

UMUADA AND FAMILY CONFLICT RESOLUTION FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study assessed the contributions of Umuada (lineage daughters) in conflict resolution in Enugu state, Nigeria. The study was guided by four objectives with corresponding research questions. A case study research design was adopted with a sample of 27 members of Umuada Associations from three communities. The instrument used for data collection was a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) which covered the objectives of the study. Data collected were analyzed thematically. Findings of the study revealed among others that Umuada contributes to family conflict resolution by persuading the conflicting parties to meet and settle the disputes amicably and also acting as a traditional court of arbitration and punishing the offenders severely. The study recommends, among others that the Umuada, as a recognised association should be involved in formal peacebuilding and conflict resolution activities at the state level to reduce conflicts and improve community development.

Key Words: Umuada, Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Sustainable and Community Development.

Introduction

Conflict occurs when two or more parties engage themselves in serious disagreement or argument. Family conflict manifests when members of a family express contrasting views about an issue. Kreitner & Kinicki (2010) noted that family conflict is inevitable and could bring a negative or positive impact on the family; on the positive angle, a family conflict could foster community development when effectively managed. However, where these contrasting views are not resolved peacefully and orderly, serious disagreement, arguments, resentment, and fight could arise and may involve more individuals and families in the community. Family conflict could arise as a result of faulty socialization, speaking ill about one of the spouses in public, poor relationships between the husband and wife, wife and husband's relations or between the husband and the wife's parents or other relations and association which one of the spouses is opposed to among others (Mezieobi & Okpara, 2007). When these differences are left unresolved, it leads to conflict, which mostly results in violence.

Women in traditional Igbo society play important roles in maintaining peace and order in the family and community at large. To enable them to achieve this objective, they collectively form groups such as Christian women association, Ndinyom (women married in the same kindred) or Inyomudi in some dialects, market women association, Umuada among others. However, according to Arogo, Ohanaka, Diekedie, Ephraim-Emmanuel & Apiakise (2017), Umuada is the most effective of all-women groups in Igbo land.

The authors further define Umuada as the powerful daughters in Igbo culture, native daughters of a

common male ancestors or “daughters of the soil”. Umuada plays key roles in resolving family conflict as their judgments and decisions are final and binding (Ugwu & Ijah, 2011).

Umuada is a recognized traditional association for peacekeeping in the five states of South-Eastern Nigeria, which makes up what is referred to as the Igbo land; however, they are faced with various challenges in their operation. Recently, the Umuada are neglected in some cases of family conflict; these conflicts are rather taken to court than reported to the Umuada. Furthermore, the debilitating effects of long-distance marriages, religious activities, western education, and pursuit of self-interest among others are challenges threatening the effectiveness of Umuada in family conflict resolution (Amaechi, 2016). In order to reduce the challenges of Umuada in family conflict resolution, seminar and conferences should be periodically organized to discuss the rights and obligations of the Umuada women group. Through this means, the Umuada will be updated on the extent and limit of their rights; also, their responsibilities in peacebuilding will become clearer to them. However, it is worthy to note the mode of operations of Umuada in various societies is not uniform; therefore, this study focused on assessing the contributions of Umuada in family conflict resolution in Enugu state, Nigeria.

In the modern society, family conflict has become a common phenomenon especially in polygamous families. In the case where this conflict is not properly managed, it could reach the point of serious violence which could threaten the peaceful co-existence of the family and the community at large. In an attempt to manage conflict, some families ignore the traditional institutions for conflict resolution and go to court. As the conflicts escalate, other community members take sides and make the resolution difficult. The involvement of other community members affects community unity and cohesion which are veritable tools for community development. Community members cannot interact effectively to discuss community matters; individuals and community’s resources are wasted and attention distracted from pressing development needs. This pose a serious threat to the peace and order required of the family and community for healthy co-existence and development. It is against this background that the study examined the contributions of Umuada in effective family conflict resolution for sustainable community development in Enugu state, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this research is to assess the contributions of Umuada in family conflict resolution in Enugu state, Nigeria. However, the specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the causes of family conflict in Enugu State, Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the extent Umuada contribute to family conflict resolution for sustainable community development.
3. Ascertain the challenges Umuada face in family conflict resolution.
4. Determine the strategies to enhance the contributions of Umuada for effective family conflict resolution.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the causes of family conflict in Enugu state, Nigeria?
2. To what extent does Umuada contribute to family conflict resolution for sustainable community development?
3. What are the challenges Umuada face in family conflict resolution in the study area?
4. What are the strategies to enhance the contributions of Umuada in family conflict resolution?

