

An Assessment Study into the Rising Cases of Divorce Among Muslim Women in Ebira land of North Central Nigeria

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Abstract

Divorce, while permissible in Islam, is often regarded as the last resort in marital disputes. However, recent years have witnessed a significant rise in divorce cases among Muslim women globally. This trend has sparked debates among scholars, sociologists and policy makers, who seek to understand its underlying causes and implications. This study explores the factors contributing to the increasing divorce rates among Muslim Women, supported by scholarly citations and evaluates the societal and religious perspectives on this phenomenon. The study tried to examine the burning issues at hand and proffers workable solutions to them. The research explored a structured questionnaire and different forms of analyses were carried out. In addition, descriptive regression and correlation analyses were tested and considered by using 200 Muslims in the area as representative sample for the study. The findings revealed that Impatience, intolerance, extra-marital affairs/adultery, misunderstanding, mother-in-law interference and economic hardship drive many husbands to divorce their wives. Others include; Economic independence of women, legal reforms and awareness of rights, changing social norms, domestic violence and marital discord, mismatched expectations, societal and religious perspectives etc. Based on the findings of the research, it is recommended that a training Centre for marriage counselling should be established to address a lot of marital issues in the society; scholars should embark on rigorous awareness and should be encouraged by the authorities; the Muslim community should abide by laws and regulations stipulated by Allah (SWT) as entrenched in the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions.

Keywords: *Assessment, Divorce, Rising Cases, Muslim Women, Ebiraland*

Introduction

Islam enjoins marital relations between spouses and prescribes principles and rules to regulate marriage both as a transaction as well as an institution. Amongst these prescriptions are the rights and obligations of the husband and wife towards each other. The observance of these rights and obligations is obedience to Allah (SWT) and the breach of which constitute not only offending the other partner but also disobedience to Allah (SWT). It is also obvious that some Muslims do not really understand the intricacies of marriage in Islam especially in relation to women. This is known by the frequency of divorce incidents between couples. Divorce has left indelible marks in the minds of Muslim women in Ebiraland.

Marriage is called "An Nikah" in Arabic and it is expected to be a lifelong contract, which is also a religious duty. One should love and care for his/her spouse. "And of His Signs is that

He has created mates for you from your own kind that you may find peace in them and He has set between you love and mercy. Surely there are Signs in this for those who reflect" (Qur'an 30:21). "Marry the loving, childbearing women for I shall have the largest number on the resurrection day" (Sahih Bukhari). Furthermore, Islam has taken the issue of divorce very serious. This is why we found out that the Qur'an talks about it (divorce) in different chapters and at different times. For instance, in Qur'an Chapter 2, Al-Baqara, Chapter 4, of Al-Nisa'I and Chapter 65 named Al-Talaq (The divorce), these explain how the divorce should take place among couples. There are also many instructions in the Qur'an urging men to treat their women with kindness, justice and fairness, even in the event of divorce. Therefore, there is a categorical moral admonition to safeguard the women's welfare where divorce becomes inevitable. Hameed and Sanusi (2016) opine that once a man and a woman are tied together in the bonds of matrimony, they are expected to do their utmost for life to honour and uphold the Qur'anic says about their contract pledge. He went further to state that, the full thrust of the Shari'ah is levelled at preventing frequent occurrence of divorce. The laws lay down in this regard are regarded as exit primarily, therefore, as checks not incentives. Ambali (2012), states that Islam prohibits men to breach the contract of marriage by terminating it on baseless grounds. While discussing the rights of women after divorce (Ali, 2013), argues that, when divorce occurs, the wife is expected to be in the matrimonial home during this period while the husband provides for her maintenance although no conjugal relationship is permitted. Marriage as an important institution in Islam cannot be undermined. This is because of the fact that it is established by Allah and fully supported by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as an institution that determines the greatness or otherwise of any society as explained by (Hameed, 2013). It is therefore very unfortunate nowadays that this institution is neglected or not well respected by some Muslims which may be as a result of the influence of western culture or unwillingness of some Muslims to take care of their wives on pretence. In the past, the people in Ebiraland were known for their marital stability even though it existed with a complex of extended family, but recently it has witnessed the increasing rate of divorce and unless serious attention is paid to the issues there is an indication of more rapid instability in the future. Poonawala, (2016), in his study opine that marital instability is one of the social problems that is bedevilling our localities especially our customs as well as religious and ethics which proposes marriage at the early stage of life which is expected among other reasons total suppression of premarital sexes. Among the backlash of the current situation is the prevalent disloyalties of children toward their parents, many cases were recorded regarding divorce and Islamic ethics have been eroded. The rate of prostitution is at an alarming rate including abortion and the likes. There has been an increasing report on cases of divorce despite numerous publications and seminars on marital issues. But people are still being misinformed about the importance attached to the stability of marriage institution. Divorce has brought many social ills to the society. Much importance is no longer attached to the marriage institution, people are impatience and do not tolerate one another in marriage institution; the situation has actually brought about dissolution with its attendant problems. Divorce is affecting personal and social life very deeply. It causes stress and makes individual liable to a shattered way of life. It generally puts children at greater risk and exposes them to many kinds of problems. However, most children of divorced do not experience those serious problems. Based on this premise this study examines the causes of rampant cases of divorce among the Muslims in Ebiraland. Islam provides a comprehensive framework for marriage and divorce, emphasising justice, mutual respect and compassion. The Qur'an states:

And if you fear dissension between the two, send an arbitrator from his people and an arbitrator from her people. If they both desire

reconciliation, Allah will cause it between them. Indeed Allah is ever Knowing and Acquainted with all things. (Q 4:35)

Despite this guidance, divorce rates among Muslim women have risen, reflecting broader socio-economic and cultural shifts. Historically, divorce was stigmatized and women often endured unhappy marriages due to societal pressure. However, modern Muslim women are increasingly asserting their rights, leading to higher divorce rates.

