

Marital conflict mediation by social welfare officers in selected family support agencies in Lagos

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Abstract

The study investigated the level of knowledge and use of mediation by social welfare officers in selected family-based institutions in Lagos State. The qualitative method of In-depth Interviews (IDIs) was employed to collect data from key persons to provide contextual data on the study objectives. Ten respondents, sampled through purposive sampling technique, were recruited from five purposively selected family support agencies in Alimosho, Shomolu and Surulere, Ikeja, and Yaba offices. Results revealed the trajectories of knowledge and usage of mediation resulting in family reconciliation by the practitioners in their social work practice. The study concluded that they know about mediation but in order to have a better future for mediation in social work practice in family institutions, the social welfare officers as well as intending social work students should be professionally trained in the skills and techniques of mediation, communication, and negotiation to reduce the increasing incidences of family crisis and mediation courses should be included in the curriculum for Schools of Social Work in Nigeria.

Keywords: conflict, competencies, family, mediation, marital disputes, social work

Introduction

Conflict is a ubiquitous and inevitable part of human existence. In other words, conflict is like one's shadow and no one can run away from it. The universality and inevitability of conflict are known throughout all known ages. Similarly, conflict is a normal part of marriage (Best, 2006). Marital conflict occurs when one partner threatens another partner by using manipulative aggressive and violent behavior to control his or her partner. No matter how much a wife and husband love each other, there will be moments of disagreements and issues and that does not necessarily mean anything is wrong with the marriage but the way marital disputes are handled goes a long way to determine their marital quality and unity among other attributes. Hence this study borders its thesis on marital mediation, which is a process for couples, who are experiencing marital problems or difficulties and who are willing to save their marriage, to avoid divorce or marital violence.

Mediation is a practical solution-oriented approach to solve problems for disputing parties (Wang, 2014; Ugorji, 2012). It can be useful to address family divorce disputes, child welfare negotiations, school-based conflicts, discrimination complaints, nonviolent crimes or civil offenses, health care negotiations, public policy debates, and even business-related conflicts. In recent years, many jurisdictions have begun to

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incorporate “mandated mediation” into their legal systems, which can help clear court dockets and allow disputing parties to develop their resolutions (Don, 2014).

Interestingly one of the basic roles of social work is to facilitate the interaction between individuals and systems to properly examine social problems, of which marital conflict is a topical concern. Marital conflict has been linked to the onset of depressive symptoms, eating disorders, male alcoholism, episodic drinking, binge drinking, and out-of-home drinking (Martsin, 2012; Grinnell & Unrau, 2011). Marital conflict is associated with poorer health and with specific illnesses such as cancer, cardiac disease, and chronic pain, perhaps because hostile behaviors during conflict are related to alterations in immunological, endocrine, and cardiovascular functioning. Marriage is also the most common interpersonal context for homicide, and more women are murdered by their partners than by anyone else (Tafese, 2016; Schrich, 2015). More so, marital conflict is associated with important family outcomes, including poor parenting, poor adjustment of children, increased likelihood of parent-child conflict, and conflict between siblings. Marital conflicts that are frequent, intense, physical, unresolved, and child-related have a particularly negative influence on children, as do marital conflicts that spouses attribute to their child's behavior (Bradbury, Rogge, & Lawrence, 2001).

Given the inherent weaknesses of the modern judicial system, one of which is the increasing marital separation or divorce with resultant effects of growing social vices in the society, there is a need to revert to the neglected old order of pre-colonial justice. Specifically, the study seeks to investigate the level of knowledge of mediation and the extent of usage of mediation by social welfare officers working in various family agencies in Lagos State. The next section introduces some of the concepts used in the study.

Conflict, according to the Cassell Concise Dictionary (1997) defines conflict as (i) fight, a struggle, a contest (ii) a class or the opposition of interests, opinions or purposes (iii) to differ, to disagree and as (iv) the opposition of incompatible needs and desires. Conflicts often have their roots in ideological dissimilarity. For instance, when two people disagree on how certain issues are to be resolved, the stronger one between them tries as much as possible to dominate the other's view. This may lead to physical conflict, which leads to war.

Conflict resolution is intrinsically not aimed at conflict prevention but to ensure that its occurrence does not threaten the fundamental basis of human existence. So conflict resolution has been variously defined as:

- i. An outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties, self-sustaining in the long run and productive of a new, positive relationship between parties that were previously hostile adversaries; and any process or procedure by which such an outcome is achieved.
- ii. A sense of finality, where the parties to a conflict are mutually satisfied with the outcome of a settlement, and the conflict is resolved in a true sense.

