

## **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.

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### **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

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the world over Jonkowiak[9]. However, studies also have revealed that infidelity is quite common Allen [10]. With the above definitional view, there is need to consider the typology of extramarital affairs to get a holistic conceptualisation of the phenomenon.

Literature reveals that there are different types of extramarital affairs. Kenkel [11] highlighted different kinds of extramarital affairs. The first type is the 'one night affair,' which is an affair that happens unintentionally. It is usually un-planned due to impulsive decisions in which one is lost in the moment sex. Business trips or nights out of town are often contexts in which they occur. Furthermore, alcohol and other recreational drugs contribute to the situation. Affair Resources [12]. Closely linked to the one night affair is 'philandering.' According to Tuch [8], philandering results in brief sexual encounters which have nothing to do with intimacy or romance. Furthermore, philanderers fear emotional involvement with women because they believe it exposes them to the risk of greater emotional involvement. The motives of philanderers are all about power, control, safety and triumph and also sexual obsession rather than a spiritual one Tuch[8]. A study by Thomson in Tisapelas, Fisher & Aron [13] indicates that 31% of men and 16% of women had a sexual affair that entailed no emotional involvement. 13% of men and 21% of women had been romantically not sexually involved with someone other than their spouse, and 20% men and women had engaged in an affair that included both sexual and emotional connection.

The third type of affair is 'emotional affair' whereby the unfaithful spouse does not only give the body but also the heart Kenkel, [11]. This kind of an affair can be a major betrayal to the primary spouse Affair Resources and Advice[12]. Since these affairs are emotional, involving above and beyond the physical attraction the couple shares, this presents the most danger to marriage Tuch [8]. Fourth is the 'sexual addict affair. Kenkel [11] suggested that a sexual addict affair uses sex over and over again to cause pain and emptiness. Such serial cheaters also feel powerless to control their desires. They are happy in their relationships but never get complete fulfilment from it Affair Resources and Advice[12]. Last is the 'revenge affair' where revenge is a motivator to find an affair which begins with dissatisfaction and anger towards the partner for lack of satisfaction Affair Handbook [14]. The big motive of the affair is to hurt the loved person. Men, harbour resentment and anger with the spouse Tuch [8]. Olanyika [16] contends that if a wife deprives her husband sexually, he may retaliate by not having sex with her again resulting in extramarital affairs. Glass and Wright [17] identified revenge, rebellion, and hostility as significant reasons why married men have affairs.

## **FACTORS LEADING TO EXTRAMARITAL AFFAIRS**

The proliferation of infidelity may be due to a number of reasons. Futurescope.com [2] highlighted the following factors:

- Lack of sexual satisfaction from the primary relationship.
- Desire for additional sexual encounters.
- Lack of emotional satisfaction in the primary relationship.
- Falling out of love with a partner.
- Seeking revenge and curiosity, and seeking new experiences.

According to study findings men in America engage in extramarital affairs for reasons, which are boredom, monotony and the need to boost one's ego Ogwokandembe & Ishola, [7]. Many studies have pointed to the lack of variety in a relationship as a contributory factor to extramarital affairs, McCabe [18]; Fair [19]. According to Humprey in Tuch [8] the greatest enemies of sexual monogamy is monotony. Regardless of how innovative partners are, doing the same thing with the same person, in the same setting and often in the same way can be dull. According to Pittman (1989) in Tuch [8] affairs are not about a man having found someone who is different from his wife, more often men are not seeking an alternative to their marriage but a supplement to it, which provides whatever they are not getting at home.