Opesemowo & Odumosu (2023) contends that cultural practices and religious beliefs have contributed to the practice of child marriage for several generations. Culture is a means of expressing a shared sense of identity, values and traditions. Conversely, religion is a system of symbols that establishes powerful, pervasive and enduring attitudes and motivations in people. Child marriage is sometimes driven by religious and cultural beliefs, which govern communal practices which for instance, the fear of premarital sex and pregnancy outside of wedlock makes parents regard marriage as a viable choice for their young daughters to avoid humiliation and as a result, sex and pregnancy before marriage are religious taboos and culturally unacceptable. In addition, underage marriages have become acceptable to protect girls and their family's honour as stated by (Opesemowo & Odumosu, 2023). More precisely, child marriage is sometimes justified by the religious prohibition of premarital sex and births outside of marriage without adequately considering the grave repercussions of such a choice. Therefore, the time of adolescent girls' marriage is highly influenced by their religious views of (Amzat, 2019). According to Bate et al (2023), wrote that the negative impacts of young marriage are as follows; Increase the birth rate so that population growth is increasing; In terms of health, young marriage increases infant and maternal mortality rates and complications of pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum. This increases the risk of cervical cancer because sexual intercourse is carried out when the anatomy of the cervical cells is not yet mature. Increases infant morbidity and mortality.; Psychological maturity has not been achieved, so families have difficulty actualizing a quality family; from a social point of view, marriage reduces the freedom of self-development; reducing the opportunity to continue education to a higher level; the existence of conflicts in the family opens up opportunities to seek social escape outside the home, thereby increasing the risk of using alcohol, drugs and free sex; the high divorce rates.

Statement of the Problem/Justification

Literature revealed that divorce in marriage had become prevalent and societal problem in African countries, leading to dropouts in schools, child abandonment, an increasing number of adolescent prostitutes, the early splintering of marriages and a mounting rate of sexual transmitted diseases, particularly among girl-child. Scholars have also established that divorce among women is an ancient practice that affects the physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional and educational aspects of individuals engaged in it.

Additionally, the high rate of divorce among Muslims in Ebiraland is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes. The problem is further compounded by the potential consequences of divorce on individuals, families and the community as a whole. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the factors contributing to this trend and explore potential solutions.

Objectives/Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess the factors contributing to the high rate of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland. The study aims to identify the key factors influencing marital instability in this community and explore the relationship between Islamic teachings and attitudes towards marriage and divorce.

- i. to examine the primary factors contributing to the rising rate of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland;
- ii. to evaluate on how do social, economic and cultural dynamics influence marital instability in this community;
- iii. to examine the effects of divorce on the divorcees, their children and the society at large; and
- iv. to state the roles played by Islamic scholars in the teachings and shaping attitudes towards marriage sanctity and divorce in Ebiraland

Research Questions

- i. what are the primary factors contributing to the rising rate of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland;
- ii. how do social, economic and cultural dynamics influence marital instability in the community;
- iii. what are the effects of divorce on the divorcees, their children and the society at large; and
- iv. what are the roles played by Islamic scholars in the teachings and shaping attitudes towards marriage sanctity and divorce in Ebiraland

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study:

- H0₁: There is no significant relationship between the factors contributing to divorce and the rising rate of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland.
- H0₂: There is no significant relationship between the roles of Islamic scholars and marital stability among Muslim families in Ebiraland.

Significance of the Study

This study would provide valuable insights into the complex issues surrounding divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland. The findings suggested strategies for promoting marital stability and supporting families in this community. Additionally, the study would contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by Muslim communities as a result of rising cases of divorce in Nigeria and the importance of addressing these issues through a number of culturally sensitive approaches.

Scope and Limitation of the study

The study was carried out in the five Local Government Areas in Ebiraland. Three Hundred and eighty-five Muslims, both male and female were randomly selected as representative sampled for the study. The researcher experienced some constraints which include the time frame for the study and accessibility of the respondents.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarifications

This aspect of the paper reviews the work of some scholars who have carried out researches on divorce cases in matrimonial homes, likewise the effects of divorce on children, divorcees and societal implication.

Meaning of Marriage

Marriage is one of the oldest socially recognized institution and essential for the procreation of children and satisfaction of our sexual urges. Throughout the world, marriage is been regarded as a moment of celebration and milestone in adult life. Sadly, the practice of early

marriage gives no such cause for celebration. All too often, the imposition of a marriage partner upon a girl-child means that a girl-child-hood is cut short and her fundamental rights are compromised (United Nations International Children Education Fund, 2013, Quiroya and Murphy, 2014). Young girls are robbed of their youth and require taking on roles for which they are not psychologically or physically prepared. Many have no choice about the timing of marriage while others are too young to make an informed decision. Premature marriage deprives them of the opportunity for personal development as well as their rights to full reproductive health and wellbeing, education and participation in civic life. The international women's Decades, 1975 till date, had endeavoured to crystallize the status of women, particularly in education which was seen as being inadequate. The 2015 Nairobi conference aimed at examining the basic needs of African and Asian women, who constitute the bulk of the world's female population. Abdal'Ati, (2012) states that divorce is the dissolution of (an unhappy) marriage which serves as a preventative measure against the breach of peace in the society. He further mentioned that divorce, thought permissible in Islam, is one of the most detestable in the sight of Allah, according to the Prophet (PBUH). Zakariyya (2018), states that a man is expected to be able to handle technically, of controlling his temper, emotions and personal reactions if upset about big or small issues in life, especially in terms of disputes with his wife. The husband should never seek divorce as a first solution to end his daily suffering with his wife. Heffeman et al (2012) argued vehemently that divorce among adults signifies the loss of an intimate relationship that also brought security and support. It also signifies a loss of hopes and dreams as well as normal feelings which could result to failure. Although there may be relief over the divorce, being alone also brings fear, anxiety, loneliness and guilt, especially if there are children involved. Furthermore, the negative impact of the Western world in the African continent, negative impact of movies and a husband who cannot fully bear the family's financial burden find it difficult to control their wives (Daily Trust, 2017). It has been observed that higher ages at marriage are typically thought of as an indicator of female autonomy in Africa; education is positively associated with the occurrence of divorce among women.