- iii. A variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems, distinct from management or transformation of conflict (Best, 2006).

By conflict resolution, it is expected that the deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed and resolved, and behavior is no longer violent, nor are attributes hostile any longer, while the structure of the conflict has been changed (Best, 2006). For this paper, the concept of conflict resolution would be used synonymously with and to include mediation.

Be that as it may, irrespective of the variation and nature (including physical or naked warfare), conflict has usually made the world unsafe for human beings. Hence there is a need for effective means of conflict resolution for peaceful coexistence in marriage. Mediation is a dynamic, structured, interactive process where an impartial third party assists disputing parties in resolving conflict through the use of specialized communication and negotiation techniques. In other words, mediation is a form of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) resolving disputes between two or more parties with concrete effects (Suifan, Alhyari & Sweis, 2019; Roth, 2018). All respondents in mediation are encouraged to actively participate in the process. It is focused primarily upon the needs, rights, and interests of the parties. The mediator uses a wide variety of techniques to guide the process in a constructive direction and to help the parties find their optimal solution. A mediator is facilitative in that s/he manages the interaction between parties and facilitates open communication. It can be evaluative in that the mediator analyses issues and relevant norms while refraining from providing prescriptive advice to the parties (Pely, 2016; Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 2012).

Marital conflict or violence is a social problem. This is so in the sense that it constitutes a devastating experience for every member of the family system especially the wife and husband and their families. It disrupts virtually every aspect of the family, damaging the physical and emotional wellbeing of the couples and frequently resulting in the separation of the husbands and wives. This study is guided by mediation theory, which is known as conflict transformation theory. Douglas (2011) expounded the theory and provided a framework on basic conflict dynamics. This theory tries to build and restore a good relationship between two parties in conflict or to build one if there was none (Fisher et. al, 2013). Lederach (2015) argues that social conflict started by two persons engaged in relationships and the transformation of such conflict will involve the need to change and transform the mindset of both parties involved in the conflict. In a similar vein, MacGinty (2014) argues that mediation goes beyond conflict resolution because it builds longer-lasting relationships and takes conflict away from violence and toward personal development.

Mediation theory helps us understand how a disputing relationship between individuals and groups can be transformed from a hostile to a peaceful relationship (Martsin, 2012). It focuses on change and the processes of the conflict rather than on explanations about why conflict occurs. Put differently, mediation theory deals with changing relationships between conflicting parties, changing expectations and shifting the environment, in which they exist, as well as building and rebuilding the relationship

between conflicting parties to create an enabling environment for forgiveness and reconciliation (Adebayo, Benjamin & Lundy, 2014).

Within the context of the study, mediation theory will assist in understanding approaches and levels of knowledge used by social welfare officers managing the family agencies spread across Lagos State and how they have been to transform marital conflict into positive or constructive relationships. Mediation theory has been criticized for failing to demonstrate convincingly the ideals and norms of pre-colonial order of justice in settling marital conflict. The theory has also been accused of being confused with meditation or arbitration, another mode of conflict management but a distant cousin (Ademowo, 2017). Parties (wives and husbands) are often confused and fearful of losing their rights and being taken advantage of. Lawyers frequently believe they will be out of business but they are concerned for their clients' wellbeing and often confuse mediation with counseling (Bossy, 2013). Mediators also run the risk of overselling themselves and sometimes are not clear about their role as a mediator as opposed to a counselor, lawyer, or other experts. So for mediation to take place, legitimate concerns need to be separated from misconceptions about the process (Barsky, 2017; Gillespie & Zittoun, 2010).

Materials and methods

Study area and design

The study is both descriptive and explanatory by research design and relied majorly upon primary data using qualitative approaches of in-depth interviews (IDIs) and field observation. The study was carried out in Lagos State, the commercial capital of Nigeria with the migration of Nigerians and foreigners on daily basis pursuing different interests, thereby leading to various experiences of conflict and all manners of violent behaviours.

Procedure

Data were collected through in-depth interviews (IDIs). The IDIs were conducted among social welfare officers in five purposively selected family agencies in Alimosho, Shomolu, Surulere, Ikeja, and Yaba areas across the State. In all 10 in-depth interviews were conducted; that is only two social welfare officers engaged in each selected agency.