Umuada

In discussing Igbo historical peacemaking processes, the role of women becomes relevant to mention. Women in Igbo land contribute to peace making mostly through Umuada association. “Ada” in Igbo language represents daughter; “Umuada” represents daughters born to a particular family, kindred, village or town in Igbo land. These daughters who have the same paternal ancestors in Igbo land are referred to Umuada not minding their marital status (M. Ogbodo, personal communication, November 10, 2018). In Igbo land, Umuada is treated as holy and powerful and are held in very high esteem because of the significant roles they play in families; Umuada is seen as a functional forum for women in the Igbo society. The Umuada functions along a formal and organized system which is based on a hierarchical arrangement. Umuada is a women group widely respected for their dignity, strength, determination and courage to fight for peace and development in their ancestral communities.

Family Conflict Resolution

Conflict is an inevitable part of human life. Conflict is said to occur when individuals tenaciously hold on to their contrasting views, interests and goals. A family is a social unit consisting of persons who are related by blood, marriage or adoption. They are committed to mutual relationship existing in the family. Family conflict occurs when the individual family members have varying views and values. This can lead to misunderstanding which often results in conflict. According to Mezieobi and Okpara (2007) family conflict could arise when there is poor relationship between the husband and wife and between the wife and husband’s parents and vice versa. Most families are separated; some divorced while others are living in fear as a result of family conflict. This makes family conflict resolution more necessary.

Family conflict resolution is the method and process employed in prompting a peaceful end to conflict involving family members. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall (2016) noted that family conflict resolution involves identifying and resolving the deep-rooted causes of family conflict in order to kill any violent or hostile attitude among the family members. Therefore, family conflict resolution is the process of managing the differences among family members, thereby eliminating the source of family conflict and ensuring that the family members feel good about the plan of action. Effective family conflict resolution process involves post conflict actions such as reconciliation, reinsertion, reintegration and rehabilitation.

Umuada and Family Conflict Resolution

Umuada association represents an important women association in Igbo land. This is so because Umuada do not just play the roles of a mother but also that of a judge and a peace maker. Maduagwu (2012) stated that the Umuada association wields strong judgmental powers when it comes to the management of family conflict; in the case where a family or a clan finds it difficult to resolve the conflict among them, the Umuada are involved, and in most cases, the conflict is effectively managed. They are effective in settling conflicts involving physical fight between family members, assault on a wife by a husband, unfaithful lifestyle of the wife or husband, assault of a wife on her mother-in-law among others. The Umuada employs various measures in ensuring peace; measures ranging from imposition of heavy fines to defaulters to excommunication of unrepentant defaulters from the community activities.

Area of Study

Enugu state is in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria and part of the Igbo speaking society in the country. According to the 2006 national population census, Enugu state has a population of 3,267,837 and covers an area of 7,161km². The state is made up of seventeen Local Government Areas grouped into three senatorial districts namely; Enugu East, Enugu West and Enugu North. The state shares borders with Abia and Imo states to the south, Ebonyi state to the east, Anambra state to the west, Benue state to the north-east and Kogi state to the north-west. The peoples' main occupation is farming and trading while Christianity is the dominant religion in the state. Notwithstanding the challenges of family responsibilities and survival, women in Enugu state are very industrious and hardworking and contribute immensely to the economy of the state.

