

A CASE STUDY OF PREVENTION OF DIVORCE ARISING FROM INFIDELITY IN MARRIAGE THROUGH COUNSELLING (47 YEAR OLD WOMAN)

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Abstract

Infidelity remains a leading cause of divorce, and many marriages that began with strong affection have ended in separation. This case study presents the counselling experience of a 47-year-old woman, Inidikimama, referred by a friend. Her marital issues, which culminated in her decision to divorce, were traced to her husband's behavior—persistent absence, emotional neglect, extramarital affairs, verbal abuse, and sexual rejection. A weekly counselling schedule was agreed upon to explore the root causes, lifestyle factors, and implications of the patient's decision on her personal life, marriage, and children. In five sessions, the counsellor applied techniques such as empathy, active listening, restatement, and clarification. Upon medical referral, it was discovered that the client had an undiagnosed infection from a family planning procedure that had caused an offensive odor—a complaint her husband had made. After treatment, communication and intimacy in her marriage improved significantly. Follow-up after 2 months revealed sustained positive outcomes, with the client reporting renewed happiness and marital satisfaction. Counselling was formally concluded, and future support made available. It is recommended that spouses take each other's complaints seriously and prioritize mutual care. Spousal satisfaction should be seen as shared responsibility and passionate commitment.

Introduction

Marriage, otherwise known as matrimony or wedlock, is culturally recognized and practiced across cultures around the globe; it could be said to be universal. The union between spouses. Marriage is a socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and woman, that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of partners and accord status to their offspring (if any) (Britannica, 2023). Successful marriage is what most people crave for or desire, but the circumstances of life undermine this desire

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to pave the way for divorce. One of the leading causes of divorce is infidelity (Gillette, 2022). The concept of infidelity has been defined in literature using multiple terms, such as extramarital sex, extramarital behavior, extra-dyadic involvement, non-monogamy, extramarital coitus, and polyamory, depending on the features of a particular study (Munsch, 2012).

Infidelity can have a devastating effect on marriages and individuals; when a partner is unfaithful, it can lead to several issues, such as divorce, separation, emotional breakdown, and what have you. Supporting this assertion, Fieldman- and Cauffman (2008) stated that extramarital affairs are a major reason for divorce and marital problems. However, research has shown that infidelity is not only sexual but also emotional in nature because a spouse may be emotionally attached to someone other than the partner (Urooj, Anis-ul-Haque & Anjumet, 2015). Divorce results in emotional reactions such as intense feelings of depression, anxiety, and hostility (Hack & Ribordy, 1980). Once in marriage, care should be taken to guide it with all diligence to avoid divorce. Most African cultures frown at divorce and do not encourage it. In those days, divorce was not a popular trend in the African context. Marriage is one of the core values held at high esteem among Africans, but today the story is different.

The purpose of this counselling process is to counsel Inidikimama a forty-seven year (47) old married woman of about 1.45 meters tall. A Christian with an orthodox background from one of the riverine communities in Rivers State, Nigeria, a post-graduate student in the researcher's school (PhD student precisely). The first child in a family of four, a business woman based in Port Harcourt with three children (2 boys and 1 girl). **Inidikimama** was referred to counselling by her friend, who was also her course mate with whom she shared her experiences. This friend encouraged her to come and share with the researcher/counsellor who is a lecturer in the client's faculty. She came to counselling alone without the company of anyone, only mentioned that her friend asked her to see the researcher/counsellor and share her experiences. **Inidikimama** had once had a beautiful marriage, but at the time she came for counselling everything has changed and her marriage was at the verge of collapse. The verbatim narration of her experience is provided in the problem assessment section for better understanding.

Steps in the Counselling Process

Relationship Building

The first step in the counselling process is relationship building, which actually defines the direction of the relationship as the first impression matters a lot. **Inidikimama** came to the counselling relationship with relationship anxiety as she came sweating profusely with shortness of breath and feeling edgy and restless. Counsellor initiated a social conversation to help her relax before hearing the purpose of her visit.

EXCERPTS

Client: Good morning, ma'am, can I come in?

Counsellor – Yes, come in please. You may have a seat (offers her a seat).

Counsellor ensured that the patient was comfortable by asking 'are you okay or would you prefer to sit on the sofa? I'm okay, she replied. I am Dr Margaret George Kennedy; may I know you?

Client: I am **Wariboko Inidikimama** (real names withheld for purpose of anonymity) looking highly anxious.