A pre-defined in-depth interview guide was used to direct the discussion but respondents were allowed to narrate their circumstances. This granted the researcher deeper insight into how they think of and handle cases of marital disputes and how they subjectively interpret their respective clients' situations. Equal representation of men and women was considered appropriate to allow an equal proportion of the voices of men and women to be heard. The voices of men and women are reflected in the results of this study.

Ethical considerations

Verbal consent was obtained from the social welfare officers after clarifying issues such as participant's consent and freedom to withdraw from this study at any time

without fear. The confidentiality of the respondents and information given were emphasized and observed.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were grouped according to pre-determined themes. The data processing and analysis were done using thematic content analysis.

Results

Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents

The study reveals the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The table reveals that the majority of the respondents are between the ages of 40-59 years of age. Also, the table indicates that 50 percent of the respondents were male while 50 percent others were female. It also indicates that 10 percent of the respondents were single while 90 percent were married. In addition, the study also shows that all the respondents were Yoruba. The reason is not far-fetched being that the study location is in Lagos state which is in the South-West and therefore a Yoruba state. The study establishes that 100 percent of the respondents were civil servants. The reason for this is because the family institutions are under the Lagos State government.

Furthermore, the study reveals that 50 percent of the respondents had Bachelor's degrees while 50 percent had Master's degrees. Forty percent of the respondents indicated that they studied Sociology/Anthropology, 20 percent studied Philosophy, 10 percent studied Political science, 10 percent studied Economics; 10 percent studied Psychology while 10 percent studied more than one course in their first degree. Findings also show that 70 percent of the respondents have undergone training in social work, 10 percent of the respondents said they had not undergone training in social work and 20 percent of the population did not have any response. The higher percentage of respondents who have undergone training in social work is because the ministry organizes training for social welfare officers and a lot of on-the-job training is done. The next section presents the findings of the study.

Level of knowledge of mediation among social welfare officers

Drawing from the in-depth interviews, it was gathered that to an extent, the social welfare officers had an understanding of what mediation is all about and also stated its significant relationship between social work and mediation. Even though most of them reported that they have not taken a course in mediation but they believe mediation is greatly relevant to their work and that as 'social workers', they need a lot of mediation skills to perform well while also attesting that there is a great importance of mediation in social work. Below are some of the excerpts of the respondents to the above-stated objective.

A male respondent said:

Mediation is trying to assist in resolving problems, getting solutions to issues, helping people to have a kind of go-between-in. You are in between two disagreeing persons and you are trying to help them to solve problems...reconciliation...okay? (IDI, Male, Social Welfare Officer, 53years).

Another respondent went further to state that:

Mediation has to do with intervention, peaceful resolution of disputes among people, in most cases, reported cases. Mediation is an act of discussion, talking people out of their problems, intervention that could bring succour to the parties. (IDI, Male, Social Welfare Officer, 50 years).

A female interviewee helped to bring the relationship between mediation and social work into the limelight by saying that;

Yes there is a similarity between the two because social work is a profession that has to do with humanity; it has to do with people, environment, where you meet people with different backgrounds every day. So, invariably, once you meet different people with different backgrounds; married couples, youngsters, youths that are been delinquent, you have to mediate in their life; therefore they work hand-in-hand together, synergy. (*IDI, Female, Social Welfare Officer, 42 years*).

A male respondent said:

Mediation is the bedrock of social welfare practice. Without it you cannot do much. You need to learn some basic negotiation skills; you have to listen to people, you have to understand their conditions and see how best you can bring those suggested solutions to the table, so without mediation, there cannot be social work and there cannot be social welfare practice. (*IDI, Male, Social Welfare Officer, 40 years*).

Another respondent added that:

Social welfare workers need to be trained on mediation, because even if you had been trained on communication skill, you still need to use your own inner mind to ask some questions when you want to intervene between couples or disputing parties. Definitely looking at the skills of mediation, social worker needs to have a lot of mediation skills. (*IDI, Male, Social Welfare Officer, 53 years*).

A female respondent went further to add on her use of mediation that:

Like I said, you meet different people every day. You see same married couples coming for a long time, probably due to differences, misunderstanding, and miscommunication; so in order to get it right that's why we call it counseling. So you know, we try to bring them together united and like I said, you still maintain them. Probably you have a woman, a mother coming to meet you that a child is being delinquent. Bring the child for counsel, and you mediate, you bring peace or calmness into that child. (*IDI, Female, Social Welfare Officer, 45 years*).