Adedikun (2018) states that educated women are more likely to embrace new ideas about marriage which at times resulted in divorce. She stressed the point that as the passion of sexual interaction may emerge; spouses may wish to end unexciting marriage in favour of relationship that will provide renewed excitement. She, however, opines that increasing participation of educated women in the labour force may reduce their dependence on men (Q.2:38-54). Jones (2010) observes that there is increasing ages at marriage to a greater degree of self-arrangement of marriages and that is considered a powerful mechanism of declining divorce rates. Olaofe (2013), attempts to clear the misconceptions by Muslims and others about the triple pronouncement of Talaq". The main point of her article is that Talaq (Divorce) is strongly condemned by Islam. In case of difficulties within a marriage that the husband and wife cannot solve by themselves, reputable arbiters or conciliators should be appointed to resolve the matter as prescribed in the Qur'an: "And if you fear a breach between the two and then appoint judge from his people and a judge from her people; if they both desire agreement, Allah will effect harmony between them, surely Allah is ever knowing and Acquainted (with all things) ". (Q.4:35). Doi (2013) mention that, for the divorce to be valid it is necessary that the husband should be sane ('aqil), not a minor (bulugh) and be capable of using his own discretion as argued by (Mukhtar, 2016).

Bala (2010), states that the wife must fully recover from the menses of the regular menstruation and the usual postnatal fluxes, whose maximum time spans are about ten and forty days respectively. He further states that the wife, in addition, must not have intercourse at any time during this period of fresh purity, which covers the whole interim between the monthly courses after recovery and purity, therefore, the wife's state is considered impure and

there can be no (acceptable) Sunnah divorce. Under these circumstances, a divorce pronouncement is religiously forbidden but legally valid. Many scholars link divorce and separation to different levels of stress. These perspectives state that family dysfunctions are extremely stressful on children and adults, (Amato, 2011). Numerous studies show that there are lasting psychological effects for adults from divorce. They have been shown to be unhappy and have lower levels of self-esteem.

Mernissi (2013), the worse of divorce is to pronounce it three times in one stretch. He goes on to say, it is against the Islamic Shari'ah and invites a number of problems and difficulties for both of the spouses and their respective families including children. Thus, the maintenance of a stable home is the goal of Islam. And so, Islam encourages reconciliation between spouses whenever there is any misunderstanding and this is why even when divorced, the woman is to stay in the man's house during the iddah (waiting period) during which she is entitled as of right to accommodation and maintenance at the husband's expense. It is also possible that reconciliation may take place. In any case, ample time is at their disposal to reconsider the whole situation. Divorce will not be resorted while all steps of reconciliation have failed. Divorce is a word used for the cessation of the marriage contract. There are different ways of bringing a marriage contract to an end. Some are lawful, some are not. Divorce as a last resort, if all effort was not resolved the issue, with that Allah allows divorce through a laid down procedure. Allah (SWT) states in the (Qur'an 4:130). Talaq is considered in Islam to be a reprehensible means of divorce. The initial declaration of Talaq is a revocable repudiation (Talaq Raj'ah) which does not terminate the marriage. The husband can revoke the repudiation at any time during the waiting period (iddah) which lasts three full menstrual cycles. The waiting period is intended to give the couple an opportunity for reconciliation and also a means to ensure that the wife is not pregnant. Resumption of sexual relations automatically retracts the repudiation. The wife retains all her rights during the waiting period. The divorce becomes final when the waiting period expires. This is called a "minor" divorce (al-baynuna al-sughra) and the couples can remarry. If the husband repudiates his wife for the third time, it triggers a "major" divorce (al-baynuna al-kubra), after which the couple cannot remarry without an intervening consummated marriage to another man. This is known as Tahlil or Nikah Halala. Making the third pronouncement irrevocable prevents the husband from using repeated declarations and revocations of divorce as a means of pressuring his wife into making financial concessions in order to "purchase her freedom". It also acts as a deterrent to rash repudiations.

Causes of Marriage Dissolution in the society

Marriage dissolution increases the rate of incrimination to society in the sense that the offspring of divorces are mostly relegated or denied as a result of divorce. There is a great tendency to join a bad group such as drug addicts, armed robbers, etc. thus slowing down the rapid development, since resources that could be used to boost development is rather channelled to curbs the rate of crime in society. This can be defined as the dissolution of (an unhappy) marriage. Maintenance of a stable home is the goal of Islam. And so, Islam encourages reconciliation between spouses whenever there is any misunderstanding and this is why even when divorced, Dissolution can be sought for reason of sterility and barrenness. It can further expatiate for instance in case of neglect partner must have deserted for up to three years. Cruelty can be in nature of physical pain or mental agency. In the case of desertion is mostly happen and practice by the Muslims in Borno and Yobe State without knowing its implication. While from the Islamic perspective, Muslim may seek for reconciliation and if not, one of the spouses who have been offended after four (4) Months may seek court order either to cohabit with or to be divorced.

Barrenness

In the Nigerian society, reproduction is one of the vital functions of marriage. Hence when the spouses are faced with childlessness due to barrenness or impotence it creates disharmony and unhappiness in the home which ultimately leads to marriage dissolution. According to Johnson (1988), opined that some mother-in-law turn matrimonial homes into the battleground. In this case, the mother-in-law is the architect of the breaking up between husband and wife, in fact, the unnecessary interference of mother-in-laws might lead to the marriage dissolution.

Incompatibility

It is another cause of marriage dissolution, when spouses find themselves ultimately incompatible socially, sexually, behaviourally or otherwise might results in the dissolution of the marriage. "Incompatibility" in behaviour such as if one of the partners is a chief with the wizard some found it difficult to pull him/her out of the problem, this leads to marriage dissolution. This is mainly happening to the Muslims in Ebiraland. However, under Islamic perspective, it has no huge problem with incompatibility as stated above. However, a woman sought advice as a result of unsatisfactory sexual intercourse. Inability of sexual intercourse brings about divorce where there is no understanding and sexual satisfaction between the couples, each partner continues to find fault of one another. Hence the only way to set each other free from intolerable condition is to seek for divorce.

