

Motivation for Union formation: A Case of Zambia

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Abstract Introduction: Marriage institution has been considered as an important institution in almost all societies. For a long time, the institution has been held in high esteem in most societies in both the developed and the developing countries. Despite marriage being considered as a culturally universal, its meaning and value has been changing over time and it has always differed from one society to another. Other societies such as Africa look at marriage as very important to one's life process while other societies, such as European societies, marriage is considered a personal issue based on an individual's desire to get into it. Increase in other family forms such as cohabitation and single parent families are some of the indicators showing that marriage is not perceived as important as it once was. In countries such as Zambia more people are getting married even when other societies are recording a decline in marriages as people opt for other forms of union such as cohabitation and single parent families. Based on this account, this paper seeks to understand the value or motivation for entering marriage in Zambia. **Methods:** The paper used a desk review approach to gather relevant literature to help address the paper's questions. The review focused on literature from around the world with much emphasis on Marriage in Africa and other parts of the world. This data was accessed from journal articles in Family Sociology and other relevant journals articles such as Cherlin's work on "Deinstitutionalization of American Marriage". **Results:** The results show that primarily both Africa and Europe had similar views for marriage. In both societies, marriage was initially considered very important and was thus held in high esteem such that entrance and exit from this form of union was highly regulated by social institutions such as religion and the state. The study also noted that due to industrialisation, economic and social development, family formation was affected as new forms of unions emerged coupled with weakening influence and importance of marriage on individuals. On the other hand, it seems in Africa, social structure still highly influences marriage even with increasing pressure from forces such as globalization, modernization and increase in technological advancements. **Conclusion:** In conclusion, marriage unions in Zambia and other African countries are not free from the impact of globalization and modernization. But unlike Europe, Africa is still entrenched in its old traditions, values and beliefs on marriage union. In the case of Zambia, it primarily fulfils the social obligations while personal fulfilment comes secondary. Those individuals who seek other forms of union are usually given negative sanctions such as lack of recognition as members of the community and in most cases are considered as deviants who are used as examples of bad behaviour in society. This in one-way clearly shows that societal demands compel individuals to get married.

Keywords: family, marriage, values, Africa, Europe, Zambia

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1. Introduction

Marriage belongs to the oldest and most widespread institution together with the family. For most people in different societies, this institution together with the family are considered to be very important elements of human development as well as for the social cohesion of society ([1]: 10). For this reason, the institution has been held in high esteem in most societies for a long period of time in both the developed and the developing countries. Despite marriage being considered as cultural universal, its meaning and value has been changing over time and it has always differed from one society to another. Other

societies such as Africa look at marriage as very important to one's life process while in other societies, such as European societies, marriage is considered a personal issue based on an individual's desire to get into it. This arrangement shows that marriage is viewed and valued differently in different societies. Increase in other family forms such as cohabitation and single parent families are some of the indicators showing that marriage is not perceived as very important as it once was. In countries such as Zambia more people are getting married even when other societies are recording a decline in marriages as people opt for other forms of union such as cohabitation and single parent families. Based on this account, this paper seeks to understand the value or motivation for entering marriage in Zambia. The paper also seeks to

understand the role of social norms in influencing individuals to marry. Using relevant literature in family sociology, the paper will attempt to address the above questions.

2. Background

Marriage, also known as matrimony, is a socially or ritually recognised union between spouses that established rights and obligations between those spouses, as well as between them and any resulting biological or adopted children and affinity [2]. The institution of marriage has existed in all cultures for a long period of time and each culture or society has a very good account of its origins and value to the respective societies. In Europe for example, the Christian era influenced marriages and how they were organized. During this period (16th century) marriages were based on mutual consent, declaration of intention to marry and upon the subsequent physical union of the parties (ibid). The church's huge influence on marriage regulated when and how people could enter and exit the marriage union. During this period the value of marriage union was highly emphasised on primarily its biological function to procreate. Marriage was viewed as biologically determined to address basically three needs: procreation and the rearing of children; the lengthy period of dependency of children on their parents; and the need for prolonged parental care and training ([3]: 15). Similarly, marriage in other societies was seen to serve these functions as well as classification of kin relationships ([3]:16). However, as argued by Chambers [3], marriage bonds and its importance started to weaken as it became clear that family bonds required social recognition rather than just relying on biological procreation. Furthermore, the changes in family structure and alternatives of marriage also contributed to the weakening of the values that were attached to marriage as a sacred union especially in developed regions such as Europe and United States of America [4]. This means that marriage shifted from being institutionalised to being individualistic and private. On the other hand, developing countries in regions such as Africa, still perceive marriage as it was in the early centuries despite the increasing pressure on marriage from new forms of union such as cohabitation and single parent families. Why is this the case?