Methodology

A case study research design was used for the study. This design is ideal to the study as it determines the contributions of Umuada in family conflict resolution. Case study research involves an approach whereby the researcher seeks to investigate some present circumstances; how some social phenomenon works and affects real life. A defining feature of case study design which gives it strength is its ability to make use of a variety of sources including interview, observation notes, previous literature among others (Yin, 2014).

The Umuada Women Associations in the seventeen local government areas in Enugu state constitute the population of the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select three Local Government Areas (L.G.A) out of the seventeen local government areas (one from each senatorial district) in the state for the study. Furthermore, purposive sampling technique was used to select one Umuada associations each from three communities in the three Local Government areas under study. The communities selected include; Obollo-Afor (Udenu L.G.A., Enugu North), Agbudu (Udi LGA, Enugu West) and Amuri (Nkanu-West L.G.A., Enugu East) . The choice of the selected Umuada Associations in these communities is as a result of their recent involvement in family conflict resolution. In each of the Umuada associations, 9 women were randomly selected in addition to the eldest member of each of the associations (Onyishi Umuada) making up 27 respondents for the study.

Instrument for data collection

The study made use of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as the major instrument for data collection. This technique was designed to ensure that the views of the Umuada association are adequately captured. The members were informed of the meeting with the researcher through their leaders known as Onyishi (the eldest among them). The researcher attended the meetings in the three communities with two trained assistants (one of which is from the community visited). They helped in audio-taping and recording the proceedings while the researcher who served as the moderator concentrated on asking questions to observe gestures and body languages.

The respondents were asked questions such as the causes of family conflict in their communities, the extent Umuada contributes to family conflict resolution, the challenges Umuada face in family conflict resolution and the strategies to enhance the contributions of Umuada for effective family conflict resolution. To ensure that the respondents understood the questions clearly, Igbo language and the dialect of the respondents were also applied in the process when necessary. The discussion in each of the communities lasted between 45-65 minutes after which there was a light refreshment for the researcher, assistants and the respondents. In addition to data gathered from the FGD, relevant information was also accessed from past research work. The data gathered was subjected to thematic

analysis in order to achieve the research objective.

Results and Findings

The data gathered from the discussions were analyzed thematically in order to ascertain the contributions of Umuada to family conflict resolution in Enugu state, Nigeria. In the presentation of the findings, direct or verbatim quotations from the respondents were added to buttress issues that emerged in the data.

Research Question one: What are the causes of family conflict in Enugu state, Nigeria?

This research question was designed to determine the causes of family conflict in Enugu state. The qualitative data gathered from the FGD showed that the following are the causes of family conflict in Enugu state, Nigeria.

- Lack of consensus among parents on child discipline: in the father disciplines a child and the mother consoles the child, the child becomes attached to the mother and despises the father.
- Disagreement with in-laws: in the case where the wife has a repeated argument with the mother or father in-law, this could result in serious conflict.
- Financial challenges: in the case where the father finds it very difficult to meet up with the financial needs of the family, the wife could become rebellious along with the children and this can lead to conflict in the family.
- Suspicion and lack of trust: when the couple no longer trusts each other and suspects themselves of infidelity, this could result in a huge conflict in the family.
- Sibling rivalry: this occurs when the children in the family see themselves as rivals in the quest to gain more of their parents' attention, this breeds jealousy and results in conflict.
- Inheritance: in the case of demise of the father, the children could fight over his properties in a bid to gain more of the inheritance; extended family of the father could also get involved in the fight for property.
- Polygamy: a polygamous family has a higher risk of conflict due to the usual rivalry between the co-wives and the children from different mothers.
- Peer influence: when the family members pay heed to directions outside the family, it could lead them into actions against a family member, the conflict could arise.

Research Question two: To what extent does Umuada contribute to family conflict resolution in Enugu state, Nigeria?

This research question was designed to determine the extent to which Umuada contribute to family conflict resolution in Enugu state.