Other researchers suggest that family origin influences the late adolescent's attitude, leading to a replication of patterns where infidelity was present. Adult children who knew about their father's infidelity were also more likely to engage in philandering Platt [15]. Olanyika [16] and Ogwokadembe and Ishola [7] cited material and psychological deprivation, breakdown of communication, sexual incompatibility, unemployment, childlessness, and differences in interest and age at marriage as factors contributing to extramarital affairs. Other factors also included personality traits, length of marriage, opportunity and satisfaction Winking [20]. Migration of economically productive people may result in extramarital affairs. 88% of females agreed that there is a possibility of husbands engaging in extramarital affairs because of their absence and separation from their husbands (Chibanda [21]. In addition, spouses who have a low degree of agreeableness or conscientiousness are more likely to engage in infidelity (Shackelford, Besser and Goetz [22]. Research has found that 90% of extramarital affairs occur because of unmet human needs with the marital relationship (Previt and Amito [23]. This is exacerbated by the fact that less than 5% of all societies are not strict about extramarital affairs Lance in Carol [24]. With this background, we sought

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to find out evidence that was Zimbabwe-specific to add to the body of literature that was largely foreign.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

In this study we sought to explore the factors that induce or propel men to engage in extramarital affairs. Given that society does not condone such affairs and that in the wake of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, extramarital affairs become a risk, findings should assist in proffering suggestions that may mitigate the indulgence in extramarital affairs. As such, two questions to guide this study came to the fore:

1. What are the factors which propel men to engage in extramarital affairs?
2. How can the adverse factors be mitigated?

### **METHODOLOGY**

Taking off from a feminist interpretivist platform, this study sought to give men voice; to get the 'men's' insider perspective so that they could learn their experiences by hearing it from them. As such, a qualitative research approach was employed in this study. This approach was selected to enable the researchers to explore the nature of the problem and to develop a complex and holistic view of the social phenomenon Cresswell [25]; Kumar [26]. The study was investigative, where the researchers gradually made sense of this social phenomenon by immersion in the everyday life of men engaging in extramarital affairs. Marshall & Rossman [27] suggests that immersion in the everyday life of a setting chosen of the study, the researcher enters the informant's world and through on-going interaction, seeks insider perspectives and meanings. Data were collected through interviews and focus groups with married men of all ages who were eligible for this study. Individual interviews continued until data saturation point, where no new data emerged. A total of 25 purposefully selected participants and three focus groups of 8 each participated in this study. Data were thematically analysed in line with the qualitative research approaches. In line with advice from Henning [28] data analysis took place throughout the data collection process, commencing with reading and dividing it into meaningful units.

### **STUDY FINDINGS**

Analysis of the data was qualitative. The qualitative data analysis followed a thematic approach in its description and interpretation. A number of factors associated with extramarital affairs emerged. These are as follows;

#### ***Cultural factors***

Interviews with men revealed that they were just men and they needed variety though they professed loving their wives. Men interviewed indicated that in line with African culture, men were regarded as 'bulls' and bulls would make babies with many cows. The

following sentiments come out from some interviewed men:

*"Naturally a man cannot be accommodated by one woman"*

*"Culturally we men are termed bulls and what would you expect from a bull"*

It also emerged from the study that some men are products of polygamous families, but because of church expectations, their marriage contracts and the economy, they are dissuaded from having many wives. As a result the men ended up engaging in extramarital affairs. Evidence from focus group discussions revealed that some totems also encourage men to serve as many women as possible. There was agreement that when men were addressed by their totems it gave them a self-fulfilling prophecy to live to the expectations of the totem.

It also come out of this research that due to culture some men are encouraged to inherit their late brothers wives. Some might not be able to openly do so because of fear of how their wives would react or are prohibited by the nature of marriage contract with the wife. As a result one man confessed of having an extramarital affair with his late brother's wife in order to fulfil the cultural obligation.

Wealth is another factor that led men in engaging in extramarital affairs. Basically most participants in the study believed that having many women symbolised how rich one was. Asked why they spent money on extramarital affairs, one man said, *"I need variety and variety is the spice of life which is worth spending money on. When I get money I want to spend it with a lot of fun and women just balance the equation."* The other men had this to say, *"Extramarital affairs are like sports. I do it for leisure."* The other man lamented of the economic environment which inhibits him from having many women. Carol [25] confirms these views and said that the existence of increased polygamy of the native chiefs shows that the more power a man has, the more women he may try to sexually monopolise. Having multiple partners is interpreted as a sign of masculinity and wealth in some cultures.

