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THE PASTOR, FAMILY DISPUTE MEDITIAON AND ITS ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES: EXPERIENTIAL REPORT

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Abstract

Reconciliation is a core Christian ministry. The pastor, a servant of God and of man, ensures family harmony in the nuclear family, and by extension, the extended family. However, experience in one's family counselling/mediation engagements revealed frequent family's disputes, therefore, is a cause for study. Thus, this paper documented personal experience in family mediation. The procedure used is anecdotal documentation of the narratives. A striking example of my experience was a case, when at mid-night at a certain year a spouse came to my home and said that it was either I followed them to resolve their dispute or be prepared to bury the other. The issue was resolved after one on one interactions with them. Scenario 2: was a spouse reported her spouse's infidelity. The reporting spouse was subjected to self-examination and that resolved the matter. Another example was when a spouse reported some lingering developments that could lead to a wider family dispute and possible disintegration. It was easily resolved; it was non-economic issue. Scenario 3: A spouse brought the case of the opposite spouse's resistance to certain decision. Rapport created between them resolved their differences. Mediation guaranteed amicable resolutions of disputes, thereby promoting the economic family viability.

INTRODUCTION

It is made succinctly clear in the Bible that the main duty of the Christian, and much more so the Christian Minister, is the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5: 18-20). it was committed to minister by the Lord Christ. This ministry of reconciliation is two-way issue: recoiling human to God, in some way, predicated on reconciliation of human to human (Romans 12:18-21; Hebrews 12: 14). Hebrews 12: 14 states that unless we in peace with one another, holiness will elude one and without peace with one another, and holiness, we cannot see God, implying one is yet to truly reconcile with God. Marriage in more ways than one epitomises the relationship between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:22ff), so as the members of the Church sometimes offend, so do the partners offend each other. The human to God relationship is often restored when we acknowledge our acts of commission and/or omission. Invariably same should happen in the human to human relationship, except that while in human-

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God, only the human errs, because of God's infallibility, the immutability of His word and His inherent perfection. Thus, any form of human to human relationship, offence will take place, while peace does not guarantee the absence of conflict, but conflict ignite peace-building process and which in turn restores normalcy to relationship and often makes it better in the long-run

The family unit is the basic building block of the society and the Church. It is held in very high esteem by God (Genesis 1: 26-31). this passage shows God was not satisfied with His creation until He had concluded through evaluation that the addition of human to His creation makes very good (Gen. 1; 31). Furthermore, In Gen. 2: 7-25, shows that God instituted marriage for the joy of the human and for His glory. God is happy with the human, from the basic unit of the human society, lives in harmony and peace with their spouses and in the nuclear family, later dovetailing to the extended family and then the Society and the Church at large. Jesus Christ stressed the importance of marriage, and by extension, the family. It is noteworthy that consists of at least husband and wife and where blessed child(ren). One way the family can fulfil what God designed for them is for each partner to be responsible with regard to the duty God has assigned to each of the spouses, especially the husband, who is the head and whose responsible is the be economically responsible for the family well-being, for if they failed in this duty, they adjudged to be worse than infidels (1 Timothy 5: 8). This development of being a responsible husband and father is part of what qualifies the human for the work of the ministry in the Lord's vineyard. Thus, economic responsibility is a mark of an husband and a father. Absence of this quality could jeopardise harmony in the home. And the result of such development is disharmony and economic meltdown in the home as disharmony could further bring strain to the finances of the home. In 1 Kings 17: 10, we saw the widow of Zarephath preparing for death due economic depression, which problem was solved with the intervention of the Prophet Elijah she lived and did not die (1 Kings 17: 11-16).

Acts of paternal economic irresponsibility continues to thrive in some homes and oftentimes it is the children that suffer the most. In some other cases, the women takes full responsibility for the running of the home. This trend, sometimes brings strained sexual intimacy, thereby aggravating the disharmony and lack of peace in the home. However, the trend rubs off on the society and the Church negatively. Yet, if the development is not minimised, the society will be filled by economic miscreants leading to more crises in the society. The Church represented by the pastor, cannot fold her arms and allow the trend to continue unchecked, otherwise she will be failing in ambassadorial duty of reconciliation (2 Timothy 5: 8). Thus, there various causes of family crises, yet underlying most of the immediate cause is a remote cause, often economic. The reason, there is a need to report an experience that can help families to navigate economic-prone crises in the homes. Studies have shown that family economic crises could be responsible out of children roaming. It also affects performance of children still in school because some would be made to fend for themselves, while could be out of school for days or weeks as a result of parental economic incapacitation, which could culminate in family crisis as one of the spouses may escalate the issue as unwillingness on the part of the other (Onuka and Arowojolu, 2008; Onuka and Amusan, 2008; Onuka and Durowoju, 2010; 2011). it is very obvious to many that only peaceful blocks of family would make a