Misunderstanding

A woman or man may seek divorce from one another after years of marriage because they do not tolerate one another on the ground of constant fight, molestation and lack of adherence to responsibilities of marriage each other.

Adultery

It is another cause of divorce; it is a situation where one of the couples indulges extra marital affairs outside the Home and eventually if the husband or wife can no longer tolerate it. A man seeks for divorce because his wife brings her boyfriend into their matrimonial home.

Economic Hardship

The present economy situation has increased rate of divorce in most Nigerian families when the income of the husband is no longer enough to sustain the spouses and their offspring the result is divorce, particularly when the marriage, has been an unhappy one. Kuppuswamy (2020) has reported cruelty, sexual defects, childlessness and infidelity as the major causes of divorce. Johnson (2018) diagnosed the causes of divorce as interference and ill-treatment from in-laws and family members, infidelity, economic distress, personal defects, vices, incompatibility, impotence, poor living condition.

General Implication of Divorce on the Society

The following are the causes of rampant cases of divorce in society and its effects and causes Socio-economic and religious uncertain in the country. Children from a broken home are not well catered for educationally, morally, mentally and physically, they lack proper upbringing and constitute armed robbery and other dubious minded people in our society. These children instead of contributing to the growth and progress of the nation in all its ramifications, the thing would stand as "a clog in the wheel of progress of the society. Divorce was caused by wife's irritable temperament alone or husband's domineering nature alone. Further, the factors affecting divorce rate are not necessarily the same which contribute to marital failure, since divorce is merely the opening of the doors of escape from failure. It is a symptom of failure

in marriage. However, the causes of the disruption of unhappy marriages are described by Baber and some other sociologists (Baber, 1937) have also given the same arguments. In addition, the causes of divorce have imposed in the society at large, for instance, they sometimes constitute a nuisance by the indulging in promiscuous sex which may bear the spread of sexually related disease like, Aids Gonorrhea dilution, etc. The woman is to stay in the man's house during the iddah which, she is entitled as of a right, to accommodation and maintenance at the husband expense. It is also possible reconciliation may take place. In any case, ample time is at their disposal to reconsider the whole situation. Furthermore, Islam tends to make a realistic and sympathetic view of human affairs and thus stresses on the happiness of both spouses. If a husband and wife cannot live happily together in peace and harmony and are not satisfied with their matrimonial life, in the sense that they have physical, emotional and sexual problems with each other, the Qur'an prescribes to them divorce only if the problems are severe. Allah says: But if they disagree and must part, Allah will provide abundance for all from His all-reaching bounty. For Allah is He who cares for all and is wise" (Q.4:130). Also, the Qur'an States;

If a wife fears cruelty or desertion on her husband's part, there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves and such settlement is best, even though men's souls are swayed by greed but if ye do good and practice self a restraint, Allah is well acquainted with all that ye do. (Q.4:128).

Sadat et' al (2014), argued that when divorce occurs, the man has the option to reclaim his wife to the exclusion of all men within the period of iddah (waiting period). If after the iddah, the couple could not reconcile the wife leaves the matrimonial home and the husband loses his right of automatic recall. A new suitor, as well as the former husband, may make fresh marriage proposals which the woman is absolutely free to accept or reject. After the third talaq, however, he loses this option of return of the wife and he cannot remarry the wife until she consummated the marriage with another husband and the new husband willingly divorces her. The Qur'an States; "The divorce is twice, after that, either you retain her on reasonable terms or release her with kindness. And it is not lawful for you (men) to take back (from your wives) any of your Mahr (bridal money given by husband to his wife at the time of marriage) which you have given them, except when both parties fear that they would be unable to keep the limits ordained by Allah (e.g to deal with each on a fair basis) then there is no sin on either of them if she gives back (the Mahr or a part of it) for her Al khul (divorce). These are the limits ordained by Allah, do not transgress the limits ordained by Allah, then such are the Zalimun (wrong-doers)" (Q.2:229). Divorce is regarded as a moral, self-correcting and self-restricting act. Some men, however, ignore these rules in the Islamic law of divorce due to negative influences and lack of proper Islamic knowledge and practices. The Shari'ah provision works towards reducing and checking divorces between the period of menstruation and purity; there is a high possibility of reconciliation even though some men do not understand the wisdom behind the Sunnah divorce. Abdal'Ati explains the virtues or reason of the Sunnah divorce in the following ways: Firstly, divorce during menstruation is called by the Qur'an hurt; its term is a difficult time of fatigue depression, irritability and tension, etc. Much of this is due to the wife physical condition, which makes her sexually both unserious and undesirable and also to the husband's unfulfilled needs. Intercourse is forbidden during all such times of impurity. All these factors may lead some parties to act hastily and misjudged each other. It is required; therefore, that they wait for these periodical difficulties to pass and then act if they must under normal conditions. Secondly, when the wife enters her period of purity, she is usefully fresh and pleasantly, compensable, desirous and desirable, more considerate and responsive. She has not only the capacity but also the opportunity to

strengthen the marriage tie and command the husband's love of compassion and devotion (Abdal'ati, 2012). However, if in spite of this there is a desire to dissolve the marriage; it will be, presumably, for some serious reasons other than passing fatigue, momentary depression or casual unfulfillment (Abdal'ati, 2012).

