, it's well worth the time and effort expended.
7. **Weak Erection/impotence:** Erectile dysfunction can be devastating because, generally, a man's sexual functioning is a rather fragile and ego – defining thing. For most men, sexuality is a central issue of pride or ego. Most men think, they must be able to perform anytime, anywhere, and could (theoretically) satisfy anybody. Men who have difficulties sexually often end up struggling with low self – esteem. However, if there is a medical diagnosis, this tends to be less of a problem.

There is much debate about what percentage of erectile difficulty is psychological and what percentage is biological. The best evidence now is that many erectile dysfunctions are more biological than psychological in origin. Alcoholism prevents many men from attaining erections. High stress or illness may drive down testosterone levels, thereby reducing erectile ability. Many medications, especially heart medications, reduce sexual functions somewhat. Long – term and uncontrolled diabetes may also cause erectile problems.

One step a man can take in self – diagnosis is to observe whether he ever wakes up with an erection, which demonstrates that it can happen. Physically healthy men have an erection for ten minutes or so about every ninety minutes all night long. According to Harold and Gene, "If a man is not having night time erection and if he is not becoming somewhat sexually aroused by

attractive stimuli, it is possible that he has physical problem". Psychologically, feeling of intense guilt over an affair can cause erectile dysfunction.

Effects of Sexual Problems in Marriage

When sexual problems appear, some couples simply "give up" and don't try to resolve their difficulties. Some are afraid to discuss their problems or believe that things will never get better. Others develop headaches, abdominal pain, fatigue, emotional distress, or other symptoms that hide the sexual problem and can provide an excuse for abstinence.

When there is no sex, this can be very difficult for spouse who wants sexual fulfilment. In addition to the avoidance of intercourse, sexual difficulties in marriage can have several other major effects:

1. **Lowered self – esteem:** Self-esteem and sexual capability often go together, especially in men. If intercourse is not mutually satisfying, the husband and wife both may have doubts about their sexual competence. If a man cannot maintain an erection or arouse his wife, for example, he is likely to experience a loss of confidence about his sexual and manly capabilities. If his wife jokes about the fact that he may be losing his virility, this strikes an even greater blow to his self – esteem, and his ability to perform sexually is hindered further.
2. **Selection of substitute Activities:** When sex within marriage is not satisfying, husbands and wives often turn to substitute activities. These include masturbation, viewing pornography, sexually explicit novels, increased fantasies that become a second – best substitute for the real thing, or extra – marital sex.
3. **Deteriorating Relationships:** According to Wheat, M.D and Gloria Okes Perkins (1980) "sexual problems can create anger, resentment, and interpersonal tension, impatience, and communication break downs. Sexual problems can lead to divorce and it is difficult to have a really good marriage when there is sexual dissatisfaction.
4. **Committing of suicide:** Sexual problems in marriage can make some to commit suicide, especially when they are mocked by their wives, a friend or a relative, due to lack of erection. In the late 1980s, a man from a village called Onuko – Obare in Ethiope East Local Government Area of Delta State committed suicide when the wife told him that "he is not man enough" due to lack of erection. More so few years ago, a man from Eku in Delta State also shot himself to death when he discovered that he could no longer perform his conjugal obligation. A sexless marriage is dangerous to itself, the couples' involved and even people around them.
5. **Adultery:** The greatest danger of lack of sexual fulfillment at home is adultery. In a recent research in America, 41 percent of people confessed to have cheated on their spouses, while 25 percent said it was because they were looking for a better sex; 18 percent said they were looking for adventure; only 9 percent said it is for ego boosting. Every couple should build a good and deep sexual life so as to avoid infidelity as much as possible.
6. **Separation/Divorce:** One of the signs of a bad marriage is lack of excitement in the bedroom and permanent withdrawal from anything that involves sex and romance. This leads to sexual and emotional separation, before it ends in physical separation and divorce if nothing is done to address the situation. No matter what is happening in a marriage, experts believe that in as much as couples are still having sex, the relationship looks healthy. But as soon as they vow never to sleep together again, then that marriage is finished.

7. **Scapegoating:** Transfer of aggression is common in a sexless marriage. You see the man beating the children unnecessarily; fighting the house help, shouting on everybody without any cause, just to vent his anger. An impotent man is an angry man. Any little thing can make him get angry and attack anybody that crosses his way.
8. **Wife Battering:** This is very common in sexless marriage. Men constantly see wives that deny them sex as wicked and difficult, so they go all out to punish, or even beat them, as the case may be.

How to Enjoy Sex in Marriage?

Onakonvwen (2003) has opined that, "Any properly married couple that understands the joy and calm relaxation that accompany every meaningful sex experience, shall surely but appropriately improve on their sex approach to one another". It must be understood that no one takes pleasure in an uninteresting experience. The following are some clues to enjoying marital sex.

1. Make your spouse to know your intention early enough before going out for the business of that day. You can signal your spouse and make her understand that you would need her body later. The husband having made a proposal to the wife, she should also make adequate preparation for good food.
2. Always appreciate the beauty or handsomeness of your spouse. Look at the body built of your spouse and begin tenderly to introduce acts of romance. In the process you may decide to enter the bathroom together and before you are through, both of you must have gained the sexual stimulation needed for enjoying sexual satisfaction.
3. Settle quarrels quickly. Never allow a quarrel to linger, sit down and talk about it in the spirit of love; never give room for "fence building" rather build bridges. Always connect and reconcile.
4. Stay in the same room, on the same bed. Never stay in different rooms. What God has put together, let no room put asunder.
5. Be kind to each other. Do something to give support, love, affection and encouragement.
6. Give surprise gifts always. Everybody loves gifts, your spouse will be very happy if you can surprise him/her with gifts once in a while. This will encourage romance and boost your bed room life.
7. Increase your P.D.A (That is public display of affection). Do not be ashamed to display how much you love your spouse even in the public. Hold hands, appreciate each other openly, be fond of each other, and honour each other in the public.
8. Never turn your room to a guest room. Your room should be a private place, not where you entertain guests. It should be a Garden of Eden for your "Adam" and "Eve". A Guest, no matter how highly placed or close to you, should stay in the guest room. Your bedroom should be your "Lover's corner", "strong room", "honey moon centre" where there is no crowd.
9. Cultivate Romance: Romance enhances good sex life. If a marriage will be enjoyable, it must be romantic and not traumatic.
10. Look nice always, smell nice, and be clean. Deal with body and mouth odour and dress to draw the attention of your mate.
11. Have selfless sex always. Always have it in mind that you want your spouse to enjoy you. Be selfless, and have a partner focused sex.

Conclusion

According to Bisi and Yomi Adewale (2007) Sex and money seems to be the strongest issues in the world today, yet sex is a little bit ahead. It is the foundation of life. God gave sex to man as a gift, to be accepted, received and celebrated. It is never His plan to use it against His creature. If sex is well used, if it is well accepted, if it is well celebrated, it can be the catalyst for the family progress. It can also lead to joy and love – filled marriage and make couples to live happily.

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