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peaceful nation (Musa, 2025; Akande, 2025). it is also noted that family poverty is a great contributory factor to lack of peace in nations across the globe (Adebowale, 2025; Musa, 2025). it is important to equally understand that the pursuit of humanity security will most likely translate into national security (Musa, 2025). he further stated that human economic empowerment is a key factor in human security and by extension, national security. Pastoral counselling is the most viable option in resolving the Christian family crisis provided the pastor learns to use mediative counselling without imposition of judgement, which was found to also work in resolving community disputes (Oniyama, 2024). Thus, the essence of this study.

Conceptual Framework of Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET), primarily developed by sociologists George Homans and Peter Blau, posits that social behavior is the result of an exchange process aimed at maximizing benefits (rewards) and minimizing costs.

People rationally weigh the potential rewards (e.g., love, companionship, financial support, security) and costs (e.g., arguments, stress, effort, restrictions, conflict) of a relationship or interaction, and they strive to achieve a favorable outcome

Secondly a family relationship is maintained as long as the participants perceive the rewards to be greater than the costs, therefore the theory operates on two key comparative standards that determine a person's satisfaction and stability in a relationship: Comparison Level (CL): This is the threshold of what a person feels they deserve in a relationship, based on their past experiences and observations of others.

For instance, if a current relationship outcome (Rewards minus Costs) is below the CL, the individual will be dissatisfied. Comparison Level of Alternatives CL: This is the perceived outcome of the best available alternative (e.g., separation, a different partner, or being single). If the outcome of the current relationship is below the individual is likely to terminate the relationship because a more profitable option exists elsewhere

In the context of the pastor's mediation, SET helps explain why family members engage in dispute and why they eventually accept reconciliation. The dispute itself represents a severe imbalance where the costs of the relationship are perceived to outweigh the rewards, pushing the relationship outcome below both the CL (dissatisfaction) and potentially the CL_{alt} (the desire to leave). The midnight crisis scenario is an extreme example of the costs being intolerable. SET and the Pastor's Role as Mediator The pastor, acting as a third-party mediator, essentially functions as a facilitator for a re-evaluation and renegotiation of the relational exchange. The pastor's interventions are strategically aimed at modifying the perceived costs and rewards to restore a positive balance and ensure the current relationship's outcome is superior to the perceived alternatives:

Modifying the Cost-Reward Calculus Reducing Emotional Costs: The pastor's use of "one on one interactions" and "rapport created" provides a controlled, safe environment for communication. This directly reduces the immediate emotional cost of conflict and the destructive, high-stakes costs associated with threats of violence or family disintegration (the "bury the other" case). The pastor reframes the exchange from one of punishment to one of problem-solving. Enhancing Psychological Rewards: In Scenario 2 (infidelity), the

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pastor subjects the reporting spouse to "self-examination." This is a profound SET mechanism. Instead of focusing only on the external costs (the spouse's infidelity), the process encourages the spouse to find internal rewards, such as personal growth, re-asserted self-worth, or a renewed sense of agency or equity in the relationship, effectively raising their own CL and making the relationship feel more profitable than simply leaving it.

