

Unmasking Factors that Propel Men into Extramarital Affairs as Perceived by Men in Gweru's Mkoba Suburb: Zimbabwe

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Abstract: This paper examines the factors that propel men to engage in extramarital affairs in Mkoba suburb Gweru. Underpinned by the interpretive paradigm, data were collected through individual in-depth interviews with twenty married men and three focus groups of eight men each. Participants were purposefully selected in line with the qualitative approach employed in this study. Data were thematically analysed. It emerged from the study that indeed men engaged in extramarital affairs driven by factors that included cultural beliefs, domestic problems, men's ego, and wife untidiness in cooking, personal hygiene and house maintenance. The study recommended counselling for married couples among other recommendations to mitigate the indulgence in extramarital affairs. Further research is recommended on a wider scale to come up with more generalisable findings and solutions.

Keywords: extramarital affairs, infidelity, straying, marriage, divorce, relations, philandering, indulgence.

INTRODUCTION

Extramarital affairs have become rampant in today's society despite the universal disapproval of this behaviour and its role in the spread of HIV/AIDS. Some women in Gweru lamented their husbands' engagement in extramarital affairs. Interviewed women estimated the participation of men in extramarital affairs to be at 80 – 98% while men made an estimation of 70 – 90%. Surveys have shown that extramarital sex is more frequent among men than among women [1]. Coma [1] notes that in one study, 27.2% of first time married men and 22.9 % of married women were having extramarital affairs at the time of the survey. According to Futurescopes.com [2] infidelity is the chief cause of breaking marriages. Statistics from the same source revealed that in the United States 27% of divorces were caused by extramarital affairs. Kaler [3] views infidelity as the major trigger for dissolution of a marriage which might in turn affect children's welfare. Booth and Amato [4] reported that there evidence suggests parental conflict and divorce have adverse effects that often persist in childhood.

Extramarital affairs also expose partners to the risk of getting infected with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Extramarital affairs relations are a powerful factor in the diffusion of the HIV pandemic in the sub-Saharan Africa [1]. Furthermore, according to Coma, 55% and 93% new infections in Zambia and

Rwanda via heterosexual intercourse have taken place in married and cohabiting couples. Extramarital affairs may result in anger, hatred, jealousy, pain, humiliation and desperations. Extramarital affairs impact on marital satisfaction and mental wellbeing for different couples Lee [5]. Given the potential adverse effects of extramarital relations it is crucial to explore factors that induce men in these extramarital affairs. Knowing the factors would facilitate in the formation of necessary interventions to be undertaken to reduce the prevalence of extramarital affairs.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

At this point it is important to operationalize the term 'extramarital affair.' Extramarital affairs are romantic or sexual relationships outside marriage that present both legal and moral problems for society [6]. According to Ogwokhademhe [7] an extramarital affair is seen as a contamination, by adding a foreign substance to water down or destabilise marriage. Glass and Marano in Tuch [8] propose that an extramarital affair must satisfy the following three criteria to be considered a fully-fledged affair:

- the partners must be emotionally intimate;
- there must be sexual chemistry and the wife must be kept in the dark about the affair's existence for as long as possible.

Many studies have shown that extramarital relations are viewed negatively by victimised partners