3. Literature Review

Overall, many studies that have been done in different parts of the world on the subject of marriage and its value to society suggest that marriage is now situated in a very different and difficult context than in the past [4]. Since the mid twentieth century, studies show that the marriage institution has been faced with pressure from other forms of union that have emerged such as cohabitation and single parent families around the world [4,5]. But despite the changing meaning of marriage and its value to society, individuals have continued to get married in large numbers especially in the developing world such as Africa and Zambia in particular. Cherlin [4] argues that surveys conducted annually from 1976 show no decline in the

value individuals attach to marriage. It is further shown that having a good marriage and family is one of the important aspects of one's life [6]. For this reason, individuals still pursued marriage than cohabitation because of enforceable trust which could only be offered by marriage [7,8]. Cherlin further argues that marriage still requires a public commitment to a long-term or possibly a lifelong relationship. This commitment involves relatives, friends, and religious congregants who act as witnesses and supporters of the union. Cohabitation in contrast, requires only a private commitment, which is easier to break. Therefore, marriage more so than cohabitation, lowers the risk that one's partner will renege on agreements that have been made ([4]: 854). For this reason, individuals would choose to marry rather than cohabit because of this value or benefit marriage can offer. This can be seen in the increase in pro-marriage movements that emerged among gay and lesbians who sort the right to marriage [4]. This shows that despite the rapid changing family structure and the emergence of alternatives to marriage, marriage is still seen as an important aspect for people's lives in developed countries such as the USA.

On the other hand, Africa and Zambia in particular, have a different view on marriage. A view which has remained rooted in the social structures. Just like other societies, Zambia is also facing pressure on the changing family structure and emergence of alternatives to marriage but at a lesser extent when compared to developed countries. Adebusoeye ([9]: 5) argues that because of high levels of collectivism in African societies, marriage has not really reflected individual choice but social or collective requirement. Every member of African society is expected to marry in order to contribute to the survival and sustenance of the kinship networks and lineage. Unlike in other regions where marriage is seen as a personal fulfilment, marriage in Zambia and other African societies is basically a reflection of one fulfilling their societal function. For this reason, regardless of the ongoing changes in the family structure and emergence of new union forms, Zambia and other African societies have remained partially stable because of strong traditional beliefs guarding the institution of marriage and the huge emphasis on collective happiness rather than individual fulfilment. Despite the strong traditional beliefs regarding marriage in Zambia and Africa as a whole, studies have shown that marriage in Zambia and other African countries is facing pressure especially from modernization, industrialization and globalization. For example, Kalu ([10]:350) argued that this pressure from these three main social processes has brought about the need to adjust and redefine the roles and features of marriage in Zambia and other African countries experiencing social change.

As mentioned earlier, there are a number of reasons that have been presented by many scholars regarding why individuals get married around the world. One main argument has been that which was put forward by the mid twentieth century sociologists which argued that marriage was basically there to give children a link to the status of a man, right to protection and a claim to inherit property (Mair, 1971 cited by [4]). Furthermore, some evolutionary theorists have also argued that individuals got married in order to address the sexual needs of sexually wandering males (Tiger & Fox, 1971 cited by [4]). With reference to

the above and current changes in marriage meaning and definition, one would argue that certain societies have shifted the attention from it being an institutional issue to a more individual and personal arrangement. For this reason, one would argue that the value or motivation of individuals to marry has changed from an institutional level to individual level in most developed countries. Unlike in early centuries when individuals married to fulfil institutional obligations, individuals in most developed countries are making decisions on whether to enter a form of union or not for their own personal fulfilment. On the other hand, the picture in Africa and Zambia in particular looks different from the developed world scenario as getting married is seen as a very important event in which all members are obliged to consider.

The literature above shows that despite the pressure exerted on marriage by new forms of unions in both the developed and developing countries, individuals have continued to get married even if there are variations in the rates between regions. Various reasons have been put forward such as procreation, controlling sexual activity, and as a source of inheritance for children. But it is not really clear from the literature what the value or motivation for people to get married in Zambia is. It is not clear whether it is an individually driven process or a societal driven process.

4. Discussion

Zambia, like many other African countries, is influenced by strong traditional beliefs and values which regulate all spheres of life including entrance to marriage and family formation. For this reason, the essay in the following paragraphs will attempt to answer the questions raised earlier by presenting the various values that are believed to motivate individuals in Zambia and Africa at large to get married.

4.1. Value of Community and Kinship

In the African culture and tradition, marriage is seen as an important institution which is responsible for the continuation of the clan and maintenance of the kinship. This is because marriage in the Zambian and African context means an alliance between two families aimed at contributing to the continued survival of the society [2]. For this reason, one important event in the life of a Zambian is marriage. Magesa ([11]:113) argues that marriage of two individuals means fulfilment of their social functions to the community and the society. In turn, individuals receive positive sanctions such as change of status, mingling with elders and being invited for community events (which does not happen to singles) to encourage others to get married. It can be noted here that individuals are motivated to get married in order to fulfill this social obligation of sustaining the kinship and community.