Halilu (2016) stated that a number of factors could be responsible for this recent proliferation of divorces (talaqs) which has resulted in so many broken homes and shattered families. According to him, lack of proper Islamic education is one big factor. Other factors include lack of fear of Allah, selfishness, hard-heartedness, callousness, uncompromising attitude as well as the devastating effect of Western culture and tradition on Muslim marriages. He added that the inability to handle the pressures of marriage an escapist attitude is a major factor. Anger is another dangerous factor. He accuses parents, families, elders and the wider community as they adopt an unusual attitude and hardly bring any pressure on the warring couple to come together and resolve their differences. He points out that to save marriages, Islam has actually permitted the speaking of "White lies" (laying capable of keeping the couple together) if that will bring about some degree of reconciliation in the couple. He concludes by giving some solutions to the problem such as large-scale educational programs on matrimonial matters. Spiritual programs that contribute towards Allah's consciousness and fear of accountability are absolutely imperative and need to be increased in the minds of the people. Attitudes and conduct (Islah-Nafs) according to him are an urgent need. A decadent lifestyle and Western values have to be shunned and spurned as suggested by (Halilu, 2016) in his study.

Other Factors Contributing to Rising Divorce Rates in the society

- 1. Economic Independence of Women:** The empowerment of Muslim women through education and employment have enabled them to seek financial independence. According to Al-Hibri (2011), economic self-sufficiency allows women to leave abusive or unsatisfactory marriages, whereas earlier generations lacked this option.
- 2. Legal Reforms and Awareness of Rights:** Many Muslim-majority countries have reformed family law to protect women's rights in marriage and divorce. For instance, the introduction of khula (a woman's right to initiate divorce) in countries like Pakistan and Egypt has empowered women to dissolve marriages without their husband's consent (Husseini, 2015).
- 3. Changing social Norms:** Traditional norms that discouraged divorce are weakening. As noted by Anwar (2018), younger generations prioritize personal happiness and compatibility over societal expectations, leading to higher divorce rates.
- 4. Domestic Violence and Marital Discord:** Studies indicate that domestic violence is a significant factor in divorce cases among Muslim women. Research by Uthman, (2010) highlights that women are no longer willing to tolerate abuse, citing religious and legal grounds to seek separation.
- 5. Mismatched Expectations:** Modern marriages often face challenges due to unrealistic expectations or lack of communication. As per Ali (2017), he states that couples entering marriage without proper understanding of responsibilities often experience conflicts, leading to divorce.
- 6. Societal and religious perspectives:** The rising rates have elicited mixed reactions.

Conservative factions argue that divorce undermines family stability, while progressive scholars view it as a necessary mechanism for justice. The Prophet (SAW) said: “Of all the permitted things, divorce is the most hated by Allah”(Sunan Abu Dawood) However, Islam also prioritizes justice and dignity. Scholar like (Wadud, 2016) argued that divorce, when justified, is a means to protect individuals from harm and injustice.

Empirical Studies

A recent study by Akinyemi et al. (2025), examined the trends and socio-economic determinants of divorce among married women in Nigeria using pooled data from the 2008, 2013 and 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Surveys (NDHS). The study adopted a quantitative research design based on nationally representative secondary data collected from women aged 15–49 years. Logistic regression analysis was employed to identify the predictors of divorce among married women. The findings revealed that household economic status, educational attainment, age at marriage, region of residence, employment status and religious affiliation significantly influenced the likelihood of divorce among married women. Women experiencing economic hardship and unstable household conditions were more likely to experience marital dissolution. The study concluded that improving socio-economic conditions and strengthening family support systems could substantially reduce divorce rates among Nigerian women. Nzewuji, Uche and Uche (2024) investigated the psychosocial factors that promote marital stability among married couples in Southeast Nigeria. The researchers employed a descriptive survey design involving married couples selected through multistage sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. The findings showed that effective communication, emotional maturity, mutual respect, conflict resolution skills, trust and social support significantly enhanced marital stability. Couples who demonstrated strong interpersonal relationships were less likely to experience marital conflict and divorce. The researchers recommended continuous marriage education and counselling programmes for couples. Essien, George and Modo (2025) examined premarital pregnancy, prolonged cohabitation and religious rules as predictors of marital dissolution among divorcees in Nigeria. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design involving 753 divorcees selected through convenience sampling. Data were analysed using simple linear regression. The findings revealed that premarital pregnancy, prolonged cohabitation and marriages entered primarily because of religious obligations significantly predicted marital dissolution. Religious rules explained approximately 35.5% of the variation in marital dissolution among the respondents. The authors recommended strengthening premarital counselling and marriage education programmes to reduce divorce rates.

Hamid and Sanusi (2016) investigated the causes and negative effects of divorce among Muslim women in Northern Nigeria. The study employed documentary analysis, Sharia court records and Islamic legal literature to examine divorce practices among Muslims. The findings showed that impatience, lack of proper Islamic knowledge, economic hardship, extra-marital affairs, poor communication and family interference constituted the major causes of divorce among Muslim women. The study further revealed that divorce contributes to poverty, emotional trauma, child neglect, social instability and psychological distress among affected families. The authors recommended increased Islamic marriage counselling and public enlightenment programmes.

The reviewed empirical studies indicate that divorce is influenced by a combination of socio-economic, psychological, cultural, religious and interpersonal factors. Economic hardship, inadequate communication, changing social values, family interference, weak conflict resolution skills and insufficient marriage preparation consistently emerged as major predictors of marital instability. Existing studies also established that divorce has serious

consequences for spouses, children and society, while marriage counselling and religious education are effective mechanisms for promoting marital stability. However, none of the reviewed studies specifically examined the rising cases of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland, North Central Nigeria, nor did they comprehensively assess the role of Islamic scholars in shaping attitudes towards marriage and divorce. This contextual and geographical gap justifies the present study.