Counsellor – **Inidikimama**, good to meet you, how are you? You look good on your pink gown with pokers dot, it's really lovely, I love simple things like this

Client: Thank you Ma. It is not even expensive, but it is always attracting compliments. I bought it for just 15,000 naira.

Counsellor – Really? Was it in sales figures?

Client – not quiet—that woman sells her goods reasonably. She has a lot of customers. If you want, I can give you her address to see what she has or take you there if you don't mind.

Counsellor—I don't mind. Give me the address. I will visit when I am free.

Client: Hands over the address of the boutique to the counsellor

Counsellor—Thank you so much, really grateful. Looking good is a good business you know. I will find time and visit the boutique. Counsellor observed client keenly and noted that the initial anxiety she came with had dissipated all her nonverbal behaviors were keenly observed to understand her emotional state (At this point the business was initiated). Okay, let us know why you are here. How can I help you? !I have a serious problem in my marriage that I want to share. I have been dying in silence.

Counsellor – Really? Don't worry, you will be fine, you are at the right place, just relax and open up. Confidentiality of whatever we discuss is assured; please feel free to express yourself. Confidentiality is the hub of counselling practice (Ajoku, 2007).

Problem Assessment (In-depth Exploration)

To access the client's problem means critically evaluating or examining the client's presenting problem (Kolo, 2013). Through observation and diligent inquiry, information related to the client's presenting problem was obtained; thus, the second stage of the first session with the client was purely for problem exploration/in-depth discussion of **Inidikimama's** problem. Most importantly, the client was keen and anxious to disclose the problem. The counsellor used nonverbal attentiveness, which includes the use of appropriate eye contact, head nods, facial animation, body posture and the use of verbal attentiveness by encouraging the client and assurance of confidentiality to open up without reservation. This made the counselling process to flow naturally and with ease,

Mthe client presented her problem to the counsellor as presented below;

The case as presented by Inidikimama (verbatim)

“ My husband and I were very intimate, I can tell you with confidence that he loves me dearly and people often refer to us as brothers and sisters, but all these changed when he started working out of town in a construction site as a civil engineer. He comes into town on Saturdays after work and goes back on Sunday evening or Monday morning as early as 5:00am. I miss my husband so much. He was a very faithful husband committed to his marriage and family life, but since the commencement of this particular project, I no longer spend quality time with my husband. That is not even the issue. My concern is that on his return after refreshing, I serve him food, there after expecting to find rest in his arms, he will rather tell me he is going to the village to check on something. This was a recurring decimal from week to week, and most times he passes the night at the village. I have endured this for eight months running, I nagged and complained bitterly to him expressing my feelings, but he felt unconcerned about my feelings, and I felt so ashamed to discuss this with anybody. I was rather dying in silence, I only shared the problem on the periphery with my friend who encouraged me to see you. I got crazy the day I tried getting him to make me feel like a woman, he got lame, do you know what he said? I don't like the stench (disgusting odor) coming out of your womanhood. I was shocked. I examined myself and could not figure out anything that was smelling around me. I have been just like a decoration in my marriage for over 8 months. This is a man who cannot stay without feeling attracted to me, especially after staying away from me for a while. That same Saturday, this incident happened, and he told me that he was going to the village to check on his cousin that there is something they are to do together. I sobbed in a manner I have never done in my life, but this man never cared to see me sob in that manner. He carried his bag and walked away.

Ma, the story is a long one, as soon as he left for the village I heard a voice saying “go to the village and see what takes him there’ I looked around to see if someone was speaking to me I found no one rather the voice came stronger saying ‘stand up now and go’ reluctantly, I got dressed and headed for the village. As soon as I highlighted from the bike, a distance family member who lives in our compound saw me and greeted me warmly. She called me closer and said ‘Thank God you are here, your husband is always coming here to see this woman’s daughter (name withheld for anonymity) I don’t know if you know the girl that fair girl. You must do something fast about it, it is becoming too much, he is around ooh, are you aware? I’m sure the girl is there with him. I respect your husband so much, but this thing he is doing has eroded the respect I had for him. At that point, I broke down and shed secret tears, and I was visibly shaking. She consoled me and encouraged me to go and check what was happening. I went straight to the house and saw exactly what the woman was narrating; he never expected me. I immediately turned back and returned home without uttering a word. He did not run for me or call me back, nor did he return home. He went back to work immediately from the village, had no calls, and no communication of any sort. This is the height of it all I told myself, my mind is made up, I have to end this marriage, I no fit again. I told you it’s a long story, no vex, and hope you understand my problem? These were her exact words.