Another male respondent added that:

Mediation should be one of the principles in social work practice; mediation should be one of it. If mediation is not there then you are not achieving anything as a social worker, okay? A social worker who is not using mediation, then what do you want to achieve! Nothing! Your reconciliatory move, your reconciliatory step, your reconciliatory methods presupposes that you are a

problem solving person and that is mediation. (*IDI, Male, Social Welfare Officer, 55 years*).

He gave additional comments saying that:

Cases are not beyond mediation, some cases are irreconcilable in the sense that you have mediated but the party says no. From the onset, the two parties must agree that they want to engage in mediation. They must agree that they want you to explore how to solve their problems, how to help them... reconciliation does not mean they should come back as husband and wife, they can still be estranged persons but because of the children involved. So, mediation is a situation where when they are at daggers drawn, when they are at daggers drawn and you try as much as possible to mediate and they say no, then you opt-out for it, which means they are not ready for it. Even in court, the judge or the magistrate must first ask them whether they are open to mediation before sending them for mediation. Once they are prepared for mediation and they say, yes we can explore, then good, but if they say that they don't want it, it doesn't mean that they are not successful but if they still insist that they want to divorce, yes they can divorce. It is your right to divorce. Marriage is not till death do us part again, I mean... that is the Biblical and the Quranic whatever. The reality of marriage today is that if you no longer love each other, then you can go your way for goodness sake! But you must take care of the children of the union; that is just the issue. Because if the husband and wife divorce, they still have to come to terms with how to take care of their children, that is an aspect of mediation. Yes, the offsprings must be catered for. (*IDI, Male, Social Welfare Officer, 57 years*).

From the data gathered above, it can be seen that mediation is used by social welfare practitioners in their work, it has helped them to manage conflict and in most cases where reconciliation is not achieved, a peaceful way is sought. Also, the in-depth interviews showed that conflict is a necessary evil; although its outcome depends on how it is managed. It went further to establish that not all cases are reconcilable, though all cases require the skills of mediation as long as the parties involved agree to it.

Use of mediation for marital conflict resolution in social work practice

The data gathered revealed that all of the respondents believe that the use of mediation should be strongly encouraged in family institutions to ameliorate the conflict situations of their clients. They all admitted that mediation should be included in the social work curriculum, while most of them agreed that having social work as a background would have been of great advantage.

A female respondent had this to say:

Oh! Mediation has to be applied and encouraged because it has played a key role in helping the profession, most cases that we do, it has made it so easy. So, mediation plays a major role, most times it is not all matters that should go to court. Through the usage of mediation, you can resolve some issues without even going to court. So it is very important. Mediation should be employed in strengthening the profession. (*IDI, Male, Social Welfare Officer, 40 years*)

Another respondent expressed the use of mediation in family matter by stating that:

Very well, we use mediation to bring peace between wives and husbands and it should be a continuous thing. Well if it is not continuous or if you stop it, then you are not going to help the families and families will be breaking down astronomically, even if you have another one it would still break down as long as the process is not there, so it has to be a continuous thing (*IDI, Male, Social Welfare Officer, 48 years*).

A male respondent gave insight on why having a background in social work could be useful;

Social work is specifically a profession that has to do with helping people. Sociology is broader and wider, but specifically focusing on social work would have given me more rounded knowledge with regards to helping people to solve their problems with the use of skills in mediation (*IDI, Male, Social Welfare Officer, 44 years*).

Another male respondent expressed his opinion on the future of mediation in social work by adding that;

Training... training... Training of officers in the field of mediation, reconciliation, so that they will be equipped instead of being trained on the job on how to do it. There should be a special skill on the process of counseling of bringing the warring factions to the recognition of what ought to be, in terms of having the knowledge, the technical know-how of how to go about mediation, how to go about intervention, that you need not be judgmental, you need to be attentive, you need to listen, you need to be observant, and the environment where you are doing it must be conducive. And the role of the warring partners must even be recognized, alright? (*IDI, Male, Social Welfare Officer, 50 years*).

Another female respondent however had this to say;

You know it's in this part of the world that you don't have professionals in the field who are professionally trained social workers and all that. So, to a great extent, the skill is very important but a lot of us do not have this skill. So those who find themselves in it can still go for further training so that the relevant skills can still be acquired and the job can be better performed (*IDI, Female, Social Welfare Officer, 46 years*).