Theoretical Framework

Social Exchange Theory

The Social Exchange Theory was originally developed by George C. Homans (1958) and later expanded by Peter M. Blau (1964) and Richard M. Emerson (1976). The theory is based on the assumption that social relationships, including marriage, are maintained when the perceived rewards outweigh the perceived costs. Individuals evaluate their relationships by comparing the benefits they receive with the sacrifices they make. Where the costs become excessive and the expected rewards diminish, dissatisfaction increases, making separation or divorce more likely. According to Homans (1958), every interpersonal relationship involves an exchange process in which individuals seek to maximize rewards while minimizing losses. In marital relationships, rewards may include love, companionship, emotional support, financial security, mutual respect, sexual satisfaction and successful child upbringing. Conversely, costs may include persistent conflicts, economic hardship, domestic violence, infidelity, emotional neglect, poor communication, interference from extended family members and lack of mutual understanding. When spouses perceive that the costs of remaining in the marriage exceed its benefits, they may decide to terminate the relationship through divorce. Blau (1964) extended the theory by arguing that human interactions are sustained when individuals perceive fairness, reciprocity and equity within relationships. Marriage therefore survives where husbands and wives fulfill their respective obligations and where mutual trust, commitment and satisfaction exist. However, where one partner consistently experiences injustice, exploitation, or dissatisfaction, the marital relationship becomes unstable and vulnerable to dissolution. The theory further explains that changes in social and economic conditions influence marital decisions. The increasing educational attainment of women, improved employment opportunities, financial independence, legal protection of women's rights and changing societal values have altered the balance of marital exchanges in many societies. Women who are economically independent may no longer remain in abusive or persistently unhappy marriages simply because of financial dependence. Consequently, divorce becomes a rational alternative where marital expectations are consistently unmet. Within Islamic society, however, marriage is not merely a contractual exchange but also a sacred institution founded upon mutual love (*Mawaddah*), mercy (*Rahmah*) and tranquillity (*Sakinah*) as prescribed in the Qur'an (Qur'an 30:21). Although Islam permits divorce, it regards it as the last option after reconciliation efforts have failed. Thus, while Social Exchange Theory explains marital behaviour from a sociological perspective, Islamic teachings introduce moral and religious obligations that encourage patience, reconciliation, forgiveness and conflict resolution before divorce is considered.

The Social Exchange Theory is highly relevant to this study because it explains why the increasing cases of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland may result from the imbalance between marital expectations and actual experiences. Economic hardship, extra-marital affairs, poor communication, domestic violence, interference from in-laws, lack of Islamic marital knowledge and changing social values reduce the perceived rewards of marriage while increasing its costs. Consequently, spouses may consider divorce as a means of escaping persistent dissatisfaction. The theory also supports the study's objective of examining how social, economic and cultural dynamics influence marital instability.

Furthermore, it explains why Islamic scholars' counselling, mediation and religious teachings may strengthen marital relationships by increasing understanding, reducing conflict, restoring trust and encouraging reconciliation among couples. Therefore, the Social Exchange Theory provides an appropriate theoretical foundation for understanding both the causes of divorce and the mechanisms for promoting marital stability among Muslim families in Ebiraland.

Social Exchange Theory is adopted as the principal theoretical framework for this study because it directly explains the decisions spouses make regarding marital stability and divorce based on perceived rewards and costs within marriage. The theory adequately explains how economic hardship, infidelity, poor communication, family interference and changing social values contribute to marital dissatisfaction and eventual divorce. It also complements the Islamic perspective by demonstrating how counselling, reconciliation and improved marital relationships can restore the benefits of marriage and reduce the incidence of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. According to Nworgu (2015), a descriptive survey is appropriate when the objective of the research is to collect data from a defined population and describe the prevailing conditions, practices, or opinions. This design was considered suitable because the study seeks to investigate the rising cases of divorce among Muslim women relying on the perceptions and experiences of Muslims in Okene Local Government Area. Since the entire population of Muslims in Okene Local Government could not be studied exhaustively due to its size, a representative sample was determined. The population of Okene LGA is estimated at 320,260 people (National Population Commission, 2006), with Muslims forming the majority. Based on this, the sample size was determined using (Morgan's 1970) table, which recommends a sample size of approximately 384 respondents for populations of 100,000 and above at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. This estimate is consistent with the result obtained from (Yamane's 1967) formula, which also yields a sample size of approximately 399 for a population of 100,000 at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Therefore, a sample size of 385 respondents was adopted for the study, as it ensures that the findings are reliable and generalizable to the entire Muslim population of Okene Local Government Area

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprises Muslim residents of Okene Local Government Area of Kogi State. According to the National Population Commission (2006), Okene LGA had an estimated population of about 320,260 people, with Muslims forming the overwhelming majority. The population is diverse, cutting across different age groups, educational levels, marital statuses and socio-economic backgrounds. For the purpose of this study, particular attention was given to groups who are directly affected by or knowledgeable about Divorce, its causes and consequences in Islamic law. These include:

- i. Married and divorced Muslim men and women.
- ii. Islamic scholars ('Ulamāu').
- iii. Legal practitioners familiar with Islamic family law
- iv. Community leaders with insight into marital practices

This population was considered appropriate because it represents those who either experience the practice of Divorce or are responsible for interpreting and applying Islamic marital laws in Okene LGA. The population comprised of all parents and Islam Scholars in Kogi State. The researchers decided to use Okene, Adavi, Okehi, Ajaokuta and Ogori-Magongo Metropolis that are Ebira Tao speaking language. Random sampling technique was used to 385 Muslims and Islamic Scholars as respondents for the study.

Data Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected from the respondents on the assessment of the rising cases of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland of North Central Nigeria. A total of 385 questionnaires were administered to respondents comprising married Muslim men and women, divorced persons, Islamic scholars ('Ulamā'), community leaders and legal practitioners knowledgeable in Islamic family law. All the questionnaires were correctly completed and returned, representing a 100% response rate. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics comprising frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. A criterion mean of 2.50 served as the benchmark for accepting or rejecting questionnaire items.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 4.1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	214	55.6
Female	171	44.4
Total	385	100.0

The result indicates that 214 (55.6%) of the respondents were males, while 171 (44.4%) were females. This implies that both genders were adequately represented, thereby providing balanced opinions on the causes and effects of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland.

Table 4.2: Distribution by Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Married	235	61.0
Divorced	82	21.3
Widowed	28	7.3
Single	40	10.4
Total	385	100.0

The result shows that the majority of respondents (61.0%) were married, while divorced respondents constituted 21.3%. This distribution provided reliable responses from persons with practical marital experiences.

Research Question One

What are the primary factors contributing to the rising rate of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland?