The qualitative data gathered from the FGD revealed that to a high extent, Umuada contribute to family conflict resolution in Enugu state as they demonstrate their strong powers in settling family conflicts. It was revealed that when there is conflict between a man and his wife, the Umuada also interferes in the situation; if the wife is found guilty of maltreating her husband, the Umuada group sanctions the wife. The wife is handed some deserving punishments; most times, the wife is excommunicated until she is able to serve her punishments. For emphasis, in Obollo Afor, a story was told about wife who maltreated the husband to the extent of uttering a very abusive speech to the husband ("kporu nshi rie" which means "may you eat feces"). The Umuada group passed a judgment that the woman must be excommunicated and chased back to her father's house until she publicly has a taste of feces and apologizes to the husband. After sometime she accepted to publicly

have a taste of feces and apologized to the husband; then peace returned to the family. Therefore, to a great extent, Umuada contributes to family conflict resolution in Enugu state through adjudicatory processes in the case of conflict among family members.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that to a great extent, Umuada contribute to family conflict resolution in Enugu state through the following means:

The Umuada takes the lead in resolving conflicts between married couple; they act as traditional court of arbitration and punish the offending husband or wife severely. Through this, no family would allow their marital conflict to get the attention of Umuada. The Umuada plays important roles in reconciling conflict between brothers in relation to properties such as land inherited from their father. They do this by means of persuading the conflicting parties to meet and settle the disputes amicably. The Umuada creates laws about an unfaithful wife or an uncaring husband. These laws have severe punishment and act as deterrent to infidelity and battery. They also make peace between widows and their in-laws and any party that does not agree to peaceful management of the conflict will face their (Umuada) wrath.

Research Question three: What are the challenges Umuada face in family conflict resolution in Enugu state, Nigeria?

This research question was designed to determine the challenges Umuada face in effective family conflict resolution in Enugu state, Nigeria. The qualitative data gathered from the respondents revealed the challenges Umuada face in effective family conflict resolution in Enugu state, Nigeria. The findings reveal the challenges Umuada face in effective family conflict resolution to include:

Rural-urban migration: the women or respondents mentioned that due to the search for greener pasture, higher education or for the purpose of marriage, the members of Umuada association often leave their patrilineal to the urban areas. This migration has posed the following challenges to effectiveness of Umuada in family conflict resolution

Difficulty in attending meetings: As a result of the long distance from the urban areas where they now reside to their patrilineal land, they find it so difficult to be present in most Umuada meetings especially the emergency meetings.

Class division: On the other hand, some of them become so educated and highly placed in the society; this often lead some of them to avoid going so close to their counterparts in the rural area whom they describe as low class.

Value retention: As the older Umuada grow old and die, the responsibility of retaining the values of Umuada association lies on the younger girls; however, the challenge is that most of these girls have been taken to the urban areas even at a very tender age. Therefore, they were not available to be taught the values of the Umuada association.

Dominance of the men over women: the women are widely perceived to be weak and unable to make appropriate decisions when faced with difficulties; most times the men challenge the appropriateness of decisions made by Umuada in the conflict resolution process. This could limit the Umuada to playing second fiddle to men; thereby making it difficult for the Umuada to stand independently in the process of family conflict resolution.

Doctrines of Christianity: Most of the Umuada are Christians and as a result of the belief in

Christianity, they abstain from and preach against some of the traditional practices with which the Umuada association thrived on. This has really challenged the effectiveness of Umuada in family conflict resolution.

Research Question four: What are the strategies to enhance the contributions of Umuada for effective family conflict resolution in Enugu state, Nigeria?

This research question was designed to determine the strategies to enhance the contributions of Umuada for effective family conflict resolution in Enugu state, Nigeria.

The qualitative data gathered from the respondents revealed the strategies to enhance the contributions of Umuada for effective family conflict resolution in Enugu state, Nigeria. The findings reveal the strategies to enhance the contributions of Umuada for effective family conflict resolution in Enugu state, Nigeria include:

The need for establishing Umuada association branches in various urban areas; this will limit the challenge of travelling long distance to attend meetings. The outcome of the Umuada meeting in the rural area will be reconciled with that of the urban branches.