Highlighting Sunk Costs: The pastor implicitly reminds the couple of the significant investments they have already made (e.g., years of marriage, children, shared property—their "sunk costs"). This investment becomes a powerful barrier to exit, increasing the perceived cost of ending the relationship and strengthening their commitment to making the current relationship work.2. Adjusting the Comparison Level of Alternatives. The pastor's guidance often involves helping the parties to realsie that the alternatives (divorce, litigation, separation) carry their own extreme emotional, social, and economic costs. By making the CL_{alt} look less appealing, the pastor increases the relative stability and attractiveness of the current relationship, even with its existing costs. The resolution of the "non-economic issue" is an instance where the pastor swiftly managed a cause that, if left unresolved, would have pushed the relationship past the $CL_and into disintegration. The pastor's moral authority and focus on reconciliation (a core Christian ministry) also adds a significant social reward (divine approval, community support) and a potential social cost (communal disapproval, guilt) to the calculation, heavily influencing the parties to pursue a positive outcome within the marriage. SET and the Economic Consequences The link between SET and "economic family viability" is a critical application of the theory. Family stability, a major social reward, is a fundamental economic asset, and conflict is an economic cost. Conflict as Economic Cost: Unresolved disputes lead to significant, tangible transaction costs: Legal Costs: Divorce and custody battles are financially ruinous. Productivity Loss: Emotional strain from conflict (as seen in the midnight scenario) erodes focus, leading to decreased work productivity and potential job loss. Duplication of Assets: Separation necessitates the costly division and duplication of resources (two homes, two sets of utilities, increased single-parent expenses).SET explains that high conflict costs lead to relationship termination, which triggers these devastating economic consequences. Mediation as Economic Preservation (Maximizing Rewards): By mediating successfully, the pastor preserves the family's joint economic infrastructure. The "amicable resolutions" are, in economic terms, successful negotiations that allow the division of labor (shared household and financial responsibilities) to continue, thereby maximizing their combined rewards. Scenario 3 ("resistance to certain decision") highlights this perfectly: Resistance to a decision could block a joint financial strategy (e.g., buying a home, starting a business). The pastor's success in creating rapport eliminates that roadblock, ensuring the family unit continues to function as an effective, wealth-building economic team, thus promoting "economic family viability."

In conclusion, Social Exchange Theory provides the socio-psychological engine for understanding the dynamics of the pastor's work. The pastor's mediation techniques are effective because they skillfully manipulate the costs, rewards, and comparative standards of the disputants, ultimately leading to a renewed agreement that the current relationship, with its imperfections, remains the most profitable option emotionally, socially, and economically,

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PROCEDURE

The procedure for the study is participant observer anecdotal experiential records of some mediated disputes among Christian families through mediation interactions over a period of thirty-eight years by employing the varied Biblical resolution approaches. An inventory list was developed from these interactions. The items therein were used to categorise forms of dispute, their causes and consequences (implications).

THE REPORT

The journey into pastoral counselling ministry of the authors started in 1982 and 2010 respectively. Family crises are regular features of most if not all marriages. Therefore, we must obviously plan to manage them and arrest any possible escalation. Thus, from our experience the following are our categorisation of regular marriage/family crises: types, with remote and immediate causes and the economic consequences as displayed in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Marriage/Family Crises- sources, remote and immediate causes and economic implications

TYPE	IMMEDIATE CAUSE	IMPLICATIONS
Lack of trust	economic	Financial irresponsibility, family disintegration
Sexual denial	Could be economic or pride	Financial retaliation or abuse, family disintegration
Economic issues	Abandonment, hoarding money, or imprudence	Financial recklessness, family disintegration
Egocentricism	Abuses and exercise of authority	Withholding economic support to the family or withdrawing from sexual intimacy, family disintegration
External/extended family influence	Misbehaviour in the home	Abuses, withdrawal of or reduction in financial support, family disintegration
Children's welfare	Lack of adequate care/school dropout	
Comparison with others	greed	Disintegration
Sundry sources	naggy	Possible disintegration if not handled with care

From Table 1, we can infer that there are 8 different sources of family crises, their immediate and remote causes and the fact that one cause could dovetail across many sources and economic issues constitute both source and cause. Economic cause can be felt in many of the sources/types. This trend of economic issue being the cause of most family crises could be said to have confirm the statement in the Epistle of Saint Paul in 2 Timothy 5: 8 that any man who refuses to cater for his family is just an infidel, but