4.2. Reproduction and Access to Sex

Most developed regions such as Europe and the USA have been experiencing an increasing shift from restricted

sex and child bearing to marriages, to childbearing even outside marriage. This move has to some extent impacted the desire for individuals to get married as they can have sex and children even when they are not married [4]. In contrast, in Zambia and other African countries, childbearing and sex are still considered sacred and are restricted to marriage. Children are considered to be a blessing and a fruit of marriage. As a result, the increasing desire to have children and sex has inspired Zambians of age to get into marriage and this would explain the high rates of child marriage [2]. Scholars have argued that this value tends to put procreation above individual fulfilment, but many studies in Africa [1,2] show that for many individuals, personal fulfilment is achieved principally in having offspring through which individuals express and perpetuates themselves [2]. It can be noted that one other reason that motivates individuals to marry is the need to have sex because of stiff sanctions on sex and childbearing outside the marriage union.

One strong belief that has existed for a very long time to date is that of sex and marriage being sacred realities. For this reason, African societies hold and see sex to be only for individuals who are married otherwise engaging in sexual activities outside marriage was held to merit a serious curse. For this reason, as argued by Mbiti ([12]:146), sexual organs such as buttocks, genitals, thighs and breasts must be carefully protected as they were gateways of life as such, they were not to be publicised as they performed a sacred function. In this case, sex is limited to marriage only. For this reason, many individuals are motivated to marry in order to have access to sex and avoid the curse of having sex outside marriage ([1]: 216).

4.2. Family Obligations

Marriage is another way in which African children fulfil two main important family obligations for their parents. The first one aims at giving the parents grandchildren and the second important obligation is to integrate and support the parents of the spouses in their home especially in old age [2]. These obligations are quite difficult to fulfil if one is not married and for this reason, every individual in the Zambian society looks forward to entering marriage as soon as they have economic stability to perform these obligations. This observation is similar to the findings of Daatland et. al [13] where they observed that countries in the South and East of Europe had stronger family and filial ties as compared to countries in the North and West of Europe. The authors further observed that one reason to this was absence of a strong welfare state in the South- East of Europe. Similarly, Zambia like many other African countries has no welfare or good pension system to take care of old people. For this reason, parents especially in older age look up to their children for support and protection. This serves as motivation for individuals to marry in order to fulfill these obligations (See [1]: 215).

4.3. Source of Status and Dignity

In Zambia and many other African countries, marriage bestows honour, status and dignity to both men and

women. Individuals that are of age and are not married are segregated and despised, especially women in most social activities. Ayisi ([14]: 8-9) argues that getting married gave both women and men rights and privileges within the community which were not available to singles. For example in Zambia, leadership positions are restricted to married individuals. To ascend to any position within the community, government and other social positions, one needs to be married. This situation also acts as a motivation for individuals to get married as they look forward to having access to rights, status, dignity and privileges for married people.

5. Conclusions

The paper aimed at understanding the value or motivation which make individuals to marry in Zambia despite changing trends in family structure and the emergence of new forms of unions. The paper also attempted to understand the role played by social norms in influencing individuals to get married. To address these questions, the paper described various understandings and underlying reasons why people get marriage from both European and African context.

It was found that primarily, both Africa and Europe had similar views for marriage. In both societies, marriage was initially considered very important and was thus held in high esteem such that entrance and exit from this form of union was highly regulated by social institutions such as the religion and state. The paper also noted that due to industrialisation, economic and social development, family formation was affected as new forms of unions emerged coupled with weakening influence and importance of marriage on individuals. On the other hand, it seems in Africa social structure still highly influences marriage even with increasing pressure from forces in form of globalization, modernization and increase in technological advancements.

The study further found that many people are getting married in Zambia and other African countries because of the strong value and belief system which is imbedded in the social structure. For this reason, it can be noted that as much as individuals may have choices about the person they want to marry, the process of entering into marriage union is still regulated by society such that if one exceeds a certain age before marrying, the society will start exerting pressure on them so that they can get married. In this sense, it is possible to conclude that marriage in the Zambian society is not necessarily an individual affair but a communal one. For this reason, the entrance of individuals into marriage can in one way seem to be primarily to serve their societal expectations or roles rather than fulfilling their individual desires. Therefore, from the literature reviewed, individuals marry in order to have access to sex as sex outside marriage is not permitted. The paper also noted that individuals marry in order to have children, an important process in the Zambian

society and this brings social status and dignity to married couples. Individuals also marry in order to fulfil their filial obligations to their parents especially in old age as Zambia has no welfare system to take care of the old. Through marriage, are able to provide grandchildren to parents a very important act in the African society.

It is also important to note that, marriage unions in Zambia and other African countries are not free from the impact of globalization and modernization. But unlike Europe, Africa is still entrenched in its old traditions values and beliefs on marriage union. It can therefore be concluded that marriage in the case of Zambia is primarily to fulfil the social obligations. Personal fulfilment comes secondary. Those individuals who seek other forms of union are usually given negative sanctions such as lack of recognition as members of the community and in most cases, they are considered as deviants who are used as examples of bad behaviour in society. This in one-way clearly shows that societal demands compel individuals to get married.

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