Empowerment of the vulnerable members of the Umuada women association. Some of these women are single women, divorced women who have various economic responsibilities; as such they become vulnerable due to poverty. This can limit their participation in the Umuada process of family conflict resolution; therefore, there is need for the government, Non-governmental organizations or influential individuals to empower these women economically so as to improve their active participation in family conflict resolution.

The Umuada association of all the communities in Enugu State should be formally registered in the appropriate government authority and also have representatives in the government house. This will make them more powerful and influential in family conflict resolution.

A meeting hall should be built and dedicated to the Umuada women association in all the communities in Enugu state; this will prove the Umuada to be more recognized and accepted in the communities. This hall will also serve as the traditional court of Umuada in Enugu state.

Discussion of Findings

Finding of the study revealed that the causes of family conflict in Enugu state, Nigeria include disagreement with in-laws, financial challenges, lack of consensus among parents on child discipline, suspicion, polygamy, peer influence among others. This is in line with Mezieobi and Okpara (2007) who stated that family conflict could arise as a result of large family size especially in polygamous house; in this case, children loyalty is divided in favour of one of the parents and some ganging up with their mother against their father and his other wives and children, leading to disobedience to parents' directives. In addition, the findings of the study revealed that to a great extent, Umuada contribute to effective family conflict resolution in Enugu state by persuading the conflicting parties to meet and settle the disputes amicably and also acting as a traditional court of arbitration and punishing the offending husband or wife severely. In resolving conflict between husband and wife, co wives, siblings and in-laws, the Umuada group invites the conflicting parties to make a case for themselves. Upon hearing the cases of both parties, the Umuada group analyzes the facts presented by the conflicting parties and draws a conclusion; upon which the offender is severely punished (M. Ugwuoke, Personal Communication, January 11, 2019).

Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed that the challenges Umuada face in effective family conflict resolution in Enugu state, Nigeria include rural-urban migration, dominance of the men over women and doctrines of Christianity. Due to the high level of Christianity among the women in Enugu state, most of the Umuada has begun to dissolve the spiritual principles guiding Umuada in family conflict resolution; they hold Christianity and its doctrines above every other principle (J. Eneh. Personal communication, January 13, 2019). Finally, the findings of the study revealed that in order to enhance the contributions of Umuada for effective family conflict resolution in Enugu state, Nigeria, there is need for the government, Non-governmental organizations or influential individuals to empower the vulnerable Umuada group members economically so as to improve their active participation in family conflict resolution, the Umuada should also be registered legally in the government house. There is an urgent need for the Umuada association to be registered formally and also have a representative in the government house in order to become adequately recognized and protected (H, Ugwu. Personal communication, January 14, 2019).

Conclusion

The study discussed the causes of family conflict and the extent to which Umuada women association contributes in family conflict resolution in Enugu state, Nigeria. The study made it clear that disagreement with in-laws, financial challenges, lack of consensus among parents on child discipline, suspicion, polygamy, peer influence among others could lead to family conflict. On the other hand, Umuada contribute to effective family conflict resolution in Enugu state by persuading the conflicting parties to meet and settle the disputes amicably and also acting as a traditional court of arbitration and punishing the offending husband or wife severely. In addition, the Umuada group is challenged by rural-urban migration, dominance of the men over women and doctrines of Christianity in their contribution to family conflict resolution. However, there is need for the government, Non-governmental organizations or influential individuals to empower members of the Umuada women association economically so as to improve their active participation in family conflict resolution to achieve peaceful co-existence among community members which is a veritable ingredient for sustainable community development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Umuada should be involved in formal peacebuilding and conflict resolution activities at the state level to reduce conflicts in the state.
2. There is need to organize training or workshop for members of Umuada on the skills of managing conflicts and formal peacebuilding outside the communities
3. Men should give more powers to Umuada in conflict matters in communities since they are highly respected by community members for improved peaceful co-existence
4. The government should empower the Umuada in rural areas so as to reduce the effect of rural-urban migration on Umuada's conflict resolution potentials.
5. The members of Umuada should strike a balance between their religious responsibilities and their responsibilities to the community as peace builders.

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