As **Inidikima** narrates her problem the counsellor used verbal reflection skills by restating to the client what she is hearing her say in terms of Affective reflection (what are somethings that upset you most about this situation). That is reflecting the client’s feeling statements. Cognitive reflections that have to do with reflecting the client’s thoughts (what makes you think that you are okay and your husband’s insinuation is wrong about the foul smell?). In this way counsellor uses verbal paraphrases that is using her own words to communicate the depth of what she understands **Inidikima** to be saying. In addition, counsellor makes inferential responses by making statements that suggest that she understands beyond what **Inidikima** is reporting, and she makes statements to **Inidikima** that suggest confidence or hope that the client can handle the challenge.

The counsellor after the narration of the client identified the Antecedents, Precedents, Consequences and contingencies to have an in-depth knowledge of the problem for proper assessment and diagnosis.

Antecedent

In a bid to study and assess this problem, it is important to note that infidelity is one of the threats to divorce; it is more common among men than among women, although some women also meddle in it. No one wants to share their partner with another. Discreet Investigation and Security (2023) revealed in a general social survey from 2010 to 2016 that men are more likely to cheat than women, with 20% of men and 13% of women reporting having sex with someone other than their partner while still married. In the case of the husband of Inidikimama, he started cheating when he experienced a stench from his wife, which coincided with his off-station work while his partner our client (**Inidikimama**) remained faithful to him. She is considering divorce because of infidelity on the part of her husband and his inability to make her feel like a woman (not making love to her).

Precedents

Five precedents are associated with our client’s decision to divorce.

1. The husband abandons her to go to the village on return from work after being absent from home for a week
2. He does not make her feel like a woman (have sex with her)
3. He accused her of having a disgusting odor from her womanhood.
4. She discovered that another woman was sharing her husband with her.
5. She wants to end the marriage to save herself from the emotional drain.

Consequences

The aftermath of infidelity leading to divorce is quite adverse for the individual, the marriage, the couple, and the child. In the case of **Inidikimama**, the consequences are personal: she was experiencing pain, betrayal, sadness, contempt, anxiety, and disgust. The marriage will disintegrate and will never remain the same if her decision comes to play, couples might experience feelings of insecurity, decreased level of happiness, change in status, emotional problems, depression in some cases, relationship anxiety, and so on. On the part of the children, they may experience adjustment problems, mood changes, and disruptive behaviors and so on.

Contingency

The counsellor having successfully discovered the precedents, antecedents and consequences of the client's behavior (clamor for divorce), the contingencies associated with it were not difficult to find. The counsellor explained to the client that the divorce she was clamoring for may not be the best option, as there are several options to resolve the problem amicable. If the options are put forward to you, you might find joy again in your marriage. Just calm down, take things easy, and everything will be fine. All I need is your cooperation to find a solution to this problem the counsellor affirms.

Goal Setting

Goal setting is crucial to the success of counselling (Akinade, 2012, Uzoeshi, 2013, Hackney et al 2005). The major function of goals is to provide direction to the counsellor and the client, goals were mutually defined by the counsellor and client. This is because the counsellor has the advantage of greater objectivity, training in normal and abnormal behavior, and experience in the process. The client, on- the other hand, has the advantage of intensive experience with the problem and its history, potential insights, and awareness of personal investment in change. Thus, the client needs to be involved in the thinking as well as the decisions about what should happen. (Hackney, et al 2005). Nevertheless, Hackney et al (2005) averred that counselling goals are never chiseled in stone; they can be altered when new information or new insight into the problem call for change. Therefore, when setting goals, the counsellor must ask the following pertinent questions:

What is the aim/purpose of counselling? What will the client intend to achieve from the counselling experience? What are the objectives of counselling? These questions helped define the goals of counselling for both counsellor and client (Uzoeshi, 2013). In line with these assertions counsellor and client mutually identified the goals of counselling tagged “**rescinding decision for divorce to build a happy marriage**”; thus, the goals of counselling were stated as follows:

At the end of the counselling process, **Inidikimama** should be able to provide the following:

1. Gain her husband back without he abandoning her to go to the village on return from work after being absent from home for a week
2. As she gains him back, he will make her feel like a woman (have sex with her)
3. The accusation of having a disgusting odor from her womanhood will end.
4. Another woman will no longer share her husband with her.
5. She will resign from her decision to divorce, and her marriage will flourish again.