It also emerged that culture was biased when it comes to barrenness. Evidence revealed that the myth that it is the woman's fault if the couple fails to have children prevailed among men. For this reason the men will hop from woman to woman with the aim of proving his fertility as well as having children. Indications were that some men went to the extent of having extramarital affairs if they produced children of the same sex, especially girls. They do this with the hope of producing a male child. Furthermore, men engaged in extramarital if the family produces a

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disabled child. "Normally disability is blamed on the woman," one man said.

In one focus group, it emerged that men are not expected to divorce a woman. They fear ridicule and, as such, even if there is no more love between the two or married couple, the men would resort to straying rather than divorce their wives.

#### **Domestic problems**

The study revealed that domestic problems which embrace aspects such as illnesses, jealousy, wife's poor cooking skills, poor relations between husband and wife, and the couple and relatives lead men into extramarital affairs. One man confessed that his wife was ill for a long time and he was tempted into having a relationship with another woman. He said, "This woman is my wife though we are not legally married."

In this study some men condemned their wives for being too suspicious and possessive of their partners. This irritated them to the extent of straying. It was also pointed out that some women were untidy in the manner they prepared food, swept the house and poor personal hygiene. From the findings it would appear some men engaged in extramarital affairs to take refuge in the extramarital affair and escape from domestic problems.

#### **Bruised men's ego**

Evidence from the study revealed that some men strayed into extramarital affairs because their ego would have been bruised. Sometimes when a couple gets married they would be having equal educational qualifications and sometimes the men would be earning more than the wives. It was revealed that when the situation changed to the opposite, some men became threatened by their wives' higher qualifications and income. Some men in a focus group said they saw it pertinent to fend for the family. If the woman took over the charge, they would feel disempowered and thus seek dominance in other women, resulting in extramarital affairs. Some men also revealed that today's women were so privileged with many rights which tended to irritate the men. One man said that he felt so disempowered to the extent of losing control of the family. The other men said some women tended to misinterpret these rights, leading them into abusive tendencies. It also emerged from the study that some men engaged in extramarital affairs just for self actualisation. One man said, "If I have an affair with a woman of high status I just feel good."

#### **Other factors**

One other factor that emerged was that some men married at young ages with little or no experience with women. Indications from focus group discussions were that such men were tempted to experiment with other women out of curiosity. Tied to this factor was the

fact some men, before marriage, used to have many girlfriends concurrently, and this tended to continue in their marriages.

Other men interviewed blamed their wives of lacking bedroom skills while others felt that their wives were too nagging, failed to treat their relatives appropriately, as well as getting too busy to attend to family and conjugal rights. One man lamented "My wife is always busy on church activities forgetting her conjugal rights. Why one should be surprised if I stray"

Separation due to work related and other activities led men into extramarital affairs. Some men worked in town while their wives stayed in the rural areas. Other men and women crossed borders leaving their spouses behind. For this reason the men said it was a fertile ground for extramarital affairs.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study sought to investigate the factors that induce extramarital affairs among men. Generally it was observed that men engaged in extramarital affairs although society does not condone such behaviour. The major factors which came out of this study included cultural beliefs and practices, some totems, bruised men's ego, curiosity, early marriages, nagging and negligent wives. Furthermore, men sought refuge in extramarital affairs in trying to escape from domestic problems. While some factors can be avoided the findings tend to indicate that it was difficult to control some of the factors leading to extramarital affairs. Some marriages therefore will continue to break due to the behaviour of extramarital affairs.

#### **Recommendations**

Extramarital affairs tend to threaten or destroy the marriage institution. As such, efforts need to be made to mitigate some of the behaviours. The following recommendations are therefore proffered:-

- Premarital and post marital counselling of couples is needed to help mitigate some of the factors that lead to extramarital affairs.
- Married couples should try by all means to live together all the time.
- There is need for schools to help children respect the marriage institution from the tender age as part of the curriculum.
- Further research on a wider scale is needed to come up with empirical based solutions to the behavior of extramarital affairs.

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