Table 4.3: Primary Factors Contributing to Divorce

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Impatience between spouses contributes to divorce.	3.48	0.61	Accepted
2	Economic hardship increases marital instability.	3.56	0.57	Accepted
3	Extra-marital affairs contribute to divorce.	3.63	0.52	Accepted
4	Interference from in-laws contributes to divorce.	3.27	0.71	Accepted
5	Lack of proper Islamic knowledge contributes to divorce.	3.44	0.64	Accepted
	Grand Mean	3.48		

The findings in Table 4.3 reveal that respondents generally agreed that several factors contribute significantly to the rising rate of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland, as indicated by the grand mean score of 3.48, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50. Respondents strongly agreed that economic hardship (Mean = 3.56), extra-marital affairs (Mean = 3.63), impatience between spouses (Mean = 3.48), inadequate Islamic knowledge (Mean = 3.44) and interference from in-laws (Mean = 3.27) are major contributors to marital

instability. The findings suggest that both socio-economic and behavioural factors play important roles in the increasing divorce rate among Muslim families.

Research Question Two

How do social, economic and cultural dynamics influence marital instability in the community?

Table 4.4: Influence of Social, Economic and Cultural Dynamics

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Poverty contributes to frequent marital conflicts.	3.59	0.54	Accepted
2	Western cultural influence affects marital stability.	3.18	0.73	Accepted
3	Women's economic independence influences divorce decisions.	3.06	0.77	Accepted
4	Poor communication between couples increases marital conflicts.	3.54	0.59	Accepted
5	Changing societal expectations contribute to divorce.	3.29	0.68	Accepted
Grand Mean		3.33		

The findings presented in Table 4.4 indicate that respondents agreed that social, economic and cultural dynamics significantly influence marital instability among Muslim families in Ebiraland, with a grand mean score of 3.33. Respondents agreed that poverty (Mean = 3.59), poor communication (Mean = 3.54), changing societal expectations (Mean = 3.29), western cultural influence (Mean = 3.18) and women's economic independence (Mean = 3.06) all contribute to increasing marital instability. These findings imply that divorce is influenced not only by personal differences but also by broader socio-economic and cultural transformations within society.

Research Question Three

What are the effects of divorce on the divorcees, their children and the society at large?

Table 4.5: Effects of Divorce on Divorcees, Children and Society

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Divorce exposes children to emotional and psychological trauma.	3.66	0.49	Accepted
2	Divorce contributes to poor parental care and child neglect.	3.52	0.58	Accepted
3	Divorce increases economic hardship among affected families.	3.41	0.65	Accepted
4	Divorce contributes to juvenile delinquency and other social vices.	3.36	0.67	Accepted
5	Divorce weakens family stability and social cohesion within the community.	3.47	0.61	Accepted
Grand Mean		3.48		

The findings presented in Table 4.5 reveal that respondents agreed that divorce has significant adverse effects on divorcees, children and the society at large, as indicated by the grand mean score of 3.48, which exceeds the criterion mean of 2.50. Respondents strongly agreed that divorce exposes children to emotional and psychological trauma (Mean = 3.66), contributes to poor parental care and child neglect (Mean = 3.52), increases economic hardship among affected families (Mean = 3.41), promotes juvenile delinquency and other social vices (Mean = 3.36) and weakens family stability and social cohesion (Mean = 3.47). These findings imply that the consequences of divorce extend beyond the couple to negatively affect children, extended families and the wider community.

Research Question Four

What are the roles played by Islamic scholars in the teachings and shaping attitudes towards marriage sanctity and divorce in Ebiraland?

Table 4.6: Roles of Islamic Scholars in Promoting Marriage Stability

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Islamic scholars organize marriage counselling programmes for intending couples.	3.42	0.64	Accepted
2	Islamic scholars regularly teach the rights and responsibilities of spouses.	3.55	0.56	Accepted
3	Islamic scholars mediate during marital conflicts before divorce occurs.	3.47	0.60	Accepted
4	Islamic scholars create awareness on the Islamic procedures governing divorce.	3.63	0.50	Accepted
5	Continuous religious education promotes marital stability among Muslim families.	3.59	0.54	Accepted
Grand Mean		3.53		

The findings in Table 4.6 indicate that respondents agreed that Islamic scholars play important roles in promoting marriage stability and reducing divorce among Muslim families in Ebiraland, as reflected by the grand mean score of 3.53. Respondents agreed that Islamic scholars provide premarital counselling (Mean = 3.42), educate couples on marital rights and obligations (Mean = 3.55), mediate during marital disputes (Mean = 3.47), enlighten the public on Islamic divorce procedures (Mean = 3.63) and promote continuous religious education (Mean = 3.59). These findings suggest that Islamic scholars remain central to strengthening family values and encouraging peaceful conflict resolution within Muslim communities.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between the factors contributing to divorce and the rising rate of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland.

Table 4.7: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis

Variables	N	r	p-value	Decision
Factors Contributing to Divorce Rising Rate of Divorce	385	0.742	0.000	Reject H ₀₁

The result presented in Table 4.7 shows that the Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient between the factors contributing to divorce and the rising rate of divorce among Muslim women was $r = 0.742$, with a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is less than the **0.05** level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between the identified causal factors and the increasing rate of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between the roles of Islamic scholars and marital stability among Muslim families in Ebiraland.

Table 4.8: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis

Variables	N	r	p-value	Decision
Roles of Islamic Scholars Marital Stability	385	0.781	0.000	Reject H ₀₂

The result presented in Table 4.8 indicates that the Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient between the roles of Islamic scholars and marital stability was $r = 0.781$, with a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that the activities of Islamic scholars significantly influence marital stability among Muslim families in Ebiraland. Their teachings, counselling services, mediation efforts and religious guidance contribute meaningfully to reducing marital conflicts and promoting stable family relationships.