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worse off. As economic issue that remain unaddressed could lead to disintegration of the home. Yet, divorce is forbidden in the Bible (Matthew 19: 1-6; Mal. 2: 14-16). the reason economic issue in the family can lead to disintegration is because while money can answer all things, it becomes a root of all evils when one loves money much more than their family or human generally. Economic problem in a family may not be due to lack, but due imprudence, thrifty, hoarding, recklessness, drunkenness, infidelity, greed on the part of either of the spouses. Being fist-tighted could lead to family disintegration and thus countermand God's commandment against (Matt 19: 6). Whereas sexual intercourse is very legal and spiritual within the ambit of marriage, many spouses use sexual intimacy denial as a weapon to get at the other party for reason of feeling neglected, the being of neglect is usually as a result of withholding economic assistance (responsibility) from the purse of the family, upon which the well-being. Here again, we can find economic connection to sexual intimacy, yet sexual intimacy is a strong pillar that usually holds family together, because it propels harmony in the home. This usually culminates in peaceful home, which makes the children a proud and future peaceful spouses. The most dominant cause of family crises is economic issue. It is obvious from Table 1 that economic issue is dominant factor remotely leading to crises in the average Christian family. This finding led to further interrogation and dis-aggregation of the type of family economic problems and their consequences.

Lack of trust could arise due to economic inability or irresponsibility of one of the spouses, often the man. This could result in constant nagging, which escalate the crises beyond what the partners can handle. This usually leads to inviting third parties could either escalate or deescalate the challenge. If the former is the case, the economic consequence could become adverse as lack of trust and subsequently peace would not allow the couple the time to find ways of augmenting the inadequate source of earning. Lack of trust could also be caused by suspicion of infidelity by one of the partners against the other. This often results in reduction in provision for the home by the one suspecting the other. Allegation of infidelity can also lead to sexual denial, supposedly to avoid being infested by venereal disease. Economic issue is often attached to each type either as a cause or as a consequence. Take the case of comparison/unhealthy competition is usual a product of insatiability or covetousness, when a partner keeps comparing their family with another without the different sources or family backgrounds that produced these family it will lead to conflict in the home and if the other spouse goes beyond their financial capability to satisfy the other spouse's covetousness, the ensuing scenario will be economic incapacitation, which rather solved their challenge, complicates it further. Also, it has been discovered that parental/external interference could have resulted from economic issues or incessant recourse by one of the partners to their family and this could either resolve the issue or complicate it, depending on the egocentric-ism of the other party. The type, causes and consequences are interwoven and usually dovetail to one another.

The above is supported with the following selected scenarios/episodes in my real life experience as a pastoral counsellor/mediator in marriage/family-related crises.

A striking example in my experience was a case that occurred in December, 1988, when at mid-night at a certain spouse came to my house and said that it was either I followed them to resolve their dispute or be prepared to bury the other partner. No pastor worth their calling will ever ignore such message.

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On getting there tempers rose beyond the limit of human control. The quarrel cannot be instantly resolved. However, in silent communion with God, the inspiration to advise them to go to their separate and see me individually, worked. As issue was resolved after one on one interactions with them and bringing them together again for them to iron out their difference, while one was just moderating. One thing helped, one never told them what they individually told, otherwise, I would have scattered rather than sustain the marriage. Two things were identify as the underlying factor here: accusation of infidelity and economic irresponsibility from the perspective of the second partner. Scene 2: Here one spouse reported the other spouse's infidelity. The reporting spouse was then subjected to self-examination, for them to discover the extend of their own contribution to the act of infidelity of the other spouse. The reporting spouse discovered she the major cause of the partner's infidelity, because of unnecessary and unreasonable frequent sexual intimacy denial and that resolved the matter. Nevertheless, the occurrence in the first instance, incapacitated the reporter economically because there was reduction in upkeep in order to meet the demand of the side friend. A third scenario was when a spouse reported some lingering developments that could lead to a wider extended family dispute and possible disintegration. It was easily resolved because it was non-economic issue, it was just a misunderstand of the position about the other spouse's relation. This spouse impressed it on me to intervene and I did and issue was resolved because it did not involve both sexual denial and economic matter. Scenario 4: A spouse brought the case of the opposite spouse's resistance to certain decision. They were brought together in a typical mediation pattern to discuss their individual interest and find a common ground. Thus, creating rapport between them resolved their differences and that was it. Again, it was easy to resolve because no economic issues involved.

The Table 2 below shows the types of the economic-inspired family crises and the possible way out of them.