In addition, a field observation was used to witness the case of a client who brought her family conflict issue to the family institution. It was observed that the social worker was able to use the provisions of law (i.e. the law binding in Lagos State Family Institutions which is known as the Child Rights Law) to arbitrate the case for both parties, making them know what is legally right and what is not legally right according to the provisions of the law, so as to tame their will. For instance, party A wanted the marriage to continue even though he made unpleasant remarks about his wife. Party B however wanted the other party to settle financially and wanted full custody of the children. The social welfare officer was able to mediate, in that he listened to both parties to fully understand the root of the conflict. The practitioner then tried to settle the conflict by bringing both parties to a point of peace, at least to a great extent. The session was the first joint session for the client and another session was fixed, while

the social worker gave the couples a window time to think on what they really wanted and the practitioner also counseled the parties separately to be more calm and more understanding.

This data further revealed that the use of mediation is critical in social work practice in settling family disputes. Though, the future of mediation is largely dependent on the training and required skills of mediation that is given to social work practitioners, which is a major reason why the respondents consented to the inclusion of mediation in the social work curriculum. However, the place of passion and innate ability cannot be overlooked as they all work together to produce what is called a professional.

The deadlock of mediation among social welfare officers

This finding can be regarded as serendipitous data revealing what some social welfare officers do whenever they realized that the couples seem not to be coming to terms with mediation.

The deadlock of mediation, from field observation, can be as a result of incompetence of the social welfare officers, cultural issues, feminism, patriarchy, economic capacity of women and power play among others. The following excerpt is a good case in point. A female respondent narrated her experience:

.....You have to do mediation to a certain level before you can bring cases to the court. You have to make sure the matter must have gone out of hand and you cannot handle it very well again, except that you can take the matter to court, because if you don't put all your best efforts and skills in order to mediate within the couple in the office and you are pushing every case to the court because over there in court they are still going to mediate for a check. We do transfer complicated cases to family court but it is not every case that we take to the magistrate in the court because they mostly put blames on this one or that one before us. So we use the using inner chamber, most especially for couples. They will still sit them down, and mediate and talk to them one-on-one; it doesn't matter if you are the complainant. The magistrate would still call both parties to the inner chamber and mediate. So, during that period, if you are fooling yourself and the magistrate discovers that you have not done your job well before bringing the case up to the court, it is a big slap on us. The magistrate would be looking at you that they are not even doing anything in the office, that this just small case that you are supposed to settle in the office you are bringing it to the court. So that means you as a social worker, you have to put all your effort and skill to work and make sure that you try to unite the disagreeing wife and husband but if it fails totally, then we bring everything before the family court, so as not to fool yourself. (*IDI, Female, Social Welfare Officer, 46 years*).

The findings above revealed the place of the family court in settling marital conflict where the family institutions cannot handle or the client is not responding to the intervention process laid down by the social welfare officers. Although findings also showed that when a case is taken to court, the court still attempts mediation as a first step, but if the practitioners fail to properly engage the skills of mediation and just take the case to the court, if the court is able to resolve the dispute, the practitioner is seen

as incompetent. Hence, the transfer to and approach of family court is also considered professionally helpful to resolving marital conflict in the study whenever the social work practitioners cannot handle irreconcilable and difficult marital problems.

Discussion

Evidence from this study is suggesting that those in marital conflict look upon social welfare officers as solution providers. In-depth interviews with respondents showed that social work practitioners are seen as the most trusted persons who can give lasting unbiased solutions to marital conflict (Kaminsky, 2017; Espin, 2010). Not only are they competent to provide advice, but also often offer counseling services with follow-up home visits and calls. In the light of the findings, it is important to note that they demonstrate an adequate level of knowledge of mediation in the course of relating with their clients; people who come up with family or marital matters in the family-based institutions in this study area. This finding is in support of the reports of Li et. al (2019) and Mayer (2013) that reported that mediation knowledge is a core competency for social workers and that conflict resolution professionals provide preventive, restorative, substantive, procedural and decision-making services to assist people in a conflict situation.

Furthermore, the study revealed that knowledge of mediation is instrumental to resolving marital conflict and other social problems. Irving and Benjamin (2012) and Hietler (2010) indicated that conflict resolution skills can be adapted to disability issues, community problem-solving, workplace harassment, criminal justice, social policy, and intercultural disputes. This shows that mediation is not limited to marital conflict but also relevant in other fields of social work practice.