Counselling Intervention

The real issue when discussing interventions is change and how it occurs. The essence of counselling is to initiate and facilitate desirable change after identifying desirable goals. The first step taken by the counsellor was to ask **Inidikimama** about the remedies she had already tried before making a decision to divorce. This action was taken to avoid suggesting alternatives that would be rejected. **Inidikimama** reported that she has tried dialoguing with her husband to understand her offense, he insisted that she smelled from her womanhood, she seduced him to no avail, and she did not know what else to do, which was why she came for counselling.

This information gave the counsellor a sense of **Inidikimama's** past effort to remedy her problem, and this answer also broadened counsellor's definition of the problem to include **Inidikimama's** inability to decode her husband's complaint by going for a medical examination to clear any doubt.

Choosing the right intervention is often a process of adaptation; not all interventions work with all clients, or as well as one might predict, the selection of intervention should be selected judiciously and be prepared to change strategies when the intervention of choice is not working, the counsellor should have an alternative treatment in reserve or re-evaluate how the problem is defined (Hackney et al, 2005). Based on the features of her problem as a prerequisite for her to rescind her divorce decision, which was the primary goal of the counselling session. The following intervention strategies were carefully selected; listening, responding, Empathy, restatement, encouraging, and confrontation.

The second session of counselling intervention dealt with mapping out activities she would undertake; such as seeing a gynecologist to ascertain the validity of her husband's claim. Below is an excerpt from the session.

Counsellor–You were very close to your husband, and people regard you as a brother and sister. And now you are somewhat miles apart, physically and emotionally. Right? (Restatement)

Client: You heard me very well. That is the situation Ma, and presently I cannot continue with it. It is better to end it.

Counsellor: empathize with you. I can feel your pain. You know it is very painful for one to share a beloved spouse with another. (Empathy). Don't worry, all will be fine. I just need your cooperation (assurance). As he continuously complained about a foul smell coming from your womanhood, did you border on seeing a medical doctor for a proper examination?

Client: Why would I? There is nothing wrong with me. He was only trying to be funny because he has found a new love. I'm now nothing. I just have to end it.

Counsellor- You don't assume things like that. There is no harm in trying. Why not see a gynaecologist and explain to him.

Client: Ma, Will that solve the problem? Ma, you won't understand. I don't know how best to explain to you. I'm the one wearing the shoe, and I know where it is pinching me.

Counsellor – Sure, I am currently putting myself in your shoes and will do exactly that if I am in your position.

Client: Really? Are you blaming me?

Counsellor – Why/ I'm only encouraging you to pay attention to every complaint made by your spouse for peace to reign. I encourage you to see a doctor before our next session.

Client: I have heard from you. I will see a doctor and get back to you.

Counsellor–Stay action on your divorce issue, everything will be alright, let us be sure the problem is not actually what he is insinuating.

Client: Thank you so much. I will see you as soon as I see the doctor.

During the third session, which was one week later, Indikimama came to the counselling session with the laboratory report, which showed that she had an infection arising from the family planning she had undertaken after the birth of her last child four years ago (IUCD). She reported that the doctor said that the IUCD had eaten deep into her system. As he brought it out, I saw particles of my flesh dangling on it. He said, Madam, you were careless you were not going for a check-up. The IUCD implanted itself into your womb. This is the reason for the foul smell. You have been infected. I was speechless and ashamed of myself, Ma. He placed me on these drugs (showing the counsellor the drugs). What will I do now? In response the counsellor thanked God for the revelation and encouraged her to take her drugs seriously and not to blame herself. After treatment, she was encouraged to sit with her husband and tell him the steps she had taken and the results of her findings regarding

his complaint. Apologize to him and tell him some good things he would like to hear. Provide him with assurance of your unfailing love.

Client: I will do that and return to you, Ma. Counsellor responded, “You are welcome”, and the session ended with “Peacefulness.

Evaluation

Evaluation was conducted at the fourth session after **Inidikima** had completed treatment. When she came to discuss her experiences with the counsellor it was observed that she was happy and full of life, which indicates that she had overcome her emotional drain and had rescinded her decision to divorce. Excerpts:

Counsellor – Welcome, it’s nice to see you once again. You are looking great. Hope all is fine?