Table 2: *Consequences of economic-inspired family crises and possible way out*

S/N	Consequence	Possibly solution
1	Sexual denial	This is not a solution. The problem needs to be discussed or mediated to ensure understanding of root. It could be wrongly assumed that one spouse is withholding money from the family use. A transparency and accountability mechanism should evolved in the home
2	Family maladjustment	The Church could empower a maladjusted family because being empower is the possible solution
3	Criminality/hooliganism	A child not catered for is likely to become wild, counselling, empowerment and rehabilitation are the most essential steps to take by the

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		Church after investigation that the cause is economic challenge in the home. Some NGOs are doing something in this direction
4	Spiral poverty	The Church must be concerned about poverty alleviation/wealth creation much more than wealth accumulation by the leadership
5	Disintegration	Early warning signs of family crises should be observed and resolved before they reach point of escalation by the Church. The pastor would be taken into confidence if s/he visits families without any hidden agenda.
6	Aggression	This has to be addressed by the Church through constant teaching about its ills and how it can be addressed
7	Drop out from schools	The Church should be concerned by identifying who drops out of school and why.
8	Early marriage	People should be mature before they go into marriage. It should be a voluntary decision by the individuals.
9	Abuse	A deliberate effort by members to ensure they respect the sanctity of their humanity and in adherence to the Biblical injunctions with respect to marriage relationship. Teachings on marriage should be undertaken by the Church at least quarterly.
10	Lack of love	Make deliberately make to love all members of each family

It is enough to highlight the types of crises, their causes, consequences, but it is also necessary also proffer solutions. Thus, the above Table 2 outlines the consequences and suggested solutions:

Sexual denial: from the documented experience of the author, sexual denial is a means which some spouses usually use to drive protest against economic inability and/or economic irresponsibility of the other. This weapon is more often than not use by the female gender, since it African universal norm that the male is the leader and main sustainer of the family. However, this approach to protesting economic inability or irresponsibility could rather complicate the issue it is meant to resolve than solve it. The solution lays in discussing the issue amicably by the couple and if necessary a mature confidant of the couple. The Church should preach on this and also investigate such issue and make standing provision for economic empowerment of the genuine needy, to curb the use of sex as

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instrumentality of protesting economic irresponsibility or inability as it could ultimately lead to disintegration of the home and the consequent trauma on or maladjustment of the children (Musa, 2025; Adebowale, 2025; Amos 3: 3).

Another consequence of economic-induced crisis is maladjustment of the children of the family. The consequence often dovetails into sustained delinquency that could become a propeller of national crisis. The same process used for arresting the all economic-prone family crises: economic-empowerment and education, since it may not be sufficient to empower, but they should also be given economic-education to give them the right orientation on economic sustainability (Musa, 2025).

Other consequences include: Spiral poverty, Disintegration, aggression, criminality, lack of love, abuse, early marriage and school dropout; The solution remains economic-education and empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Economic crisis is a major cause of family crisis. The importance of family peace cannot be over-stressed, nor can the mediation role in family conflict and their economic well-being be downplayed. Thus, the Church, which has as its major ministry, the work of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5: 18-20), cannot ignore family conflict resolution. So, it thus, a major prank of the pastor's ministry. It can also be inferred from the experiential report that there are many causes of family crisis. Prominent among them sexual denial, egocentricism and economic-induced crises. However, with a careful interrogation of the various causes of family crises, it was discovered that the most crises are either consequences of economic-inability/irresponsibility induced conflict or result in economic-depravity/suffering in the home. The reason to investigate its causes and consequences, to find way of frontally addressing it to minimise in order to contain the consequences on societal safety and security.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Pastor through regularly visitation as well as raising a visitation team can gain the confidence of congregation members, by which they will relate to him/her as mediator. A ministry of reconciliation should form a major plank of the pastor's mandate. The main focus of such should be the home.

2. Church evolve a mechanism to research the causes, consequences of and possible solutions to family crises with the aim of preventing them and minimising their occurences as well as preventing the spiral effect on the children and the the society at large, thereby reducing anti-social behaviours among young population

3. The Church should corporately work out mechanism to ensure economic education and empowerment of the poor members through establishment of small scale business and cottage industries to engage members with little means of livelihood as such steps will minimise economic-induced among her family members

4. Couples should avoid comparing their homes with those of others, fingers are not equal, so be content with what you have and when it is not enough, discuss ways you can get over it through hard work and resilience

5. Couples should ensure transparency and accountability in every aspect of their family. In fact, such development builds trust between couple and marriage sustainability.

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