The in-depth interviews conducted with the study respondents also indicated that the usage of mediation as a marital conflict resolution is a key method. This finding shows that mediation was mostly considered as the last option when both partners have not been able to solve their differences on their own. As indicated by Fisher et. al (2013), mediation is used when two individuals have a disagreement and a third person such as a social worker or family member or friend intervenes to help them clarify the problem and talk about it than fight over it. Mediation is assistance by a third party where the parties to a conflict admit that they have a problem, which they are both committed to solving, in which the social welfare officer as the mediator manages but does not impose a solution on the parties (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014). Mediation is similar to seeking a third opinion based on the mediator's perceived experience or expertise and reverence accorded to him or her by the disputing parties looking for a solution. Mediation must be free and fair, which implies that disputants must engage in the mediation of their own free will and consider the mediator's "judgement" to be fair; that is not favoring any party. The so-called judgement is not binding; hence it is a voluntary process (Hasan, 2012).

In responses to whether mediation in solving marital conflict is effective, their responses also showed that mediation was identified as the key method to marital conflict resolution. The social welfare officers have helped to restore several marriages due to their interventions and couples are living peacefully and harmoniously. Brand-Jacobsen and Jacobson (2012) state that the role of the mediator is to serve as a

medium, helping to facilitate dialogue, act as the go-between to the involved parties to the conflict and bring them a resolution. The solution to the problem must be one that comes from the conflicting parties themselves.

Theoretically, in order to resolve marital conflict, it is important to turn negative conflict to a positive one. This strongly supports the theory of mediation or conflict transformation. Marital conflict is like any other conflict that must be transformed into a harmonious relationship if the family or society has to function and play meaningful roles; just as traditional society is different from the modern society. Conflict resolution and transformation involve three critical stages and these include mediation, negotiation and arbitration (Robbins, Chatterjee and Canda, 2012; Olaoba, et. al, 2010).

During the analysis of the findings, it showed clearly that the social welfare officers play a very critical role and they ensured that for a mediation to take place; it must be voluntary; involve give and take (shifting grounds), reciprocal and uncompetitive. It involves being open-minded, considerate, and factual.

Conclusion

Findings from the study showed that the use of mediation, as a conflict resolution strategy by the social welfare officers in the family agencies in Lagos, is critical to restoring and building harmonious homes, families, and marriages. The respondents do not only demonstrate adequate knowledge of mediation but also show effective usage of mediation in helping their clients in the study area. However, they indicated the need for more proper on-the-job training to ensure a smooth interface between social work practice and theory. This re-emphasizes the importance of professionally trained social workers in Nigerian society.

A major limitation of this study lies in that the data were collected from a single source. Besides, the relatively small sample size limits the representativeness of the sample. Despite this limitation, the findings of this research can potentially inform effective family interventions aimed at reducing the increasing problems of marital crisis among couples as well as in the entire Nigerian society.

In the light of the above, the following recommendations based on the study findings are made to further improve the use of mediation by social welfare officers in Lagos State Family Support Institutions. First, since all the practitioners agreed to the importance and need of mediation in social work especially as it relates to their practice, they should be properly trained on the knowledge of mediation, its principles and processes so that they are properly guided and well equipped for the task before them. The training of practitioners is not only in the skill of mediation alone but also in the core competencies of social work practice since most of them did not any degree in social work.

Secondly, although legally and institutionally, the government viz-a-viz family institutions cannot force reconciliation on a family, it is recommended that the government should look deeply into this method because it can prevent family conflict, youth delinquency and other social vices in society. The government may include

compulsory pre-marriage counseling in family institutions for the couples preparatory to marital life, especially at the local government areas before issuing marriage certificates.

Thirdly, stakeholders in academia should review the curriculum used in the training of social work students to include the use of mediation as an integral part of the courses taken by the students. This is to ensure that the social work students are properly grounded in the skills and techniques of mediation and conflict resolution generally.

Fourthly, policymakers and stakeholders in ministries, departments and agencies in charge of the administration and functioning of family institutions should look into the method of hiring and posting social welfare officers to agencies, most especially family institutions because these institutions are the ones that are in charge of the welfare of the people and are closer to the people. Therefore, it is important for those who are posted to these family welfare agencies to be well-grounded in the profession of social work with adequate training and prerequisites, so that the welfare of the people can properly be catered for.

Lastly, the government should endeavor to publicize or educate the general public on the existence of family support institutions as most of the cases handled are based on referrals. This is because there are other families facing family conflict or marital problems that do not know about the existence of these family welfare agencies in Lagos State.

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