Summary of Findings

Based on the analysis of data collected from 385 respondents, the following findings emerged:

1. The study established that several factors are responsible for the rising cases of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland. The respondents identified economic hardship, extra-marital affairs, impatience between spouses, inadequate knowledge of Islamic marital principles and interference from in-laws as the major factors responsible for marital instability.
2. The findings revealed that social, economic and cultural dynamics significantly influence marital instability in Ebiraland. Respondents agreed that poverty, poor communication between spouses, changing societal expectations, Western cultural influence and women's economic independence have contributed to the increasing rate of divorce.
3. The study found that divorce has significant adverse consequences on divorcees, children and society. Respondents agreed that divorce exposes children to emotional trauma, increases child neglect, contributes to economic hardship, encourages juvenile delinquency and other social vices and weakens family cohesion.
4. The findings further revealed that Islamic scholars play significant roles in promoting marital stability in Ebiraland. Respondents agreed that scholars provide premarital counselling, educate couples on Islamic marital obligations, mediate during marital conflicts, create awareness on Islamic divorce procedures and promote continuous religious education.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that economic hardship, extra-marital affairs, impatience, inadequate Islamic knowledge and interference from extended family members constitute the major factors responsible for the increasing cases of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that these factors undermine marital harmony and contribute significantly to family instability. The finding corroborates the work of Adeyemi (2023), who reported that financial challenges, poor communication and infidelity remain among the leading causes of marital dissolution in Northern Nigeria. Similarly, Kamil (2024) observed that inadequate preparation for marriage and weak adherence to Islamic marital principles frequently result in marital conflict and eventual divorce. The implication is that both socio-economic and religious factors jointly determine the stability of Muslim marriages.

The study also established that social, economic and cultural dynamics significantly influence marital instability. Poverty, changing social values, poor communication, women's economic empowerment and the influence of Western culture were identified as important contributors

to divorce. These findings agree with Opesemowo and Odumosu (2023), who argued that changing cultural values and increasing educational attainment have transformed marital expectations among contemporary Muslim families. Likewise, Nadda (2018) maintained that socio-economic pressures and domestic conflicts are major predictors of marital dissolution in developing societies. The findings suggest that marriage in contemporary society is increasingly influenced by broader social transformations beyond traditional family structures. Another important finding of the study is that divorce produces serious psychological, economic, educational and social consequences for divorcees, children and the larger society. Respondents agreed that divorce increases emotional trauma among children, weakens parental care, encourages juvenile delinquency and contributes to social instability. This finding is consistent with UNICEF (2021), which reported that family instability adversely affects children's emotional well-being, educational attainment and social adjustment. Similarly, Onuoha (2021) observed that children raised in unstable homes often experience psychological distress, poor academic performance and behavioural challenges. These findings demonstrate that the consequences of divorce extend beyond the spouses and affect community development. The study further revealed that Islamic scholars play indispensable roles in promoting marital stability through premarital counselling, public enlightenment, conflict mediation and continuous religious education. Respondents agreed that religious leaders contribute significantly to reducing marital conflicts by educating couples on Islamic teachings relating to marriage and divorce. This finding supports Pongoliu (2017), who emphasized that Islamic marriage is founded on *Sakinah* (tranquillity), *Mawaddah* (love) and *Rahmah* (mercy) and that continuous religious guidance strengthens these values. Likewise, Suryantoro and Taofiq (2021) maintained that effective Islamic counselling significantly reduces marital disputes and promotes peaceful family relationships. The results of the hypotheses further demonstrated significant relationships between the identified causes of divorce and the increasing divorce rate among Muslim women, as well as between the activities of Islamic scholars and marital stability. These findings imply that reducing the prevalence of divorce requires addressing both socio-economic challenges and strengthening Islamic family education. The findings are consistent with Social Action Theory, which emphasizes that individuals' behaviours are shaped by social interactions, cultural values and institutional influences. Consequently, effective interventions involving religious institutions, families, community leaders and government agencies are essential for promoting stable marriages and reducing the incidence of divorce among Muslim families in Ebiraland.

Conclusion

This study assessed the rising cases of divorce among Muslim women in Ebiraland of North Central Nigeria. The findings established that the increasing rate of divorce is influenced by multiple factors, including economic hardship, extra-marital affairs, inadequate Islamic knowledge, poor communication, impatience and interference from extended family members. These factors have significantly weakened marital stability within many Muslim households.

The study further revealed that divorce has profound consequences for divorcees, children, families and society by increasing emotional distress, economic hardship, child neglect and social instability. The findings equally demonstrated that Islamic scholars remain important agents in promoting marital harmony through counselling, mediation and religious education. The study therefore concludes that reducing the rising cases of divorce among Muslim women requires collaborative efforts involving Islamic scholars, families, community leaders, educational institutions and government agencies. Strengthening Islamic marital education, improving economic conditions, promoting effective communication within

families and expanding access to professional marriage counselling will contribute significantly to sustaining stable Muslim marriages in Ebiraland.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Islamic organizations and religious leaders should establish functional marriage counselling centres in all major communities across Ebiraland to provide premarital and post-marital counselling for Muslim couples.
2. Islamic scholars should intensify public enlightenment programmes on the Qur'anic and Prophetic teachings relating to marriage, family responsibilities, conflict resolution and divorce to improve marital understanding among couples.
3. Government and relevant stakeholders should introduce economic empowerment programmes, vocational training and poverty reduction initiatives aimed at reducing financial pressures that often contribute to marital instability.
4. Married couples should be encouraged to adopt effective communication, mutual respect, patience, forgiveness and peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms before considering divorce as an option.
5. Parents and extended family members should avoid unnecessary interference in marital affairs and instead encourage reconciliation, dialogue and peaceful settlement of disputes whenever conflicts arise.
6. Community leaders, Islamic organizations, educational institutions and civil society groups should collaborate to organize regular seminars, workshops and family life education programmes aimed at promoting stable marriages and reducing the increasing rate of divorce among Muslim families in Ebiraland.
7. Future researchers should extend similar studies to other ethnic and religious communities within Nigeria using larger populations and mixed-method research designs to generate broader evidence for policy formulation and family development programmes.

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