Client: I’m very fine, thank you so much Ma, thank God I came for counselling, I would have died in ignorance, two heads are better than one. I’m okay and fine now. I apologize to my husband, as you suggested. I explained everything to him, and he was very happy. He also apologized to me and promised never to let me go through this again. He blamed himself for not taking me for a proper check-up in these words ‘I’m really sorry, it wasn’t like this from the beginning I would have stood by you, but you know what?’ I couldn’t stand the smell; it puts me off. Baby I’m for you forever, really, really sorry, and he made me feel like a woman for the first time nearly after 10 months (**Inidikimama** smiled mischievously).

Counsellor- that is very good. Congratulations, now you can see that divorce is not an option. Paying attention to the complaints of a spouse is critical in marriage. Don’t take things for granted and make an effort to address such complaints.

Client: Thank you so much Ma. How do you wish other women will learn from my mistake of not heeding my husband’s complaints?

Termination or Referral

The counsellor is the first person to introduce the notion that counselling is approaching termination (Hackney et al 2005). This decision according to Hackney et al may be based on the client’s progress toward identified counselling goals or the counsellor may determine that his or her expertise does not match the client’s needs. In the case of **Inidikimama**, the termination of physical interaction was necessary because progress toward identified counselling goals were noticed in her feedback following the evaluation meeting. The goals of counselling were achieved because according to her, she felt very fine, realized her mistakes and regretted all her earlier actions.

EXCERPTS

Counsellor–Have we gained anything in this counselling relationship? Can you please summarize the gains of counselling? Do you think we have achieved our counselling goals?

Client: Haah, Ma. I have gained so much. I came here sad, now I am happy. I would have made a decision that will make me regret throughout my life time, I want to thank you again. God used you to save my marriage. I will always remain grateful to you. All the counselling goals have been achieved. My husband does not go to the village again when he comes home for the weekend. He does not complain of the foul smell again. I am not sure if he is still seeing that girl and I can’t even dream of divorcing my loving husband. Thank you very much.

Counsellor – I thank God you are happy again, since all the counselling goals are achieved I think we can end the counselling process here. Nevertheless, if you have a problem other than this, you can come for counselling but let us meet in two month’s’ time to know how you are faring.

Client: Thank you so much. (Counselling process ends with pleasantries)

Referral was not necessary in this case because the counsellor’s expertise matched the client’s needs and all the counselling goals were met.

Follow Up

Follow up in counselling is concerned with the nature and amount of professional contact that occurs between the Counsellor and client after termination. Counsellor and client agreed to meet in 2 months' time to evaluate if the gains of counselling are sustained.

Evaluation

The client showed up on the appointed day and time and narrated how she had enjoyed her marriage. After the reconciliation, he changed my car (in low tone). This second evaluation proved that **Indikimama** is a happy woman and that her decision to divorce has been rescinded; this simply shows the gains of counselling.

Termination

Counsellor – I'm happy to hear that you are once again a happy woman; please try and sustain your joy; do not walk in assumption always pay attention to your husband's complaints about you; thrive to please him; he will love you throughout the days of his life. Do you have any clarifications, observations, or comments to offer?

Client: I do not have anything to say other than thank you. I have heard from you, and I will try my best.

Counsellor- We are ending our meetings (counselling sessions) today. If you have any problems other than this, you can call to book an appointment with me. This is my number (counsellor gives number to client). Counselling ended by exchange of pleasantries.

Conclusion

In conclusion, infidelity is a destroyer of the marriage relationship, and it should be avoided by the spouse. Challenges in marriage are temporal; thus, making a permanent decision to divorce may not be the best option, as you may end up regretting throughout the days of your life. From the case of **Indikimama**, we can see that paying attention to the complaints, opinions, observations, and discoveries of a spouse is very important to understand them better for a lasting marriage relationship. We should not work on assumptions.

Recommendations

1. It was recommended that in the midst of a boisterous storm in marriage, sincere professional counselling should be sought to help couples remain happy in marriage. They should not depend on family members or friends to start judging issues; this may ridicule them in the future.
2. Second, develop passion for pleasing your spouse. Human beings are naturally selfish; keep aside selfishness and think of your spouse.
3. Finally, couples should spend quality time together to boost communication and grow their love passionately, paying attention to complaints made by a spouse.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were adhered to in this case study. The counsellor obtained a verbal and a written consent from the client for the work to be published. The client was assured of confidentiality, which was adhered to strictly throughout the counselling period and that her name would remain fictitious in the publication. Relationship between client and counsellor was strictly based on professional boundaries, no exploitation of the client and no fees were charged, counselling were voluntary. The researcher ensured that her values did not inappropriately or unduly influence those of the client.

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